

**THE ROLE OF GRASSROOTS WOMEN PEACEBUILDERS IN SOUTHERN  
THAILAND**

By

MÉLANIE-ANNE BONNAR

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MASTER OF ARTS

In

CONFLICT ANALYSIS AND MANAGEMENT

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

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Faculty Supervisor, Hrach Gregorian, PhD

---

Fred Oster, PhD  
Program Head, MACAM Program

---

Gregory Cran, PhD  
Director, Peace and Conflict Studies, RRU

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this project is to document the peacebuilding strategies of Thai grassroots women community leaders from the provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala, in Southern Thailand, and to understand how feminist perspectives of peace and conflict influence local conflict management initiatives. Constructive conflict analysis and social-psychological approaches are utilized to assess the core constructs of peacebuilding initiatives initiated by Thai women peacebuilders in Southern Thailand.

The primary approaches identified in Thai women's peacebuilding strategies include the promotion of inter-community dialogue forums, diverse educational initiatives, basic health care provision, victim rehabilitation, and justice-seeking activities. The influence of feminist perspectives is demonstrated in the use of grassroots peacebuilding leadership roles to overcome gendered stereotypes of women's victimization; in the utilization of socially and culturally defined domestic female roles to complement peacebuilding strategies; and in women's capacities to overcome intergroup cultural differences through cooperation between Thai Muslim and Buddhist women in grassroots peacebuilding initiatives.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CAR	Conflict Analysis and Resolution
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
BBMP	United Patani Mujahidin Front (Barisan Bersatu Mujahidin Patani)
BIPP:	Patani Islamic Liberation Front (Barisan Islam Pembebasan Patani)
BRN	National Revolutionary Front (Barisan Revolusi Nasional)
BNPP	National Pattani Liberation Front
CPM 43	Civil-Police-Military joint headquarters unit
FCFW	Fourth World Conference on Women
GAMPAR	The Greater Pattani Malayu Association (Gabungam Melayu Pattani Raya)
GMIP	Islamic Mujahidin Movement of Pattani (Gerakan Mujahidin Islam Patani)
OIC	Organization of the Islamic Conference
PBC	Peacebuilding Commission
PfA	Platform for Action
PPM	Pattani People's Movement
PULO	Pattani United Liberation Organization (Pertubuhan Persatuan Pembebasan Patani)
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
PSC	Protracted Social Conflict
SPBAC	Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre
UN	United Nations

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview of inquiry

The contemporary conflict in Southern Thailand has undergone various cycles of avoidance, confrontation, escalation, and conciliation since its inception. Various governmental, political, and religious group interventions have thus far failed to break the destructive cycle of conflict, and a sustainable strategy to reconcile conflict relations remains elusive. The formation of insurgent groups that actively promote violent strategies to attain their goals of autonomy and self-determination has further escalated conflict tensions in recent history, and the surge in anonymous acts of terrorism has heightened local, national, regional and international pressure to reduce violence, promote peace, and stabilize the region.

The intensification of violence in Thailand's three southernmost provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala since January 2004 has stimulated analyses of various aspects of the emerging dynamics of intrastate conflict and violence. Media reports and conflict analysis literature have thus far focused primarily on the dynamics of conflict escalation in terms of historical motivations; political contributions and implications; religious rationales; terrorism as a threat to national and regional security; and the immediate effects of violence on local populations.



There remains a gap, however, in contemporary peace literature regarding the emergence of innovative, non-traditional sources of conflict management that propose to transform the cycle of destructive community relations in Southern Thailand. Specifically, there is limited information published about how local actors in Southern Thailand have emerged to define their roles as agents of conflict management and transformation through grassroots peacebuilding initiatives. Local community leaders' emergent strategies that propose to minimize violent conflict and build processes that foster positive peace thus require greater analytical discussion to increase understanding of the range of viable strategies that exist to manage destructive conflict in Southern Thailand.

Just as it is important to critically analyze the complex structures and processes of conflict causation, escalation and intensification, it is equally valuable to engage in critical analysis of multiple levels of leadership involved in managing or transforming conflict relations (Lederach, 1997). Although top and middle level leadership initiatives often have a greater capacity to effect change on a broader segment of the overall population, grassroots approaches to conflict management represent the local realities of individuals directly experiencing conflict, and thus constitute an important locus of inquiry (ibid).

The contribution of women, in particular, to building peace within local communities in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala has been overlooked in the literature. Women-led peace activism is often prevalent in societies affected by violent conflict, but their activities are also less visible due their emphasis on longer-term strategies to transform conflict

relations and promote social justice (Anderlini, 2007). The specific role of grassroots women community leaders as local peacebuilders in Southern Thailand thus requires further elaboration, in order to identify the value of their particular contribution in fostering positive peace and reducing intergroup conflict in Southern Thailand.

## **1.2 Synopsis of Major Research Project**

A systematic analysis of Thai women peacebuilders' conflict management initiatives has yet to be undertaken in the field of peace and conflict studies. In particular, little is known in academic literature about how local Thai women community leaders from the three Southern provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala have understood and responded to their ongoing environment of human insecurity, and to what extent they have managed to develop strategies to foster the growth of positive peace in their respective communities in Southern Thailand.

A participatory action research project was developed in close cooperation with the Prince of Songkla University in Pattani to investigate the role of Thai women community leaders in local peacebuilding initiatives in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala. The project was designed to facilitate the analysis of personal narratives of women leaders currently engaged in a range of grassroots peacebuilding initiatives.

This research proposes an actor-centered approach to analyze an emerging sector of Thai civil society involved in peacebuilding initiatives in local communities in Southern

Thailand. Specifically, a representative group of Thai Muslim and Buddhist women grassroots leaders from Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala were interviewed in order to identify: (1) what specific peacebuilding strategies are employed to manage intergroup conflict relations; (2) to identify a feminist perspective of peacebuilding in Southern Thailand; and (3) to determine what effect gender has on the development of grassroots peacebuilding initiatives in Southern Thailand.

The research and analysis employ a constructive view of conflict, as a manageable and necessary process needed to initiate change in societies affected by protracted social conflict. Emphasis on a human security perspective also highlights the immediate and long-term concerns of women peacebuilders, and demonstrates how existing peacebuilding strategies reflect these priorities. Additionally, the growing need in the field of peace and conflict studies to more accurately identify opportunities for peace from the perspective of local conflict management actors (Lederach, 1997), is reflected in this research. The analysis thus proposes to define Thai women peacebuilders' roles as agents of constructive conflict transformation, and to emphasize their potential to foster grassroots strategies of creativity, cooperation, and peace in their communities.

### **1.3 Delineation of the scope of investigation**

The analytical focus of this project is on the description of grassroots women-led peacebuilding initiatives in the provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala, in Southern Thailand. Specifically, this project investigates the involvement of local Thai women

leaders in emerging capacity-building civil society roles as agents of conflict management and transformation in their respective local communities.

Relevant historical, political, and social aspects of the conflict are included, however, the research itself does not propose to achieve a complete conflict analysis of the complex array of factors influencing the escalation of intergroup conflict in Southern Thailand.

The history of the conflict and the primary parties involved are briefly reviewed to describe the general context within which grassroots women peacebuilders conduct their peacebuilding initiatives, but more inclusive analyses of historical developments are available in other conflict management literature and media sources.

The core analytical focus of this research is thus aimed at investigating alternative methods of conflict management designed by female grassroots peacebuilders from Southern Thailand in order to contribute to ongoing academic and practical discussions about what alternative local resources are available to manage conflict relations in communities affected by protracted social conflict.

#### **1.4 Why focus on women?**

The world today is fraught with conflicts of local, regional and international scope and complexity. The reality we are collectively faced with is that conflict of any sort cannot be addressed by one sector alone (Knight, 2003). Effective conflict management should maximize the use of available resources to foster peace, and given the fact that women

constitute roughly fifty percent of the global population, they are a resource that should not be overlooked (Anderlini, 2007). The efforts by women in the field of peacebuilding thus need to be better understood in order to capitalize on and promote this underutilized asset.

Although the international community has taken important steps towards recognizing the role of women in peacebuilding, the gap between expressed doctrine and reality remains large (ibid). United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325, passed in 2000, is emblematic of an international commitment to recognize and support women's critical roles in peace and security initiatives. Resolution 1325 enshrines the need to include women in all peacebuilding and peacekeeping processes and reaffirms the need to promote gender mainstreaming in the broader peace and security system. It reaffirms "the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding" and emphasizes:

the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution." (UNSC 1325, 2000).

The language of this international resolution suggests that women have an integral role to contribute to the field of conflict management, which, in theory, should lead to their equal recognition and participation in peacebuilding initiatives.

Although international protocols and standards are increasingly cognizant of the need to include women as key stakeholders in peace initiatives, the reality of international peace operations has yet to reflect this objective. There is a growing need to focus critical

analytical attention to the real work that women peacebuilders do in conflict situations, in order to prove their integral value to local, regional and international audiences. As Anderlini (2007) reflects on the same theme, “The central question addressed is not so much what peace processes can or should do for women, but what do women do for peace processes, which by definition benefit society as a whole.” (p. 4).

### **1.5 Research purpose**

The purpose of this research project is to identify how local Thai Buddhist and Muslim women peacebuilders manage conflict in their communities, and to illustrate the value of these initiatives within the broader systemic structure of peace and conflict relations in Southern Thailand. The primary objective of this research is to analyze the narratives of a representative group of women peacebuilders from Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala in order to describe the specific approaches to peacebuilding used by grassroots Thai women peacebuilders.

Broader objectives of the research include determining how Thai women peacebuilders’ unique perspectives influence their efforts to manage conflict relations in their communities, and to identify what specific characteristics of these approaches can be attributed to their feminist perspectives of peace and conflict.

Additionally, a subsidiary role of this research is to contribute to contemporary peace literature by promoting the need to include critical analyses of the views and voices of

local women leaders in societies affected by violent conflict. The contribution of this research will add to an existing body of literature that concerns itself with understanding the role of grassroots women peacebuilders in local conflict management initiatives, and contribute to a discussion regarding the identification and promotion of alternative community resources available to address conflict constructively.

## **1.6 Primary research questions and framework for analysis**

Thai women community leaders' grassroots peace building initiatives are analyzed within two related frameworks. Initially, a descriptive analysis of individual peace building strategies is presented to illustrate the collective effect of women's grassroots peacebuilding efforts in Southern Thailand. Subsequently, an investigation of the relation between feminist peacebuilding strategies and existing conflict management initiatives is pursued to identify the value of Thai women's conflict management efforts in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala.

### *1.6.1 Personal peacebuilding perspectives*

What specific peacebuilding strategies are Thai women community leaders currently engaging in to foster conflict transformation in their respective communities? How have Thai women's peacebuilding strategies proposed to minimize the destructive effects of conflict, and to maximize opportunities to build positive peace? How do Thai women peacebuilders' personal perceptions of conflict influence their strategies for building peace in Southern Thailand?

### *1.6.2 Relational dynamics*

What does a feminist perspective of peacebuilding contribute to grassroots conflict management initiatives in Southern Thailand? What contributions do Thai women community leaders offer to grassroots peacebuilding initiatives that are attributable to their unique feminist perspectives? How is a feminist perspective of peacebuilding different from other conflict management initiatives?

## **1.7 Organization of the thesis**

Chapter One has provided a brief introduction of the purpose and design of the Major Research Project and the systemic approach of the inquiry. The following chapters will analyze seven components related to the research objectives.

Chapter Two will provide a brief historical overview of the conflict context within which Thai women community leaders engage in peacebuilding initiatives, and describe the principle actors contributing to conflict escalation.

Chapter Three will describe the analytical framework used to conceptualize the conflict management initiatives of grassroots women peacebuilders, and will include a discussion about the theoretical frameworks that influence the analysis of research results.



Chapter Four presents an overview of the research methodology, the design of the Major Research Project, a discussion of data sources and methods of data collection, and the definition of key terminology.

Chapter Five provides a discussion of the major research findings derived from the primary data, and Chapter Six presents an analysis of the results within the context of contemporary feminist ethics and conflict theory.

Chapter Seven summarizes the major conclusions of the research project, and Chapter Eight provides initial recommendations for future conflict analyses and intervention initiatives, and will include a discussion about the broader significance of the research for future academic and practical initiatives.

## CHAPTER II: THE SCOPE OF THE CONFLICT

### 2.1 Overview of the conflict context

Conflict is not a new phenomenon in the regions of Southern Thailand bordering Malaysia. Evidence of conflict between the minority Thai Muslim population and Thai Buddhist authorities has existed for over two centuries (Haemendira, 1976; Ishii, 1994; Islam, 1998; UCDP, 2008). The evolution of the conflict has produced various cycles of escalation, low-intensity violence, and accommodation since its inception, but the intensification of violence in January 2004 marked a significant shift in conflict dynamics toward violent confrontation (UCDP, 2008).

Violence in Thailand has been primarily concentrated in the southern provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala, but also in the provinces of Satun and Songkla near the southern international border with Malaysia. Violence in these regions has been manifested through anonymous gun shootings and stabbings; bombing of military, governmental and religious buildings; kidnapping, beheading, and bodily dismemberment of victims; and burning of corpses and schools (ICG, 2005). The primary groups targeted as victims of violence include Thai government officials, soldiers, and police; civilian government supporters; school teachers; agricultural workers; human rights defenders; and recently, moderate religious leaders (AI, 2008; BBC, 2009).

Although most of the violence to date has been perpetrated by anonymous insurgents, a number of key Muslim militant groups and members of official Thai security forces have been identified as potentially responsible for committing various acts of violence, and further contributing to the escalating cycle of violent conflict in Southern Thailand (AI, 2009; ICG, 2005). Media reports focused on terrorism, Islamic insurgency and religious conflict have increased the public visibility of escalating conflict dynamics, but so far, conflict management interventions remain futile. Violence and death persist in the provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala, and effective conflict management methods remain the subject of persistent questioning within Thailand and the international community.

## **2.2 A brief history of the conflict in Southern Thailand**

### *2.2.1 Pattani Raya*

The area formerly known as Pattani Raya, in contemporary Southern Thailand, was an independent Islamic kingdom from 1390 to 1902 (ICG, 2005). This region, which encompassed territory currently known as the three Thai provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala, as well as parts of western Songkla and northern Malaysia, adopted Islam as a state religion in the 15<sup>th</sup> century through the influence of Arab merchants and traders in major centers of trade and commerce on the east coast (Ishii, 1994; Islam, 1998).

Prior to 1786, the Muslim sultanate of Pattani Raya was independent, but underwent periods of nominal control from neighbouring Siam (Thailand), and the sultans of Pattani Raya were obliged to provide offerings of silver, gold and military aid as symbols of their loyalty to the Siamese kingdom (ICG, 2005). Alternately, sporadic revolts arose in Pattani Raya between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries as objections to indirect Siamese Buddhist dominance over the independent Muslim sultanate (Haemindra, 1976).

### *2.2.2 Pattani under Siamese control*

The Muslim sultanate was abolished in 1786, when Pattani Raya was conquered by Siam (Islam, 1998). Uprisings in 1789-1791, organized to resist Siamese rule over Pattani Raya, prompted the Siamese government to pursue a strategy of “divide and rule” to increase the effectiveness of their indirect administration over the newly acquired Southern provinces (Haemindra, 1976). Pattani Raya’s traditional structure of sociopolitical governance was subsequently disbanded, its traditional leaders were deposed, and the land was divided into seven provinces, administered by chiefs appointed by the King of Siam. Sporadic rebellions were periodically manifested within the local Muslim population throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century to resist indirect Siamese rule over Muslim territory and population (ibid).

The Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909 formally consolidated the international border that presently separates Thailand from Malaysia, and officially enshrined Siamese governance over the provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala (ICG, 2005). The official imposition of a centralized administration structure over the diverse religious population within the

new borders of Siam posed new challenges, both for Siamese authorities and the culturally diverse civilian population under its control.

### *2.2.3 Nationalist assimilation policies*

Relations between Bangkok and the local Muslim population in the Southern provinces in the twentieth century were characterized by cycles of escalation, conciliation, and relative de-escalation of tensions. To this effect, the imposition of a series of policies of cultural assimilation were met by strong local resistance, often followed by poorly implemented conciliatory gestures from the government, and temporary easing of tensions (ICG, 2005).

The 1921 Compulsory Primary Education Act dictated the requirement that all children in Siam attend public primary school for four years to learn the Siamese language and a secular curriculum, infused with Buddhist ethics (ICG, 2005). This policy was perceived in certain circles as a direct attack on the culture, religion and language of the local Muslim population and their traditional Muslim *ponoh* schools (ibid). *Tok Guru* teachers from the local Muslim *ponoh* schools staged massive protests to oppose the education policy and subsequently, the payment of taxes. The government, in response, initially arrested and executed suspected leaders of the resistance, and subsequently reduced taxes on Muslim villagers to temporarily diffuse the growing tension between Bangkok and the Southern provinces (ibid).

The strongest resistance against Siamese rule was manifested through the Muslim leaders deposed by the new administration. Assimilation policies created a strong sense that the Siamese government was specifically attacking Islam and ethnic Malay culture, which gave rise to significant local resistance.

One source of this resistance was the *ponoh* (religious boarding school), the most important institution for reinforcing Malay Muslim identity. When Thai rulers replaced traditional elites with Thai Buddhists, the head teachers (*Tok Guru*) became the de facto community leaders, defenders of the faith, and upholders of Malay identity (ICG, 2005, p.2).

Local Muslim leaders advocating for the rights of the Muslims of the Southern provinces gained popularity among the masses, and orchestrated numerous uprisings in the early twentieth century.

A bloodless coup d'état orchestrated in 1932 by revolutionary Western-trained military officers introduced a constitutional monarchy system through the enactment of a constitution based on Western models (Ishii, 1994). The ultra-nationalist Pan-Thai policies subsequently initiated by Phibun Songkhram in the 1930s initiated another cycle of confrontation between the central government and the local Muslim population in the South in light of its radical strategies to implement the principles of the 1932 revolution. The implementation of these policies initiated another phase of deliberate cultural suppression of Islamic political, legal and social customs (Islam, 1998).

