



LUND UNIVERSITY

# A Grieving Nation

*Exploring Thainess in the Space of Emotion*

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TKAM02 - Spring 2017

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## Abstract

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The passing of Thailand's King Bhumibol Adulyadej on October 13, 2016 marked a significant turning point in modern Thai history. As the world's longest-reigning monarch, King Bhumibol had been much loved and revered as the country's father figure for 70 years. In the wake of his demise, it seemed to be that every corner of Thailand was packed with emotions that also came with an array of cultural implications for what it means to be Thai. Through an ethnographic study of the unique emotional phenomenon, this thesis aims to explore how grief in Thailand's post-King Bhumibol era manifested in terms of spatiality, as well as and how it was culturally constructed. Ultimately, this thesis argues that how the nationwide mourning was practiced had engendered a space for mourners to perform *Thainess*—an umbrella term for good citizenship and Thai national identity. Apart from a cultural analysis, this thesis shall contribute to the interdisciplinary fields of ethnography, political science, Southeast Asian studies, and Thai studies, as it navigates the uncharted territory of understanding Thainess and the monarchy by taking into account the people's perspective.

*Keywords:* King Bhumibol; Thainess; Thai monarchy; grief; collective emotions; spatiality; Nigel Thrift; cultural analysis

## Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I owe my deepest gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Tom O'Dell, whose invaluable input has guided me from an early stage of the excruciating process of this research. The completion of this thesis would not have been remotely possible without your advice, comments, inspiration, and, above all, your encouragement.

I am deeply thankful for my informants who have given me insightful material to reflect on in the thesis. I truly appreciate your participation which I know was based on trust and our long years of friendship. Here I also thank my readers, Jon Thor, Claudine, and Eli, for the critical feedback which helped me in finalizing my work. And Sandy, no one could have been a better proofreader and editor for my thesis.

I would like to acknowledge Lars-Eric Jönsson, my Specialization Course professor who not only had read and commented on my academic paper which was developed into this thesis, but also generously sent me the literature relevant for my research topic after the course. Special thanks go to Lotta, Markus, and Jessica, my MACA professors, who have given me useful input and shown interest in my thesis from the very beginning. Their generous support throughout the program has also made my time in Lund exceptionally meaningful.

All my MACA friends, especially Michiel and Claudine (again), thank you for being my support system throughout the writing process, and throughout MACA. My parents, thank you for giving me the best education, and for never questioning the choices I made in life. Top, Chat, Muk, Gift, Dana and all my friends in Thailand, thank you for always believing in me and staying with me throughout this two-year journey despite our geographical distance. I would not have made it through some difficult days without knowing you were there for me. Por, our encounter kept me sane and for that you deserve a mention.

Lund, 2017-06-02

Jitlada Meesuk

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

October 13, 2016 started off as a typical Thursday. As I was checking social media as usual, I saw updates about the king of Thailand's deteriorating health on Twitter. I soon learned that the king was on a ventilator and that his condition remained unstable after being hospitalized since October 3. The statement regarding his health was issued by the palace the night before, and by that time crowds of well-wishers had already started to gather at Siriraj Hospital where the king was admitted to say prayers and give him support (Solomon, 2016). My Twitter and Facebook feeds were flooded with prayers and wishes. Pictures from the hospital began to reach the Internet, showing lots of people holding the king's portrait close to their chests as they cited Buddhist chants. Many of my friends collectively changed their Facebook profile pictures to yellow-background images—the king's birthday color—with a message “I love the king” in the middle. It was not until 18:47 (Thailand time) that a monochromatic palace broadcast appeared on television. Much to the audience's dismay, a news anchor in a black suit then solemnly announced: King Bhumibol Adulyadej passed away.

It was as if the whole country burst into tears. Right after the announcement, I saw a myriad of farewell messages and expressions of sadness exploding on social media as many across the nation and beyond reacted to the death. I myself was overwhelmed by the whirlwind of emotions which followed probably the most meaningful death in modern Thai history. As the world's longest-reigning monarch, King Bhumibol had served as Thailand's head of state for 70 years. Through multiple political and economic transitions, the same king had been regarded and touted as the icon of stability, guiding the country through various upheavals. His passing brought distress to millions of Thais who referred to him as the “father of the nation”, the beacon of hope for their national community.

Following King Bhumibol's death, the Thai government announced an official year-long mourning period. A lot had happened since with regards to mourning in the virtual and physical reality. From observing the rise of emotions through cyberspace in Lund, Sweden, to walking the actual mourning space in Bangkok, I composed ethnography of Thailand's unique emotional phenomenon which manifested in mourning practices. By exploring emotional manifestations in spatiality, I argue in this thesis<sup>1</sup> that mourning became a means by which the Thai people performed “Thainess”—an ambiguous umbrella term for good citizenship and national identity.

## The Monarch, Monarchy, and Thai Politics

### Early years on the throne

King Bhumibol Adulyadej, also known as King Rama IX, was the ninth sovereign of Thailand's Chakri dynasty. He ascended the throne in 1946 at the tender age of 18 and was officially crowned in 1950. He spent most of his childhood and adolescence in Switzerland before permanently returning to Thailand in 1951 (Farrelly, 2016). It was a critical period for Thai politics given the recent end of absolute monarchy in 1932. The transition to constitutional monarchy posed security concerns to the palace as its role and power were structurally relegated. Therefore, advocates of the monarchy spent the early years of King Bhumibol's reign building his public profile as the upholder of the Buddhist faith—the major source of moral and cultural norms in Thai society—as part of a constant attempt to regain palace stability (Head, 2016). From mid-1950s, King Bhumibol had traveled extensively to rural villages across Thailand. Images of the young king, often accompanied by the queen, with a camera hanging from his neck and a map in his hand, had been widely mediated and memorized. This, along with his charismatic personality and various talents, earned him respects far and wide as people learned to recognize him as a compassionate and dedicated monarch (Farrelly, 2016; Fong, 2009; Head, 2016).

The BBC's 1979 documentary "Soul of a Nation" mentioned King Bhumibol's visits to remote rural areas. The purpose of his visits was twofold: to improve the welfare of the underprivileged and to leave the impression that, in his presence, these people were no longer neglected (BBC, 1979). According to the documentary, no other previous kings had been to the Northeast of Thailand—the country's poorest region. King Bhumibol, on the other hand, had traveled to far-off districts in every region and even interviewed the poor himself to gain hands-on insights into their problems, thus bridging the distant gap between the monarch and his subjects. As a consequence, he initiated more than 4,000 development projects for the betterment of people's quality of life (Rachawadi, n.d.). His rural tours and initiatives constituted the major part of how he developed the unique relationship with the Thai people who, to this day, had seen him as an icon of perseverance and hard work. Thanks to his widely-perceived humanitarian efforts, the king also gained international recognition, being presented with the United Nations' first Human Development Lifetime Achievement Award in 2006 (UN News Centre, 2006).

### The ‘activist’ monarch

Under the regime of constitutional monarchy, the king’s political power was officially limited. His image had also been constructed by Thai nationalists as being “above” and “beyond” politics (Fong, 2009, p. 674). This perception is reinforced by the fact that criticisms against royal actions are prohibited under the *lèse-majesté* law<sup>2</sup> (McCargo, 2005). However, political science scholars often address King Bhumibol’s political role and interventions (Farrelly, 2016; Fong, 2009; Hewison, 2008; Thongchai, 2008; McCargo, 2005). During the 1960s and 1970s when communist insurgency was spreading from the countryside of Thailand, his discursive royal initiatives were said to have reduced its influence (Farrelly, 2016; Head, 2016; Crossette, 1989). The king continued his development schemes including in areas where the insurgents were based, despite their conflicts against the nationalists who fought in his name (BBC, 1979; Fong, 2009, p. 684). In the BBC documentary, when asked if he thought of the locals’ support of a dam building—one of the royal development schemes—as victory against the insurgency, he replied:

Oh, I don’t know. But we are winning against hunger. This is what we are doing. We are not fighting against people. We are fighting against hunger. We want them to have a better life. If we make this [the dam] and they have a better life, the people you call the communist insurgency will have a better life also. So everybody is happy (BBC, 1979).

The response reinforced the king’s image as the moral figure who devoted himself to caring for his people, and who by all means had no interest in politics. In spite of that, he appeared to become the leader in Thailand’s combat against communism which highlighted his political significance. The king’s political role reemerged ostensibly in 1973 and 1992 when bloody political events culminated in peaceful settlements thanks to his successful interventions (Fong, 2009; McCargo, 2005). Student protestors of October 14, 1973, in their demonstration against dictatorship<sup>3</sup>, were given shelter at the king’s Bangkok palace as they ran away from the military’s raid (Head, 2016). In the Bloody May incident of 1992<sup>4</sup>, the king summoned the Prime Minister and the protest leader to the palace, commanding them to end their confrontation and instead cooperate in solving the problems and working towards the country development (Farrelly, 2016; Head, 2016; The Golden Jubilee Network, 1999). The video of both the political opponents receiving the royal address and prostrating before the king was televised, underpinning the portrayal of the king as a national hero who saved

the country from falling apart (Fong, 2009). This notion formed the major part of the royalist narratives.

Political scientist Duncan McCargo (2005) states that Thai politics could be understood in terms of political networks with the palace being the central authority. Thus, he introduces the term “network monarchy” as an identity of Thai politics under the reign of King Bhumibol. McCargo describes the king’s role in network monarchy during 1980-2001 as “the ultimate arbiter of political decisions in times of crisis” and “a didactic commentator on national issues, helping to set the national agenda, especially through his annual birthday speeches” (McCargo, 2005, p. 501). The former depiction accords with the aforementioned royalist discourse and the general perception of the king among Thais, while the latter underlines his image as the father figure whose relationship with his *children* involved teaching them morals and paving the way for their future. The royal addresses and speeches had remained a powerful source of inspiration among Thais to this day. In this way, the king had embodied the Buddhistic leadership concept of *dhammaraja*, which focuses on “righteousness, compassion and piety”, and ultimately become a figure that personifies an ideal of Thainess with his image linked with myriad virtuous values (Fong, 2009, p. 682).

### **The palace and political struggle**

King Bhumibol’s royal and political roles became less active from the 1990s due to his age and faltering health (Farrelly, 2016; Fong, 2009). At the same time, Thailand’s monarchy whose strength was essentially resurrected under his reign began to encounter a number of new political challenges. Nicholas Farrelly (2016), scholar of Southeast Asian studies, in his recent online article, listed modernization, consumerism, mass education and the Internet as among these emerging challenges that began to undermine the traditional political order. The most important turning point, however, was the rise of Thaksin Shinawatra, a billionaire-turned-politician who was elected the Prime Minister in 2001. Thaksin’s landslide victory was ascribed partially to vote-buying, his image as a proactive and decisive leader, his manipulation of populist rhetoric, and his grassroots-oriented policies (McCargo, 2005). Viewed as a threat to monarchical stability, Thaksin epitomized “the new money-based political forces that were unhappy with the polyarchy of network monarchy” (McCargo, 2005, p. 512).

As McCargo (2005) puts it, Thaksin attempted to replace network monarchy with his own rules and political network. That was, however, impeded by rounds of protest against his

corrupted government, which ended in a military coup in 2006. The move against him was speculated to be maneuvered by the palace's associated network (Farrelly, 2016; McCargo, 2005). It is worth noting that Thaksin was Thailand's first elected Prime Minister to complete his four-year term, and was re-elected in 2005 (BBC News, 2011). After the 2006 coup, he still infiltrated and influenced Thai politics through his proxies in the same political party which won the general elections years after despite him being banned from politics. His younger sister Yingluck Shinawatra became Thailand's first female Prime Minister in 2011-2014. Her term in office also ended in a military coup, resulting in Thailand being ruled by a military government up until 2017—the year in which this thesis was published.

The initial protest against Thaksin highlighted the royalist slogan “fight for the king and return royal power” (Salisa, 2012, p. 93), while many of his pro-democracy supporters proclaimed themselves as palace opponents. The clash between the monarchical agency and civilian liberals who aimed towards participatory politics free from the palace's intervention seemed to manifest substantially from the time of Thaksin demonstration onwards. The series of protests and political struggle between royalists/conservatives and pro-democracy liberals (including anti-royalists), which occurred in Thailand from 2006 to 2014 in association with Thaksin, had contributed to the deep polarization of the nation. In addition, the current military government had prioritized the mission to eradicate anti-royalists by actively summoning activists and critics of the monarchy for the “attitude adjustment” episodes, and ultimately by strengthening the enforcement of the *lèse-majesté* law (Pravit, 2015).

### **The king's demise and mourning regulations**

The king died peacefully on October 13, 2016 at the age of 88. Minutes after the palace announcement, the Prime Minister issued an official statement on the accession to the new reign and the mourning regulations. According to the statement, government officials and state enterprise employees were required to wear black mourning attire for a year. Government offices and public agencies flew the Thai national flag half-mast for 30 days. Television and radio were to refrain from broadcasting entertainment for a month, and could only air in monochrome or muted colors. Entertainment events were postponed or cancelled within the 30-100 days after the king's passing. All celebratory and cultural events would be toned down for a full year as a mark of respect (Simpson, 2017; BBC News, 2016a). The general public was advised to “mourn as appropriate” (The Prime Minister's Office, 2016).

(Many other guidelines with regards to mourning were issued, and are later discussed in Chapter 6.)

The government declared Friday, October 14 a holiday, the same day King Bhumibol's body was moved in a procession to the Grand Palace in Bangkok for the royal funeral rites. People began to camp out at Sanam Luang and the nearby streets before sunrise to wait for the historic procession which was broadcast live on every television channel from 14:30, lasting for one and a half hour. According to news reports, more than 150,000 mourners came to bid their last farewell to the king, turning the streets into the sea of black (Cripps & Berlinger, 2016). Many lined up to attend the symbolic royal bathing at Sala Sahathai Samakhom, a building inside the Grand Palace which continued to be open for the general public to sign the book of condolences until October 28.

On October 15, the palace announced the 100-day funeral rites. The rites included daily praying, merit-making, and other traditional ceremonies attended by members of the royal family and foreign dignitaries. In addition, religious ceremonies were held on the 7<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup>, and 100<sup>th</sup> day after the death, according to the traditional royal customs influenced by Brahmanism and Buddhism (Bureau of the Royal Household, 2016; The Nation, 2016). Mourners had been allowed to pay homage to the king inside the Grand Palace since October 29. They were required to dress formally in all-black or in their relative uniforms. (The dress code in details and its implications are further discussed in Chapter 5.) The royal cremation was scheduled for October 26, 2017 at Sanam Luang (literally translated as “The Royal Field”), a public square near the Grand Palace which usually accommodates royal functions and ceremonies (Reuters, 2017).

## **Research Aim, Questions, and Significance**

The demise of King Bhumibol had given rise to an unprecedented phenomenon of collective emotions. With his 70 years on the throne, most Thais had never known of any other kings, let alone one that had made such an indescribable impact on the lives of the people and Thai society. A massive outpouring of emotions occupied the cultural landscape as millions mourned the death of their beloved king. The Internet, a modern technology nonexistent in the reign of former Thai monarchs, had created a new virtual space that provided for an outward manifestation of people's internal feelings. Meanwhile, in the physical reality, more than three million mourners (as of March 2017) had visited the Grand Palace to pay homage

to the late king. These two domains—cyberspace and the public mourning area at the Grand Palace and Sanam Luang—had become a new social space with specific cultural meanings.

