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Amporn Marddent Ph.D.

Walailak University, Thailand, mamporn@wu.ac.th

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Humphries, R. *Kingdom's Edge*. St. Albans, Hertfordshire, United Kingdom: Richard Humphries Photography, 2016.

I came to know Richard Humphries in person during a book launch held during the 13th International Conference on Thai Studies in Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2017. Humphries, an independent British professional photojournalist, spent an eight-year journey, from 2005 to 2013, traveling to the southern provinces of Thailand from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia almost every month, in and out of the conflict area, where the South Thailand Insurgency¹ has raged for over half a century. Humphries is based in the Malaysian capital city, where the news of daily attacks and photographs taken along the southern-most edge of the kingdom of Thailand in the mass media often portrayed merely stereotypical images of a battle ground. Humphries' work, in contrast, provides an intimate look at life in the conflict area. The book shares a behind-the-scenes look into 15 selected color photographs (out of a total of 79 captioned images) and two maps. This is the second and major part of *Kingdom's Edge* (pp. 26-193), presented after ten pages of background, introductory text, written by Gerard McDermott.

Humphries' visual narrative is a masterful collection. Each photograph is accompanied by a caption and passage of text that adds to the interest of the photograph and illustrates deep understanding of the varied ways in which the conflict manifested across the conflict zone. Humphries' photographs give the impression that he is speaking directly to the viewer. A particular photograph (p.167) which Humphries says "so immediately" illustrates life in the conflict zone, for example, was shot right after Humphries traversed a road on which the deputy village headman had been ambushed by suspected insurgents and lay dead in the road; this picture gives a flavor of the struggle for life in the area of unrest.

The photography in this book frames and examines a complex set of phenomena in Southern Thailand that fuels the insurgency; simply, the book is a means of observing culture in action. Shooting photographs in various tangible places, such as temples, mosques, Islamic schools, checkpoints, tea shops, red-light districts, rivers, and markets is a method Humphries employs to understand the coexistence of (and conflict between) the Malays of Patani² and the Thai state. Humphries carries a sort of "organic" attachment—a phrase he used to explain his approach during the book launch discussion—to his subjects. As such, his work attempts to frame and understand the people who live along this contested border. He examines both the insurgent activity and the state's control over people in the conflict area. He explains that he was drawn to observe the complexity of society in which the Pattanian³ people—which includes both Malay Muslims and Thai Buddhists—as well as military and government officials possess distinctive characters and separate identities. Humphries also found that the Malays in this region possess more in common in terms of shared cultural characteristics with the Malays of Malaysia than they do with the Thai Malays who live in the capital of Bangkok.

In the first part of the book, Gerard McDermott, an independent researcher and writer from the Republic of Ireland, provides the volume with its introduction (pp.6-25). McDermott has previously published his work in the journals *Peace Review*, *Politico* and *Peace Research*. In the first part of the introduction, McDermott introduces key events during the ongoing conflict since 2004. The second part of the introduction outlines the history of the historical Malay Sultanate of Patani, which was established in the 13th century as a Buddhist Sultanate before Islam became the dominant faith in the early 15th century. The author provides a comprehensive review of the period of state formation in 1900s, when the Thai state alternated between implementing strategies of assimilation and accommodation. The text emphasizes that the Thai state has continued its goal of incorporating the Malay citizens into an overarching Thai identity. Within this period, spontaneous and sporadic rebellions emerged, and Malay populations struggled against state authority. The third section brings the readers to understand the current

insurgency, in which much of the violence is aimed at civilians, particularly those who are loyal to the Thai state. The section covers the entrenched violence in Thailand's deep south, including that associated with regional economic disparities, unemployment, crime, and illegal drug use.

McDermott demonstrates a central point of the *Kingdom's Edge* in the final part of the introduction, which was particularly enjoyable reading. He projects the overall challenge of moving from a war-to-peace spectrum when the conflict has no clear means of reaching a compromise. McDermott states that violence in the south is associated with the unyielding nature of the warring parties, including both the insurgents and the central Thai government, which has the backing of monarchical authority. Any attempt to conduct peace talks between the active insurgents (under the banner of MARA Patani) and the Thai government will have to concern itself with fundamental changes in approach before any political progress can be made. The author continues to describe important factors of the spirit of humanist photographic reporting, which this book has vividly illustrated. Malay Muslims are often represented either as violent fanatics or oppressed victims. As McDermott says, Humphries' photographic collection will fill the gap of representation and provide a respectful portrait of the people involved.

This is a well-constructed piece of writing and photographic journalism about the violent conflict in the southernmost provinces of Thailand, which has only intensified during the present century. The book demonstrates that conflict and peace are the flip sides of the same coin in this region. The people's lives and their cultural values that are not demonstrated very well by mainstream photojournalists. As such, people outside the deep south make different assumptions about the region and its people in order to make sense of news reports and coverage. This book will certainly add to the scholarship that more accurately depicts the region's players by portraying its residents and their daily struggles up close. However, one problem with the book is its lack of bibliographical references. It was McDermott's relevant piece in *Politico*, "At the Kingdom's Edge – Exploring Thailand's Forgotten Conflict" (2012), which did provide proper references, that essentially provided not only a close reading of the context of the photographer's book but also gave the reader an idea of the historical roots and social-political texts. These kinds of references should also have illuminated the informative and extensive accounts presented in the historical part of the text, especially for the reader's understanding of the documentation that the photographs depicted. This could have helped the inhabitants of a distant Bangkok to more fully comprehend the troubles of their kith and kin across the southernmost edge. Nonetheless, *Kingdom's Edge*, is an insightful and fascinating read, provided alongside compelling photographic journalism.

¹ The southern provinces of Thailand host a sizeable population of ethnic Malays (the third largest population after Malaysia and Indonesia). Concentrated in Thailand's southern provinces, the Malay population, also largely Muslim, has faced ongoing efforts at forced assimilation. Between the 1940s and the 1980s, there were a number of separatist movement uprisings. After a decade of silence from the separatist movement, violence has escalated since 2004, with the insurgents who pit themselves against both the Thai Buddhist majority and more moderate Muslims.

² The current Patani region (the historical area where Thailand annexed the independent Sultanate of Patani in 1902 under the policy of forced assimilation) includes the southern Thai provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, which are at the center of the South Thailand Insurgency. Thailand has imposed martial law throughout the region, where violence remains intractable.

³ The Malay-majority province of Pattani, spelled with a double "T", is one of three provinces in the Thai nation state. While Patani, written with one "T", refers to an older and larger imagined region of the former independent Sultanate.

Reference

McDermott, G.B. (2012). "At the Kingdom's Edge – Exploring Thailand's Forgotten Conflict." *Politico: Social & Political Issues*. <http://politico.ie/world-politics/special-thailands-forgotten-conflict/8672-at-thekingdoms-edge-thailands-forgotten-conflict.html>