In 1939, the ethnically neutral name of Siam was changed to Thailand, and Thai cultural norms were strictly imposed throughout the country. The subsequent implementation of *Ratthananiyom* (Cultural Mandates) dismantled traditional Islamic Shariah and adat laws,

and was replaced with the overarching Thai legal system. Furthermore, the use of the local Malay language and its regional dialect, Yawi, were banned in government offices, government employees were forced to take Thai names, and men and women were prohibited from wearing traditional Muslim-Malay clothing in public (ICG, 2005). Buddha statues were placed in public schools, and all students were forced to bow to them as an act of patriotism (ibid).

Expression of non-Thai identity was described in as not only unpatriotic, but as a threat to national security.

The fusion of national security and national identity created one of the central paradoxes of the conflict: the state saw assimilation as the key to reducing a perceived security threat posed by Malay Muslims who refused to adopt Thai culture, but the only real threat to security came from protests against assimilation policies. (ICG, 2005, p.3).

Through the imposition of policies that swiftly enforced the eradication of Muslim authority figures, legal traditions, religious education system, and the official use of customary Malay and Yawi languages, the Thai government effectively ostracized the Thai-Muslim population, who found themselves suddenly stripped of their traditional authority, and whose daily customary practices and traditions were directly threatened (Islam, 1998). The seeds were sewn for escalating hostility between the Thai-Muslim minority in the Southern provinces and the central Thai-Buddhist administration.

#### *2.2.4 Cycles of confrontation and conciliation*

A surge of Muslim protests, rebellions and resistance movements emerged throughout the second half of the twentieth century, as underground Islamic independence movements

gathered momentum in their collective opposition to the treatment of Thai-Muslims by the central government. A cycle of renewed confrontation was sparked with the enforcement of a State of Emergency, which facilitated the suppression of demonstrations through the use of military force, resulting in mass arrests and deaths (Islam, 1998).

Accommodation was tested after WWII through the rescinding of certain discriminatory policies, namely; re-opening *ponoh* schools; allowing Muslim names to be used; the enactment of quotas for Muslim enrolment in post-secondary institutions and government offices; and the creation of the National and Provincial Councils for Islamic Affairs, as an attempt to include Thai-Muslims into the governance process (Islam, 1998). The Patronage of Islam Act further attempted to incorporate Muslim leaders into the central governance structure, although this was widely perceived as a plan to co-opt appointed Thai-Muslims into illegitimate positions of authority (ICG, 2005). The appointment of two *Qadis* (Islamic judges) to provinces with Muslim majorities was similarly veiled in deceitful intentions, since Thai Buddhist judges retained ultimate authority over all legal decisions (ICG, 2005). Additionally, development programs, focused primarily on agricultural development, were planned in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala as attempts by the central government to narrow the gap between Bangkok and the South.

Despite these efforts at accommodation, cycles of low-intensity conflict continued to take precedence in Southern Thailand through sporadic protests, rebellions, guerilla activity, and the use of military force. The subsequent creation of pro-independence Islamic



organizations, and the lack of effective discourse between the growing number of parties in conflict further escalated conflict tensions, and deepened the divisions between groups.

### **2.3 Islamic insurgency**

The gradual domination of the Southern provinces by the Thai government, and the forceful and discriminatory manner with which control was implemented, fostered deep resentment amongst certain circles of the Thai-Muslim population in the Southern provinces of Thailand. Burgeoning from initial acts of passive resistance to coordinated guerilla warfare and terrorism, the development of Islamic insurgency as a response to the Thai government's unconventional methods of control and integration has heavily influenced the escalation of conflict in Southern Thailand

#### *2.3.1 Early developments*

Tengku Abdul Kadir, the last sultan of Pattani, organized one of the original movements of Muslim resistance to the Thai government's policies at the end of the nineteenth century. Following his arrest and release in 1903 and 1906, respectively, he continued to exert significant influence over informal resistance movements in Southern Thailand from Kelantan, in northern Malaysia (Haemindra, 1977).

Two notable uprisings led by Sufi sheikhs To'tae and Haji Bula, preaching jihad against the Siamese government, were organized in 1910. The army managed to quell these movements, and the leaders were imprisoned to prevent the spread of their radical

ideology (ICG, 2005). Numerous leaders of the Muslim resistance movements reportedly relocated to Northern Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, where they provided fundraising for future separatist movements in the region (ibid).

### *2.3.1.1 The legacy of Haji Sulong*

In 1947, the chairman of the Pattani Provincial Islamic Council, Sulong bin Abdul Kadir bin Mohammad el Patani (known as Haji Sulong), created the Pattani People's Movement (PPM), which demanded self-rule, the implementation of Islamic law, and basic linguistic and cultural rights for the Thai-Muslim population (ICG, 2005). Haji Sulong, educated in Saudi Arabia, and influenced by his counterparts in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Southeast Asia, became a leader of a growing autonomy movement in Southern Thailand. He led the submission of a seven-point demand for change to the central Thai government in 1947, which formally outlined the needs of the Muslim leaders in Southern Thailand. Haji Sulong and other religious leaders were subsequently arrested on charges of treason, which initiated a period of intense conflict escalation. Widespread riots in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala and protests outside the police station where Haji Sulong was incarcerated led to the deaths and arrests of hundreds of protesters (ibid).

Haji Sulong's influence is evident in his ability to unite both religious and nationalist groups under a common goal of autonomy, which recast Thai-Muslim unrest into a populist national movement that had broad appeal from the dispossessed masses (ibid).

Haji Sulong's leadership and Islamic credentials paved the way for the creation of numerous Islamic independence organizations in the 1950s and 1960s.

### *2.3.2 Organized resistance*

Organized resistance to Thai rule escalated dramatically in the 1950s and 1960s. As reported by Al-Jazeera (2009), "Very rarely does any group claim responsibility for attacks in the area, and the identity and precise goals of the fighters have never been publicly declared". It has been reported that there were over sixty armed groups operating in Southern Thailand in the late 1960s.

They included Muslim separatists and Thai and Malaysian communists, criminal hit men claiming to be separatists, and guns-for-hire contracted by the political groups to carry out operations on their behalf. Their tactics (extortion, kidnap, murder) were identical. The goals of the armed separatist movements were broadly similar but they rarely cooperated. There was no leader who could command the broad support of Haji Sulong. (ICG, 205, p.6).

#### *2.3.2.1 BNPP*

The National Pattani Liberation Front (BNPP) formed in 1959, demanded full independence from Thailand, and is credited with publicizing the Thai-Muslims' plight throughout the Arab world (ICG, 2005). Based in the province of Kelantan, in northern Malaysia, BNPP leaders recruited followers through religious teachers, who nominated students, teachers and local villagers to political and military training in Southern Thailand, Afghanistan, Libya or Syria, or to Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt for further academic studies (ICG, 2005). BNPP is also credited with having ties to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Arab League, and Parti Islam in Malaysia (ibid).

In 1985, a BNPP split produced a more militant group: Barisan Bersatu Mujahidin Patani (United Patani Mujahidin Front: BBMP). This group proposed a more radical Islamist agenda, and “called for jihad against the *kafir* (infidel) Thai government, which it saw as deliberately undermining the Muslim identity of the Patani people” (ICG, 2005, p.10).

#### 2.3.2.2 *BRN*

Founded by a *Tok Guru* from Narathiwat in the early 1960s, the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (National Revolutionary Front: BRN), aimed to create an independent republic consisting of the provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, Satun, Yala and parts of Songkla (ICG, 2005). It was primarily focused on promoting Islamic religious education, and also promoted an “Islamic socialism” ideology (ibid).

A three way split in BRN occurred in the 1980s to form; BRN Coordinate; BRN Congress; and BRN Ulama. BRN-Coordinate is reportedly one of the strongest insurgent factions in the contemporary conflict, and concentrates its political activities in religious schools and urban sabotage. A subsidiary youth wing known as Permuda became active in the early 1990s, which has been linked to arson and shootings (ICG, 2005).

#### 2.3.2.3 *PULO*

Pertubuhan Persatuan Pembebasan Patani (Pattani United Liberation Organization: PULO) was founded in 1968 as a coalition of young activists disillusioned by what they perceived as an ineffectual resistance movements in Southern Thailand (ICG, 2005).

Their official ideology was “Religion, Race, Homeland, Humanitarianism”, and advocated the advancement of education and political consciousness of Thai-Muslims. PULO’s senior leadership was based in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, where they actively recruited pilgrims performing the hajj, and its military operational headquarters were based in Kelantan, Malaysia (ibid). PULO reportedly had some of the best-trained guerilla forces due to its leader’s fundraising abilities, particularly from Libya and Syria, and military training facilities established by the PLO (ibid).

In the 1980s, New PULO split from PULO, in the pursuit of a strategy designed to minimize loss of life, which was exemplified through direct attacks at government installations, rather than police and Buddhist civilians (ibid).

#### *2.3.2.4 GMIP*

The Islamic Mujahidin Movement of Pattani (Gerakan Mujahidin Islam Patani: GMIP) was formed with the goal of creating an independent Pattani state. Its leader, originally from Narathiwat, was trained in guerilla insurgency tactics in Libya, and fought with the Afghan mujahidin in the early 1990s (ibid). In late 2001, ICG (2005) reported that GMIP “distributed leaflets in Yala calling for jihad and support for Osama bin Laden, in the service of the separatist cause.” (p.13).

#### *2.3.2.5 Hikmat Allah Abadan*

Hikmat Allah Abadan (Brotherhood of the Eternal Judgment of God) formed in 2000 and is based on separatist ideology and Islamist principles. The group reportedly trains

autonomous cells in Southern Thailand, which normally meet at night in mosques or *tadikas* (religious schools) to pray, study, and in some cases, undergo physical and weapons training for terrorist activities (ICG, 2007).

#### **2.4 Thai government response to Islamic insurgency**

Conciliatory measures were taken by the Thai government in the 1980s in an attempt to ease tensions between Bangkok and the Southern provinces. A Civil-Police-Military joint headquarters unit (CPM 43) was established to coordinate security operations in Southern Thailand, economic development projects were planned to increase the accessibility of electricity and running water to remote areas, and village committees were established to promote cooperation between civilians and police (ICG, 2005). Additionally, the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC) was formed in 1981, which advocated for Thai-Muslim participation, and emphasized a general understanding of Malay Muslim culture through cultural awareness and language training in Yawi (*ibid*). The SBPAC notably focused its efforts on addressing Thai government official corruption, and hosted forums for dialogue with local populations. Special quotas for Muslim students were also reserved in Thai universities, and new schools were built to promote the education of Muslim students (Haemindra, 1977).

Cooperative bilateral diplomatic strategies developed between Thailand and Malaysia in the 1990s precipitated the arrest of numerous insurgent leaders in northern Malaysia.

Many insurgents subsequently took the Thai government's offer of amnesty and turned themselves in for rehabilitation programs operated through CPM 43 (ICG, 2005).

Although these new administrative structures marked important steps towards cooperative strategies of intergroup conflict management, their successes in ameliorating conflict relations were overshadowed by persistent police corruption, and discriminatory national policies. Former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's decisions to dismantle the SBPAC in 2002, to overwhelm Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala with military troops, to sustain emergency laws in Southern Thailand, and the reliance on paramilitary groups, provoked violent responses from insurgent organizations and local populations (ICG, 2007).

Although paramilitary forces have been used in Thailand since the early 1900s, American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officials conducted extensive paramilitary training in the 1950s and 1960s to combat communist insurgents. The Thai government's subsequent reliance on groups such as the Volunteer Defense Corps (*Or Sor*), the Border Patrol Police, and the Village Development and Self-Defense volunteers, known collectively as 'rangers', has further tarnished their reputation (ICG, 2007). Specifically, "the gross human rights violations committed by rangers in the 1980s left a legacy of hatred and fear among southerners." (ICG, 2007, p.8). Amnesty International (2009) cites abduction, framing, and torture as measures used to extract information or confessions from suspects by rangers from the 41<sup>st</sup> Border Patrol Police unit in 2008. Allegations of murder and rape of civilians by rangers have also been documented by ICG (2007).

The policies of the successive Thai governments have thus far not proved able to resolve the conflict, and appear to have done little to manage it effectively. Al Jazeera (2009) reported in March that current Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva's government planned to send 4 000 additional military troops to supplement the 60 000 soldiers already stationed in the Southern provinces. Violence has only become more frequent, and conducted in more inhumane manners. The death of over 3 500 Thai Buddhists and Muslims since January 2004 is indicative of the overall failure of the government's efforts to manage the cycle of destructive conflict relations in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala, and the critical need to consider alternative methods of conflict management to reduce violence and build peace between groups.



## CHAPTER III: ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

### 3.1 Conceptualizing conflict analysis and management

The focus of this research is to understand how Thai women peacebuilders define their present and future role within the broader system of conflict relations in Southern Thailand, and to determine what can be learned from their grassroots feminist perspectives and contributions. This actor-centered analysis of feminist peacebuilding strategies will contribute new knowledge about constructive grassroots conflict management practices and their utility in generating opportunities to maximize opportunities for peaceful intergroup relations. The findings will illustrate the value of women-led grassroots peacebuilding initiatives as alternative sources of conflict management, and contribute new insights to the range of resources available for the future coordination of non-violent multi-track conflict management strategies in Southern Thailand.

#### *3.1.1 Conflict management through grassroots leadership*

A core proposition of this research is that conflict analysis must be rooted in an innate recognition that conflict is best understood from the local perspectives of individuals and groups who have direct experience participating or living within conflict settings. Theories, frameworks and models generated by scholars and conflict practitioners external to the conflict situation can be applicable to the analysis of international conflict situations. However, without the prefacing understanding and awareness of the needs,

fears and perspectives of local populations, external conflict analyses risk producing conclusions and recommendations that do not accurately reflect the local reality of conflict situations (Ropers, 2003).

As Lederach (1997) states, grassroots peace building strategies “represent points of contact with the masses rather than a comprehensive program for reaching them.” (p. 52).

Critical analysis of grassroots peacebuilding strategies can thus serve to identify how local leadership understand and interpret the needs and fears of the population directly affected by the conflict, and to demonstrate how this local knowledge shapes their strategies for conflict management. The generation of awareness and understanding of local peacebuilding efforts will thus contribute to a more realistic analysis of the real effects of conflict, and the potential local resources available for its management.

Conversely, the general focus of contemporary peace literature is on the role of third party interventions through Track One dialogues or by parties external to the conflict situation, and comparatively little has been written about the specific roles of ‘inside actors’ involved in conflict management initiatives (Francis, 2002). In his seminal work, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, (1997), Lederach proposes a framework for conceptualizing an actor-centered analysis of peacebuilding approaches conducted by actors at different leadership levels. Lederach’s conceptualization of a three tiered pyramid of top, middle and grassroots leadership levels serves to emphasize the range of actors involved in different peacebuilding interventions, and illustrates the existence of potential knowledge and cooperation gaps

between diverse members of society engaged in different capacities of conflict management (see Figure 1).

To this effect, Lederach (1997) explains a key assumption of this model by stating that:

A higher position in the pyramid confers on an individual greater access to information about the bigger picture and greater capacity to make decisions that affect the entire population, but it also means that the individual is less affected by the day-to-day consequences of those decisions. On the other hand, a lower position increases the likelihood that an individual will directly experience the consequences of decision making, but reduces the ability to see the broader picture and limits access to decision-making power. These two inverse relationships pose key dilemmas in the design and implementation of peace processes". (p. 43)

In this context, the constructive roles of leaders directly involved in local conflict management initiatives at different levels of society merits critical analysis in order to more effectively determine the range of peacebuilding strategies developed in societies affected by destructive intergroup conflict.

More specifically, there is a growing need for systematic, actor-centered analyses of the roles of grassroots peacebuilders involved in managing or transforming conflict relations in local communities affected by protracted social conflicts (Francis, 2002). In this sense, initial micro-level analysis of specific initiatives and perspectives of grassroots peacebuilders can be effectively complemented by relating macro-level understandings of the broader systemic structures influencing conflict dynamics (ibid). This type of critical analysis can serve to identify what specific conflict management strategies are generated by grassroots leadership, what local constituency-building processes are emerging to

manage conflict relations, and what effect such initiatives have on the broader systemic structure of protracted social conflict management.

### *3.1.2 Female leadership in grassroots conflict management initiatives*

The analysis of the role of women in conflict management and peacebuilding has received increasing attention in peace and conflict literature and contemporary international relations (Charlesworth, 2008). Women's roles in conflict-affected societies are increasingly being discussed in academic circles less in terms of their potential for victimization, and increasingly in terms of their innate capabilities to work for peace (Anderlini, 2007). However, "As a relatively new field, unmet demand and huge gaps persist in knowledge on gender and peacebuilding and how it is created and used intellectually, politically and in meeting practical needs." (UNIFEM & PBSO, 2007, p.1).

A key event that sparked international recognition about the integral role of women in peace and security initiatives was the United Nations (UN) sponsored Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW), which took place in Beijing in 1995. The inclusion of Chapter E (Women and Armed Conflict) in the FWCW Platform for Action (PfA) initiated a global movement of women's activism in peace and conflict initiatives (Anderlini, 2007). The outcome of the FWCW PfA includes a constructive dialogue that addresses women's agencies for promoting peace, which sparked an international movement to support women's roles in peace and security initiatives globally (ibid).

Another important development in the international recognition of women's roles in building peace is the creation of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) in 2006, which reaffirmed "the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding", and emphasizes:

...the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution and peacebuilding" (United Nations Security Council Resolution 1645, 2005).

The international community's contemporary emphasis on the intrinsic value of women's contributions to international conflict management efforts, specifically in peacebuilding roles, reflects a similar focus in this research.