The primary aim of this thesis is twofold. Firstly, it aims to study the cultural construction of grief as manifested in mourning in both domains of space. Secondly, it argues that mourning practices enabled a space in which Thainess was significantly activated and performed. Scrutinizing grief as collectively experienced in the mourning space was possible by answering two main questions:

1. How is grief culturally constructed and manifested in spatiality, temporality, and materiality, with an emphasis on spatial analysis?
2. How is mourning as a manifestation of grief associated with Thainess?

By offering an analytical account of mourning in association with the recent death of King Bhumibol, this thesis touches upon a number of cultural and sociopolitical issues. The empirical discussion deals greatly with the notions of affect and leadership, which provides some lessons for governments and policymakers to learn from, especially for those working in the field of Thai politics. At the same time, this thesis adds to the study of emotion from a cultural perspective, drawing from theoretical traditions in anthropology, sociology, and human geography. Ultimately, the cultural analysis that this thesis delivers shall contribute to the existing body of research in ethnography, political science, Southeast Asian studies, and Thai history, as it offers a new trajectory of understanding Thainess and the monarchy by looking at them from the people's perspective.

## Thesis Overview

To lay the groundwork for the upcoming analysis, in Chapter 2, previous studies are reviewed along with literature on the cultural notions of emotion and the philosophy of space—the key theoretical framework for this thesis. Chapter 3 offers a methodological reflection, a reflexivity of my position as an insider researcher, and some ethical considerations. The empirical discussion and analysis begins in Chapter 4, with an exploration of mourning on cyberspace. In Chapter 5, stories from the physical mourning space in Bangkok are presented along with a touch on the temporal and material aspects of mourning. The last analytical chapter deals with the question of Thainess and mourning. This thesis will conclude with reflections on affect and leadership, as well as on ways to rethink Thainess, which are hoped to serve as a frame of reference for future applicability.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Social scientists have contributed to a body of literature that either informed this thesis or played a vital role in establishing its analytical and theoretical framework. In what follows, previous studies about King Bhumibol and Thai monarchy, Thainess, and public mourning will be reviewed. Another section will provide a theoretical framework for this thesis which involves two major themes: emotion and space.

### Previous Research

#### The King and Thai monarchy

The most recent and relevant study regarding the grief phenomenon is “A Qualitative Study of the Assessment of Mourners’ Reactions and Experiences in the 100 Days after the Death of King Bhumibol Adulyadej<sup>5</sup>,” conducted by The Faculty of Sociology and Anthropology at Thammasat University, Thailand, in collaboration with the Society and Health Institute (2017), Ministry of Health. The data presented were concerned with mourners’ experiences of grief and their fond memories of King Bhumibol, the manifestation of mournfulness in clothing, and the acts of service in tribute to the king at Sanam Luang by volunteers who were students, individuals and representatives from public and private organizations (SHI, 2017). Most informants reported they had always held King Bhumibol in high regard and had been loyal to him for as long as they could remember, having witnessed the king’s deeds and benevolence from the mass media. Parental teaching and formal education were also influential in inculcating them with this loyalty mentality. I will argue in my study that this process of inculcation had proven to be continuously effective and successful because it was emotionalized. It is also worth noting that three out of six topics under this study deal with community service performed by mourners “for the king” (SHI, 2017, 2017, p. 5). As will be discussed in this thesis, this act of service is associated with good citizenship which is closely tied to the notion of Thainess.

Another relevant study is Jack Fong’s (2009) *Sacred Nationalism: The Thai Monarchy and Primordial Nation Construction* which provides a sociological reading of Thailand’s monarchistic legacy. Building on McCargo’s (2005) “network monarchy”, Fong argued that the monarchistic power under King Bhumibol’s reign had, since the end of absolutism, been sustained by way of culturally constructing “the sacred nationalist in its material, aesthetic and institutional forms” (p. 692). This cultural construction was based primarily on

monarchistic networks' reinforcement of primordial themes and practices<sup>6</sup> which "incite emotions and powerful feelings" among the populace (Fong, 2009, p. 677). These included the promulgation of King Bhumibol's December 5 birthday as Father's Day and a national holiday, the revival of royal ceremonies, and the promotion of the king's public profile as merciful and compassionate king. The glorification and sacralization of the monarch contained meaningful affective depth which informed and sustained the royalist narratives and ultimately contributed to the process of modern Thai national construction. This thesis will address the affective elements of this cultural construction through an exploration of grief in terms of spatiality.

### The mainstream thought on Thainess

Regarding the concept of Thainess, Thai historian Saichol Sattayanurak (Saichon, 2005) argues in her article *The Construction of Mainstream Thought on "Thainess" and the "Truth" Constructed by "Thainess"* that the meaning of Thainess has been periodically defined and adjusted by Thai elites in response to the changing political contexts. The fluid meanings, however, have been backed by a single consistent ideological foundation: Nation, Religion, and King. The trinity of Thainess derived from the regime of absolute monarchy whose aim was to centralize state ruling and prioritize the Buddhist monarch's role in unifying the subjects and mobilizing country development. According to Saichol, the notion of Thainess has been reestablished and sustained after the transition to constitutional monarchy in 1932 by Kukrit Pramoj, a royalist politician and scholar. Kukrit's bestseller writings, especially his 1953 novel "Four Reigns" (Si Phaen Din)<sup>7</sup>, have constantly addressed the merits of "Thainess", creating a mainstream discourse of "Thailand is good"—good because all Thais live in a modernized society rich with history and beautiful Buddhism-inspired arts and culture, and in a peaceful Buddhist kingdom unique with a humanistic monarch who rules the country with morality and talents (Saichol, 2005). This mainstream notion of Thainess has become the "truth" that familiarizes Thais with justification for social hierarchy, palace hegemony, and an infinite search for "the good men" to rule the country, while inherently playing down equality, political participation, and cultural diversity which are democratic values. Ultimately, Saichol argues that the mainstream thought on Thainess has contributed to the country's structural violence, a concept referring to a social system that prevents an egalitarian allocation of economic resources (Saichol, 2005). Following Saichol's arguments, the final part of this thesis will attempt to deconstruct the mainstream Thainess which manifested in mourning practices.

### **Public mourning and grief**

Tony Walter's *The New Public Mourning* (2008) addresses interesting notions of social mourning and grief in traditional as opposed to modern societies. With reference to Émile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, he asserts that public mourning in the past was a means by which communities reaffirmed social integration, values, and religious legitimacy. With regards to grief, Walter, citing classics professor Gail Holst-Warhaft (2000, cited in Walter, 2008, p. 243), states that the passion of grief has a function to transform societies, thus has to be displayed in public.

But in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the privilege over private grief has been normalized based on ideas of individualism. In this vein, private grief has become more valued as a form of liberation "because public grief could be observed, inspected, and controlled" (Walter, 2008, p. 244). Despite the modern norm, Walter (2008) observes two kinds of "New Public Mourning (NPM)" in western societies: 1) those who mourn the people they know are publicizing their private grief, e.g. on the Internet; and 2) there is public mourning for people one did not know personally (Walter, 2008, p. 245).

Walter (2008) concludes that NPM in western societies differs from traditional mourning in three major ways. Firstly, in traditional societies, mourning the social superiors is a duty of the subjects, whereas in the NPM no one is obligated to mourn. Secondly, in connection with the previous statement, the NPM is more about people's personal feeling than a social requirement like in traditional mourning, thus is supposed to be more authentic. Lastly, however, non-mourners may criticize new public mourners (instead of the other way around like in traditional societies) for being inauthentic, especially when grief is publicized through mass media or expressed online by individuals. Walter contends that such charges of authenticity derive from the privileged norm of private grief, which takes for granted how people have mourned through history (Walter, 2008, p. 259). His observation of NPM will be relevant with how the Thais mourned on cyberspace.

### **Situating the thesis**

While the previous study on the same phenomenon emphasized the mourners' emotional reactions and experiences which mainly reflected their relationship with King Bhumibol, my thesis will address mourning practices and the associated affective elements in terms of spatiality. The point is to contribute to the academic discussion of Thainess in relation to the

monarchy using a cultural analytical approach which takes into account the people's lived experience.

## Theoretical Framework

### Emotion as a cultural product

Among the pioneering works around the cultural concept of emotion is Catherine A. Lutz's (1988) *Unnatural Emotions*. By exploring an emotional life on the Ifaluk atoll of Micronesia, Lutz's aim is to deconstruct emotion as a cultural product, arguing against the conventional conceptualization of emotion as an unintentional and uncontrollable biological imperative (Luz, 1988, p. 62-63). Her ethnography of the Ifaluk emphasizes on analyzing the way people talked about emotions which, as she puts it, indicates "how emotions are culturally, socially and morally conceptualized" (Lutz, 1988, p. 44). A major component of Lutz's work is dedicated to comparing and contrasting the ethnopsychological framework which structured her research against the American concepts of emotion. She contends that the American view that the person is a "sovereign individual" jars with the idea that "the person is first and foremost a social creature and only secondarily, and in a limited way, an autonomous individual" (Lutz, 1988, p. 81) that highlights her findings on Ifaluk.

As a "social creature" as Lutz puts it, human can to some extent be involved with socially-shared emotions. Sociologist Émile Durkheim was the first to address emotion as a social construct (Fisher & Chon, 1989), pointing out that collective emotions gave meanings to a community's socially shared beliefs and values (Scheve & Salmela, 2014). He also emphasized the role of emotion in reaffirming group unity by means of rituals, stating that the development of group identity requires "religious ideals (or their nationalistic equivalent)" [de Rivera, 2014, p. 224]. For Durkheim, the intense emotion arising and heightening in rituals could culminate in what he calls "collective effervescence" which forms the basis for a social solidarity (Scheve, 2011). Durkheim's ideas about shared emotion, especially in the context of mourning rituals, will be used extensively in the thesis.

In addition to Durkheim, J.H. Denison's (1928) *Emotion as the Basis of Civilization* was an early work which emphasized the role of emotion in community building. Denison presented the concept of emotional system and cultural unification, arguing that every society required a certain emotional system in order to keep itself intact. A society in which its members identify themselves with a highly-revered leader cultivates its emotional system through what

he calls a vertical or *patriarchal* integration. Meanwhile, a society unified through a horizontal or a *fratriarchal* arrangement is one in which the associated individuals identify themselves with a common will or purpose (Denison, 1928, cited in de Rivera, 2014, p. 219). Although Denison addressed emotion as a psychological attribute with a social function, his concept of “emotional system” is still applicable for this thesis.

### Affect and politics

Before moving on to a more modern concept of emotion, it is worth mentioning that this thesis deals greatly with the role of emotion in politics. In this regards, Michel Foucault’s (1991) political concept “governmentality” is relevant. The term, contracted from “government rationality”, means the way in which the state practices control over the conduct of individuals as well as the way individuals choose to govern themselves (Gordon, 1991). Foucault approaches his theme of government through what he calls “biopower” or “biopolitics” which describes the “forms of power exercised over persons specifically in so far as they are thought of as living beings” (Gordon, 1991, p. 4-5). Foucault’s governmentality will be the term to address the affective governing structure constructed by Thai leadership which also manifested in the space of mourning.

Foucault’s “biopolitics” informed Nigel Thrift’s (2004) arguments on the significance of affect in politics. According to Thrift (2004), affect is another form of thinking which is crucial to framing our understanding of the world. Affect can be manipulated or, in his terms, “engineered”, through various forms of communication including mediatization and landscaping—both of which redefine our knowledge of the political and thus entail a political impact (Thrift, 2004). Accordingly, the notions of affective influence give rise to an experience economy, another domain of capitalist development, as well as “a series of purchases on the world” (Thrift, 2000, p. 50) which are advertising, sensorialized goods, packaging, objects producing kinaesthetic experiences, and memorabilia. Unlike the other theorists mentioned, Thrift’s argument underlines affect as a biopolitical instrument rather than something that contributes to collective identity. In this thesis, however, Thrift’s concept will be used to explain the mechanism that enabled an emergence of collective emotions which drew impact on Thais as a political subject.

Also interesting about Thrift’s argument is the notion that emotions are non-representational (Thrift, 2004; 2000). In other words, they cannot be represented by verbal descriptions, but rather are embodied in our practices. Among these practices are the practices of magic or

mystical communication through rituals (Thrift, 2000). As Thrift (2000) puts it, “mystical experiences can be brought forth and animated through the power of body posture, repetitive movements, schedules of recall and spatial juxtapositions” (p. 45). These mystical experiences are central to the collective emotions arising in the mourning ritual to be discussed further in the thesis. It should be noted that Thrift’s non-representational concept will not be applied on the way informants talk about their emotion, but on how the affective engineering process has influenced the activation of Thainess in the mourning space.

### **The philosophy of space**

Thrift (2004) considers urban space as a politics especially with an affective engineering in place. In this study, the mourning space is essentially characterized by political attributes. The spatial analysis would, therefore, be structured by Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) *The Production of Space* which also sees space as political and social. According to Lefebvre, space is not a given, immobile precondition for things and beings to exist in. Rather, space is a dynamic process not limited to a visible boundary. Lefebvre argues that space is constituted by three attributes: physical, mental, and social. Thus, a spatial analysis must consider space as a *product* in connection with its material constituents, the ongoing practice within it, and how it is lived and experienced. He proposed the *conceptual triad of space* comprising spatial practice (perceived space), representations of space (conceived space), and representational space (lived space) in order to provide an analytical framework for investigating a production of space. This thesis will demonstrate how collective emotions became a force of space production. Meanwhile, it will discuss how space was affectively engineered and thus contributed to a new political intensity (Thrift, 2004).

### 3 METHODOLOGY

As a cultural analysis, this study took advantage of a short-term ethnographic approach which includes intensive fieldwork and interviews. While long-term immersion with the research subjects has been a conventional method, short-term ethnography (Pink & Morgan, 2013) best suited this study since it explored an ephemeral phenomenon of intense emotions. The study, however, adopted an anthropological way of understanding people through a theoretically informed analysis (Pink & Morgan, 2013), as it involves a first-hand experience in mourning practices both in the virtual and physical reality.

To produce a thick description of the phenomenon, netnography was mainly used for the initial data gathering, and was accompanied by one interview. The initial research focused on the emotion-driven production of cyberspace and its cultural implications, the central theme of my previous paper that became the major point of departure for this thesis (Jitlada, 2017). This was followed by a week of physical fieldwork in Bangkok from January 31 to February 7, 2017. More in-person and video/voice-call interviews were conducted, as well as two participant observations at the Sanam Luang and the Grand Palace.

#### Mapping the Fields

As I was in Sweden most of the time before and during this study, social media and websites were the primary sources that kept me apprised of the current situation in Thailand. The emotional atmosphere I experienced online after King Bhumibol's death became meaningful to me in terms of research. Once the thesis topic had been decided upon, I began to treat cyberspace as an ethnographic field whose occurrences were to be juxtaposed with those in the actual setting in Bangkok. Cyberspace, in this regard, refers to Thai official websites and my newsfeeds on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, all of which became distinctive as a culturally-produced space, especially in the first month after the king's death.