A core purpose of this research is thus to locate the emerging role of grassroots Thai Buddhist and Muslim women peacebuilders in the context of the ongoing international debate about the role of women and gender in peacebuilding initiatives. Critical analysis of the peacebuilding activities of Thai women leaders from Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala will identify what specific role(s) grassroots women leaders have in the management of conflict in local communities affected by conflict, and explore how gender roles and relations are perceived by women peacebuilders.

Additionally, since the 1995 Beijing PfA at the UN FWCW, widespread attention has been focused on the use of gender mainstreaming as an integral tool for all levels of conflict analysis and management in order to emphasize the necessity of incorporating the perspectives of both genders in all aspects of conflict management initiatives.

Sandole-Staroste (2009) comments to this effect by stating: “We know from experience, now backed up by a growing body of literature, that sustainable peace, security and development cannot be achieved if only one gender is included in decisionmaking processes.” (p. 226). Furthermore,

The field of conflict analysis and resolution (CAR) does not ignore gender relations and most scholars do not dispute that gender relations must be addressed. They agree that women and men should participate equally in conflict resolution processes. They support the idea that women and men should have equal or equitable access to resources, control, opportunities, rewards, and benefits. However, the *taken for granted* stance that gender must *always* be addressed if sustainable peace, inclusive security, and development are to be achieved is still lacking. (ibid, p. 235).

Gender mainstreaming as a tool for conflict analysis thus purposefully directs its analytical focus to determine how conflict affects women and men differently, and how women become engaged as active participants in their communities during war and conflict situations (ibid). This research thus purports to contribute to the growing body of feminist scholarship by using gender mainstreaming as a tool to engage in a critical analysis of how grassroots women leaders’ perspectives contribute to their active involvement in local peacebuilding strategies to manage conflict relations in their communities.

It must be recognized that gender mainstreaming in practice is normally conducted as a top-down process (ibid). However, given the specific focus of this research on Thai women’s grassroots conflict management initiatives, gender mainstreaming is analyzed from a bottom-up approach in order to broaden our understanding of how grassroots Thai

women leaders' perspectives of conflict influence their decision-making power in local peacebuilding initiatives.

It is also recognized that a truly gendered analysis of grassroots peacebuilding practices should include an analysis of local male peacebuilders' perspectives and strategies in order to present a balanced view of both sexes' contributions to local conflict management (Anderlini, 2007). However, the focus of this research is specifically focused on the perspectives and strategies of local women peacebuilders from Southern Thailand. Future research about the corollary role of grassroots male Thai peacebuilders from Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala would thus complement this research, and contribute to a more holistic, gendered discussion of grassroots peacebuilding initiatives in Southern Thailand.

### **3.2 Theoretical constructs**

The merits of in depth analytical inquiry of conflict situations stem from a conception of conflict as both an agent and an outcome of change (Francis, 2002), which is useful in generating holistic understandings about why conflict emerges, how it progresses and how specific parties engage in various intervention initiatives. The unique human dimensions that contribute to the generation and escalation of protracted international conflict situations, however, do not create ideal conditions for implementing mechanistic standardized frameworks for intervention in, and analysis of, conflict situations (Lederach, 1997). The application of different conflict theories from divergent

approaches thus suggests the possibility of multiple entry points for conflict management initiatives, and the difficult task of assessing how, where, when and who should intervene to manage intergroup relations in protracted social conflicts.

### *3.2.1 Constructive conflict analysis*

Conflict need not always be objectified in negative connotations. Although violent manifestations of conflict outcomes receive widespread media attention and scholarly analytical focus, conflict in itself is not always necessarily a negative process. Studies have shown that when important differences exist between groups, the suppression or avoidance of conflict can actually produce more detrimental outcomes than addressing conflict constructively (Folger et al, 2005). At the other extreme, the harsh reality that materializes when conflict escalates to produce violent confrontation can lead to the entrenchment of positions and the deepening of division between groups, which can prolong a conflict's duration, and increase resistance to its resolution (Fisher, 2006).

Conflicts therefore have the potential to manifest themselves in constructive or destructive manners (ibid). Participants engaged in constructive conflicts typically demonstrate flexibility in their behaviours and interactions in order to reach a mutually satisfying and sustainable solution (Snyder, 2006). Rather than maintaining rigid defense of respective positions, which is often characteristic of destructive conflict interactions, in constructive conflict dynamics, parties may fluctuate between cycles of avoidance, confrontation, escalation and accommodation as the nature of their interaction changes (Folger et al., 2005).



Constructive conflict management strategies generally navigate parties in conflict away from the extremes of avoidance and violent confrontation that polarize divisions between groups. Conversely, the focus is redirected towards the need to *constructively* address the real intergroup incompatibilities that form the root causes of conflict. Kelman (2009) points out that parties whose interaction are highly focused on a history of antagonism risk missing opportunities for change due to constraints on intergroup communication.

Therefore, conflict resolution efforts require promotion of a different kind of interaction that is capable of reversing the escalatory and self-perpetuating dynamics of conflict – an interaction conducive to sharing perspectives, differentiating the enemy image, and developing a language of mutual reassurance and a new discourse based on the norms of responsiveness and reciprocity.” (Kelman, 2009, p.175)

A strategy of responsiveness advocates the need to address the other parties’ needs, fears, and concerns, which creates space within a conflict for positive interaction between groups, and a strategy of reciprocity emphasizes the mutual interdependence of parties and the need to engage in cooperative strategies (ibid).

The enablement of norms of constructive conflict management is greatly facilitated by communication between groups, which allow parties to assess each other’s capacities for positive change (Kriesberg, 2009). Interactions in constructive conflicts thus tend to be flexible in terms of the belief that all parties have the capacity to attain their goals through sustained efforts to overcome the perceived incompatibility of positions (Folger et al., 2005). As Fisher (2006) indicates, “When differences are handled constructively,

such conflict can be a source of learning, creativity, and social change toward a more pluralistic, harmonious, and equitable world.” (p. 177).

Individuals, groups or organizations that choose to engage themselves in the spirit of cooperation and collaboration in initiatives that foster dialogue and mutual understanding within and between groups, thus have the potential of transforming destructive conflicts into constructive ones. “They are the source of connections that provide channels of influence and bases of leverage, which can bring about changes in one side by members of another side in a conflict.” (Kriesberg, 2009, p.162).

Snyder’s (2006) study of global women’s movements in the 1990s correspondingly suggest that women’s foundational commitments to constructive responses to conflict are as important to building peace as specific structures and processes that promote dialogue between groups. Furthermore, when constructive approaches are employed, conflict can actually promote the equitable cooperation needed to manage conflict (Snyder, 2006).

Constructive conflict management approaches can thus be critical in contributing to the de-escalation of violent or destructive conflicts and in transforming conflict relations. Since the manner in which a conflict is waged has a direct effect on how it is settled, in terms of the sustainability of the outcome generated, this has important implications for analysis of and intervention in ongoing conflicts, insofar as sustainable conflict management is considered an optimal outcome. (Kriesberg, 2009). The analysis of actors

and strategies involved in the constructive management of conflict relations thus requires special attention in the CAR field.

### *3.2.2 Social-psychological approach*

The discipline of social-psychology is relevant to the analysis of conflict given its preoccupation with subjective social processes that influence intergroup conflict and its management (Fisher, 1993). The analytical focus of social psychology on a broad range of subjective factors that shape intergroup interactions contributes to a more thorough understanding of the continuously shifting realities, interests and relationships that are inherent in understanding conflict as a dynamic process (Kelman, 2009).

Intergroup conflict, as a continuously evolving social reality, is never static, and manifests itself in various processes, structures and aspects of human interactions. As Kelman (2009) states, “Social-psychological analysis is designed to complement (and not to replace) approaches based on structural or strategic analysis by providing a special lens for viewing international conflict that brings some of its less explored dimensions into focus.” (p. 170). The emphasis explored through social-psychological analysis is thus the intrinsically human dimensions that shape conflict relationships. In conjunction with other theories, a social-psychological approach enhances the assessment of conflict in its various stages of existence by examining the social processes that motivate actions and reactions (Fisher, 1997).

#### *3.2.2.1 Basic human needs orientation*

The most basic element of a social-psychological approach to conflict management is the recognition that “international conflict is a process driven by collective needs and fears, rather than entirely a product of rational calculation of objective national interests on the part of political decision makers.” (Kelman, 2009, p.171). Basic human needs include not only material needs of food, shelter, and safety from harm, but also psychological needs of identity, recognition, safety, autonomy, and justice (Burton, 1988; 1990). The satisfaction of basic human needs is understood in the predominant Western analytical framework, as an inherent right of all individuals regardless of race, religion, nationality, gender, language, or membership in a particular social or political group, (UN, 1948).

Galtung (1990) further qualifies the theory of needs by emphasizing that the identification of a strict hierarchy of basic human needs is not always conducive to the diverse cultural realities of individuals and groups from different societies. Rather, an understanding of basic human needs must be understood within the relative context of cultural values.

The problem consequently relates not to the concept of needs, however it is defined, but to the power of defining needs, particularly for others. If anything should relate to a need for identity then it must be the need to define one’s own situation – including in this, indeed, the definition of one’s own needs. Again, what the unit is defining needs – the individual, the group, the country, the region – can be discussed, but regardless of what level is chosen, participation in the need definition would have to be the general norm. (Galtung, 1990, p.320).

It follows, then, that if protracted social conflict is to be understood as “a process driven by collective needs and fears”, “conflict resolution must, at some stage, provide for certain processes that take place at the level of individuals and interactions between

individuals” (Kelman, 2009, p.172). Constructive dialogue with and within populations directly affected by conflict situations is thus a necessary element in defining with any accuracy how basic needs and fears are conceptualized in particular conflict situations (ibid), and what strategies are defined as *culturally appropriate* by local populations in facilitating their fulfillment.

### 3.2.2.2 *Interactive conflict resolution*

One aspect of a social-psychosocial approach to conflict management is Interactive Conflict Resolution (ICR), which involves small group discussions between unofficial and influential representatives of groups engaged in destructive conflict interactions (Fisher, 2000). The facilitation of constructive dialogue through problem-solving workshops or intercommunal dialogue between individuals and groups in conflict aims to build awareness, understanding, and trust between conflict parties, which may eventually have an effect on official policy discussions or public opinion (Fisher, 1997). A corollary ICR initiative is its emphasis on reconciliation to effectively address and transform the relationships between conflicting parties in order to protect and promote the creation of *sustainable* peace in societies affected by protracted social conflict (Fisher, 2000).

As Fisher (2000) explains, “It follows that social-psychological insights are complementary to political analysis, in that while conflict often arises out of objective and ideological differences, its escalation and intractability are typically the result of psychological and social factors.” (p.28). The focus of social-psychology on identifying

underlying patterns of human interaction emphasizes the need to address these issues through mutually agreeable solutions to reach sustainable peace in divided societies.

The merits of facilitating intercommunal dialogue between parties involved in, or affected by conflict is evidenced in the open expression of interests, opinions, and emotions formed from respective conflict experiences. Additionally, underlying elements of social interaction, such as misunderstandings, misperceptions, mistrust, and frustrated basic needs can be surfaced, identified, and clarified in intercommunal dialogue forums (Fisher, 2000). The process of expressing respective views and experiences, as well as listening and internalizing the perspectives of others, facilitates a cathartic process of validation of respective experiences, and is often conducive to facilitating future steps towards collective problem solving and conflict management (Fisher, 1997).

Although there is no standard model for conducting intercommunal dialogue in conflict situations, it is normally conducted with the involvement of a third party facilitator, following norms of open and respectful communication, and focused on generating collective understandings of conflict as a mutual problem (ibid). As Fisher (1997) indicates, however, “it should be noted that many interventions go unreported, partly because of concerns about risks to participants and organizers, but also because many of the intervenors are primarily practitioners without the position or the proclivity to publish their work.” (p.122). Nonetheless, the utility of intercommunal ICR dialogue forums in generating opportunities for facilitated communication is integral to the facilitation of

transforming conflict dynamics, and creating space for intergroup conflict to be constructively expressed and managed.

## CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Overview of research design

The methodology used to design and implement this research project draws upon the corollary disciplines of participatory action research and phenomenological approaches to data collection and analysis. The research focus on a micro-level analysis of the role of grassroots Thai women peacebuilders provides a descriptive analysis of feminist peacebuilding roles within the context of the broader system of protracted social conflict in Southern Thailand.

#### *4.1.1 Participatory action research*

Action research is characterized by the fusion of theoretical knowledge from academic literature and practical reality derived from real-life situations. Reason & Bradbury (2001) define action research as:

A participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview, which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities (p.1)

Similarly, Zuber-Skerritt (1992) proposes a theoretical framework known as the CRASP model to define effective action research as a process that is; critical; reflective; accountable; self-evaluating; and participative.



In conjunction with these core principles of action research, this study *critically* examines Thai women community leaders' roles as innovative peacebuilders, and the subsequent analysis is *reflective* of how these women peacebuilders' perceptions and actions function within the broader systemic context conflict dynamics. The action research process is also *accountable* by simultaneously protecting the identity of the research subjects while making the research results available to the public for future learning, and it is *self-evaluating* through its overlapping analyses of systemic inquiry.

Crucially, action research structure and process are *participatory*, as is evident in the development of constructive dialogue and collective input between the participants and researcher with regard to the elaboration of specific dialogue topics, and individual narratives. The usefulness of participatory action research arises from its conception of research as a collaborative process of inquiry and analysis, its view of research as a type of political engagement, and its emphasis on critically examining existing systems of power (Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009). This holistic conceptualization of research as a collaborative process involving research participants as joint partners in the exploration of key issues for analysis as well in the identification of broader systemic influences is an integral component in the design of the research structure and process.

#### *4.1.2 Phenomenological approach*

A phenomenological study is a qualitative research process that proposes to better understand participants' personal perspectives and perceptions of a specific situation or

phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p. 139). Through the analysis of multiple perspectives of individual Thai women peacebuilders, insight is generated about the collective range of understandings that form this group of female community leaders' experience of conflict and their motivations for engaging in peacebuilding initiatives.

The specific phenomenon under investigation in this study is thus how Thai women community leaders understand and experience conflict in their communities, and how these perceptions have influenced their engagement in grassroots peacebuilding work in Southern Thailand. The objective of this research is to develop a descriptive analysis of this emerging phenomenon in Southern Thailand embodied through the narratives of Thai women peacebuilders. An informal, semi-structured interview process design created the flexible framework necessary for this qualitative methodological process to unfold, allowing the research participants to guide the research process itself through their individual narratives and contributions.

#### **4.2 Data sources and collection methods**

Primary sources of information were collected through informal, semi-structured interviews with fifteen Thai women peacebuilders from the three Southern provinces of Thailand: Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala. The research participants include nine Thai Muslim women and six Thai Buddhist women: five from the provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala, respectively (see figures 2 & 3). All fifteen women are involved in different community-based peacebuilding initiatives aimed at minimizing conflict

relationships and maximizing opportunities for communication and cooperation in different capacities (see figure 4).

Research participants were selected using purposive non-probability sampling based on their identities as: (1) Thai nationals; (2) female; (3) residents of one of the three provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, or Yala in Southern Thailand; (4) Buddhist or Muslim; and (5) involved in either designing or implementing a peacebuilding initiative in Southern Thailand. Research subjects were identified according to these selection criteria by the project sponsor, and invited to participate through individual interviews in a neutral, private, safe location in Pattani, Muang District, Southern Thailand.

#### *4.2.1 Sponsor role in data collection*

A key representative of the Prince of Songkla University in Pattani, Thailand acted as a sponsor for this project. The sponsors' personal knowledge of the conflict in Southern Thailand and extensive network of contacts with Thai women peacebuilders from various community volunteer activities played a very important role in the selection of women participants for this study. Close cooperation and collaboration with the sponsor regarding the research purpose and design enabled the selection of, and communication with, a representative sample of Thai Muslim and Buddhist women community leaders from the three Southern provinces.

In addition to providing project support through initial discussions about the research project's purpose and design, the sponsor initiated preliminary contact with key Thai

women peacebuilders in their local languages, organized an interview schedule with all fifteen participants, arranged for two interpreters to facilitate communication during the interviews, and also generously provided a private location for the interview process to take place at the Prince of Songkla University campus in Pattani, Thailand. Fifteen research participants traveled to this central interview location in March 2009 to be interviewed by the researcher.

#### *4.2.2 Interview process*

Free and informed consent was provided by each research participant at the beginning of each interview (see Appendix A). All interviews were conducted in a private room at the Prince of Songkla University in Pattani with the assistance of two Thai translators: one male, and one female. Interviews ranged from one to two hours in length, and were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants in order to facilitate critical analysis of the narratives. As per the terms of Informed Consent Form, the audio-recordings of the interviews will be destroyed within six months of the submission of the project in order to further protect the anonymity of the research subjects and their responses (see Appendix A).

Interviews with individual research participants followed an informal, semi-structured process. A series of key guiding questions were used as a flexible guide to frame the interview process (see Appendix B) in order to facilitate the analysis of primary categories of inquiry, but participants were not confined to rigid question-answer responses. Conversely, participants were encouraged in the interview process to elaborate

on their personal perspectives and experiences of conflict, and of their perceptions of the role of peacebuilding initiatives in managing conflict relations.

The primary categories of inquiry included: personal perspectives of conflict; peacebuilding strategies and initiatives; the root causes of conflict in Southern Thailand; the influence of gender and religion on conflict and peacebuilding; and personal visions of the future. Participants were encouraged to provide truthful responses, and to share personal experiences in order to describe their perspectives. Subsequent aspects of individual narratives were thus explored more deeply as the interview process developed. The confidentiality of responses and the protection of anonymity of the research participants were emphasized during all phases of data collection, analysis and presentation.

#### *4.2.3 Data analysis*

The interpretation of primary data collected from the narratives of Thai women peacebuilders consisted of multiple phases of analysis. In the first phase, interviews were conducted in Pattani, Thailand, and audio-recorded with permission of participants. In the second phase, interviews were transcribed into written format. In the third phase, data was coded line by line in order to identify emerging themes that were both common and dissimilar across multiple units of analysis. In the fourth phase, nominal level coding was scaled in order to determine the extent to which emergent units of analysis exemplified particular themes.

### **4.3 Ethical considerations**

A primary consideration of the research methodology is the adherence to the established terms of confidentiality with the research participants. The anonymity of the research participants, the interpreters, and the sponsor has been preserved throughout all stages of the research process in order to protect their identity. When necessary, code names are used to identify respondents.

All fifteen women participants received a written and verbal explanation of the expectations of confidentiality in the Informed Consent Form (Appendix A).

Communication occurred primarily with the assistance of translators between Thai and English, and directly in English in certain circumstances. The research participants' agreement to participate and their acknowledgement of understanding of the research expectations and goals were confirmed through their signature of the Informed Consent Form. The interaction between the research participants and the researcher was purely voluntary, and all participants were clearly informed of their ability to withdraw from the study at any point in time.

Participants did not receive monetary incentive to participate in the study. However, the researcher was responsible for reimbursing the transportation costs for the women who traveled from their respective villages, cities and provinces to participate in the research process in Pattani. Research participants were provided with the full name and contact

information of the researcher, sponsoring organization and university institution to facilitate communication following the initial research phase.

#### **4.4 Definition of key terms**

A number of field specific terms are used throughout the project to frame the analysis and describe the perspectives of Thai women peacebuilders. A brief explanation of the key terms influencing this study is provided to operationalize the definitions for the purpose of this study.

##### *4.4.1 Protracted social conflict*

The analysis of protracted social conflict (PSC) initiated by Azar in the 1970s has been the subject of significant research and development in peace and conflict studies. The original definition of PSC has been adapted and applied to the emerging realities of complex global conflict situations, and it represents an analytical framework that is conceptually unique from the traditional state-centered approach of realist international relations theory (Fisher, 1997). Within this context, the sources of PSCs are recognized as within and across states, rather than exclusively between them (Ramsbotham, 2005).

Inherent in the study of PSCs is the recognition that structural inequalities and differences in political power are the core sources of these conflicts (Fisher, 1997). “Such conflicts can occur in any relationship where inequality exists and basic needs for identity and

participation are frustrated, but the most conspicuous are violent conflicts between communities or nations over the preservation of cultures and values.” (Fisher, 1997, p.6)

According to Azar (1990) and other conflict analysts, PSCs are rooted in longstanding intergroup cleavages, which sporadically produce outbreaks of violence. These deep-rooted social conflicts are not easily resolved by traditional military or diplomatic conflict management methods, which do not adequately address the frustration of basic human needs that are often at the core of these conflicts (Fisher, 2000).

The frustration of basic human needs for security, identity, recognition, participation and equity require thoughtful and integrative processes of satisfaction in order to effectively address the core concerns of the affected parties. When effective conflict management processes do not materialize, or when inadequate processes are initiated, protracted conflicts become vulnerable to escalation and continuous cycles of violence (Fisher, 2000).

#### *4.4.2 Peacebuilding*

The concept of peacebuilding has evolved alongside the development of peace and conflict studies to encompass a wide range of activities broadly designed to de-escalate conflict relations and foster peace. The term was originally developed by Galtung in the 1970s as a set of activities, separate and distinct from peacemaking, which address the root causes of violence and provide alternatives to war (de la Rey & McKay, 2006).

A structural emphasis was integrated to the term peacebuilding in 1992, when former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali popularized the term in his influential treatise, *An Agenda for Peace* (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). According to Boutros-Ghali’s definition, peacebuilding was linked specifically to post-conflict activities and structures needed to



prevent future recurrences of violent conflict. A key difference between Galtung's original conception of peacebuilding and Boutros-Ghali's definition is the difference between the authors' respective conceptualizations of peacebuilding within the theoretical constructs of positive and negative peace (Knight, 2003).

*Positive peace* refers to the conscious promotion of social structures, institutions, and practices that reduce barriers to peace (Galtung, 1985). More specifically, through the development of initiatives that contribute to the removal of racial, ethnic, economic, political, social, gender or ecological obstacles to peace, the construction of a more equitable social order is facilitated: one which meets the basic needs and human rights of the population (Christie et al., 2008). Alternately, *negative peace* is concerned with eliminating levels of violence in conflict situations, and avoiding future relapse into violent or destructive patterns of interaction (Knight, 2003).

Both positive and negative peace objectives are integrated in current peacebuilding research, allowing the term to be used in both pre- and post-conflict settings (ibid). Thus, peacebuilding activities can include a range of measures to manage and end violent conflict; to address immediate humanitarian concerns; and to facilitate post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation. The most commonly identifiable conceptual approaches to peacebuilding include political; economic development; disarmament; and more recently, human security perspectives (ibid).

Fisher (1993) defines peacebuilding as:

An associative approach that attempts to create a structure of peace both within and among nations - a structure that removes the causes of war and provides alternatives to war. This structure involves relations among a large domain of several parties that are equitable, interdependent, include a variety of people and types of exchange, and have a supportive superstructure. (Fisher, 1993, p. 249)

Peacebuilding activities can thus be conducted by diplomatic, military, business, non-governmental and civilian actors, depending on the intention of the intervention.

However, as Knight (2003) points out,

No one actor can carry out the complex panoply of post-conflict peacebuilding tasks on its own. The key to successful implementation of peacebuilding, according to researchers and practitioners in the field, lies in the achievement of effective partnership between international, regional and local actors on the basis of comparative advantage; the development of an integrated, well co-ordinated strategy; and unity of purpose among contributing groups. (p.253).

Still, other theorists and practitioners understand contemporary peacebuilding activities as tools of the modern liberal internationalist paradigm which constitute “an experiment that involves transplanting Western models of social, political, and economic organization into war-shattered states in order to control civil conflict: in other words, pacification through political and economic liberalization”. (Paris, 1997, p.55). The inherent danger in such approaches is that the exportation of accepted Western models will not realistically be suitable to the local realities of complex international conflict situations; the underlying structural and systemic causes of conflict will be inadequately addressed; and persistent, unjust structures will continue to affect local populations with unforeseeable future consequences.

However, when peacebuilding initiatives are initiated by grassroots actors involved directly in PSC situations, the legitimacy and authenticity of these strategies is rooted directly in the local context. Local knowledge of conflict dynamics can contribute to informed decisions about what strategies are useful and effective in bridging the gap between parties in conflict, and assist in the creation of opportunities for constructive intercommunal dialogue and conflict transformation. Fisher (1993) postulates that;

...only peacebuilding in its various interactive and developmental forms will address the relationship qualities and basic needs that are at the heart of the conflict. Once the relationship is significantly improved, the parties will be in a position to engage effectively in peacemaking to deal with their specific interests and positions and to reach agreements that guide their future interaction. This argument assumes that peacebuilding initiatives have not only reduced hostility and tension, but have begun to address the basic needs of the parties, that is, a process of social change has been instituted. (p. 249).

For the purpose of this research, peacebuilding is understood within the human security framework as a series of integrative processes designed to transform conflict relations and create *locally* designed structures that facilitate the development of positive peace. Cooperation between multiple parties is an asset to an integrative peacebuilding strategy, so long as the process is sufficiently rooted in an understanding of how local actors experience and perceive of the challenges and opportunities to build positive peace. Peacebuilding is thus understood as an emerging cooperative process informed directly by the experiences of local actors, designed to meet the basic needs of parties in conflict, to transform relationships and foster structures of equality in societies affected by PSC.

## CHAPTER V: RESULTS

### 5.1 Overview of primary data

The primary data collected from the individual narratives of fifteen Thai women peacebuilders is used to provide a description of the specific peacebuilding processes utilized to constructively manage community conflict relations, and to maximize opportunities for positive peace in Southern Thailand. The primary research questions are focused to generate data that reflect a deeper understanding of the specific strategies employed to build peace and minimize conflict, and to engage in a critical discussion of the role of gender in grassroots peacebuilding practices. Common themes and unique revelations are subsequently identified from Thai women peacebuilders' narratives.

### 5.2 Demographics

The research participants interviewed represent a diverse sample of Thai women involved in peacebuilding initiatives from the three Southern provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala. From the fifteen women interviewed, five are permanent residents of Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala respectively (see Figure 2). Nine out of the fifteen women are Muslim and six are Buddhist (see figure 3). All fifteen women are engaged in separate but related initiatives to build community structures and processes that foster positive peace.

### 5.3 Peacebuilding activities

The fifteen women participants interviewed in this study are involved in fifteen separate peacebuilding initiatives (see Table 1). The primary peacebuilding roles represented in this research sample include:

- Restorative justice officer
- Neutral third party negotiator
- Director of coordination centre for Southern Thailand
- Coordinator of dialogue forums
- Community outreach officer
- Social development officer
- Official community representative of the victims of Tak Bai
- Village chairwoman
- Chairwoman of widowed women organization
- Former school principal and community activist
- Project coordinator of peacebuilding programs for youth
- Project director of youth program
- Founder and coordinator of youth centre
- Founder and director of community centre for orphans and youth
- Project coordinator for national youth organization

All fifteen women work independently of each other in Narathiwat, Pattani or Yala, but their respective peacebuilding initiatives represent a collective movement of related conflict management strategies.

#### **5.4 Peacebuilding strategies**

The primary focus areas of Thai women's peacebuilding initiatives are respectively: community dialogue; education; health care; victim rehabilitation; and justice (Figure 4). These broad thematic categories have been identified by grassroots Thai women peacebuilders as issues needing alternative methods of conflict management in order to break the destructive cycle of violence and to foster structures and processes that build positive peace.

##### *5.4.1 Community dialogue initiatives*

The most common theme identified in Thai women peacebuilding initiatives is a focus on the need to develop stronger community dialogue practices. 73% of research participants identified their involvement in community dialogue initiatives as a primary peacebuilding strategy (see figure 4). Public speaking; community forums; interfaith group initiatives; and media interviews are described as primary methods for initiating dialogue within and between communities, and with individuals and groups external to the conflict region (Figure 5).

Notably, 100% of research participants that identified their personal engagement in community dialogue initiatives expressed a common goal of creating a more substantive link between local communities and the government (see figures 5 & 6). Descriptions of minimal or less than satisfactory contact between local villages in Southern Thailand and government officials in Bangkok and local municipalities were a common thread that linked 73% of total respondent narratives. Strategies to encourage constructive community dialogue represent the most common approach to reduce barriers between groups in Southern Thailand.

#### *5.4.1.1 Outcomes*

Individual Thai women peacebuilders evaluate the outcome of various community dialogue initiatives differently. One participant from Pattani indicates that:

To share between communities is to destroy the wall between those communities. When we have contact with government organizations, we destroy the wall between the differences. When we think that the government listened, we are happy to make more contact with them. In this way, the differences between us will be reduced. (“Isabella”, personal communication, March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009).

Another participant from Pattani articulates a more pessimistic view of community dialogue initiatives by stating:

When I open a meeting, if it is a small group of villagers only, they can talk easily. I am a villager too, and we can talk heart to heart, with open minds. But there are other forums where there are government officers or soldiers or people who are involved with the government. Then the people don’t dare to speak anymore. They are afraid. They hide. They don’t speak anymore. It is a problem. It is not convenient for them to talk. They are afraid of the effect that will come if they talk. (“Marcela”, personal communication, March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009).

Although community dialogue strategies represent the most common type of peacebuilding initiatives undertaken by Thai women peacebuilders, there remains discrepancy about the realistic outcome of these initiatives. Only 55% of the 11 participants engaged in community dialogue strategies evaluated current initiatives as successful, while 18% expressed dissatisfaction with current progress, and 27% were unsure about the overall effects of their peacebuilding initiatives (see figure 7). However, these grassroots peacebuilding initiatives are in their infancy, and accurate methods of evaluation have yet to be tested in this setting. As Ropers (2003) writes about the use of dialogue projects in conflict management initiatives;

The influence exerted by dialogue projects must therefore generally be regarded as indirect and relatively long-term. It involves the socialization of potential future leaders, the creation of networks of personal relationships, and the airing of new ideas in safe forums (p.8).

#### *5.4.1.2 Direct communication strategies*

60% of all research participants described their personal use of *direct* communication strategies to express their perspectives, opinions and stories in intergroup dialogue situations (see figure 6). Direct communication style is evidenced in 26% of the participants' promotion of bilingualism, alternative dialogue, and the communication of local perspectives outside the conflict region, as important strategies to foster enhanced communication and understanding between groups.

The promotion of linguistic knowledge of both Thai, the official national language, and Yawi, the local Malay dialect common in Southern Thailand, was identified by 26% of



research participants as a basic strategy to improve communication within local Buddhist and Muslim populations, and between locals and the government (see figure 6). The relative isolation of Yawi speakers was expressed by 26% of participants as a significant obstacle to intergroup dialogue and understanding. As one bilingual participant expresses;

Although I am Buddhist, I can speak Yawi. That's why when I talk with the families of some people affected by conflict, they can talk with me, because I speak Yawi and they trust me. ... When other speakers come to talk to explain something, they talk in Thai, but the local people sometimes don't understand. ... The point is that the local people don't understand Thai, but if the speakers can speak both Thai and Yawi, they will listen and understand and they will not have any more conflict. ... I want the speakers to understand more Yawi so that they can know what local people want and what local people think about the situation. ("Belle", personal communication, March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009).

26% of participants also identified alternative dialogue as an effective communication strategy to manage intergroup conflict. One participant's work in investigating local perspectives through house visits and storytelling has contributed to the publication of a book dedicated to narrating the local stories and experiences of individuals affected by conflict in local communities in villages in Pattani, Narathiwat and Yala. Three participants involved in youth development initiatives and victim rehabilitation spoke about the value of promoting intergroup communication through games, sports activities, music, songs, dance, poetry, and art. All three participants indicated positive self-evaluations of these alternative dialogue initiatives, claiming that working with victims and youth in conflict situations requires alternative methods of dialogue initiation to promote honest self expression and the release of emotions associated with PSC.

The use of the media by 13% of women peacebuilders as a tool for communicating local perspectives to external audiences also reflects the increasing use of technological networks to maximize direct communication to build understanding and awareness of local realities facing individuals and groups affected by conflict in Southern Thailand (see figure 5). One outspoken participant involved in media broadcasts and regional and national networks of influence explains that:

People don't understand what happened, and I explain it. I tell the truth. That's because I was in this situation. I saw what happened with my own eyes. So I know what the government, the policemen, the soldiers did... I am fearless for telling that. And I now also act as a giver of information about this situation... to the media, to inform the foreigners so that they can understand. I give information about the criminals, and about what the Thai government did: what the Thai government has to have responsibility for. The government – they will listen when I try to ask for the rights in this situation. (“Margot”, personal communication, March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009).

#### *5.4.1.3 Indirect communication strategies*

Conversely, 20% of respondents identify a preference to use indirect communication methods, and conflict avoidance as preferred strategies for conducting community dialogue initiatives (see figure 6). One participant from Narathiwat explains her motivations for conflict avoidance in community forums in the following passage:

They can talk, they can share their opinions... but they just don't talk about this conflict. ... We can talk about the content of the meeting, and we just come to work together. We neglect the reasons. We neglect the causes... And that is the best way. (“Brigitte”, personal communication, March 4<sup>th</sup> 2009).

Conflict avoidance through indirect communication in intergroup work situations is described by some participants as a strategy that facilitates progress in non-conflict related work projects, but one that does not in itself advance intergroup conflict resolution. Avoiding conflict by not talking about it thus puts the key

issues aside for the sake of necessary daily progress, but does not contribute to overcoming differences between groups. As Isaacs (1999) explains;

Losing respect for and so rejecting what is uncomfortable and unfamiliar, and becoming fixated on one's own certainties - pervade human consciousness. ... This underlying atmosphere turns out to be a critical determining factor in whether we can talk successfully or not, because it leads us either to see one another as inextricably related aspects of a larger fabric or as separate and disconnected parts, bringing up troublesome but largely disconnected problems that must be managed and eventually overcome. When we find ourselves in the latter mode, we tend not to talk together well. (p.34-35).

#### *5.4.2 Educational peacebuilding initiatives*

66% of research participants identified their involvement in various educational initiatives as important peacebuilding strategies for their respective communities in Southern Thailand (Figure 8). Of these 10 respondents, 80% spoke of the value of providing equal access to quality education for all members of Thai society. 60% focused their energies on youth education initiatives and promoting victim rights education, 50% are involved in peacebuilding initiatives that promote peace education, and critical conflict analysis knowledge, and 20% are involved in promoting Islamic rights education (see figure 9).

One participant spoke of the value of providing equal access to quality education for all youth in Thailand in the following manner:

There are many people who lack this opportunity – who don't have the opportunity to study in a class... Now, the situation is that boys can graduate from kindergarten to sixth level, and then they will go to Malaysia to work, but it's better to stay in Narathiwat – to stay in Thailand. But they know that when they grow up, they don't know what will happen in Thailand, so they think it is better to go to Malaysia and work there. And for the girls, they will get married at fourteen and fifteen,

and get pregnant and have no more education. ...to give knowledge, to open opinions – these are the best goals to open schools and educate the people and the poor students. (“Monique”, personal communication, March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009).

#### *5.4.2.1 Victim rights education*

40% of all Thai women peacebuilders interviewed spoke of their involvement in community initiatives to educate direct and indirect victims of the conflict about their rights (Figure 8). The government of Thailand has initiated a short-term compensation payment for the victims of direct violence and their families, and these Thai women’s peacebuilding initiatives are focused on ensuring that victims of violence are aware of their rights to receive government assistance. One participant explains her organization’s role in reaching out to local communities and educating citizens about their rights to compensation as follows:

This organization encourages the people to ask for their rights, and encourages the government officials to take care to respond to the people who are affected by this situation - the victims. It is useful because some local people are uneducated. So they don’t know how to ask or how to say when they need help. ... (This organization) has to give knowledge to the local people. (It) is neutral between the government and the local people. (“Maxine”, personal communication, March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009).