Another field site was the Grand Palace and its vicinity which are located at the Rattanakosin Island, a historic area in Bangkok's Phra Nakhon District. The Grand Palace was home to Thai kings and the royal family during 1782-1925, boasting a large complex of residential and state buildings, halls, pavilions, open lawns, and gardens (Bangkok.com, n.d.). The royal funeral urn is now placed at Dusit Maha Prasat Throne Hall (Dusit Throne Hall from now) within the palace compound, and will be moved to Sanam Luang for the royal cremation in 2017. Currently, Sanam Luang, which borders one side of the Grand Palace, is where

mourners sit and wait in line to go inside the throne hall to pay homage to the late king. The spatiality of the Grand Palace and Sanam Luang will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.



*Figure 1. The view of the Grand Palace from Sanam Luang on November 30, 2016, prepped for a big cleanup after a month of accommodating mourners (Thai PBS, 2016a)*

Besides cyberspace and the official public mourning space, other public places such as metro stations, shopping malls, and buildings along the streets were generally observed as I went about Bangkok to interview informants. By taking different field sites—virtual and physical—into account, I adopted a multi-sited ethnographic approach. This mode of ethnography deviates from the conventional practices which focus on a single site, for its aim is to “examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space” (Marcus, 1995, p. 96). The approach helped me to understand the phenomenon more thoroughly, as the manifestations of emotion varied according to different spatial and temporal contexts. Thus, the cultural meanings attached to these significant places encompassed multiple spaces and temporalities. Connecting the dots between these meanings across field sites furthered the depth of my analysis of how Thainess was performed through mourning, which is the essence of my argument. The great level of impact from the king’s death was also portrayed by the fact that mourning practices spanned beyond a certain locality.

## Netnography: Observing from a Distance

The term “netnography” refers to ethnographic studies that take place primarily online in order to explore cyber cultures (Rokka, 2010; Kozinets, 2002). In my study, online occurrences were scrutinized through netnography, resulting in a thick description of cyberspace that complemented the ethnography of the whole phenomenon.

The use of netnography allowed me to gain access to some insightful materials while still in Sweden. From October 2016, Thai official websites and social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) were meticulously observed and documented. Additionally, one of my friends worked at the Grand Palace and had been keeping logs of what happened at the Dusit Throne Hall on her Facebook from October 13, 2016 to January 20, 2017, for a total of 100 days. I obtained her consent to use her Facebook postings as empirical data. This online logging helped me to monitor the physical field from a distance at the point of time when the emotional atmosphere was more intense. However, the examples used in the thesis were mainly gleaned from my own observation and interviews.

In addition to the observation, I created an online questionnaire using Google Forms, an open-source survey platform, and shared it on my Facebook. With the help of my father, the questionnaire was also distributed to his friends via instant messaging, so I could reach some older informants. The questionnaire had four main open-ended questions, any of which may be skipped in case the respondents did not want to answer. The questions were: 1) How would you describe your mentality and reaction when you first heard about the king's death [where you were, what you were doing, how you felt, etc.] 2) Did your social media activity include expressing your emotions or opinions in response to the death? Did you post, share, like, or retweet anything in relation to his passing, on social media? If yes, how? 3) What phenomena did you observe on social media after the king's death and how did you feel about them? and 4) What does “being Thai” mean to you?

In total, I received 30 responses from persons who represented a diverse group of Thai individuals. The respondents came from different regions of Thailand and had different political views. Some lived abroad while participating in the study. The heterogeneity of informant profiles contributed to maintaining a balanced and unbiased analysis.

One of the advantages of netnography is its flexibility, especially in a sense that it is less time-consuming and usually provides convenient accessibility to the research objects anytime

and from anywhere (Kozinets, 2002). This flexibility allowed me to track back online data such as social media postings whenever needed, while it was impossible to revisit the fields offline given the geographical distance. Most importantly, netnographic inquiry could be performed in an unobtrusive manner (Kozinets, 2002, p. 3). This is particularly important as the death of King Bhumibol could very well be a sensitive topic to discuss directly and openly with most people. The use of an online questionnaire as part of netnography protected the informants' privacy while giving them the freedom to discuss their situation and position at length, according to the open-ended questions.

Although making a distinction between the virtual and the physical may lead to a perception that the former is less real (Jones 1995, cited in Kozinets, 2002), this research challenges such a perception by recognizing and bringing to the forefront the authenticity of cultural meanings that manifested substantially on cyberspace. By analyzing both spaces separately, my intention is not to dichotomize them; rather, the analysis will portray how the two spaces inform one another, and thus are interconnected in the same lived world. Performing netnography along with a physical fieldwork investigation helped to establish the interrelationship of the experiences in the cyber and geographical space. My emphasis on the existence of the virtual is my attempt to put this notion across.

### **Interview: Talking Grief and Mourning**

A total of eight semi-structured interviews, (four in-person, three through video call, and one through voice call), were conducted with eight informants (one interviewed twice, and two interviewed together). Apart from these, I had relevant chats with two other persons who let me use our conversations in the study. In sum, I had 10 informants from both semi-structured interviews and off-the-record conversations. All were people I know personally, and most of them had filled out the questionnaire. Each interview lasted from 30 minutes to three hours. The average length was an hour. All interviews were conducted in Thai and were transcribed verbatim, except for one three-hour interview which was transcribed only in parts that were relevant for the analysis. Only quotes were translated to English for use in the analytical chapters.

For the semi-structured interviews, I prepared a set of questions about informants' experience of the whole phenomenon, the way they mourned, their thoughts on the way most people mourned, and their perception of the mourning regulations. I always started with the question "What were you doing on the day the king died?" to investigate their emotional reaction, no

matter whether they were more affected by the death or—for the non-royalists—by others’ reaction towards the death. The second question for informants who lived in Thailand was “Could you describe the first month after the king’s death?” The recurring response was that everything turned black and somber. Although I could not be there to experience the atmosphere myself in that very first month, asking informants to describe it from their viewpoint helped me picture Thailand in grief, especially the situation in Bangkok where the official mourning took place. The point of these interviews was to interpret how grief and mourning were culturally constructed. As Lutz (1988) puts it, the way people talk about emotions indicates how emotions are culturally, socially, and morally conceptualized.

I also asked the informants to reflect on their perception of the king, the monarchy, and royalism. The point of this was not to criticize, but to gain perspectives on Thainess through the informants’ association with monarchical agency which is central to the mainstream discourse on Thainess. I intended to choose informants who held different political standpoints to avoid bias, but the majority of them appeared to have had positive reflections. Ethical considerations about the research sensitivity will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

## **Participant Observation: Living the Mourners’ Experience**

As interview outcomes were “the constructed realities that are wrapped up in the jargon of the respondent” (Tjora, 2006, p. 430), it was important to conduct participant observation to perform analysis beyond those verbally constructed realities. Participant observation usually refers to a method that requires the researcher to spend an extensive period of time living with and studying the lives of others (Davies, 2002). To study mourners at Sanam Luang and the Grand Palace, the method was applied in a “quick and dirty” fashion, which might not provide for a complete understanding of the setting, but aims to seek relevant information in a short time frame (Hughes et al., 1995, cited in Pink & Morgan, 2013). The method gave me necessary insights into mourners’ lived experience, from travelling to the place of mourning to practicing mourning rituals.

Due to the time constraints, I only had two opportunities to observe Sanam Luang and the Grand Palace. The first visit was on February 3 which was accompanied by one informant, and the second was on February 7. The former was partially a go-along, a method which mixes participant observation and interview portions, as I also asked some relevant questions during our trip together. However, the go-along is about closely studying an individual

informant by taking a stance towards his/her activities and interactions as they move (Kusenbach, 2003). Meanwhile, on this visit, the bulk of my attention was not paid to the informant's experience in particular, but more to observing the mourning space and practices. Therefore, I counted it as a participant observation.

I spent around three hours in the field on each visit. Both trips included traveling through different modes of transportation to Sanam Luang, waiting there for one to two hours, and walking from Sanam Luang to the Grand Palace, then to the Dusit Throne Hall where the royal urn was placed. I talked to a few people while waiting and eavesdropping conversations around me. I took short field notes in bullet points on my phone, and added some more from my memory afterwards. The field notes were about the physical elements of the space, the sequence of spatial practices, people's interactions, and sensual elements such as sounds and the overall atmosphere. I also took a lot of pictures and recorded some videos which helped me to better describe and analyze the space.

Due to the sensitivity of my research, I decided to enter the field as a covert observer to avoid unnecessary conflicts and maintain objectivity. Asking strangers interview questions like what they were doing on October 13 or what impressed them most about the king could have been too obtrusive. Instead, I asked general questions such as where they came from and how many times they had been to the Grand Palace. The responses from these unstructured interviews became of great value to my analysis.

## **Reflexivity and Ethical Considerations**

I have established how King Bhumibol has been much loved and revered by Thais. Researching about his death, thus, made this research emotionally sensitive. As a Thai myself, I was deeply affected by the death, mostly because the king's presence had always been part of what it meant for me to be Thai. Therefore, I considered myself a researcher with a royalist background, but who also have befriended many with different political opinions. This impartiality made it easy for me to establish rapport with both royalist and non-royalist informants/friends.

However, the case was different for some questionnaire respondents who were strangers, as they might have misinterpreted my neutral and open-ended questions as trying to elicit criticisms against the king. One respondent, clearly a royalist from her answers, stated she was not sure what my research objective was. This became a major lesson learned for me as

my description of the question might have not been clear enough. It was also a reminder of how delicate the subject matter was, especially when discussed with strangers. Thus, I insisted on interviewing only the informants whom I knew would trust me, and ultimately decided to perform covert observations.

Apart from being emotionally sensitive, this research was also legally sensitive due to the existence of *lèse-majesté* law in Thailand. One of my friends said he would not have filled out my questionnaire had he not known the researcher because “the responses would contain evidence of people’s views on the royal family.” Admittedly, I did not take this into consideration before, as I was neither expecting nor planning to use any of those extreme responses even if there were any. But under the current military regime, there is no guarantee whether a neutral response would not be labeled “extreme” or “critical” thereafter. In the writing process, I was especially careful not to include any of the responses that may put my informants at risk, while also being fully aware of the fact that the material may be used or interpreted differently after publication (Davies, 2002, p. 48).

This brings me to an issue of ethics. According to anthropologist Charlotte Aull Davies (2002), informed consent, confidentiality, and transparency are the major ethical concerns in social research—all of which were considered in my study. I asked all informants for consent prior to each and every interview, also informing them about the study purpose which was to explore Thai cultural values through mourning. I stressed that informants could choose not to answer any questions if they did not want to, and that I would ensure their anonymity by using pseudonyms in the thesis. All direct quotations were translated from Thai, so there was no concern whether the linguistic habits may reveal the informants’ individuality (Davies, 2002, p. 51). I also never disclosed or compromised my informants’ identities with anyone, although some people wanted to know.

I also conducted covert observations as previously stated. According to Davies (2002), covert research is a clear violation of most ethical codes which usually highlights informed consent. However, this ethical principle might not be relevant in some cases, such as in “observations of public rituals or performances”, which do not require researchers to notify the gatekeepers of their intent (Davies, 2002, p. 57). This was the case for my study, which I also regarded as doing no harm to the research subjects enrolled in the thesis.

## 4 THE VIRTUAL SPACE

The term “cyberspace” first appeared in a science fiction and could be generally understood as a metaphor because the space takes place nowhere (Nunes, 2006, p. 2). However, cyberspace in this thesis is treated as a real space enacted through a set of relations between “material, conceptual, and experiential processes” (Nunes, 2006, p. xxi). These processes are termed in Mark Nunes (2006)’s *Cyberspaces of Everyday Life*, which is based on Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) conceptual triad of space. Lefebvre’s theory together with Nunes’s interpretation will frame the analysis in this chapter.

The objective of this chapter is to demonstrate how Thai mourners used cyberspace to express grief during their bereavement, and how the emotional manifestations characterized Thainess—the term that represents the norm of good citizenship and Thai identity. The following sections will zero in on how cyberspace is socially produced through the force of emotion.

### Fusing Materiality and Daily Routine

The first element of Lefebvre’s triadic model is *spatial practice* which “embodies a close association, within perceived space, between daily reality (daily routine) and urban reality (the routes and networks which link up the places set aside for work, ‘private’ life and leisure)” [Lefebvre, 1991, p. 38]. Perceived space could be interpreted as the physical form of space, whereas the urban reality and spatial practice is how individuals make use of or relate to that physical form—the daily reality. In Nunes’s (2006) words, it is the material processes of cyberspace that is in question.

What, then, is the physical form of cyberspace and the processes linking individuals with this physical reality? Cyberspace exists in a network of cables and databases (Meikle, 2016; Nunes, 2006), and is accessible for users through computers, smartphones and tablets. In this study, all informants were regular users of social media; they have incorporated cyberspace into their daily routine through relations with technological devices. As they check their Facebook, Twitter and Instagram multiple times a day, they are involved in the material processes of spatial practice and thus are beginning to take part in the production of a social cyberspace through the interplay of their daily routine and physical reality.

The network technology that enables the existence of cyberspace also allows spatial practice, regardless of the places from which the practice occurs. Unlike real-world urban spaces, the contribution to this perceived space can be made from Bangkok, Lund, London, or just about anywhere in the world. Time, distance and location with regards to the spatial practice by Thai individuals make no difference in maintaining the cohesion within the production of their associated cyberspace as a social space.

## Thai Users as Space Producers

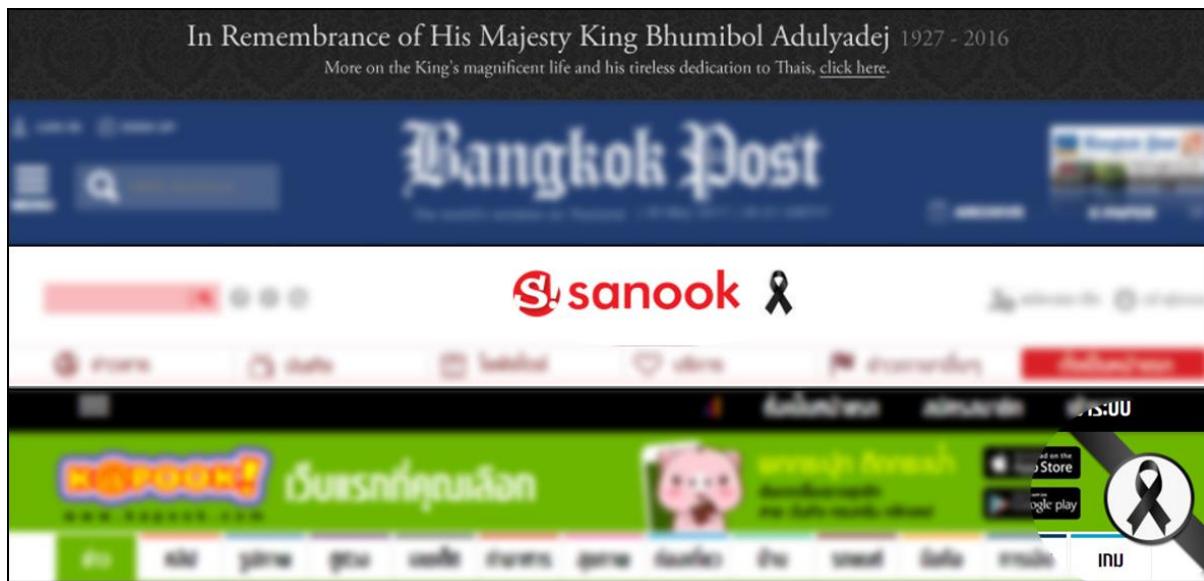
Another division of Lefebvre's triad is the representations of space or the space as conceived by "scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 38). In other words, it is the space as conceptualized through "symbols, codifications and abstract representations" (Watkins, 2005, p. 212). In real-world urban spaces, these abstract representations could be maps, signs, models and designs, all determined for a practical impact. Lefebvre calls this triadic element the "conceived space" which is dominant in any society (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39), with its ideology, spatial practices, and conceptual meanings provided by the space planners. As for cyberspace, the conceived space could be the space of web developers, web designers, webmasters, content writers, and social media administrators. The conceptual structures of cyberspace are produced through the processes of representation dominated by these virtual space planners, resulting in the portrayal of cyberspace as marketplace, public sphere, a global society, and many more (Nunes, 2006, p. xxii).