Thai women peacebuilders also identified the problem associated with the current division between direct and indirect victims of the conflict. Direct victims of violence and their families are eligible for government compensation, but indirect victims are reportedly ignored and ostracized from official government initiatives. One participant from Pattani describes the situation in the following manner:

Now the victims are divided into two groups: victims who are affected directly and indirectly by the situation. Victims who suffer directly means the family is affected, for example, if your child was shot, or your husband

was killed. Indirect victims are the ones who live near the places where there are bombs and violence. Why doesn't the government pay attention to the villagers who live near places where there are bombings and shootings? ... We need both groups of people to share their opinions, to share their perspectives together. Not only the victims who lost something. ... We must talk about not only what we have lost, but also about the way to solve this problem. ... They are not treated equally, and their chances are not equal. ("Marcela", personal communication, March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009).

Although victim rights education forms a significant focus of Thai women peacebuilders' conflict management initiatives, the official exclusion of indirect victims of violence has reportedly created further divisions within civil society, and deepened resentment towards the government and criminals directly involved in sustaining conflict relations.

#### *5.4.2.2 Youth development and education*

The focus on youth education and development is evidenced in 70% of research participants involved in educational peacebuilding initiatives' identification of education as a strategy to rescue youth from destructive manifestations of the conflict context (see figures 8 & 9). Critically, youth are perceived by Thai women peacebuilders simultaneously as one of the most vulnerable sectors of society, and as a demographic that has the most potential to lead a societal transformation from conflict to peace in the future. As one participant from Yala indicates "youth are the future of our society", and,

The reason I focus on children and youth is because they will grow up and have to develop the country, the nation and the hometowns. ... If they grow up healthy, and have basic knowledge, and basic moral thinking, they will become good people in the future. ("Molly", personal communication, March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009).

In addition to the identification of the merits of good quality general education, specific programs and workshops have been developed for youth in order to teach them about perspectivism, non-violence, inter-faith knowledge, critical thinking, and constructive conflict management skills (see figure 9). 60% of Thai women peacebuilders' educational initiatives focus on teaching perspectivism to promote the contemplation of multiple points of views from diverse members of Thai society. One participant explains that "I don't really want to change their minds, but I just want them to look at this world wider. To compare this situation to another part, to learn more about other persons, and to use their own mind to decide about other people." ("Marianna", personal communication, March 4th 2009).

Approximately 50% of participants teach non-violence, interfaith knowledge and critical thinking skills to the youths enrolled in their programs (see figure 9). These educational strategies are conducted primarily through workshops, special youth programs, and youth centers to train youth and broader society to be open minded and to consider alternative methods of understanding and managing conflict relations in their communities. Non-violence education teaches participants that:

...using violence to solve the problem, to stop the unrest situation is not the way to solve this problem. Revenge is not the way to solve this problem. ... You can use your understanding. Give the understanding to your family, to the community, to the people to stop this situation."  
("Maya", personal communication, March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009).

One participant, trained in conflict management skills, coordinates a peacebuilding program for youth, and has developed a series of interactive non-violent conflict

transformation activities. She teaches participants about how to engage in constructive conflict, to identify multiple perspectives, to listen critically and ask questions before forming automatic judgments, to brainstorm collectively for answers, to argue constructively, and to seek mutually acceptable solutions that create “win-win outcomes”. Educating the youth in these basic non-violent conflict management and critical thinking skills in 33% of Thai women peacebuilders’ initiatives is indicative of a future-oriented approach to train the next generation of Thai civil society leaders in peacebuilding and constructive conflict management skills.

Interfaith dialogue initiatives present another exemplary educational strategy utilized by 50% of Thai women’s educational peacebuilding interventions. One participant describes her organization’s youth project in the following way:

We have activities that combine youth together from three religions: Christians, Buddhists and Muslims. They will each talk about their religions, they have to listen carefully, and they can ask questions. Some may ask ‘Why do you have to put the cross on the tree?’; or ‘Why can Muslims have four wives?’; or ‘Why do Muslim women have to wear a scarf to cover themselves?’ ... So these questions will be answered by each other. They have to give the information to each other to make their own knowledge about religion. (“Marianna”, personal communication, March 4th 2009).

Interfaith educational strategies are perceived by Thai women peacebuilders as highly beneficial initiatives that increase intergroup communication and dialogue and reduce the misunderstandings between individuals and groups of different faiths. “And when they are finished this project, they can go back to tell their friends, their community, their parents about how they now understand different religions.” (“Marianna”, personal communication, March 4th 2009).

These types of educational initiatives collectively discourage surface judgments based on external sources of knowledge, promote inquisitive engagement towards understanding why individuals and groups think and act in certain ways, and emphasize the importance of contemplating how multiple perspectives can be incorporated into constructive conflict management initiatives in the future.

Notably, 30% of Thai women involved in educational peacebuilding initiatives also identified the development of Muslim religious education through local schools in Southern Thailand as a key peacebuilding strategy to promote youth development and education (Figure 9). Three Muslim women peacebuilders indicated that some Muslim youth in Southern Thailand have been significantly disadvantaged due to the poor quality of education and resources available for traditional Muslim religious schools. One research participant explains this situation by stating that:

In the past, the Muslim youth were shaped by some organization or by some school... they were taught in the wrong way. They were taught the history that Muslims were oppressed by the government and were given some wrong knowledge. ... Some students were taught to support a group or an organization that wants to divide the land, to govern themselves, and to follow the Muslim rules. ... Because of someone's reasons, someone's requirements, someone's ideals. Maybe it is religious teachers who teach this, but only one group. It is not all religious teachers, just a small group. So she questions why these religious teachers want to bring the children to this way because it is so violent! It is not the good way when you teach your students to be killers. ("Madeline", personal communication, March 6<sup>th</sup> 2009).

To counter the effects of poor quality religious education in Southern Thailand, three Thai women peacebuilders reportedly dedicate a portion of their peacebuilding initiatives



to the development of religious schools in order to promote modernization, contemporary teaching methods and international networking between international Muslim religious teachers to improve the quality of education for Muslim youth. The Thai government's historical benign neglect of Muslim schools has reportedly increased miscommunications and misperceptions between officials in Bangkok and religious teachers, so Thai women peacebuilders are engaging their communities "to improve the students, to improve the local people, to improve the youth's future and to have good ideas about religion." ("Madeline", personal communication, March 6<sup>th</sup> 2009) As one participant elaborates, "I don't want the students to study in the wrong way, to just listen and follow the teachings. I want them to think for themselves and decide." (ibid).

#### *5.4.3 Health care initiatives*

Approximately 60% of Thai women peacebuilders interviewed reported to be involved in health care initiatives in their respective communities in Southern Thailand, either through facilitating access to physical health services or providing mental health rehabilitation services to individuals affected by the conflict (Figure 4).

Of the nine women who mentioned health related programs in their peacebuilding initiatives, 55% focus on physical health problems, and 45% on mental health issues (see figure 10). One woman explains the reasons for engaging in basic physical health care provision by stating that; "in the local villages, there are many people who are sick and broken. They have some physical problems and they need a doctor's help. So this

organization goes to these villages to give help.” (“Maxine”, personal communication, March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009).

Another individual from Pattani explains the merits of her interactive healing program for youth focused on improving the mental health of children affected by the conflict by stating that:

This activity will be the opportunity for change: the opportunity to open their minds. To release what they want. They can share and release their emotions and feelings. ...The healing project will make the people in another part of Thailand build a better image of this area. Better than if they only see from the television and the news. They can go deep into the minds of the people in this area and understand them and what they experience. (“Marianna”, personal communication, March 4<sup>th</sup> 2009).

A third woman involved in organizing community dialogue initiatives to build consensus about the needs of communities within her region points to the fact that “when we talk about health, it is the one topic that everyone can share. It is the simple point that everybody agrees with.” (“Isabella”, personal communication, March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009). Better access to health care services is an immediate need that is readily identified in community forums as a common goal within and between communities.

By conducting house visits in villages, facilitating access to hospitals and rehabilitation centers, and inviting regional doctors, nurses and volunteers to care for the ill, Thai women peacebuilders are making efforts to bridge the inequality gap between Southern Thai villages and capital districts. 60% of participants indicated that inequalities between local villages and capital districts are one of the root causes of conflict in their communities (Figure 15). Thai women peacebuilders’ facilitation of access to basic

physical and mental health services is thus a short-term intervention method to fill this gap by meeting the immediate basic health needs of individuals, families and communities affected by conflict in Southern Thailand.

#### *5.4.4 Victim rehabilitation initiatives*

Among the interviewees, 53% focus directly on victim rehabilitation in their peacebuilding initiatives in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala (Figure 4). 62% of these initiatives are conducted through community-based workshops and programs, 50% provide vocational and career training for victims of conflict, 37% of services focus on providing support for widowed women and other victims through centers for peaceful living respectively, and 12% of these services are provided through emergency shelters for orphans and rape victims (see figure 11).

All of the women involved in providing victim rehabilitation services report that community cooperation is the primary strategy needed to facilitate peacebuilding activities (see figure 12). Additionally, 87% of women engage in village house visits to personally engage with victims in their community environment, 62% identify inter-group friendship as a key method to promote sustainable victim rehabilitation, 50% specified the need to engage in critical listening to local perspectives and experiences of conflict to facilitate rehabilitation, and 37% of women conduct community outreach to engage with individuals and families affected by conflict in rehabilitation initiatives (see figure 12).

#### *5.4.4.1 Psychological effects of conflict*

The sensitive nature of the experiences of direct and indirect victims of conflict and violence creates the necessity for Thai women's peacebuilding initiatives to take place directly in villages and communities affected by conflict. Many of these initiatives are conducted in 'red areas', classified as the most dangerous regions in Thailand, where anonymous acts of violence and terrorism are common. The increased frequency and changing nature of violence in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala has created significant emotional and psychological side effects within local populations living in these areas.

One woman describes the intensification of violence in her community in Yala by stating that, "in the past, they just shoot, or kill, or bomb. But right now, they cut the heads, or they burn the bodies... right now, people kill each other, and cut the heads, and it is really so violent! They have to be practicing with somebody with experience to do these things." ("Madeline", personal communication, March 6<sup>th</sup> 2009). Another individual describes the psychological effects of anonymous violence in the following passage:

The bombings do not target people. Bombings can kill many people. ... Shootings kill specific people... But really, we don't know who makes this situation. We just hear from some people or from the media, but we don't know what is the truth. ... The situation is very dangerous. We do not know who are the killers in our own communities. ("Maxine", personal communication, March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009).

Participants describe anonymous men in black suits committing murder of innocent villagers; psychological effects of bombings in public places; personally witnessing shootings; the disappearance and murder of husbands and men; and the wider societal repercussions of the creation of conflict orphans, widows, and persons with disabilities.

The engagement of local women peacebuilders with direct and indirect victims of conflict and violence encourages the sharing of personal conflict experiences throughout society, the validation of victim experiences, and the creation of intra and inter-community bonds. Either by addressing conflict victim's most immediate needs for safe shelter through the provision of emergency refuge, through individual and group counseling in community centers for peaceful living, forming group solidarity between widowed women, supporting self-sustainability through vocational and career training programs, or workshops designed to promote healing through group activities, the psychological effects of conflict are increasingly being addressed by Thai women peacebuilders.

#### *5.4.5 Justice-seeking initiatives*

A third of Thai women peace builders describe their involvement in initiatives that intend to address the sense of injustice that is commonly identified in communities affected by conflict in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala (see figure 4). Two thirds of these initiatives are focused on enhancing the implementation of traditional legal justice for victims of conflict, and 17% represent interventions to implement restorative justice, and neutral third party negotiation of disputes, respectively (see figure 13).

##### *5.4.5.1 Traditional legal justice*

The predominant trend in women peace builders' narratives is the identification that a sense of traditional legal justice is lacking in communities affected by violent conflict. This is evidenced in 100% of women involved in justice seeking peacebuilding

initiatives' identification that more institutional legal accountability is needed to account for the perpetration of violent acts on innocent civilians (see figure 14). Additionally, 100% of respondents involved in peacebuilding strategies to promote justice are involved in assisting direct victims of violence to access monetary compensation from the government; promoting victim rights; and creating broad external networks of support for individuals affected by the conflict (see figure 14).

Thai women peacebuilders' focus on seeking legal justice is reflective of their strong collective perception of the misuse of power by government, soldiers, and police in their local communities (see figure 15 & 14). Descriptions of institutionalized corruption and intimidation, the arbitrary arrest of civilians, and a general lack of accountability are common themes in Thai women peacebuilders' narratives. Peacebuilding initiatives involving legal proceedings, lobbying in influential political circles, facilitating access to legal counsel, and promoting education about victim's rights to government compensation represent grassroots attempts to encourage the implementation of traditional legal process in local communities.

#### *5.4.5.2 Restorative justice*

One participant is involved in seeking restorative justice for both victims and persons accused of crimes, beyond the boundaries of the traditional legal system (see figure 13). As Llewellyn (2006) explains, "Justice understood restoratively is fundamentally concerned with restoring relationships harmed by wrongdoing to ones in which all parties enjoy and accord one another equal dignity, respect, and concern." (p.91). The focus on

mending dysfunctional social *relationships* through “the satisfaction of each party’s rights to equal dignity, respect, and concern” (ibid) is the central aim of restorative justice initiatives.

Through the provision of counseling in private homes, hospitals and prisons, a focus on mending relationships between victims and accused is emerging as an alternative form of justice. As one participant explains, “I try to encourage the victims to tell their stories”, and to come to a place where the accused can “understand what they did and react in a good manner... they don’t talk about revenge or fighting. They just want to tell their side of the story. They just want someone to talk to. To feel less excluded. To be more included”. (“Belle”, personal communication, March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009).

#### *5.4.5.3. Third party negotiation*

One participant is involved in conducting neutral third party interventions in communities affected by conflict in order to produce independent analysis of the reality of conflict in local communities in Southern Thailand (see figures 13 & 14). The reported lack of accountability in traditional legal institutions and media reports has predicated an emergent need for independent investigations of conflict situations by neutral NGOs and third party negotiators. By obtaining the facts from local persons and government officials involved in specific incidences of conflict, small-scale, community-based, neutral negotiations produce alternative methods for managing conflict relations and seeking truths within communities. Independent analyses of conflict scenarios are

documented on an internet website and in a book to create public awareness about the plight of victims and accused in communities affected by conflict.

By engaging in alternative, non-governmental negotiations and investigations, the public receives an additional source of information about the reality of conflict in Southern Thailand, and alternative strategies for resolving tensions within communities are presented. “We realize that the government always speaks to one side, but the people don’t have the opportunity to give the real information. ... So we make a balance. The government can speak, and also the people can speak and be heard.” (“Marta”, personal communications, 4<sup>th</sup> 2009).



## CHAPTER VI: ANALYSIS

### 6.1 Feminist ethics and grassroots conflict management

Feminist ethics are focused on understanding women's personal experiences within the broader contexts of conflict situations, and nurturing relationships between individuals and groups through an interdisciplinary investigation of alternative strategies to effect change on the status quo (Porter, 1999; Porter, 2007). Feminist ethics offer a framework of analysis within which the limitations of mainstream masculine approaches can be constructively critiqued, while alternative strategies can be suggested, which include women's voices in future discussions about how to effectively manage intergroup conflict in sustainable ways.

There is an increasing need to recognize, value and support women's inherent agencies as peacebuilders in societies affected by PSC (Anderlini, 2007; Porter, 2007). Continuing to under-emphasize women's peacebuilding capacities will exclude valuable resources for conflict management, ignore feminist perspectives and strategies, and risks to prolong unequal, restrictive, and exclusionary gender relationships in international conflict management initiatives. Pursuing the ongoing investigation and evaluation of global women's peacebuilding strategies will thus produce new insights into how women understand conflict and peace, and how they propose to effect change in their respective societies.

### *6.1.1 Overcoming the stereotype of women's victimization*

A dichotomy exists in contemporary peace literature regarding the recognition that women are increasingly being typecast as amongst the most vulnerable victims of violence and war (El-Bushra, 2007). Continued overemphasis of women's victimization in conflict situations therefore risks overshadowing women's inherent agencies and strengths to overcome challenges in protracted social conflict situations (Porter, 2007). In this sense, raising awareness about women's real experiences of war and violence is at once essential to establishing the truths of their involvement in violent conflict situations, and also potentially detrimental to their overall emancipation as strong, competent, courageous, and innovative leaders.

This research focuses on women's agencies as leaders and problem solvers, and purposefully investigates the strategies through which women engage in these leadership roles in their communities. Although examples of victimization were prevalent in Thai women peacebuilders' personal descriptions of their experiences of violent conflict, the participants were selected specifically for their demonstration of leadership and strength in their community initiatives.

The research's lack of emphasis on the direct effect of women's victimization therefore does not contribute directly to this theory, but the results do exemplify women's agencies for creative peacebuilding strategies, and demonstrate their resiliency in overcoming their victimization through their involvement in peacebuilding initiatives. Grassroots peacebuilding activities therefore prove to constitute a strategy through which women

can overcome their experiences as victims of conflict through the opportunities generated for leadership, and creative intergroup problem solving in grassroots peacebuilding initiatives.

### *6.1.2 Biological explanations for gendered conflict behaviours*

One of the primary gendered perspectives prevalent in peace and conflict literature is that there are biological explanations for women and men's respective roles in conflict situations (ibid). Within this context, men are perceived as having naturally occurring tendencies towards aggression, confrontation, and potentially, violence, from an evolutionary biological perspective (Hudson et al., 2009). Conversely, women are often portrayed in peace literature, not without contestation, as "naturally peaceful" (Charlesworth, 2008).

The research findings do not succinctly address Thai male perspectives of peacebuilding and conflict, and therefore neither corroborate nor discredit the theory of male aggressiveness. However, when Thai women peacebuilders were asked to describe how they perceived male approaches to peacebuilding, the most common responses indicated men's preferences to "use power" and "hard conversations" to manage conflict situations, ("Brianna", "Isabella", "Maxine", "Maya", personal communications, March 2<sup>nd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>, 2009). Congruently, 26% of participants indicated that men and women managed conflict in significantly different ways, whereas 46% indicated that their potential capacities to engage in peacebuilding were essentially equal (see figure 16).

Women's inherent, or biologically determined peacefulness is not evaluated critically in this study. However, the findings do indicate a general trend in Thai women peacebuilders' perspectives that familial, motherly, nurturing roles are strongly utilized and valued as peacebuilding strategies. As Porter (2007) notes:

...because women universally are the prime nurturers in relationships, families and communities, they play crucial roles in peacebuilding, often in very informal, unofficial ways. These roles often emerge out of the experience of oppression, knowing what it is like to be excluded and seeking a society that is truly inclusive. (Porter, 2007, p.3).

Women's capacities to unite household bonds through their roles as wives, mothers, and primary child caregivers were identified as instrumental qualities that are mirrored in Thai women's peacebuilding roles. This is evident in the prevalence of strategies that advocate the need to educate youth as the future leaders of the community; to provide basic health care for physically and mentally affected conflict victims; and in community dialogue initiatives that promote collaborative exchanges between groups and individuals.

As Porter (2007) states, "The common ground that draws women together usually lies in women's commitment to family and community ties and the shared urgency to pool resources and meet everyday basic needs, despite being surrounded by chaos and destruction. (p.5). The research results clearly reflect this reality, which is evidenced principally in the coordination of peacebuilding efforts between Buddhist and Muslim women, with the common goal of attaining a state of peace and security within and between communities in Southern Thailand. Furthermore,

While the initial impetus for organizing may be the immediate need to pool resources to meet the survival requirements of families and communities, many organizations are later sustained by the sense of empowerment that women gain in this process, as well as by a frustration with the 'failed politics of violence'. (El-Bushra, 2007).

The research results thus suggest that women's biologically and socially defined familial roles are considered as assets to their work as grassroots peacebuilders. Whether or not women are *biologically* peaceful by nature remains contested, but the results indicate that the research participants view their peacebuilding strategies as natural translations of their domestic roles, and that their involvement in grassroots community peacebuilding initiatives is complementary to their collective feminine identity. In other words, women, as opposed to men, are especially well-suited to grassroots peacebuilding roles due to their socially and culturally defined familial roles as mothers, wives and child caregivers.

#### *6.1.2.1 Emotional components*

A common theme identified in the research results is the participants' descriptions of their emotions associated with women's roles as peacebuilders. When questioned about what advantageous qualities they perceived to contribute to their peacebuilding work, a range of responses were identified, ranging from 'cooperation', 'support', 'softness', being 'gentle', 'polite', 'warm' and 'meticulous', amongst others.

These qualities were attributed specifically to feminist characteristics of women peacebuilders which assisted the participants' respective peacebuilding initiatives, and which set them apart from male peacebuilders in their communities. These feminine traits

were also directly linked to the generation of open intergroup community dialogue: the most prevalent peacebuilding goal of Thai women leaders' grassroots community initiatives. These findings subsequently contribute to the conception of 26% of peacebuilders' identification that women are better suited to peacebuilding than men in Southern Thailand (see figure 15).

## **6.2 Cultural aspects of feminist peacebuilding perspectives**

A key research finding related to Thai women's grassroots peacebuilding strategies is the fact that Thai Buddhist and Muslim women overcame their cultural differences to unite through common peacebuilding objectives. Participants respectively identified aspects of their Buddhist and Muslim belief systems and cultural orientations that provided them with unique conceptualizations of peace and conflict. However, the differences in their beliefs were minimal in comparison to the description of their united motivation to work together to bridge the gap between cultural groups in Southern Thailand.

Although the significance of non-Western cultural peacebuilding practices has been investigated in contemporary peace literature, the interface between gender and culture has remained relatively unexplored (de la Rey & McKay, 2006). The research findings in this particular context demonstrate that grassroots women peacebuilders are effectively working together to initiate constructive intergroup strategies to minimize the differences between groups, and to build solidarity through a common vision of a future of peaceful relations between cultures and communities.

These findings are significant in light of the fact that grassroots Thai women peacebuilders are acting as models for Thai citizens to follow. Although significant barriers to full cooperation continue to exist, the description of Thai Muslims and Buddhists as ‘brothers’, ‘the same’, and united in their national identity as ‘Thai’ is exemplified in cooperative strategies that surmount cultural differences through various peacebuilding initiatives. Women-led grassroots peacebuilding initiatives, it seems, have provided the key foundations to build bridges of cooperation and mutual understanding between communities of differences.

## CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSIONS

This project was designed to investigate the specific peacebuilding initiatives of Thai Muslim and Buddhist women peacebuilders in the provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala in Southern Thailand, and how their respective experiences of conflict, gender and culture influenced their conflict management activities.

The research indicates that the primary focus of Thai women leaders' peacebuilding initiatives is on strategies that foster constructive community dialogue and quality education for youth in the Southern provinces, as well as crisis intervention strategies to protect, heal, and reintegrate civilians affected by the violent conflict through victim rehabilitation projects, the provision of basic health services, as well as traditional and alternative justice-seeking processes.

The focus on dialogue and education, especially of youth, reflects a belief in some participants that the transformation of conflict relations is possible through persistent cooperative efforts by capable community leaders. Most participants were optimistic about these endeavours, but others expressed pessimism about the outcomes of dialogue based on the guarded positions of civilians who are unwilling to share their honest opinions with members of respective religious groups and government officials. Although cooperative and capacity building efforts are predominant, a lack of trust poses a barrier to open and honest communication in certain dialogue forums.



The concentration on more immediate crisis management service provision of mental and physical health care, victim rehabilitation and the provision of justice is indicative of a desire to protect and promote the welfare of civilian society, and the desire to participate in legitimate processes whereby misuses of power and violence are identified, and their recurrence is prevented in the future. Success was expressed in the increasing ability of Thai women peacebuilders to facilitate individual and group healing processes, but the overall lack of justice remains as an obstacle to reconciliation between parties affected by human rights abuses and discrimination by government and insurgent forces.

The research also identifies the fact that Thai women peacebuilders perceive the root causes of conflict to be complex and difficult to ascertain with any accuracy. The most common perceptions of the causes of societal conflict were identified as: inequality (both between villages, and between local villages and the government), poor communication strategies within broader society, and stereotyping on the basis of religion and appearance (see figure 15). The identification of communication gaps and mistrust between villages and capitals, between Buddhist and Muslim religious groups, and within Muslim populations, is also indicative of ongoing structural challenges that face Thai women peacebuilders in their initiatives to foster positive peace in their respective communities.

Although the research results are neither deterministic nor absolute, they do reveal interesting insights about how this emergent group of female civil society leaders understands conflict in their communities, and how they subsequently propose to address it constructively in their respective peacebuilding initiatives.

What appears to be critically lacking in this system of constructive conflict management dialogue is the *sincere* inclusion of the Thai government and insurgent leaders in the process. The relative anonymity of the insurgent parties, the secrecy of their operations, and the militant zeal with which they carry out their attacks is a stark contrast to the Thai government's public campaigns to overpower local communities in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala with soldiers, paramilitary forces, and media to win the war against its own civilians. The persistent use of violent strategies on both sides of the conflict divide have only served to raise the civilian death toll, heighten escalation dynamics and further motivate the desire of respective parties to vanquish their opposition. At the moment, this cycle of destructive conflict relations appears to continue unabated, despite military and grassroots attempts to contain the violence.

What must be contextualized from this particular manifestation of destructive societal relations is that the Thai government and insurgent groups represent two extremes of conflict escalation sources. Between those extremes are Thai Buddhist and Muslim civilians who find no constructive use for violence and warfare, and who collectively hope for a future of peaceful relations between communities and groups. Exemplary women such as the fifteen interviewed in this study, lead the way to this commonly identified future by engaging themselves in the non-violent path of cooperation, creativity, and ingenuity in the face of adversity.

Peace processes are learning processes. The transition from conflict to peace is a complex, multi-faceted process that requires time, and continuous learning and reflection, in order to constructively engage diverse parties and contentious issues. By addressing the basic needs of the civilian population affected by conflict, and collectively strategizing to create integrative solutions that will foster growth, cooperation, and constructive development of diverse inter-faith communities, Thai women peacebuilders have laid the foundations for peace within and between their communities. Their efforts need to be supported by a broader societal effort to promote the constructive management of conflict relations, the elimination of violence, and ongoing efforts to build processes and structures that will foster positive peace in Southern Thailand.

## CHAPTER VIII: RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above conclusions and the research findings, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Constructive intercommunal dialogue initiatives need to be supported through systematic efforts to foster cooperation with grassroots peacebuilders in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala. If government officials are to continue to be included in dialogue forums, sincerity and authenticity of intentions need to be more clearly articulated and exemplified to validate the processes initiated by women peacebuilders. Government officials need to recognize the value of grassroots efforts to build cooperation and dialogue between diverse religious groups, and become more vocal in supporting these efforts locally, nationally and internationally. It is in the interest of government officials to make a more concerted effort to sincerely involve themselves in the cooperative forums initiated by Thai women peacebuilders, and to subsequently contribute directly to the grassroots momentum for intercommunal cooperation and dialogue.
2. Pursuant to the FWCW (1995), the PfA (1995), UNSC Resolution 1325 (2000), and UNSC Resolution 1645 (2005), the integral role of grassroots women peacebuilders in Southern Thailand needs to be recognized by the international community in order to support its continued growth and development. The international community, especially the PBC, and the UNSC should become more

- aware of the efforts of Thai women peacebuilders, and publicly recognize their constructive conflict management contributions as promoters of positive peace strategies through cooperation and dialogue. International recognition of these efforts will serve to motivate local actors to further develop their peacebuilding initiatives and contribute credibility and momentum to their cause.
3. Regional cooperative organizations, such as ASEAN should also build an awareness of the grassroots capabilities of local peacebuilding initiatives, with respect to their potential to unite diverse civilian populations under a common goal of building peace. Recognition and support from regional institutions will serve to validate Thai women peacebuilders' activities, and popularize their accomplishments. The message of unity through diversity and cooperation should be voiced and heard by regional actors, and expressively supported through dialogue that supports local strategies to build peace.
  4. As demonstrated in the research, the broad conceptualization of youth as the future conflict analysts and peacebuilders of Thai society deserves more systematic evaluation. If youth are to be educated and encouraged to be the future leaders of a peaceful Thai society, Thai women peacebuilders' strategies to teach constructive conflict analysis and management skills and inter-faith cooperation should be more systematically implemented in youth education throughout Thailand. Youth from all regions of Thailand need to be educated to understand

- the diversity of Thai society and the value of intercommunal cooperation to collectively and constructively manage conflict in the future.
5. A truly gendered analysis of grassroots peacebuilding in Southern Thailand should include an analysis of Thai men peacebuilders' perspectives and strategies to manage community conflict relations. A subject of future research on Thai male peacebuilders could thus serve as a balancing force to more accurately conceptualize the differences and commonalities in local men and women's respective abilities to manage and transform community relations in Southern Thailand.
  6. The ability of Thai women peacebuilders to affect small-scale changes in their communities has been revealed through this study. The strategies employed are reflective of the utility of women-led grassroots peacebuilding initiatives, whose incorporation of local knowledge of conflict dynamics, and the constructive use of diverse cultural resources, contribute to the legitimacy of these movements within local communities. It is recommended, therefore, that those working in the field of international conflict management and peacebuilding increasingly recognize and value the capabilities of grassroots women peacebuilders. Such action is critical in enhancing local capacities to reduce violence and intergroup misunderstandings, and build positive peace for future generations.

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## **Appendix A – Informed Consent Form**

You are being asked to participate in a study investigating the role of Thai women peacebuilders in Southern Thailand.

The purpose of this project is to better understand how women from the provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat and Yala in Southern Thailand are engaging in peacebuilding roles in their local communities, and to better understand how culture and gender influence peacebuilding activities. The results of this study will be useful to other Thai peacebuilders, scholars and conflict practitioners working in Thailand at NGOs and academic institutions, who seek to better understand how women from Thai Buddhist and Muslim cultures envision and engage in peacebuilding work.

If you choose to participate in this project, you will be asked to conduct an interview with the researcher, Melanie-Anne Bonnar, with the assistance of a Thai, Malay or Yawi translator. As a participant in this study, you will be asked to conduct a minimum of one interview with the researcher, which will occur during the course of one day, and which will last approximately one to two hours. There is a possibility that you might be contacted again for a short second interview if the researcher requires additional information. If this is necessary, you will be contacted by telephone within one month of the first interview. The researcher will compensate you as a participant for your transport costs to and from the interview.

The questions the researcher will ask you in the interview will be about your personal perceptions of the conflict in Southern Thailand, about what peacebuilding strategies you are involved in your community, and about how you believe your gender and religion affect how you conduct your peacebuilding activities. The interview will be informal, and although the researcher will be asking you specific questions, you are free to discuss any issues that you feel are relevant to your perceptions of peacebuilding in Southern Thailand.

The interview will be audio-recorded using a tape recorder in order to document the interview for the researcher, and no one but the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to these audio recordings. The recordings will not be published or broadcast in any public or private forum. The audiotapes will be locked in a safe box with the researcher for the duration of the research and analysis. Six months after the final completion of the project, the audiotapes will be destroyed to protect your identity. If you have strong objections to the use of a tape recorder, the interview can be recorded manually, at your convenience.

All information that you provide in this interview will be kept completely confidential by the researcher, the Thai translator, and the research supervisor, who are the only people who will have access to the information you provide in this interview. Your real name will not be published anywhere, and the researcher will use a code name to identify you in any documentation to protect your anonymity.

If you have any difficulty understanding the translator at any time, please let the researcher know, and the question will be rephrased. If you do not understand the researcher's questions, please make sure you ask for clarification, and the researcher will state the question in a different manner. Your participation in is voluntary, and if you choose to withdraw from the study for any reason, you are free to do so.

Do you have any questions at this time? If you have any further questions, please feel free to ask the researcher.

**AUTHORIZATION:** I have read and understand the above Informed Consent Form and I agree to be a participant in this study. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason by contacting the researcher, Melanie-Anne Bonnar by telephone at [REDACTED], or by email at: [REDACTED] or by contacting the project supervisor, Hrach Gregorian, from Royal Roads University by email at [REDACTED]. I also give my permission to the researcher to use the information from this interview in the study, without the use of my real name or personal information.

Participant's name in print \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B – Guiding interview questions**

### **I. Initial open-ended questions**

- Is there anything that you would like to say before I begin asking you some questions about your peacebuilding work?

#### *1.1 Conflict*

As a university researcher, I have learned about the conflict in Southern Thailand, but since I do not live here, I have not experienced the conflict myself.

- In your own words, can you tell me how would you describe your personal experience with conflict in your community?

#### *1.2 Peacebuilding*

- Can you tell me about what specific type of peacebuilding work you been involved in?
- Why did you decide to become involved in peacebuilding?
- How have community relations evolved or changed in your community as a result of your peacebuilding initiatives?

### **II. Intermediate questions**

#### *2.1 Gender*

- How do you think your identity as a woman has influenced your peacebuilding work?
- Do you think there is a difference between how women and men manage conflict/peace in your community?
- What lessons would you like to teach to others in your community?

#### *2.2 Culture*

- How does your religion help you understand conflict?
- What does your religion teach you about peace?
- How have other Buddhists/Muslims in your community reacted to your peacebuilding work?
- Do you think there are more similarities of differences between how Thai Buddhist and Thai Muslim women engage in peacebuilding work in Southern Thailand?

### **III. Closing questions**

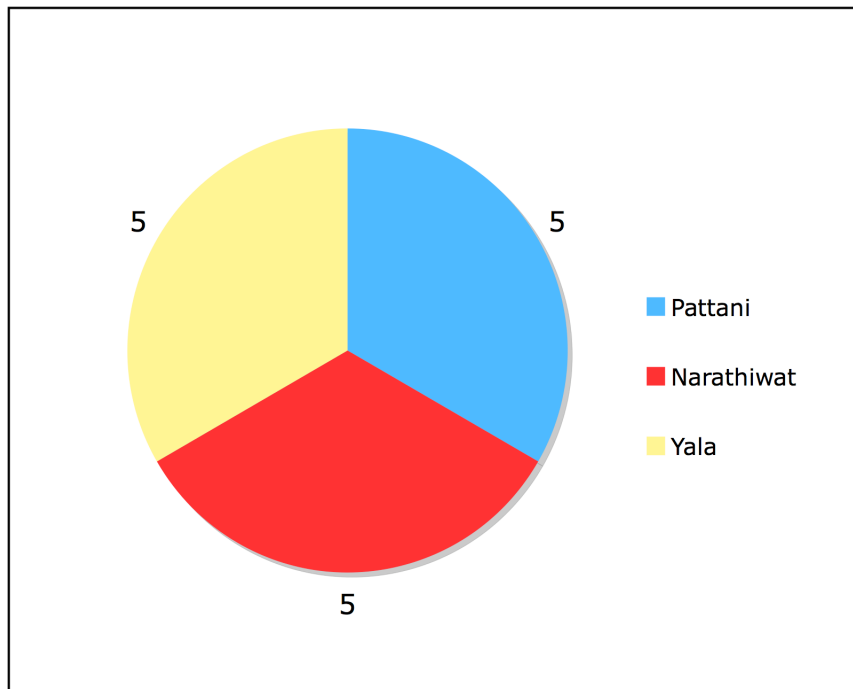
- Why do you think it is important to do peacebuilding work in Southern Thailand?
- What are some of the biggest challenges you face as a woman peacebuilder in your community?
- How do you think those challenges can be overcome in the future?
- Is there anything else you would like to add before we finish this interview?