The visual and textual representations of the Thai-produced cyberspace were observable both in websites and social media. First of all, every Thai website, including the local Thai site of Google, turned black and white in tribute to King Bhumibol almost immediately after his death was announced. Profile pictures and/or cover pictures of personal, official and commercial social media accounts were changed to black, monochrome, colored pictures with a symbolic black ribbon, or anything that represents the profound feelings of loss, respect and love towards the late monarch. The vast corners of the Internet occupied by Thai users were overwhelmed by a flurry of messages and symbols fraught with grief and sadness. In this respect, the Thai government and private organizations managing their websites were the space planners participating in the conceptual processes of the space production by performing their act of mourning through symbolic representations. Social networking sites also allowed individual space users to become the space planners themselves as they

managed their own displays of personal profile images using black and white as a sign of mourning in the wake of the king's passing.



*Figure 2. The Bureau of the Royal Household's (left) and Siam Commercial Bank's (right) websites in black and white (the former continued to be in this format as of June 2017) [BRH, 2016; SCB, 2016]*



*Figure 3. Examples of news and variety websites' headers with mourning symbols [Bangkok Post, 2016; Sanook, 2016a; Kapook, 2016]*

The representations of space emerging when Thai individuals shared the loss had put the cyberspace in an affective state of sorrow. According to Nigel Thrift (2004), when a certain state of affect is “engineered”, it gives rise to a new political implication. By changing their official websites to black and white, the government was using the space to engineer an

atmosphere of mournfulness, thus giving it a political meaning: the king's death was not only about a personal but also an institutional loss.

Individuals then began to incorporate the symbols which conceived the space into their own social media profiles as well as their personal flow of lived space. Four informants remarked that they became more depressed when browsing their Facebook feeds, especially in the first month after the death. When asked for what they had seen on social media, one of my informants responded to the questionnaire, "Everything just turned black and somber. All I saw were a barrage of depressing messages to the extent that they ended up making me depressed". The other three informants were outside the country on October 13. Despite being in a completely different physical spatial context, they all said the moment they cried and felt incredibly sad was when they read the king-related posts on social media. One informant, Pat, was on a business trip in South Korea. She said when the topic of the king sprang up, she would just be on the verge of tears and would eventually not be able to hold back the tears whenever she was on Facebook:

I remember constantly waiting to be fed with significant updates from Thailand. Whenever I checked Facebook, everybody was in a state....it was tremendously sad. I could feel sadness everywhere. Even a Myanmar girl who worked with me told me in private, '*I'm Myanmar, but I could perceive how sad the Thais were about the king. I saw Facebook posts and found myself crying'*' (Pat, personal communication, February 15, 2017).

Interestingly, the manifestation of grief through cyberspace seemed to resonate with Émile Durkheim's (2001) observation of mourning in traditional societies. According to Durkheim, mourning originates from the feeling of diminishment. The death of a community member "has the effect of bringing individuals together, putting them into closer contact, making them participate in the same state of the soul" (Durkheim, 2001, p. 299). The Durkheimian assembling highlights the "collective effervescence", the state in which a certain emotion is intensified and amplified when people gather in group (Durkheim, 2001). Durkheim highlights physical proximity as an aspect of collective effervescence. However, I argue that such intensity of emotion was possible *virtually* in the early period given the above examples, as people were sharing "the same state of the soul," despite their geographical distance. In this vein, they were sharing the same virtual space, thus were having *virtual proximity*.

However, despite the virtual gathering on social media, individuals were in fact engaged in different activities in their physical reality. Grace, for instance, was travelling abroad with her friends on the same day the king passed away. In usual circumstances, she would have had no problems posting pictures from the trip on Facebook and Instagram. She did not feel like doing so due to the depressing atmosphere online, however much she did enjoy the trip. A few days later she was tagged in a “happy picture” by her Japanese friend, which also appeared on her Facebook. One of her relatives commented under the picture and suggested that it was inappropriate because “people are sad at the moment.” The virtual mourning domain produced through the representations of space apparently demanded respect and a certain degree of conformity. Thai users factored these social expectations into their decisions regarding their behaviors within the space, exemplifying the practical impact of the conceived space as stated by Lefebvre.

This example also demonstrates the characteristics of traditional mourning according to Durkheim. In traditional societies, mourning is not only a natural instinct, but rather “a duty imposed by the group” (Durkheim, 2001, p. 295). As previously stated, the impression of diminishment and the resulting collective emotions cause people to seek comfort in one another. In order to maintain group harmony, the society establishes a moral pressure on its members to share the feelings of those personally affected by the loss. Primitive mourning customs, therefore, require attendees to express grief by weeping and wounding themselves and each other regardless of their true feelings (Durkheim, 2001, p. 297), and failing to do so may result in punishment. In the case of Thai society, this duty to mourn seemed to emerge in the conceived space of the modern-world social media at the time of sadness. Harmless content, like a party picture posted on Grace’s Facebook, could be regarded as impolite or showing ignorance. The person committing the offensive act, though unintentionally, then failed to fulfill the obligation as a Thai. Out of concerns for some form of punishment, some Thais may have lamented not so much because they were sad, but rather because they felt obliged to:

I changed my profile photo to black and white for a while, mostly because I felt I had to conform a bit. My boss is my Facebook friend, and people can be nasty if you don’t do something like this. Peer pressure doesn’t really bother me. It’s mainly because I have economic concerns that somehow are tied up with and twisted by this political expression (Toey, personal communication, January 2, 2017).

In conjunction with the new conception of space that turned Thais' social networking space into a mourning domain, the role of power seemed to have evidently surfaced in both examples. Based on Lefebvre's analysis, space also serves as "a means of control, and hence of domination, of power" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 26). Power in this sense does not mean something exercised in a top-down manner, but rather the relational forces existing everywhere in the sphere of this particular situation<sup>8</sup> (Foucault, 1978). Black and white website interfaces and profile pictures became powerful symbolic signs that had a directional impact. Individuals felt empowered to expect and demand others to act in a certain way. The image of King Bhumibol revered as an icon of goodness and sacrifice and the figure that "unifies the hearts of the Thais" as said by the informants and the media in general, established strong meanings and values among the Thais that instigated the kind of power relations immanent in the space.

## The Appropriated Cyberspace

The final element of Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad is the dominated space of inhabitants and users, the space actively experienced and which "the imagination seeks to change and appropriate" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39). Representational space could be interpreted as the combination of spatial practice and representations of space. Given both the material processes and conceptual structures, representational space is a lived space where interactions and relationships between users take place in connection with their making sense of the symbolic objects in the physical space. As Nunes (2006) puts it, the lived space embodies the material and conceptual processes through experiential processes. He uses the reframing of a "workday" concept through emails and telecommunication as an example of experiential processes with regards to the social production of cyberspace (Nunes, 2006, p. xxii). Say an office lady comes to work, checks and replies to her clients' emails, and communicated with her colleagues via Skype. In this scenario, she experiences the cyberspace through an engagement with her job, therefore giving it meanings as a space of her workday.

As stated in the previous discussion, the Thai-produced cyberspace—through some symbolic representations—instantly became a place where people gathered in grief. However, to analyze the cyberspace as a social space, the question of how individuals actually experienced and lived the space has to be considered. First of all, social networking sites generally serve as a convergent platform for users to communicate and create their own content (Meikle, 2016). This platform changes the way people receive and transmit information, reconnect with

friends and relatives, and even interact with each other in daily life. For some, it has become a new emotional outlet (Roman, 2014), or even a trustworthy and reliable “meta-friend”, which compensates for the shortcomings of other forms of communication (Miller, Tales from Facebook, 2011). This restructuring of the idea of communication in modern lifestyle concretizes the experiential processes of cyberspace in everyday use.

However, the experiential processes with which the Thais engaged after the death of King Bhumibol appeared to deviate from their usual condition as Thai users automatically created the same content on social media at the same time. In addition to numerous postings about loss and personal feelings towards the late king, visual and textual narratives of him and the royal family, as well as stories about his good deeds and beneficial initiatives were rerun and shared through every online channel. One informant said all she had consecutively seen on Facebook and Instagram for at least a month following the death were news coverage and content about the king. On Twitter, the *#KingBhumibol* hashtag was trending globally in the first week of mourning. Among the popular content were the rare footage of the king enjoying his childhood in Switzerland, the pictures of old postcards he and his siblings wrote to their grandmother, and unseen photos and videos of him showing affection to his wife and children—all of which received over 30,000 retweets. Almost every informant reported their fair share of involvement in this phenomenon, whether by reproducing the king-related content themselves, or liking and reposting others’ content. Formal and trivial accounts of King Bhumibol’s moments from birth to death were shared across social media, culminating in a large and powerful set of narratives whose meanings and values could be understood only by the Thais.

By producing and sharing the narratives, Thai individuals were altogether producing and framing a certain emotional atmosphere. This means Thais themselves had taken part in an affective engineering process, which had constituted the new political impact in their lived space (Thrift, 2004). Narratives of the king, which formed a major part of Thai leadership’s “emotional cultivation process” (Denison, 1928), now were being cultivated by the political subjects who usually would be receivers of information. This interchangeable role was enabled thanks to social media’s convergent nature (Meikle, 2016).



Figure 4. Pictures of the young king and queen were shared on Twitter more than 50,000 times (left), and the postcards King Bhumibol and his brother and sister wrote when they were children, were shared more than 30,000 times<sup>9</sup> (right).

The emergence of these narratives again emphasized the collective effervescence which, according to Durkheim, contributes to the reinforcement of group bonding and identity (Scheve, 2011). Notably, besides the #KingBhumibol hashtag, two other hashtags rapidly became popular across social media. One was the widely used phrase translated as “May I be your humble servant forever more.” Another was a newly invented statement translated as “I was born in the reign of King Rama XI.” These hashtags were not used to gather people’s opinions and concerns over a common topic (Meikle, 2016), which is originally what hashtags are made for. Rather, they became a mechanism through which the mourners enunciated and branded their identity as King Bhumibol’s *loyal subjects*, as the distinctive generation born in the era of the greatest king. The use of hashtags to emphasize their national identification, either when they appeared alongside farewell messages or the king’s stories, represented how the Thais shared the same feelings and thus in a sense were bonding through collective emotions. Apart from being a manifestation of grief, mourning in this respect had taken on another function: it became a practice through which cultural and national values were extensively expressed.

The overflowing narratives were the product of the experiential processes the Thai users performed by co-creating, liking and sharing the content. As a result, the communication

platform that social media generally provided was transformed into a new space in which history was informally written and memories collected. The redefinition of how history and memories of King Bhumibol were recorded, conveyed, and acknowledged in the Thai society in a sense demonstrated what Lefebvre calls the diversion and reappropriation of the existing space's original purpose (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 167). Even the use of hashtags was appropriated within the space. The reappropriative process was possible due to the adjustment in spatial practice and the representations of space, i.e. when the Thai users emotionally and simultaneously transformed social media into a space for mournfulness and memory despite its purpose as a mere communication platform. As a result, the Thai-produced cyberspace became a lived space with unique cultural implications.

## Grief on Cyberspace

As shown by the empirical discussion, the most important force to the cyberspace production was the shared feelings and emotions among Thai mourners. Remarkably, the symbolic representations of the space—the monochromatic websites and profile pictures, the hashtags, and the narratives of the king—were the manifestations of grief among Thais in the digital era. By simultaneously publishing and sharing the same content, Thai mourners were experiencing Durkheim's (2001) collective effervescence *virtually*, and thus were bonding through their shared identity as the king's *loyal subjects* while they mourned. Grief in this context became an instrument for unification in the Thai national community, which resonated with Durkheim's notion that grief passion would strengthen social solidarity (Walter, 2008; Scheve, 2011).

Also coming with this Durkheimian logic was a notion that mourning King Bhumibol on cyberspace was not only an intuitive impulse, but also an obligation. Failing to meet this social requirement could lead to a certain degree of punishment (Durkheim, 2001; Walter, 2008), perhaps not by the state but by the other citizens themselves. There was also an example of self-censorship so as to avoid such punishment. Grief—or, to be exact, the public display of grief—seemed to become an index for what was appropriate and inappropriate being a Thai citizen. To show grief, regardless of its authenticity, was to perform as a good citizen, particularly when the icon of grief was much loved and respected by most members of the community.

As the cyberspace phenomenon was unprecedented in relation to the death of any Thai king, it could be regarded as the *new public mourning* in Thai culture. According to Tony Walter

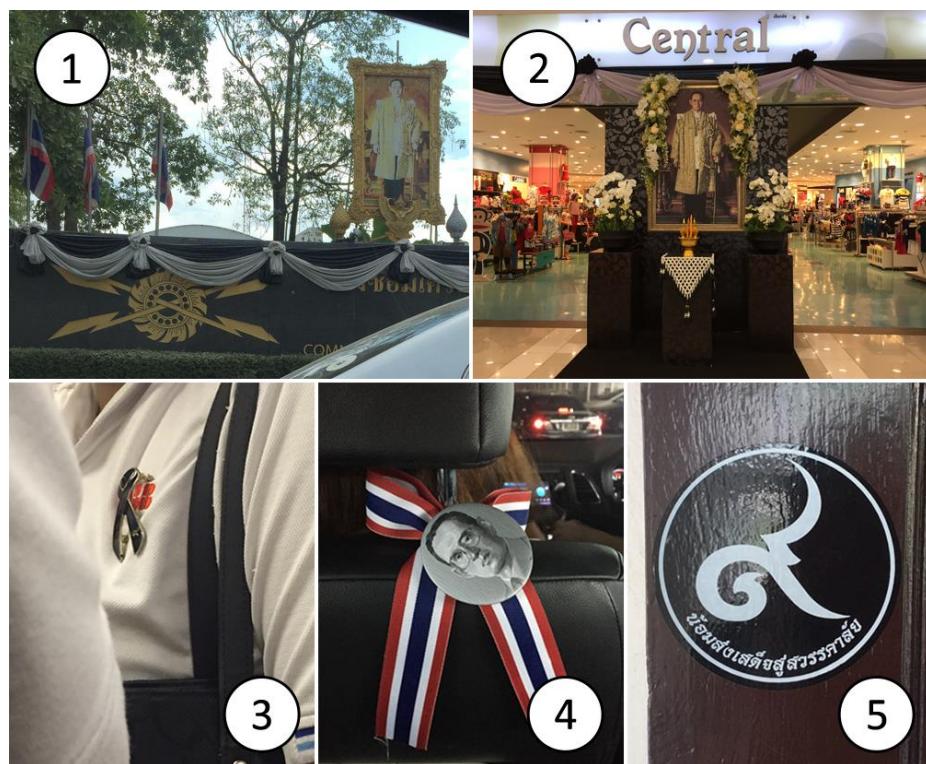
(2008), new public mourning from the 20<sup>th</sup> century in western societies has been about displaying private grief without being obliged to do so, and about mourning the death of a stranger. *This* new public mourning, however, could be best understood in terms of the mechanism through which grief was expressed, which was the Internet, while the rest of the practices could be characterized by the concept of mourning in traditional societies.

The cyberspace phenomenon also saw some Thais imposing control on others and mourners being an actor in reproducing the king-related narratives. This seemed to represent Thai leadership's *governmentality* (Foucault, 1991). According to Michel Foucault (1991), the task of governmentality is to "establish a continuity, in both an upward and a downward direction" (p. 91). This means, from an upward direction, leadership must learn to how to govern itself, while from a downward direction, individuals would adopt leadership's principle and learn to govern themselves (Foucault, 1991, p. 91-92). Clearly, the Thai produced cyberspace saw both the government and individuals mourning through black and white webpages. Most individuals had recognized and accepted King Bhumibol's role in the society as had been communicated to them by the state. They were making sure others behaved appropriately within the virtual mourning space. Finally, they themselves were disseminating the king's story, adopting the role of a political agency in maintaining the late king's significance status and image. The phenomenon highlighted how "a continuity" from both directions had been established in Thai society. The key to this continuity as being discussed in this thesis was affect and emotion.

In the next chapter, I will further explore how affect and emotion were "engineered" (Thrift, 2004) through Thai governmentality, using examples from the manifestations of grief in the physical mourning domain.

## 5 THE PHYSICAL SPACE

As the Thai-produced cyberspace became embroiled with emotions, the physical space was also appropriated as a space of mourning, even months after the king's death. As I went about Bangkok to interview informants in early February, I saw billboards with King Bhumibol's image in black and white, government buildings draped in black and white, and small exhibitions arranged in tribute to the king at public places. A lot of people were still wearing black or dark colors. Some wore black and white pins in different mourning ribbon designs. My friend's car seat was decorated with the king's image pinned to a national-flag colored ribbon. The front door at my own house had a black-and-white sticker of the Thai numeral "9" on it. These were the material manifestations of grief as presented by the government, corporate entities, and individuals. They represented the physical space of Bangkok in general, maintaining an affective atmosphere of mournfulness while the city dwellers continued with their normal routines.



*Figure 5. (1) A government building's fence draped in black and white (2) The king's tribute exhibition at a department store (3) The mourning ribbon pin (4) Inside my friend's car (5) A mourning sticker with a farewell message at my front door*

Along with the ongoing practices of city life, some new practices became routinized within the space of Bangkok. As previously stated, Sanam Luang and the Grand Palace emerged as the prominent mourning space of all the places in Thailand. A lot had happened there since October 14's royal procession, as huge crowds continued to visit the Grand Palace to sign the book of condolence and even pay respect from outside the palace wall. Since October 29, millions of mourners had traveled there from all over the country, and waited in line for hours in order to spend less than a minute paying homage to the king in front of the royal urn—the closest they could get to their revered icon. By making connection with the place, the mourners were contributing to the dynamic processes that resulted in the production of a new social space of the mourning area. These processes were associated with the manifestations of grief which embodied the hallmarks of an emotionally-driven society.

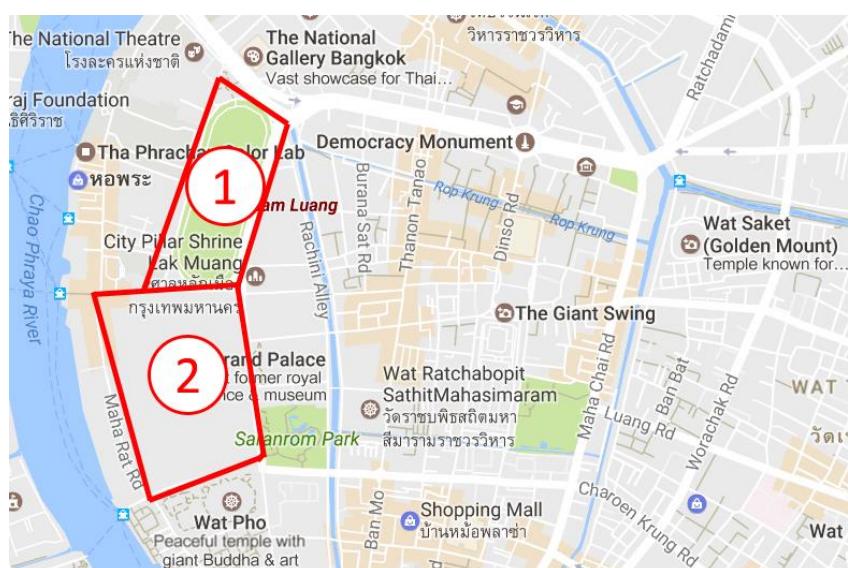
The aim of this chapter is to explore how grief was manifested spatially, temporally, and materially in the physical mourning domain, and how that was connected with governmentality. With the forthcoming discussion, I also argue that the physical space embodies the palace's affective engineering process which made the collective affect possible. The analysis should provide a closer glimpse at how Thais have constructed a certain way to mourn so as to perform good citizenship, an idea which will be elaborated in the final analytical chapter.

## Temporalized Spatial Practice

Before diving further into the social and mental life of the mourning space, we need to understand its physical form by deciphering its spatial practice. Here, temporality comes into play as the “continuity and cohesion” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33) of space is possible through repetitions of actions along the flow of time. Lefebvre (2004), in his other work *Rhythmanalysis*, asserts that these repetitions become a pulse of everyday life, which is inseparable from a composition of any society (Shove, Trentmann, & Wilk, 2009). He makes a distinction between two types of repetition: cyclical and linear, both always coexisting and interfering with each other. Cyclical repetitions exist in nature, such as the repetition of days and nights, while linear repetitions come from social practice (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 8). The synchronization of these rhythmic repetitions formed what Lefebvre calls “eurhythmia” which is a balanced, normal state of things, drawing analogy from the balanced state of human body. Eurhythmia “entails a specific identity” as it refers to an association of rhythmic simultaneities of a specific body (Vojcic, 2014, p. 92), or in this case, space. Together the

cyclical and the linear create different kinds of rhythms in social life, including what Lefebvre calls *public rhythms*—the rhythms of publicly declared practices such as calendars and ceremonies (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 18)—which is relevant with the rhythms of the mourning practice in question. In what follows, I will investigate the temporality of spatial practice from the mourners' perspective with regards to how they navigated the space and participated in the mourning rites. But first, the urban reality of the space should be clarified.

The physical mourning domain refers to the enormous area covering Sanam Luang—a 30-acre open field—and the Grand Palace complex, both situated in the Phra Nakhon District—the central district of Bangkok. Sanam Luang, in particular, is an open space where royal ceremonies and functions especially the royal cremations are held, hence the name “The Royal Field”. In usual circumstances, it is a passive landmark used only by pedestrians. However, with the mourning rites taking place, Sanam Luang had been in preparation for the royal cremation and currently appropriated as a waiting space for mourners coming to the palace. The Grand Palace, on the other hand, still welcomes tourists during the mourning period though it was closed from October 13 to 31, 2016 (Khaosod, 2016c). Tourists and mourners gained access to the palace complex through different gates. Since October 13, the side streets of the mourning area had been closed to ensure an efficient regulation of the place, which is overseen by Bangkok Metropolitan Administration with the help of the military and the police. Temporary entrances were set up with security checkpoints, making the Grand Palace and its vicinity a gigantic restricted area.



*Figure 6.* A map of the inner part of Phra Nakhon District showing the enormity of the mourning area of (1) Sanam Luang and (2) the Grand Palace (Google, n.d.)

### The navigation of space

The palace was open for mourners from 5:00 to 21:00 on most days, except when special religious ceremonies were to be held. I was there from around 14:00 to 17:00 on both occasions with about 1,200 other mourners in attendance according to what I heard from a palace official. To access the restricted area, mourners had to be screened by the police at one of the security checkpoints, holding their identification card in one hand at chest level as instructed by the entrance sign. Passing through the metal detector gate, the first thing that I noticed was groups of mourners dressed in somber and black clothing, complying with the official dress code issued by the palace.



*Figure 7. One of the entrances to the mourning area (left), and a cut-out standee instructing mourners to hold their ID at chest level (right)*

Once inside, mourners would find their way to the nearest gate of Sanam Luang. As they set foot in the zone, they would be flanked by two loose lines of military officers, giving away bottled water, two refreshing towels, and a thin souvenir book titled *What can we do to confidently say “We Love the King”*. At the end of the lines, mourners would follow each other, walking pass rows of white chairs under the large white tents to sit in a queue and wait, with four mourners in each row. The waiting time could last from one to three hours<sup>10</sup> depending on the queue. When the time came, they would be directed to march in a column of fours to sit and wait at the final waiting spot outside the palace area. From there, around 100-150 of them would enter the palace through the Manee Nopparat Gate, heading along the cloister on the northern side of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha towards the Chakri Maha Prasat Throne Hall. They would stand waiting under the sun (sometimes the rain, though

there were umbrellas for loan) in front of this building for a while, and would subsequently be directed by the palace officers to enter the Dusit Throne Hall, their final destination.



*Figure 8. The mourners' navigation of the Grand Palace (Sanook, 2016b)*

The Dusit Throne Hall is the most restricted of all areas within the mourning domain. There were two instructional signs near its gate, one directing the mourners to merge into a column of twos, another telling them to hold their bags or rucksacks in their hands instead of carrying them on their shoulders. No photography was allowed once through the gate. The mourners would have to take off their shoes before going inside the throne hall. Plastic bags are provided for them to carry their shoes. Here, they would queue up to climb the narrow stairs to the throne hall where the mourning ritual took place. Around 70 of them would be let inside at a time. A few palace officials would stand by to form mourners again into a column of fours, ready for the prostration. From there, they would sit on the carpeted floor with their legs to the right, and would prostrate by the order of a palace official who would guide them through every step of the act, from pressing their hands together to standing up. Afterwards, mourners would exit the throne hall using a different gate, then exit the Grand Palace complex at the Tevapirom Gate where they would receive a postcard printed with a photograph of the king as a memorabilia.

The rhythms of the mourning space were mainly ascribed to the mourners' movements and activities. At the outset, the mourners' spatial practice and the incorporated rhythms were determined by the palace's operating hours. The rhythmic activities in the space would be most alive for 16 hours a day. As I entered the area, I naturally noticed different groups of

people. I could tell from their movements who the newly-arrived mourners were, as from the same entrance they would need to walk towards the same direction to the nearest gate of Sanam Luang. Those who were leaving would walk in the opposite direction, while tourists (some Asian and dressed in black) would be either heading towards the Grand Palace entrance or the area exit. I could identify the space users thanks to their different movements which created the rhythmic contrasts. Apparently, the mourners' navigation manifested a temporalized spatial practice that defined the perception of the space.



*Figure 9. Mourners walking in the same direction*

### **The mourning rites**

The journey to pay homage before the royal urn was part of the mourning rites, which included a 100-day royal funeral and other religious ceremonies (The Nation, 2016). The whole practice only lasted for seconds, but was the most meaningful moment of the spatial practice that had drawn millions of Thais from across the country. My informant, Ann, who spent her life in recent years abroad, came home briefly in December. She took her mother, father, and two aunts on a trip from their home in a southern province to Bangkok so they could have this moment. The four elders had never flown before and were afraid of the plane. Two of them needed wheelchairs. Ann recalled the moment her family arrived at the throne hall: "They were so overwhelmed, having tears in their eyes from when they took their shoes

off. My aunt and another woman could be heard saying '*I'm here. Finally, I'm here.*' when we were inside" (Ann, personal communication, February 16, 2017).

According to Thrift (2000), the practice of rituals is a form of affective embodiment. Although he discusses rituals as in performative practices as in modernized terms, such as dance and theater arts, his argument is still applicable for this practice of mourning. In Thrift's (2000) words, certain body postures and spatial organization make possible some sort of "mystical communication" which contributes to an affective experience, as our organs function in relation to the space and surrounding objects while being culturally informed. In other words, some body practices come with emotional effects, considering they are performed through the "biological-cultural" knowledge (Thrift, 2000, p. 37). Ann's story showed how her family began to react emotionally as they moved closer to the throne hall, the most important spot within the space. And as they prostrated in front of the royal remains, the practice gave them a distinct emotional impact they would not have achieved elsewhere. Otherwise, they would not have been through the rigmarole of getting there. The same experience was also mentioned by Pat, who went to Sanam Luang on the next day she returned from Korea to pay respect from outside the palace:

I tried to get as close to the wall as I could. I knelt down and prostrated until my forehead touched the ground, anything to show my utmost respect. . . . Before that I felt guilty because I was abroad when he died. Now I felt relieved, like I had done what I should have done (Pat, personal communication, February 15, 2017).

Equally noteworthy is the fact that many of the mourners had been inside to pay respects more than once, some of them more than once within the same day. During my observations, the old lady on my right told me she had been there for three times. I first thought she went in to see the royal urn for a total of three times on different days, but she meant three times *today*. Altogether, this would mark her 42<sup>nd</sup> or 43<sup>rd</sup> time since the palace was open. Before that, she was there a few times to sign the book of condolences. It was physically exhausting for her, but "I was resolved to be here," she said. The woman on my left was here for her fifth time. I heard a man behind me saying this was his fifth round that day. Actually, "How many times have you been here?" was the easiest way to strike up a conversation with strangers at Sanam Luang, as if the number of times signified some sort of milestones for them in terms of mourning. This demonstrated how the temporal profile of practice matters, especially in a

sense that it reproduces competence and performance within spatiality (Lefebvre, 2004; Shove, 2009; Schatzki, 2009).

As over ten thousands of mourners routinely navigated the space and participated in the mourning rites, they were making an association with the urban reality of the space. Their spatial practice was repeated in a linear process, constituting the daily life of the mourning area while maintaining its continuity and cohesion. The sets of practice at the same time became an organic cycle within the space as space users lived the same routine every day. The orchestration of the cycle and the linear rhythmic pulses became the eurhythmia of the space. Through their spatial practice, the mourners were also linking up together Sanam Luang and the Grand Palace—both of which, in normal circumstances, were two separate places with different meanings and functions. How the mourners perceived and used the space “propounds and presupposes it” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 38), defining it as a specific mourning domain.