**FIGURES**

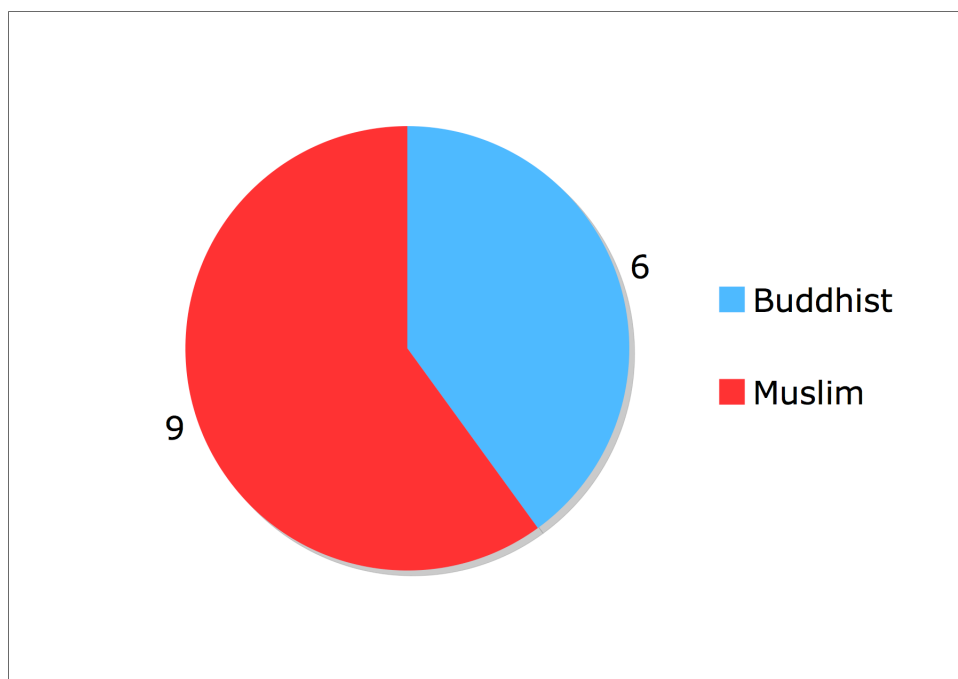
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**Figure 1: Actors and Approaches to Peacebuilding (Lederach, 1997, p.39)**

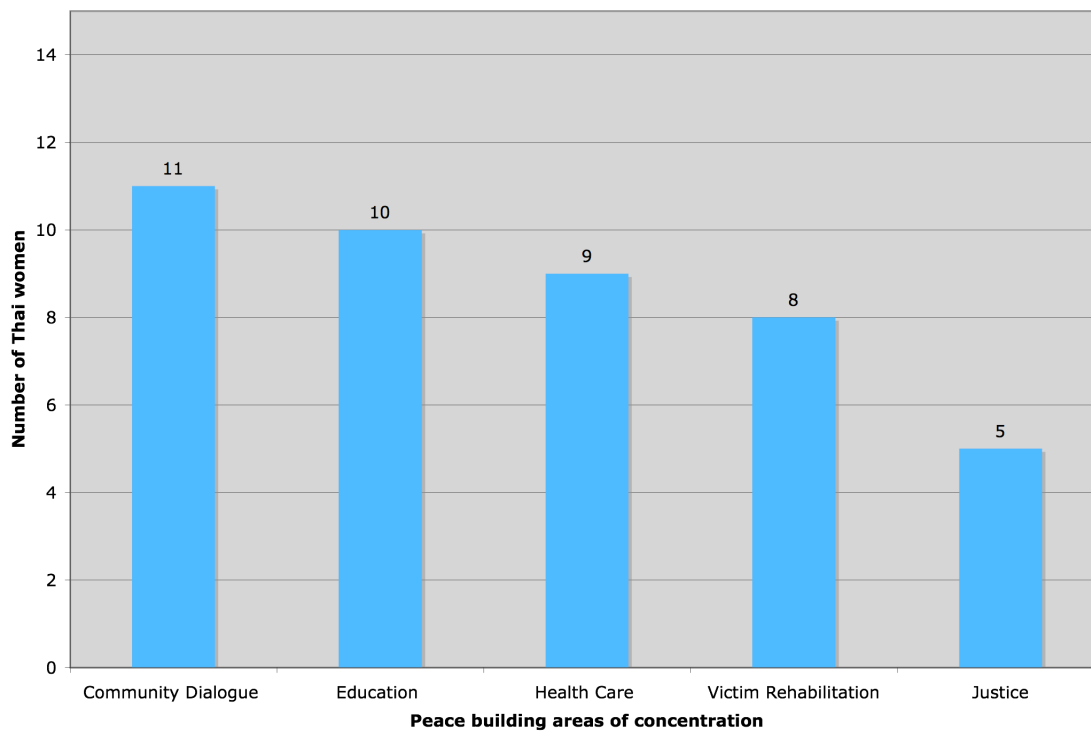




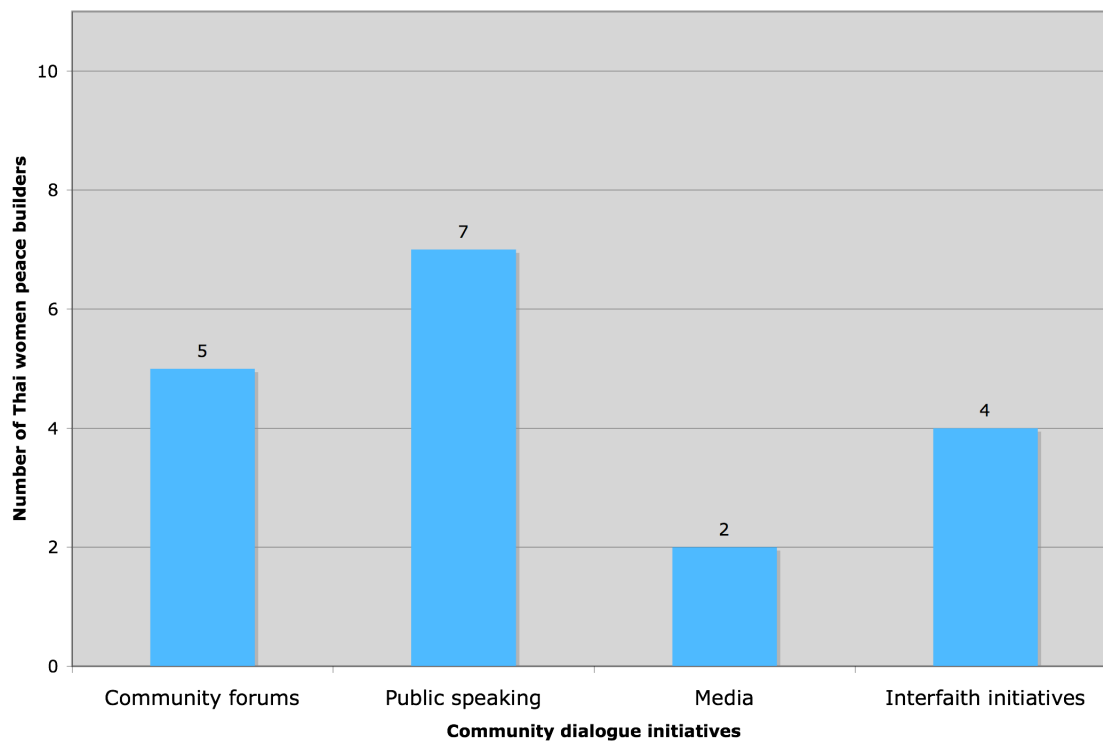
**Figure 2: Thai women peacebuilders' provinces of residence**



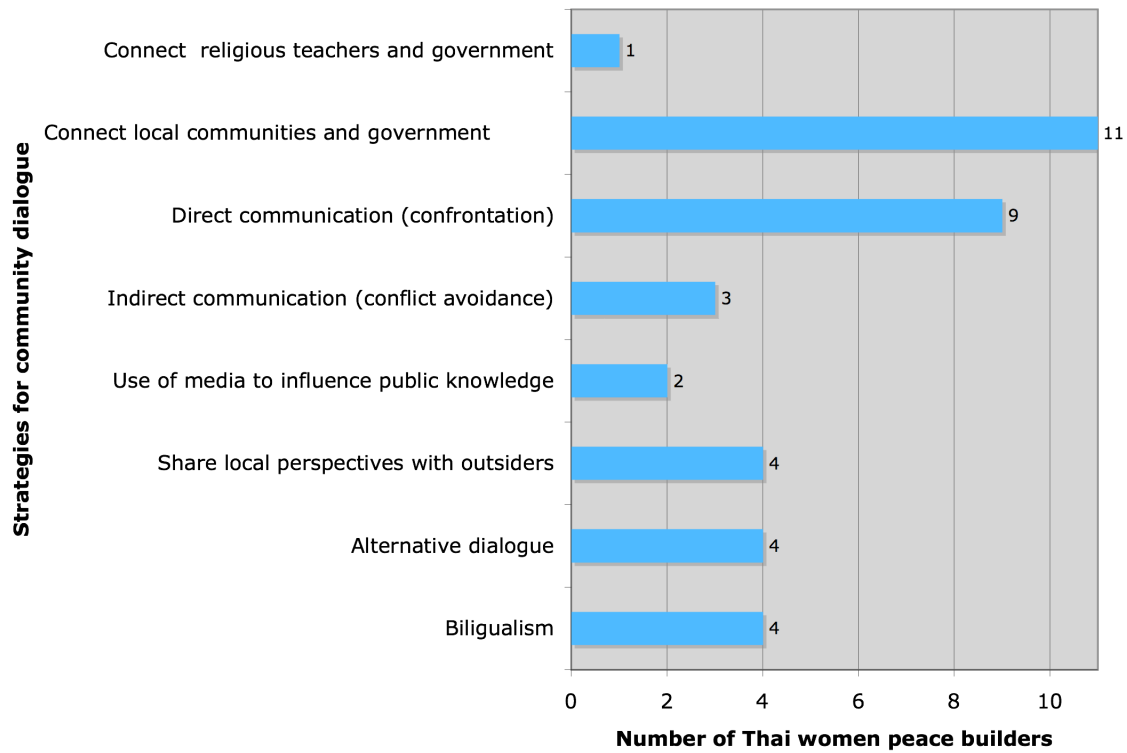
**Figure 3: Thai women peacebuilders' religion**



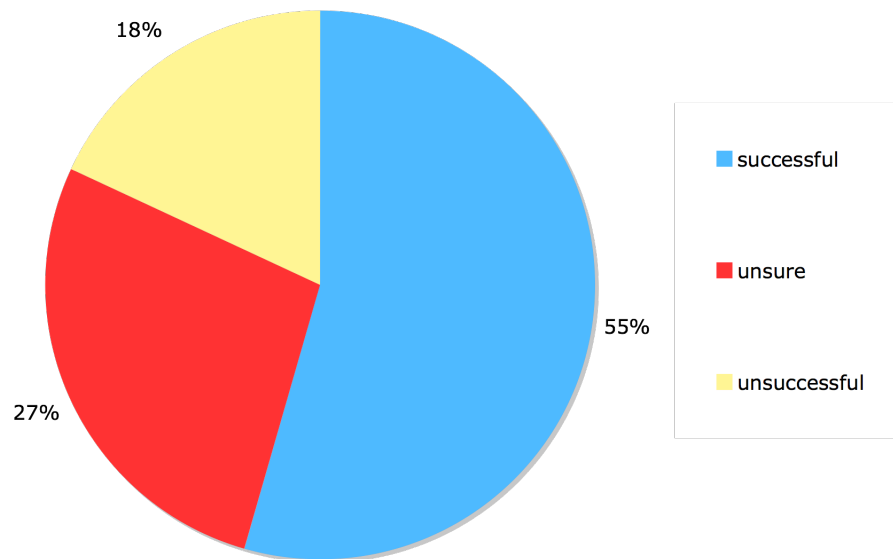
**Figure 4: Primary focus areas of Thai women peacebuilders**



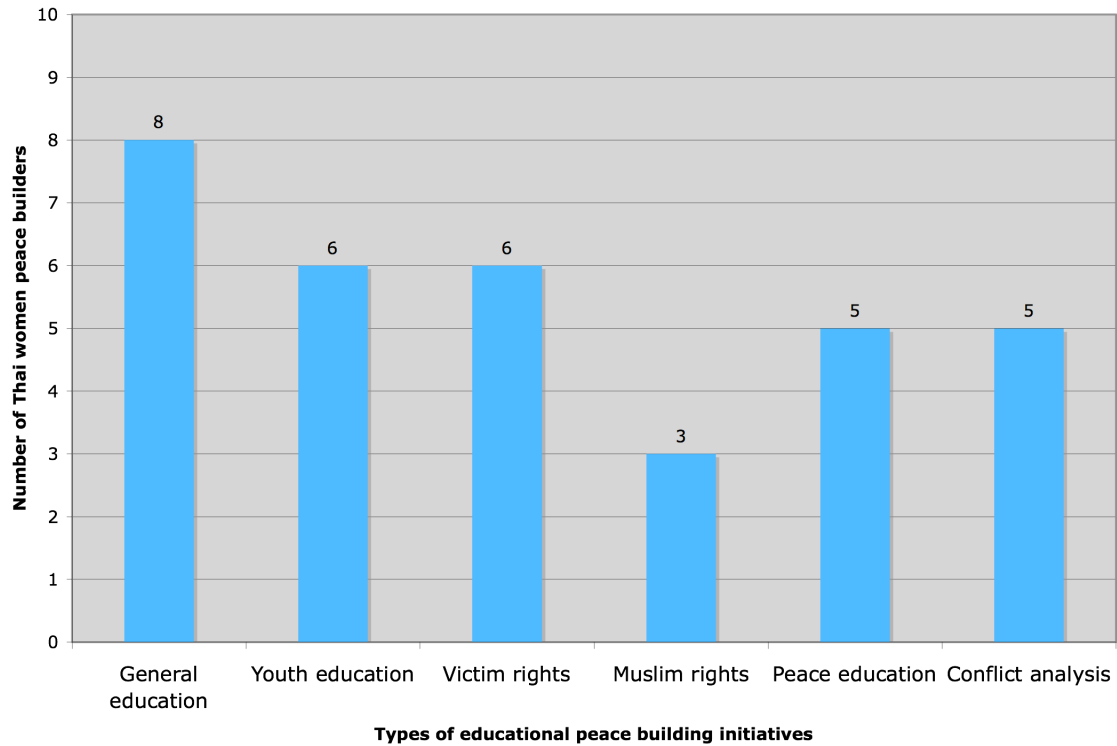
**Figure 5: Thai women peacebuilders' community dialogue initiatives**



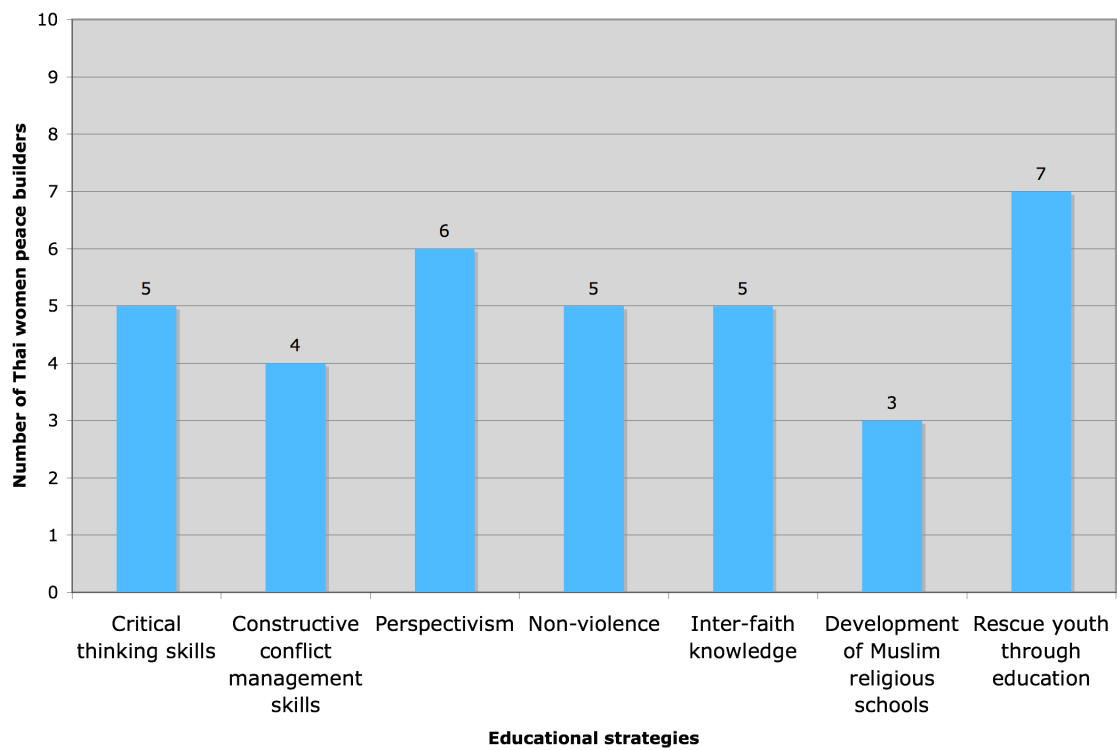
**Figure 6: Thai women peacebuilders’ community dialogue strategies**



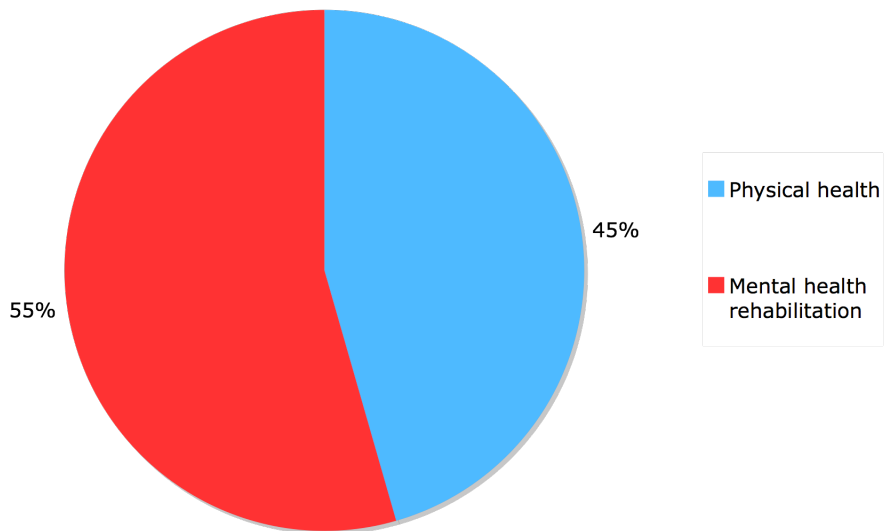
**Figure 7: Thai women peacebuilders’ auto-evaluations of community dialogue strategies**



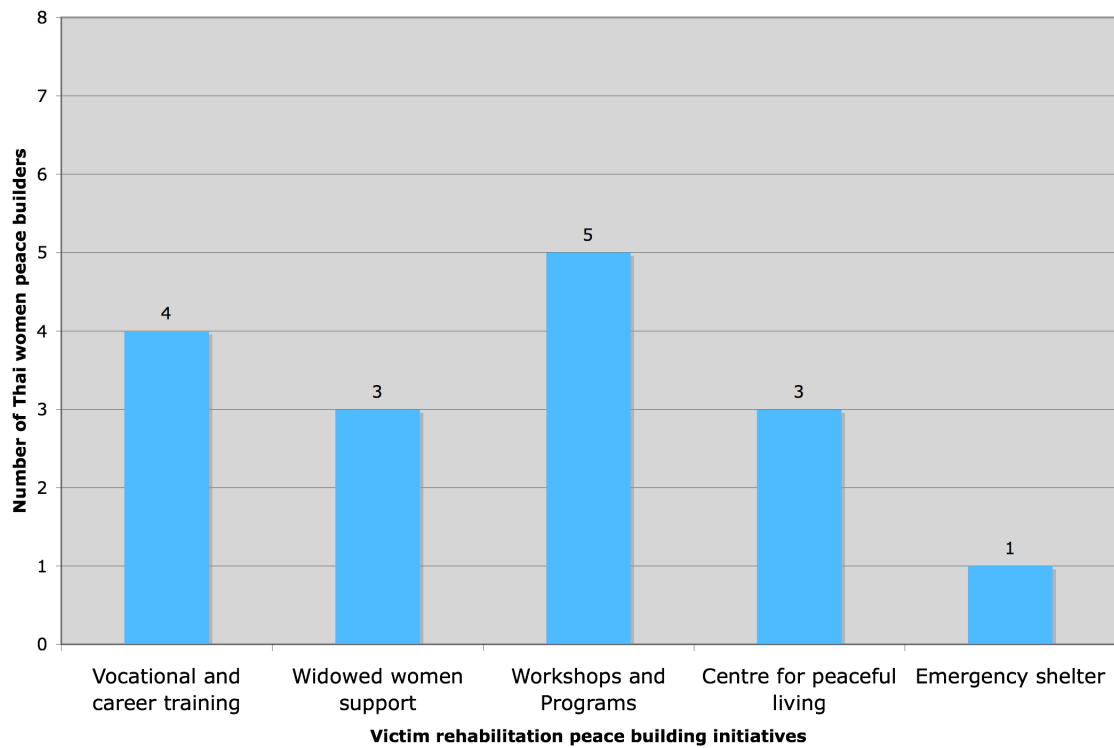
**Figure 8: Thai women peacebuilders' educational initiatives**



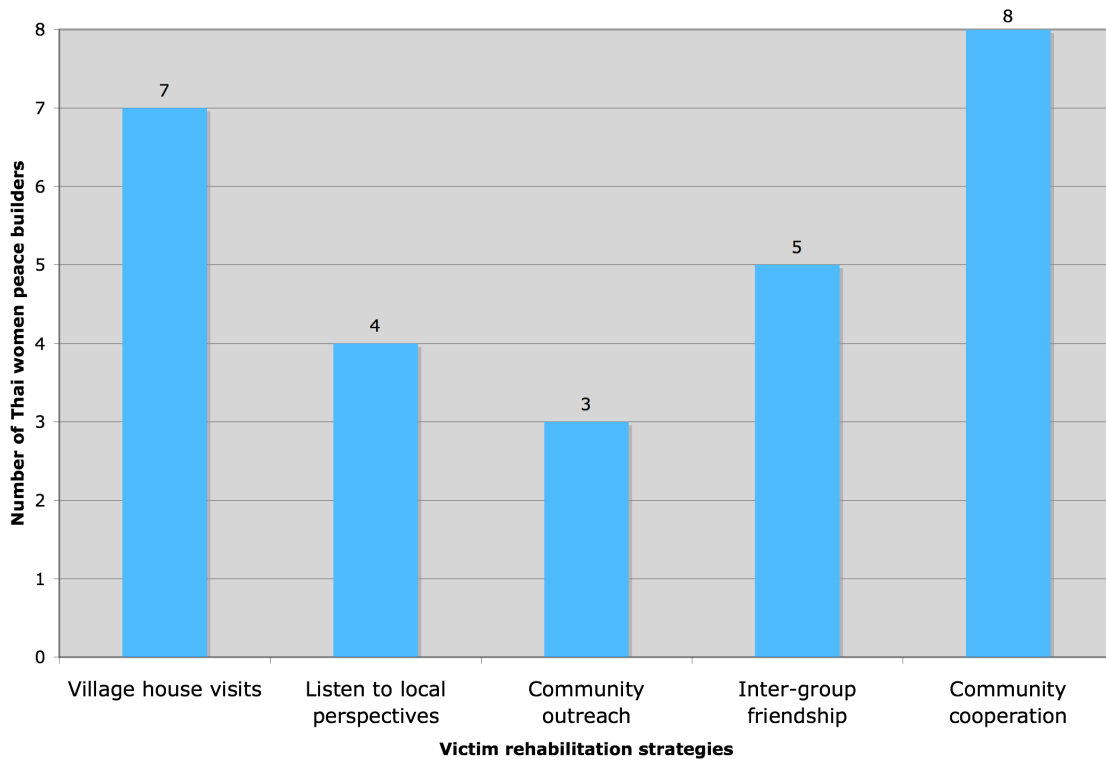
**Figure 9: Thai women peacebuilders' educational strategies**



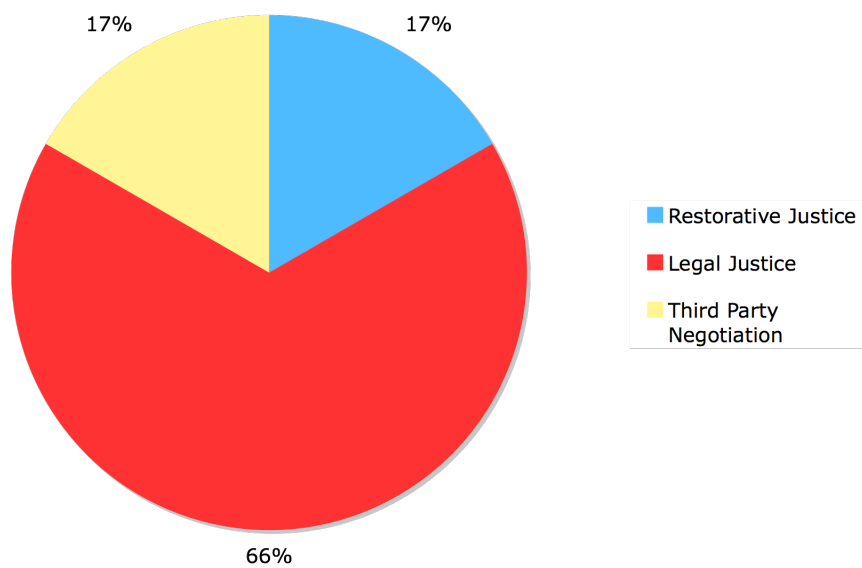
**Figure 10: Thai women peacebuilders' health care initiatives**



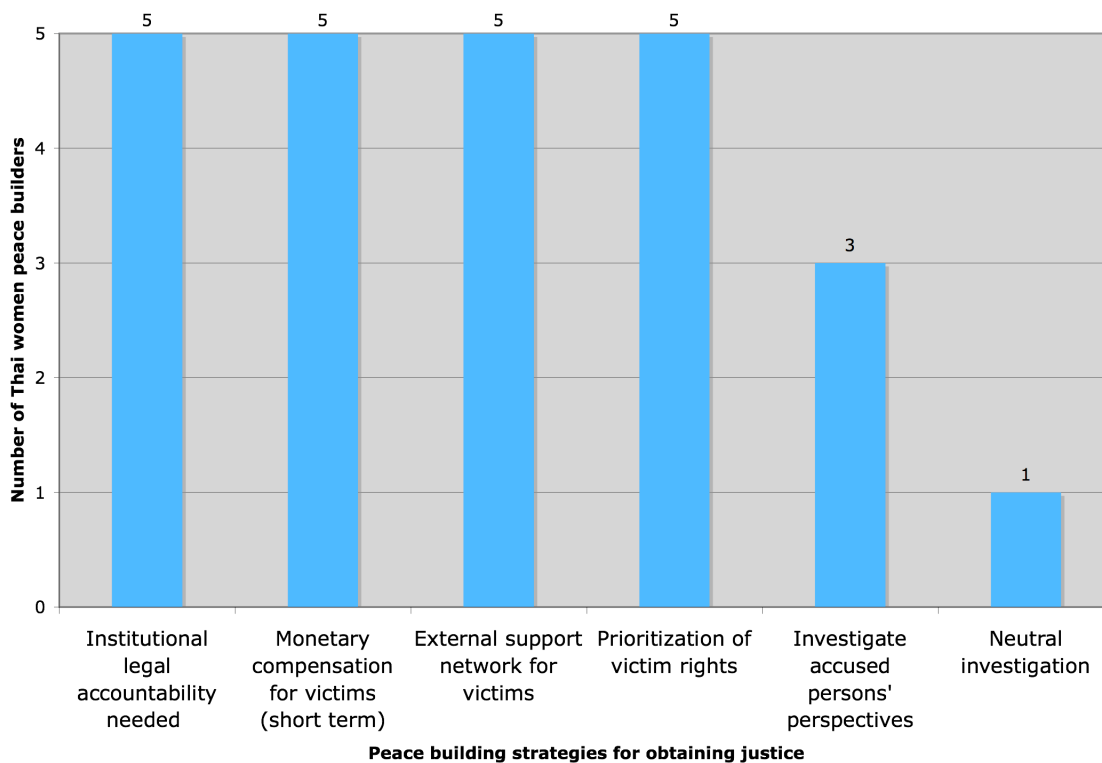
**Figure 11: Thai women peacebuilders' victim rehabilitation initiatives**



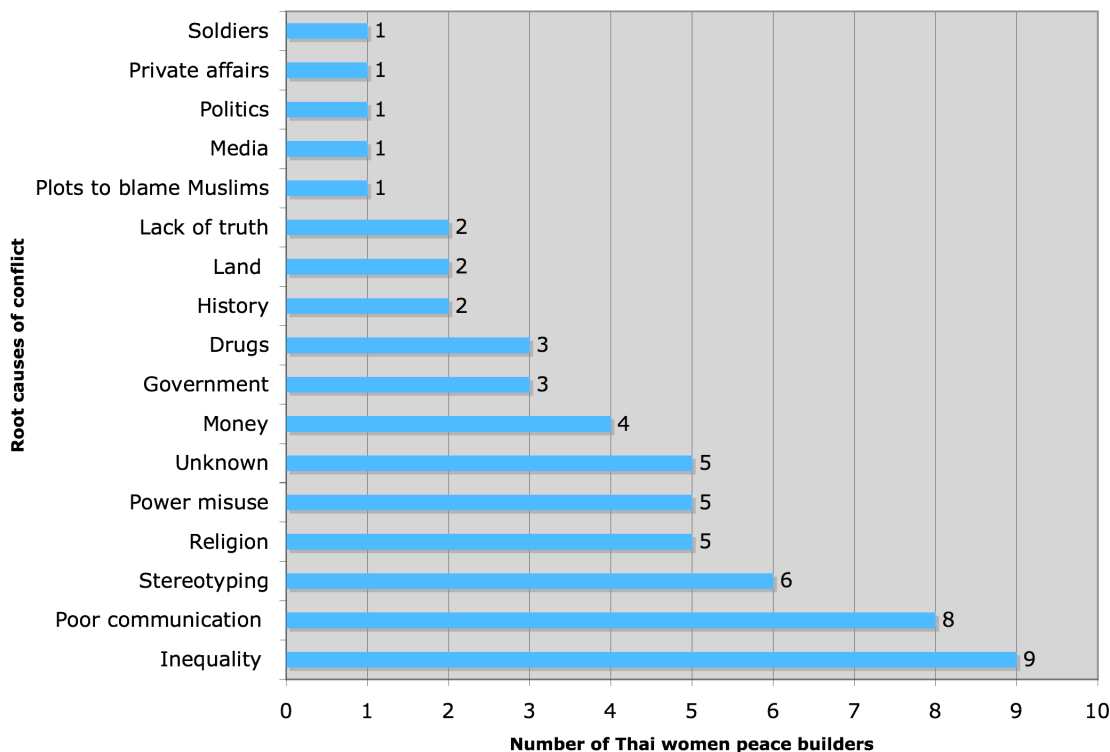
**Figure 12: Thai women peacebuilders’ victim rehabilitation strategies**



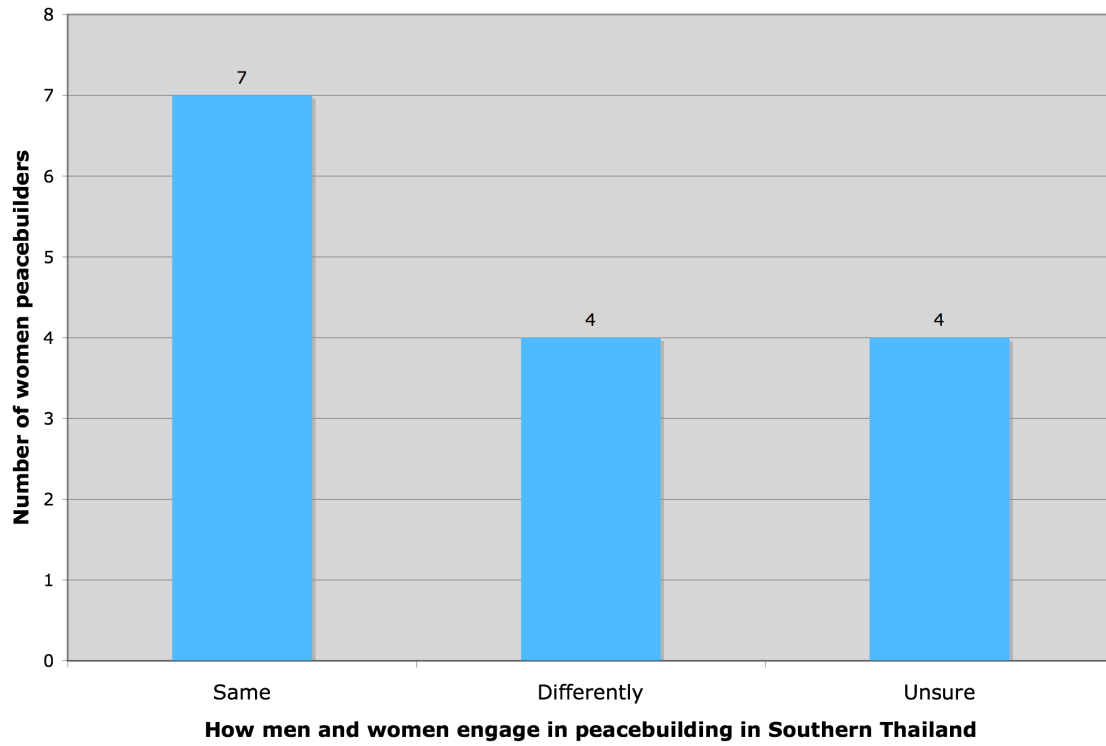
**Figure 13: Thai women peacebuilders’ types of justice initiatives**



**Figure 14: Thai women peacebuilders’ strategies for obtaining justice**



**Figure 15: Thai women peacebuilders’ perceptions of the root causes of conflict in Southern Thailand**



**Figure 16: Gendered perceptions of peacebuilding roles**



## TABLES

<b>Thai women peacebuilders</b>	<b>Primary peace building initiative</b>	<b>Primary focus areas</b>
Beatriz	Community outreach	Victim rehabilitation and health care initiatives
Becca	Project director of youth program	Education and empowerment of youth affected by conflict
Belle	Restorative justice officer	Mental health rehabilitation of victims and accused
Brianna	Chairwoman of widowed women organization	Empowerment and rehabilitation of widowed women
Brigitte	Village chairwoman	Coordination of dialogue forums for locals and government officials
Isabella	Coordinator of dialogue forums	Coordination of dialogue forums for local people affected by conflict
Madeline	Project coordinator for national youth organization	Youth educational development through the promotion of the modernization of the Muslim education system
Marcela	Social development officer	Mental health rehabilitation and coordination of dialogue forums to create a link between locals and government officials
Margot	Official representative of victims of Tak Bai	Promotion of truth and local perspectives through the media and intergroup dialogue
Marianna	Project coordinator of peacebuilding program	Youth education about the principles of peacebuilding, nonviolence, interfaith dialogue and human rights
Marta	Neutral third party negotiator	Alternative dispute resolution through neutral third party negotiation
Maxine	Director of coordination centre for Southern Thailand	Victim rehabilitation and link between locals affected by conflict and government officials
Maya	Founder and director of community centre for youth and orphans	Orphan care and youth rehabilitation
Molly	Founder and coordinator of youth centre	Development and education of youth
Monique	Community activist and former school principal	Promotion of local Thai Muslim perspectives to government officials

**Table 1: Overview of peacebuilding initiatives conducted by Thai women in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala, Southern Thailand.**