## The Politics of Space and Materiality

The representations of space constitute the process through which the mental life of the space is conceived (Watkins, 2005). In this triadic element, materiality plays an important role in embodying the space’s ideological and conceptual conditions. According to Daniel Miller (2005), materiality is not a superficial thing that symbolizes either the true self of an individual or the social order. Rather, materiality has meanings and values of its own; it is part of the world around us that concurrently informs and manifests our practices. When acting as the representations of space, the aspects of materiality ranged from how the space was organized to the rules of conduct imposed on mourners through signs, instructions, and dress code. From the moment they entered the space, mourners were guided to move in a certain direction and to behave in a certain way. By navigating through each entrance, from the outermost security checkpoint to the innermost gate of the Dusit Throne Hall, they were reaching towards more and more reserved areas with stricter codes of conduct and protocol. While the outdoor waiting tents were bustling with hums of people’s voices, announcements from the loudspeakers, and volunteers walking around distributing free food, the exquisite architecture, and the well-groomed grass fields of the Grand Palace oozed a feeling of calmness, formality, and respect. These representations of space, including the verbal signs as previously presented, levied explicit and implicit regulations on the mourners’ spatial practice.



*Figure 10.* Lines of mourners in front of the exquisite Chakri Maha Prasat Throne Hall inside the palace complex

The landscaping of the mourning area did not only have a directional impact, but also an emotional impact. According to Thrift (2004), spatial organizations embodied the interactions between urban reality and affect, thus creating “new political registers” (p. 58). Through these registers, affect plays an important role in influencing people’s choices of behavior and consumption thanks to the “biopower” it produces. Thrift’s main argument, therefore, asserts that affect can be engineered through various practices including urban landscaping to arrive at a certain political outcome (Thrift, 2004). Sanam Luang and the Grand Palace as the mourning space demonstrated such engineering process, given that people were welcomed and controlled within the space, not just as individuals but as “the loyal subjects” coming to pay respects to the late head of state with whom they identified as “their father”.

Another mentioned aspect of materiality that represented the space was the palace’s mourning dress code. To be allowed inside the throne hall, men had to wear black collared shirts and black trousers. Women must wear black dresses or shirts with sleeves and black skirts. No jeans, sleeveless shirts, and flip-flops were allowed. Students and boy scouts could wear their relative uniforms. Hill tribe people were allowed to wear their traditional costumes (Thai PBS, 2016b). Proper clothing was even provided for loan for those who did not dress appropriately. Interestingly, the type of clothing required had an impact on people’s

movements and, definitely, their emotional experience. As Judy Attfield (2000, cited in O'Dell, 2010) puts it, clothing is an object that functions as an intermediary between an individual's inner self, the body, and the external world; thus it works as a channel through which one's identity is communicated. Remarkably, the dress code worked to trivialize individual identity by prioritizing identification with formal institutions. Mourners in their institutional and cultural *uniforms* tended to move and behave in a composed manner, and comply with the rules of conduct within the space, having adopted their institutionalized self and the affective condition tied to it. From Thrift's point of view, these uniforms thus embodied an affective experience engineered through leadership. They were an obvious manifestation of power exercised upon people who willingly embraced it out of their love for King Bhumibol.



Figure 11. An infographic for the palace's dress code by Thai PBS News (2016c)

It was not only the palace who exerted control over King Bhumibol's loyal subjects. Again, the subjects themselves were policing one another. Ann was wearing jeans on her visit because at first she did not plan to get inside the palace. She was just taking care of her parents and her aunts. During the three-hour waiting at Sanam Luang, 14 different people approached her to tell her that jeans were not allowed. One person walked past nine tents just to warn her about the dress code. It was not until the 14<sup>th</sup> time that she decided to borrow a skirt. Like the case of Grace on cyberspace, this example portrayed a situation in which

governmentality was actualized through the fact that individuals were governing themselves, making sure they – and their fellow citizens – were behaving as they should (Gordon, 1991, p. 92).

Through the stated material representations of space, the space of Sanam Luang and the Grand Palace was conceptualized as a sacred place where relative lives and activities were administered under strict regulations. This conceived space was where the relationship between affect and leadership clearly manifested itself. The sacralized mourning space contained symbolic material representations that truly made it a space of domination as theorized by Lefebvre (1991). Most importantly, the rules of conduct imposed on visitors seemed to have emphasized one affective state: mournfulness. But what did mourning really look like in the social life of the space?

## The Mourners' Lived Space

“You all are the guests of the king,” a military officer spoke into a microphone at the waiting tent on my second visit. He then continued to tell us mourners how honored we were to be there. During the two hours I waited at Sanam Luang, I was offered a free lunch, hot and cold drinks, and desserts from the volunteers who walked around dutifully never with empty hands. The woman sitting on my left, who was also there by herself, asked me if I wanted food as she was going to get hers. Officers, volunteers and mourners were making small talks about how more people came today than they did yesterday, and how the Prime Minister was coming to Sanam Luang to check on something. The announcer made a joke about the Prime Minister’s visit, to which many mourners laughed. Two strangers behind me talked to each other about how grateful they were to have the king and the royal family, while watching the movie about King Bhumibol’s deeds and duties on a large screen set up near the seats. As we moved to the Grand Palace, I heard two men discussing about the number of times they had been inside today. I saw many people taking pictures of themselves even after they entered the more formal palace zone. Some snapped photos of the beautiful Grand Palace buildings and gardens, which I also did—both for my research and for Instagram. Walking down the route towards the Dusit Throne Hall, the lines of mourners were met with scattered groups of foreign tourists in colorful clothing. As we waited to enter the throne hall, a man behind me said “We came here to show unity, and to show foreigners our loyalty [to the king]” presumably referring to the tourists we just walked past.



Figure 12. The volunteers distributing food (left), and tourists at the Grand Palace (right)

With the above narrative, I intend to portray how the space was lived by the space users—among them not just mourners but also palace and government officials, volunteers, and tourists. The waiting area was awash with amenities—food, toilets, medics, even clothes for change if one needed to. For a trip to mourn the king’s death, my first impression of the place was that the atmosphere was far from gloomy. Besides my observations, Ann told me she was impressed by the management at Sanam Luang, the hospitable volunteers, and the kindness among complete strangers. Many people offered to help her with her dad’s wheelchair, which she described as “strange, because everyone was trying to help”. I also saw from news videos on YouTube that Sanam Luang was a lot more vibrant during the first 100 days with crowds of mourners and volunteers performing community service such as food donations and garbage cleaning. The space conceptualized as a sacred, restricted place for grief seemed to contradict a scene of smiling faces, hospitality, and people taking selfies as if they were tourists.



*Figure 13.* A policer taking a group photo for mourners at Sanam Luang (left) and a mourner taking a picture of the Grand Palace (right)

Looking at the social life of the space, the so-called mourning space was never only about grief. Like on cyberspace, the lived space of Sanam Luang and the Grand Palace was where the space users expressed national pride and identity as the king's loyal subjects, as "the king's guests". They performed good deeds in good faith and were involved in community service as a way of showing their good citizenship. In so doing, they were also consoling one another in a time of crisis. The fact that strangers could easily talk to each other and were willing to help each other showed how people found comfort in this shared identification and, thus, the shared emotion. Again, people gathering here were to some extent in "the same state of the soul" (Durkheim, 2001, p. 299), although I would say the emotional intensity at the physical space on my visits was not as strong as in the case of cyberspace earlier observed. As time passed by, most people would have returned to their normal daily emotional state

But the collective effervescence might have occurred on the physical domain of mourning in the first month just as it did on the cyberspace as I argued in the previous chapter. Having visited Sanam Luang in October, Pat recalled how she could feel an overwhelming amount of love and care among Thais in mourning:

I felt like this is home. Thais are still Thais. We've been through some ups and downs but at the end we know each other. It was like, '*I know how you feel. I'm feeling better now and I'm here for you.*' It wasn't all about weeping. I just felt so lucky to be Thai, to be born in a country where people were so ready to comfort each other (Pat, personal communication, February 15, 2017).

Social psychologists Spoor and Kelly (2004) argue that one of the functions of collective affect is group bonding especially when group members share a negative affective experience. This goes hand in hand with Durkheim's (2001) argument that a sense of community requires an emotional reinforcement, especially when community members interact and identify with each other in times of sadness. As he puts it, "when social feeling is painfully bruised, it reacts with more force than usual: we never value our family as much as when it has just been tested" (Durkheim, 2001, p. 299). As the example shows, it was collective grief that brought people together, and though not all of them were grieving and weeping in the mourning domain, this collective feeling contributed to a sense of unity and comfort that reaffirmed their national pride and group identity.

Returning to Ann's story in spatial practice analysis, the journey to pay respects was not an easy ride for a lot of people. Mourners came from all over the country, just for the swift moment in front of the royal urn. On both my visits, I decided to use public transportation to experience and explore all the possible routes to reach Sanam Luang the same way some people did. It turned out I had to drive to a parking lot at a metro station, take the metro to the central train station, then hail a taxi or an auto rickshaw taxi to somewhere near Sanam Luang and walk 5-10 minutes from there. A round trip for me took at least 6 hours. The longest waiting time I heard was 16 hours. But mourners were willing to go through the ordeal of their travel and wait that long for less than a minute inside the throne hall, just so they could say "*Finally, I'm here*". As the man uttered, "We came here, so foreigners see our loyalty", the journey to the mourning space was about much more than grief and mournfulness. The space as experienced by its users was the space of pride and consolation. And as mourners took pictures as proof of their visits there, which in most cases would be shared on social media as was easily observed, they were in a way celebrating the accomplishment of a mission, as well as the fulfillment of their obligation as a good Thai citizen.

## The Sacralized Space

The gigantic restricted physical space seemed to be a reflection of the gigantic restricted emotions, given that mourning as a grief manifestation was regulated through the norms and guidelines of how to enact it. Such reflection revealed the connection between affect and governmentality. While collective emotions founded the production of the cyberspace, the shared emotions manifested physically seemed to stem from a successful spatial arrangement closely associated with a deeply-rooted emotional system. The rules of conduct materialized

and displayed as representations of space underscored the propensity to establish the right way to mourn, while the space of mourning as experienced by mourners had seen a contradicting vibrant situation in which certain cultural values and group identity were celebrated. Such cultural values included hospitality, charitableness, generosity, unity, and loyalty to the king.

In this regards, the spatial arrangement also generated different affective atmospheres, given that people became more composed as they moved closer to the royal urn. The Grand Palace's stricter rules and protocol emphasized the sacralization of the space, as well as the monarch himself. As Jack Fong (2009) puts it, King Bhumibol's staying power back in his reign was "a function of material and symbolic culture that effectively harnessed historical, sacred and emotive capital of the Thai nation" (p. 680). The spatiality of the Grand Palace constituted part of this material and symbolic culture, and still continued to communicate an affective experience that sustained the Thai emotional culture centralized on King Bhumibol. This centralization will be addressed in detail in the following chapter.

Also observable in both domains of space were how the leadership was trying to take control of mourning practices, and how citizens were governing and disciplining one another. The domination seemed to stem from the need to maintain social order in the sensitive setting. In the next chapter, I will argue that *the right way to mourn* as conceptualized in the space of domination was in fact an embodiment of *the right way to be Thai*. Along with this argument, I will explore the connection between the cultural values that emerged from the field and the mainstream notion of Thainess to clarify how mourners and leadership performed Thainess through the spatiality of mourning.

## 6 THE DOMINATED SPACE

The first two chapters answered my first research question regarding how grief was manifested in spatiality, with a touch on the temporal and material aspects. Further exploring the second question—how the grief manifestations were connected with Thainess—will be the aim of this chapter.

I will begin by contextualizing the definition of Thainess and Thai governmentality in relation to the cultural values identified in the empirical discussion. Here, I seek to elucidate how Thainess was performed through the practices of mourning as observed in the realm of spatiality. The subsequent sections will elaborate on the space of domination as practiced by the Thai leadership and Thai citizens, respectively. This is to argue that domination emerged and evolved as another way of performing Thainess, and in the process had given rise to resistance. By unfolding the space of domination, I also argue that *un-Thainess* was constructed, which enabled the Thai emotional system to conceive a society that justified multiple degrees of harassment, from hate speech to physical abuse.

### Thai-style Governance: The Patriarchal Structure

In the previous chapter, I have identified hospitality, charitableness, generosity, unity, and loyalty to the king as among the cultural values that represented an ideal perception of Thainess—a term that signifies good citizenship in Thai culture. These values were closely linked to the ideological infrastructure of Thailand as facilitated by Thai elites: Nation, Religion, and King (Saichol, 2005). The triumvirate had seen “King” as the most significant element as also evidenced in the empirical discussions. According to Saichol Sattayanurak (2005), monarchy had been the institution that enabled an integration of the trinity: Thai monarchs, who ruled the country based on Buddhist morals, acted as the center of unification and successful leader of national development. King Bhumibol, in particular, had been an ideal figure who personified Thainess (The New York Times, 2016), considering his image as a charismatic head of state who worked hard for his subjects through the course of his life. As such, this perception resonated in how my informants generally admired the king, because as king, “he didn’t have to do so much for the people” (Grace, personal communication, February 2, 2017) and because “he had such a close relationship with the people” (Paweenaa, personal communication, January 2, 2017).

Saichol argues that Thai intellectuals' constructed Thainess had developed into the *Thai-style governance* which underlines the centralization of power by the palace. Given King Bhumibol's role in society as the father figure who "unifies the hearts of the Thais", the *Thai-style governance*—or in other words, the Thai governmentality—had been sustained throughout his 70-year reign. This kind of governmentality also embodied J.H. Denison's (1928) vertical, or *patriarchal*, integration of culture, an emotional system in which community members unify through identification with their revered leader—their *father*. According to Denison, state religion is a source of an emotional force that develops a sense of unity in the culture. This argument rhymes with Durkheim's notion of the sacred life of individuals which pertains to a collective identity forged through "religious ideals (or their nationalistic equivalent)" [de Rivera, 2014, p. 224]. As the "father of the nation" and a Buddhist icon, King Bhumibol played an integral part in indoctrinating cultural values, either directly such as through his speeches or indirectly by being a role model (McCargo, 2005). This was evident in how one of the questionnaire respondents when asked what being Thai meant to her:

All Thais are fortunate to have been the late King Bhumibol's most humble subjects. Therefore, they should adhere to His Majesty's teachings as guidance to lead their lives and to continue to preserve the unique Thai culture for future generations (Paweeana, personal communication, January 2, 2017).

It was not clear what she meant by the "unique Thai culture," but the informant certainly identified herself with King Bhumibol. Some other informants also had similar responses to this question, saying being Thai meant being "the king's subject." Two of them even said it meant "being loyal to the Nation, Religion, and King." The recurring response definitely demonstrated Denison's patriarchal emotional system. More importantly, it highlighted the significant influence of the mainstream Thainess as constructed through the Thai governmentality.

Unity, charitableness, generosity, and loyalty, which I saw as the key Thai cultural values, notably reflected a deep association with the monarch. Even hospitality, which had been the marketed character of "The Land of Smiles"<sup>11</sup>—as Thailand had long been known for—was a form of good deeds that arose quite extra-ordinarily within the mourning space. In addition to the circumstances observed at Sanam Luang's lived space, one informant said when she went to sign the book of condolence, the mourners waiting in line were unusually disciplined.

You know, normally it is not a cinch to regulate Thais. For example, they are sometimes not inclined to stand in line. But this time it got to the point where everyone was pitching in to make sure the lines were perfectly aligned. We don't always see this. People were so thoughtful! (Mook, personal communication, February 24, 2017)

Mook also mentioned how she felt in the first month of mourning: "I felt like Thais needed each other because the king was gone. We must try to be good people. Do it for our society!" This attitude was reflected in how all the charitable activities were performed "as a tribute to the king," according to the previous study commissioned by the Society and Health Institute (2016). Moreover, the study states that some people regarded the event of the king's passing as the time to draw people's attention to King Bhumibol's significance as a role model, as well as to the example he had set for the Thai people. In a similar vein, Thais should take this as an opportunity to practice the king's teachings and follow in the footsteps of His Majesty (SHI, 2016). Notably, one of my informants traveled from a northern province to Bangkok and stayed for a month to participate in the community service at Sanam Luang. Some mentioned they were determined to "be a better person," having the king as their inspiration. The loyal subjects of the king seemed to find unity and moral comfort in doing good deeds, which was their way of performing Thainess as they mourned.

But when the unifying force of the nation passed away, the loyal subjects who had been depending on this emotional system were struck with anxiety and uncertainty, "as if a child loses his guardian" (Pawana, personal communication, January 2, 2017). This uncertainty reflected through their various attempts to continue King Bhumibol's legacy, either by following in his footsteps, or by paying tribute through multiple ways of creating narratives. The sharing phenomenon on cyberspace and the "identity hashtags" discussed in Chapter 4 seemed like one of those attempts to sustain the emotional system centralized on the king. Multiple forms of art, like songs, movies, documentaries, and TV series have been produced as a tribute to the late king—all of which have power to support an emotional culture (Denison, 1928, cited in de Rivera, 2014). All of these formed a means by which Thai mourners honored the king and kept memories of him alive. At the same time, they were performing Thainess by expressing pride in being the loyal subjects of the monarch.

In addition to the performance of Thainess as discussed, I observed that Thainess was also activated by way of controlling everyone to mourn the same way. On the one hand, Thai

leadership had established some rules and regulations to create patterns of conduct that defined the legitimate way to mourn. On the other hand, most Thais had accepted these rules and regulations, perceiving them as the fitting way to honor the king. Furthermore, they had imposed control on one another in order to maintain such legitimacy. In what follows, I will elaborate on how Thainess was performed in the space of domination, both by leadership and by citizens themselves.

## **State: The Right Way to Mourn**

Thai leadership's "mourning regulations" ranged from adjusting official websites to controlling mourners' every movement and behavior in the physical domain. Besides the examples discussed in Chapter 4 and 5, some other aspects of control were observed. For instance, there were official guidelines for the use of royal language to express condolences and address the king's death and mourning (Prachachat Turakij, 2016). Thailand's Ministry of Culture also launched a video demonstrating the correct posture for performing prostration in front of the royal urn (Komchadluek, 2016), for there are different levels of prostration in Thai culture depending on the respected figure or the context of paying respect.

Media-wise, the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) [NBTC 2016b; SEAPA, 2016] issued and updated formal guidelines for broadcasting especially during the 100-day mourning period. The gist of the guidelines revolved around the notion that all media operators must "take into account 'appropriate' broadcasting to show appreciation towards the King's compassion and take part in mourning his death", and that an intense atmosphere of mourning must be sustained for 30 days. All information regarding the king's death must strictly follow the palace's rules; must be approved before airing; and must not include "interpretation, analysis, and criticism of such information." All television and radio channels must refrain from showing "any element of entertainment, dancing, joy, violence, impoliteness, or overly expressed emotion for 30 days." Media presenters and guests must dress in plain "black and white—preferably black, and appear composed." All entertainment programs were suspended for a month, and all King Bhumibol-related programs were recommended to cover a wide range of content such as the royal development projects, interviews with royal scholarship students, and information about the upcoming reign. Any additional comments regarding the palace content were prohibited.

The NBTC's guidelines constituted a form of "heavy and continuing *mediatization* of politics", which is one way affect is engineered for a political purpose (Thrift, 2004, p. 65).

The controlled media content and presentations foregrounded one affective state in a discernible effort to enshrine the late king's greatness and legacy, reaffirming the hegemonic status of the palace in the process. The use of interviews represents a political presentation that utilizes emotion to display credibility (Thrift, 2004, p. 65). The banning of interpretation, analysis, criticisms, and comments on the king-related content prevented the audience from receiving alternative ideas, resulting in their acceptance of the one-sided information as truth. Given the affective mediatization, Thai leadership dominated the space of mourning by taking advantage of emotional perception while maintaining that any messages other than its controlled information appeared to be lacking in the significance and credibility in the media sphere.

Well, it wasn't a bad thing, but I just felt like that was all I saw non-stop. And it made me depressed because there was no entertainment. But from a different angle, I got to see his life's work, and I knew a whole lot better (Grace, personal communication, February 2, 2017).

It is clear from the example that even though the managed affective state could be overwhelming, some people finally came to accept and even found benefits in it. The example also showed how the media manipulation seemed to work efficiently when it comes to mourning King Bhumibol's death.

Additionally, the NBTC had issued a guideline for Internet Service Providers (ISPs) [NBTC, 2016a; SEAPA, 2016]. The guideline required all Thai ISPs to immediately suspend or intercept "inappropriate" content on websites and social media or they would be prosecuted. This included working with international websites like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter on the censorship. An ad-hoc team must be set up to monitor online content 24 hours. This means control was thoroughly exercised across the mediascape, even on cyberspace which many believe would be revolutionary in terms of freedom of expression (Fuchs, 2014).

The state's domination in the mourning space emphasized how uniformity and obedience were seen as a way of showing the highest respects to the king. Undeniably, it was the state's obligation to maintain its power structure and national integrity by sustaining its constructed meaning of nationhood. However, such insistence on uniformity inherently implied disapproval against deviation from it, and thus had established a definition for *otherness* in the society. In fact, creating *the others* had always been a major aspect of the Thai national identity construction since the reign of King Rama VI (1910-1925) (Saichol, 2002; Kasian,

2009; Harrison, 2010). From estranging the Chinese community in Thailand as *the others within* (Kasian, 2009, p. 268), to creating hostility against Myanmar in the process of legitimizing international policy (Pavin, 2002), Thai leadership had been identifying someone ethnically *un-Thai* as their political enemies. Most remarkably, as historical precedents show, anxiety over the communist influence at the end of World War II had led to distrust against Thais who appeared to be left leanings (Harrison, 2010). It was the first time ethnicity was no longer an index for identifying “strangers to the concept of loyalty to the nation” (Irvine, 1973, cited in Harrison, 2010), but it is now a political ideology that hides behind such identification. The mourning guidelines, especially the media censorship, seemed to have insinuated another kind of *strangers* constructed by the state: the *disloyal subjects*.

### Citizens: The Right Way to Be Thai

The previous section showed how the Thai leadership performed and sustained the mainstream Thainess through its mourning regulations, while concurrently conceptualizing *un-Thainess*. In the space of domination, Thai citizens also performed Thainess by accepting the state’s control, for they shared the values of loyalty and unity. Corporate citizens and media operators responded to the palace’s regulations by either sharing them or launching their versions of guidelines. Many instructional videos and infographics on how to navigate the mourning area and how to dress properly were shared broadly on the Internet. One informant said his company asked employees to wear black for a month and even launched a new set of uniform shirts in black for certain departments. Another said his gym cancelled classes that involved playing music. After the classes resumed, some gym instructors asked customers to observe a minute’s silence to pay tribute to the king. Most informants said they did not feel affected by the government’s regulations in the first 30 days (mostly the wearing of black clothing and the suspension of entertainment) because “He was a great man. It wouldn’t hurt to do this for him” (Mook, personal communication, February 24, 2017), although some felt even more depressed watching the television.

As most Thai citizens conformed to the mourning rules, some had simultaneously adopted the frame of thought about *otherness*. Consequently, they feared that *un-Thainess* would be divisive to the kind of cultural integrity they deeply valued. Fears manifested in their attempts to control one another to mourn the right way. Grace’s party photo and Ann’s wearing of jeans mentioned in Chapter 4 and 5 were not the only examples. On the day the king died, a freelance comic artist I followed on Twitter posted that she heard two older women

incredulously question her, “Still in the mood for drawing?” while she was outside working. One informant told me that his aunt’s student argued with an old woman sitting next to her on the sky train and reprimanding her for listening to music on her earphones. The girl shared her story on Facebook. It went viral and reached Ann who mentioned that Facebook status after admitting her relief for not having to deal with the pressure in Thailand:

I felt lucky I was abroad during the first month after his death; otherwise, I would’ve been so frustrated and uncomfortable. The idea that everyone grieves differently came to mind when I saw Facebook statuses about someone being taken to task for listening to music on their headphones on the sky train, or some of the postings that told people off for going on vacation and showing vacation pictures. Some even judged others for not expressing sadness or gratitude, simply because they were not active on Facebook at the time (Ann, personal communication, February 16, 2017).

Ann’s quote showed how some mourners were trying to regulate other people’s emotion, which is the most private form of personal expression. This example also emphasized that the space of domination sprawled across domains of spatiality. All of the above situations—in which the persons being criticized were actually mourners themselves—occurred within the first month of mourning, the period in which the state demanded an absolute atmosphere of grief. They revealed deep tension and pressure to conform that emerged out of the group passion strengthened by collective emotion (de Rivera, 2014). Notably, some people were not only following the leadership’s rules, but also creating their own rules based on what they thought were inappropriate during the time of sadness. The space of domination expanded across the physical and virtual domains, giving rise to frustration, distrust, and anxiety over how one should express emotion. Those who failed to meet this obligation to mourn (Durkheim, 2001), although unintentionally, could be prejudiced against, reprimanded, or misunderstood for disrespecting the king and the mourners, or worse, for being *disloyal*.

When domination was intense, resistance also arose. On October 13, an infamous anti-royalist who had fled Thailand after being charged with *lèse majesté* posted a video that contained an extremely insulting message against the royal institution (Khaosod, 2016a) to provoke the mourners<sup>12</sup>. The video received over 1.5 million views, 5,000 shares, and 51,000 reactions. Among these reactions, more than 41,000 clicks were for Facebook’s “angry” icon, while more than 8,000 were for the “like” and “love” icons. The comment section was flooded with furious responses, filled with such phrases as “You don’t deserve to be born

Thai!”, “If you don’t love the king, never come back to Thailand!”, and “Get a new nationality!” Some expressed their intention to “hunt you down and burn you alive”, a response to which many reacted in agreement.

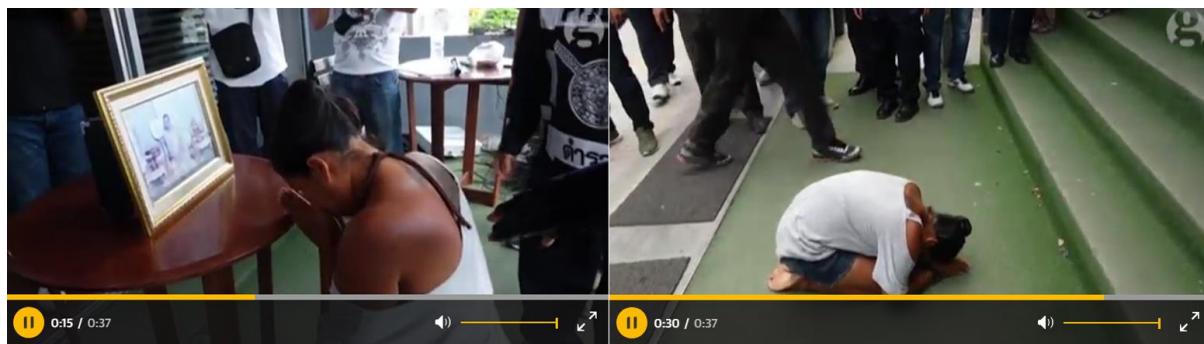
Hunting down an exiled *disloyal subject* was quite a difficult task. But on some occasions, the subject happened to reside in the neighborhood. One day before the king died, a young man in Phuket Province published a Facebook status which fell into the scope of the royal-defaming content (Phuket Gazette, 2016). It outraged people who were concerned about the king’s health. The screenshot soon spread virally via instant messaging. The man was briefly arrested and literally hunted down by huge crowds of angry Phuket residents. The agenda was set up on social media, and hundreds of people gathered in front of his family’s soy milk shop late at night on October 14 to protest because they heard the man was released from police custody. Hate banners were put up at the building’s front. The mob was broadcast live on a local news Facebook page for two and a half hours. The man and his family left the building before the crowds arrived, so no one was hurt physically. The man published a long Facebook post to apologize for using the wrong language, insisting he had no intention to disrespect the king (Khaosod, 2016d). He later went into monkhood “to pay tribute to the king,” as he wrote on his Facebook.



*Figure 14.* Angry crowd gathered in front of the Phuket man’s house and attached banners with hateful messages (Daily News, 2016).

A few other similar “witch hunt” cases occurred in the first week of mourning. Offensive videos or messages were posted on Facebook, and the owners were hunted down by the crowds and ultimately arrested. In one case, a man was besieged by a group of angry men, verbally abused, and kicked in the head several times. He was forced to kneel down and prostrate in front of the king’s portrait. An older man among the crowd yelled “Speak

louder!” as the alleged culprit was forced to apologize and say he loved the king (See also The Guardian, 2016 for the news report). In another case, a woman had to pay respect to the king’s image in front of hundreds of people who gathered at the police station where she was taken in custody. Both incidents were recorded, shared, and reposted on Facebook and YouTube. The original video of the first one had eight million hits, with more than 44,000 likes and 1,500 comments agreeing to the “punishment”. Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, through his spokesperson, expressed concerns over the series of witch hunts, saying physical assaults would be “ill-perceived by foreigners<sup>13</sup>” (Khaosod, 2016b). Although the Justice Minister Paiboon Koomchaya warned the public that vigilante actions would be prosecuted, I did not find any news reports of arrest in connection with those harming the “offenders” (Khaosod, 2016b; See also The Guardian, 2016).



*Figure 15.* The video of a woman being publicly shamed in the police’s presence (The Guardian, 2016)

While all the informants I interviewed strongly disapproved of the extreme social sanctions, a large number of people who at least responded positively to the public-shaming videos seemed to think those insulting the monarch deserved such responses. The situations resonated with one informant’s remark about the ultra-royalists: “One person might not cause much nuisance. But when they form a group together, their power ensues and [their actions] can be legitimized. As soon as they’re legitimized, they can do just about anything” (Jane, personal communication, February 22, 2017).

Ovar Löfgren (1989) states in his article *The Nationalization of Culture* that national identity can be “activated in special situations, confrontations or settings, dormant in others” (p. 9). The first week of mourning could be the moment in time when Thai national identity was mostly activated. When the *disloyal subjects* stirred up anger, the loyal Thais on the receiving end felt challenged. Therefore, they used a moral compass under the banner of “Thainess” to

sanction or ostracize them. Domination also expanded across the virtual and the physical, validating the interconnection between the two as social media functioned to allow both domains to inform each other. Under the dominated spatial context, the *disloyal subjects*, and those being suspected so, were constructed as *the others within* (Kasian, 2009). The given examples showed how the discourse of otherness had developed into hate speech, public shaming, vilification, physical abuse, and, ultimately, justifications for such actions, all of which had unquestionably permeated Thai society following the king's passing. These justifications were validated fundamentally by the existence of the lèse-majesté law, and empirically by the *loyal subjects'* emotional reactions. At the end, the Prime Minister's statement perfectly legitimized adversaries against *the others within* by favoring national concerns for the country's image of peace and unity over other values, such as human rights.

## The Space of Politics

In this chapter, I have expounded on the Thai emotional system which was central to the mainstream thoughts on Thainess as studied by Saichol Sattayanurak (2005). I pointed out that Thai cultural values emerging in the space of mourning were closely related to this emotional system, which was integrated through identification with the monarch. Within this emotional system, a space of domination in the form of mourning regulations was conceived as a means by which Thai leadership performed Thainess in an effort to keep the society intact. Along those lines, the perception of *un-Thainess* was conceptualized and recognized by Thai citizens. By mourning *the right way*, Thai citizens were incorporating Thainess into a code of conduct, practicing what they perceived as good citizenship and performing their national identity.

But with fears of losing cultural integrity due to the existence of *un-Thainess*, Thais also attempted to impose their rules of mourning—which embodied their rules of being Thai—on each other. In some cases where resistance arose, domination among citizens had led to situations in which individuals—who by all means had provoked the mourners—were intimidated, publicly harassed, and physically hurt. Punishment against those perceived as *un-Thai*—or the *disloyal subjects*—was evidently rationalized in the space of mourning, when loyalty to the king held a cultural meaning as the supreme value of Thainess, as had always been in Thai society.

Returning to Lefebvre (1991), a social space, which is always a political space, has to feature the space of domination. From the above analysis, the dominated space for Thailand in grief

was produced by way of engineering emotion which brought about a political impact (Thift, 2004). The space of mourning as discussed in this chapter had, therefore, become a space of politics in which the Thai leadership interacted actively and affectively with the biopolitical subjects it dominated. The results involved some emotional circumstances far from peace, order, and unity, which paradoxically seemed to be the leadership's primary concerns.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

In the past 70 years, Thailand has been through uncountable changes: massive economic ups and downs, political and financial struggles, the tsunami and great floods, good news and bad news. But for 70 years it had always seen the same king, so long it almost could not imagine existing without him. The death of King Bhumibol Adulyadej marked a turning point in Thailand's modern history. For the much beloved king had always been seen as the country's guiding light for most Thais, his death entailed grief, uncertainties, and fears.

Within the space of mourning, emotions intermingled with cultural implications. In this thesis, I have explored how grief manifested through mourning practices, and thus was culturally constructed, in two domains of spatiality: the virtual and the physical. Durkheim's (2001) notion of collective emotion and mourning rites, as well as Thrift's (2004; 2000) ideas for affective engineering in politics were mainly applied along with Lefebvre's (1991) *The Production of Space* which I used to frame the spatial analysis. In the virtual domain, I found that cyberspace accommodated public mourning practices for many Thais. They publicly expressed grief in black and white, whether from their official websites or personal Facebook pages. The king's unseen and untold narratives were spotlighted on cyberspace in hopes to cherish him in memories. The hashtags "May I be your humble servant forever more" and "I was born in the reign of King Rama XI" were also used as a way to mourn. During the early days of virtual mourning, grief was collectively distributed and heightened to the point that Durkheim's (2001) "collective effervescence" was seemingly possible without the physical proximity. This constituted reinforcement for collective identity. Therefore, in the lived space of the virtual domain, Thais were not only grieving for this immense loss, but also bonding through their shared identity as the loyal subjects of the king.

In the physical space, I mainly discussed observations at Sanam Luang and the Grand Palace where the official mourning rites took place. The mourning space was conceived as a restricted and sacralized place where rules of conduct with regards to mourning were the prominent aspect. Every step of spatial navigation and practices were under control so as to ensure order and uniformity. The closer one gets to the royal urn, the stricter the rules. And mourners perceived the moment in front of the royal urn as the most meaningful moment. This showed how spatial organization had contributed to the affective experience (Thrift, 2004). Here, grief was also manifested temporally and materially. In terms of temporality, I found that the number of times mourners had come to pay respects to the king mattered.

Some mourners even went so far as to repeat their practice three times or more in the span of one day. Besides being a manifestation of grief, this aspect of temporality also reflected mourners' profound respect for the king; it was how they did their utmost to show gratitude and appreciation. Concerning materiality, the palace's dress code was the most distinguished form of grief manifestation. The dress code emphasized demand for obedience and uniformity. By following the dress code, Thais were necessitated to go to mourn not as themselves, but as homogenous "citizens" ascribed to certain institutions, sectors, or cultural groups of society. They were either the general public, or students, or boy scouts, or tribal people according to the dress code. Just as noteworthy is the intriguing aspect of the physical domain as it showed how the lived space of Sanam Luang appeared to be quite animated, which somewhat contradicted the state's effort to maintain a semblance of order in the midst of the nation's critical period. The space users who were mourners, officers, and volunteers interacted in a friendly manner. The place itself was hospitable, considering a number of public services from good Samaritans and volunteers, free food, and all other necessary features. Mourners were welcomed and taken care of as if they were "the king's guests." Everybody living the space seemed to be well-behaved and supportive of each other. Here, certain cultural values emerged, such as hospitality, charitableness, generosity, unity, and, most definitely, loyalty to the king.

Identifying these cultural values which implied the conceptualization of grief brings me to the argument of this thesis. Referring to my second research question centered around the connection between Thainess and grief, I argue that mourning the death of King Bhumibol—as a manifestation of grief—engendered a spatiality in which Thainess was performed. In the final analytical chapter, I revisited the mainstream notion of Thainess as investigated by Saichol Sattayanurak (2005) in order to draw the connection between the Thainess I observed and the Thainess as constructed by leadership. I demonstrated how the cultural values from the field were holistically integrated and unified in the name of King Bhumibol, given the patriarchal arrangement of the emotional system (Denision, 1928) he embodied. That is to say, was it not precisely for King Bhumibol, these values might not have been so activated in the space of mourning. As Thais expressed their pride in being the king's loyal subjects, and exercised good citizenship through their voluntary services and acts of kindness across the realms of physical and virtual spatiality, they were performing Thainess and producing an ideal space for actualizing their national identity.

But Thainess was also performed by way of dominating the space. In both domains of spatiality, I portrayed how leadership imposed rules and regulations on mourners, and how mourners were controlling and prodding each other to follow the rules. By establishing *the right way to mourn* through its multiple guidelines, Thai leadership was trying to ensure order and uniformity which it perceived as central to national integrity, especially during the vulnerable state of the nation. However, leadership's legitimization of mourning regulations resulted in implications for what was illegitimate. Thus, in the process of performing and sustaining Thainess through these regulations, implications for *un-Thainess* were created. That is, the *disloyal subjects* were constructed as opposed to the loyal ones. As a result, it seems to be that Thailand's modern-day political enemy refers primarily to those Thais who go against the state's imposition of rules. The notion of *un-Thainess* instigated anxiety and pressure, as people feared they would be criticized, prejudiced against, or even misjudged if they were to alienate themselves from the rules.

At the same time, most Thai citizens, corporate and individual, agreed to the mourning regulations to maintain their good citizenship to an acceptable extent. More than that, some created their own rules based on what they thought was inappropriate, as *un-Thainess* for them had also threatened the unity and respect for the king. Those suspected as being disloyal or perceived as deviant from the mourning norms, could face different degrees of punishment, ranging from criticisms to physical harm. Ultimately, I argue that the Thai emotional system, or "Thai-style governance" (Saichol, 2005), had conceived a society that could justify several degrees of offense against whoever the masses pinpointed as *un-Thai*.

## Future Research

This thesis provides an analytical account of Thailand's phenomenon of collective emotions with regards to King Bhumibol's death in the early period of mourning (from October 2016 to early February 2017), using ethnography as a central method. The ethnographic narrative composed may be of use to cultural analysts, ethnographers, anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and political scientists who are interested in this very phenomenon. As the study took special interest in how this phenomenon was connected with Thainess, scholars in the fields of humanities and social science studying Thailand and Southeast Asia can use it as a frame of reference for future research in the construction of Thai nationhood and national identity. Moreover, as this research focused on the manifestations of grief in terms of spatiality, further inquiries can hone in on the other aspects of emotional manifestations in

association with King Bhumibol and his passing, such as temporality and materiality which have been addressed sparingly in the thesis. Researchers exploring collective emotions, grief, and mourning may also find benefits in this study for their investigation of a comparative phenomenon. Finally, this thesis may stimulate discussion and inspire more academic inquiries into the realm of affect and emotion in a cultural and political sense, so as to build on the social scientific knowledge of emotion which has often been taken for granted as only a psychological attribute.

In terms of applicability, the thesis outcomes may provide some new perspectives for governments, policymakers, and even organizational leaders to consider with regards to governmentality. The following reflections from the study are targeted at the aforementioned audience, and lastly, at the Thai leadership and Thai general public in particular.

## **Concluding Reflections: Affect and Leadership**

Cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) defines culture as “webs of significance” (p. 5). Thus, unpacking a cultural phenomenon is a matter of studying “the creation of meaning through which human beings interpret their experiences and guide their actions” (Geertz, 1973, cited in Alvesson, 2002, p. 5). We have learned from this study that the cultural meaning-making process always involves emotion, especially that elicited by leadership’s manipulation. In a national or organizational community, leadership can contribute to this process by engineering an emotional experience (Thrift, 2004). Once the cultural meanings are *felt*, individuals’ behavior can be manipulated to achieve a certain political goal. This was the task successfully performed through the Thai governmentality, in a sense that most individuals learned to “behave as they should” (Gordon, 1991, p. 92) in the mourning context, fully accepting leadership’s control and ideology as the king’s death to them was emotionally meaningful.

In this regard, governments, leaders, and policymakers may pay a closer attention to the emotional aspect of their governing strategies, aside from considering them as a goal-oriented task. This emotional aspect could be concerned with *how* the strategies are being communicated, as much as what is being communicated through them. Thrift’s (2004) examples of affective engineering process, which were also addressed in the thesis, were spatial arrangement and mediatization. The priority for this process is on which kind of emotive perception it should create. Given the case of Thai mourners, a successful engineering process is one through which people are able to develop identification with the

context, thus feeling a mutual sense of belonging in the national community. To clarify, Thai mourners were willingly accepting the state's domination carefully orchestrated through mourning regulations as they were able to identify themselves with Thainess which was embodied by their revered leader. In most cases, the cultural meanings and values they associated themselves with had been affectively ingrained in them through a lifetime of engineered indoctrination and socialization.

### Rethinking Thainess

The most important lesson learned from the thesis is one regarding ways to maintain cultural integrity. This research has established that the "Thai-style governance" under the regime of constitutional monarchy has embodied an emotional system tied closely to one monarch. While this has led to an emotional culture in which members of the community feel the unique sense of pride, unity, and group identity, the same culture also seems to recognize uniformity as the only absolute way to achieve unification. The need for uniformity as imposed on citizens by the state has developed into hostility against differences and individuation. This notion was articulated by how the Thai leadership and citizens were, to some extent, disciplining each other to mourn the same way, thus trying to regulate even the most intimate form of personal expression. Such intolerance towards diversity manifested most clearly in the conceptualization of *the others within* the same community. But antagonizing *the others within* has evidently culminated in damage against the society itself.

The question is whether cultural integrity necessitates uniformity as the basis for unification. From this study, besides the traditionally constructed view on Thainess which bears upon unification through King Bhumibol, Thainess could also be understood in terms of conflicts and diversity. Given the contingencies explored in the mourning space, these two features seemed to be among the realities of Thainess, as they must be in every other community. Engineering emotions to reinforce Thainess, as well as other collective identity, could also be done along with recognizing the fact that conflicts and differences constitute part of the society. Instead of trying to avoid conflicts by minimizing differences in the name of unity, conflicts could be embraced, discussed, and appreciated in order to sustain cultural integrity. This is particularly important for the current Thai society in which leadership no longer has the formidable King Bhumibol to tie in all their affective strategies with.

My ultimate wish for Thailand is to see it moving beyond its traditional ideals of cultural integrity. As the study has shown, there were conflicts and disagreements among the

mourners themselves, despite their collective identity. By all means, Thai politics and Thai culture can be understood “as a *process* of ‘community without unity’” (Castronovo & Nelson, 2003, cited in Thrift, 2004, p. 68)—*unity* in a sense that it only requires conformity and uniformity in order to move the country forward.

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis is based partially on my previous paper, “Uncovering Thai culture’s emotional landscape: an analysis on cyberspace and collective emotions” (Jitlada, 2017) submitted to the course Applied Cultural Analysis: Specialization (TKAN14) for the Autumn 2016 semester at the Department of Arts and Cultural Sciences, Lund University.

<sup>2</sup> The lèse-majesté law, otherwise known as Article 112, states that individuals who “defames, insults or threatens the king, the queen, the heir-apparent or the regent” can face up to 15 years in prison (See BBC News, 2016b for details).

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<sup>3</sup> The October 14 Event was an uprising against Field-Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn's military regime in 1973. The movement was led by student activists and grew into a bloody confrontation between students and military officers at Thammasat University (See Darling, 1974 for details).

<sup>4</sup> Bloody May 1992 was a protest against an unelected government of General Suchinda Krapayoon which ended in a massacre of the protestors by the military (The Guardian, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> The literature review is based on a seminar report published on the Society and Health Institute's official website as the study has not been officially published in print. The study is part of the institute's "Project for Inspirations for Generating Well-Being from His Majesty the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej's Royal Duties" (SHI, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Primordialism refers to "social bonds that members of society believe naturally persist overtime through ethnic kinship, ancestry, culture, history and nation" (Shils, 1957, as cited in Fong, 2009, p. 677). Primordial practices involved language, non-material, and material culture which contains strong affective influences upon the populace's beliefs in the nation (Fong, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Four Reigns has been reprinted several times and adapted into a TV series and a musical, respectively.

<sup>8</sup> According to Foucault (1978), power is not understood as a "mode of subjugation", but as a "multiplicity of force relations" existing everywhere in the relative sphere (p. 92-93). The concept is not elaborated in the thesis to avoid diverging from the key theoretical concept, but Foucault is here cited to indicate the source of the explanation provided to the power relations being discussed under a Lefebvrian framework.

<sup>9</sup> The captions were about how the users were touched by the king's love for the queen, and the royal siblings' "cute" handwritten postcard.

<sup>10</sup> The waiting time was shorter as the number of people went down when compared to that of the first 100 days. Some people had waited more than 10 hours. As of April 2017, the waiting time could be less than an hour.

<sup>11</sup> "The Land of Smile" is one of Thailand's famous tourism slogans.

<sup>12</sup> The video content cannot be described here as that would count as reproducing the royal-defaming content which could lead to prosecution under *lèse majesté*.

<sup>13</sup> The Prime Minister said "I would like to remind people to make a report to police, military and security officers when they witness acts or behavior that appear to constitute inappropriateness towards the monarchy so that they can proceed with legal action. Doing so would make Thailand a civilized nation. As a Prime Minister, I don't want images of Thais hurting Thais to be ill-perceived by foreigners" (Khaosod, 2016).