

that keep it going and the strategies that have provoked it. In place of sensational headlines, official triumphalism, and hand-wringing, this book offers a clear-eyed analysis of the increasingly complex violence that threatens the very future of Iraq.

The Muslims of Thailand. By Michel Gilquin, Translated by Michael Smithies. Chiang Mai: IRASEC and Silkworm Books, 2005, pp. 164. ISBN: 974-9575-85-7.

Reviewer: Ramizah Wan Muhammad, Department of Islamic Laws, Ahmad Ibrahim Kulliyah of Laws, International Islamic University Malaysia. E-mail: ramizah@iiu.edu.my.

Thailand, known as a Theravada Buddhist country, has a Muslim minority of up to 8 percent of the population. Muslims form the majority in three southern provinces. Michel Gilquin, a researcher at the Center for Social Science and Humanities in Rabat, Morocco, in *The Muslims of Thailand* examines the origins of Islam in Thailand and the manifestation of Muslims in the land of the Buddha. The author has revised and expanded the 2002 French publication which was translated by Michael Smithies, resident in Thailand, for the benefit of the English speaking readers.

The book is divided into three parts. Part one deals with diversity of forms in Thailand. It contains three chapters. The first chapter deals with the origins of Islam in Thailand, a country where Buddhism is the official religion. However, back then, Siam was under the reign of King Narasuan who established bilateral relationship with two brothers from Persia, Sheikh Ahmad and Mohamad Said. Consequently, the King had bestowed them with a status of Phra Khlang which is equivalent to the Minister of Trade. Many converted to Islam through marriage and formed a powerful and influential colony in Authya. King Narasuan was said to have a Bengali Minister of Finance and Indian Muslims as personal guards. These claims provide a reasonable ground to believe that Muslims had close connections with the royal family and they played an important role in Siam administration. Muslims were given royal subsidies to build mosques.

The second chapter deals with the life of the Muslim community in Thailand. It is quite interesting to note that Thai Muslims are called Khaek (literally, guests), a term loathed by Muslims and militates against their integration into the Thai nation. However, Thais, as the author rightly points out, are highly religious and do not see other faiths as antagonistic cultural facts. Living in such an environment of “liberal” religiosity, Muslims who live as a minority (other than in the southern region) tend to show considerable diversity in the way they express their piety. The reception of Islam varies from one family to the other. Some Muslims do not observe the Ramadan fast nor do they pray five times a day. Other are highly religious adhering strictly to the fundamentals of Islam.

Legally, Muslims in Thailand are subject to Islamic law and, in 1901, Islamic law has been promulgated and applied. Ironically, Islamic Law is only applicable in the four southern provinces of Satun, Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat. There were demands to extend the application of Islamic law to other areas, however, it fell on deaf ears of the Thailand administration. The author even questions the legality of the demand made by the Muslims. What has not been appreciated by the author is that upholding Islamic law is the duty of every Muslim and that the authorities are obliged to create environment for the application of Islamic law.

The third chapter explains the demographic structure of Thai Muslims. Thai Muslims number about 7.39 million of which about 6.29 million live in the southern provinces. The kingdom has 2,918 mosques of which 2,441 are located in the south. According to the author, the Muslims are increasing in number for two reasons: “the impossibility of apostatising from Islam” (p. 41) and the conversion of Thai Buddhists to Islam necessitated by mixed marriages. The author perhaps is not aware that many Muslims have been converted to Christianity by missionaries and that mixed marriages in the urban areas do not always lead to conversion. They simply ignore the religion. In any case, the author points out that in the areas with mixed populations there is a good deal of coexistence and integration of Muslims into Thai society is underway. In these areas, Muslims are active in politics and take part in campaigning for their preferred candidates during the election. This assertion can only be accepted with hard evidence which is not available in the book.

The Muslim problem is acute in the South which apparently is the heart of the book and consumes its remaining pages. Majority of Thai Muslims live in the southern part of Thailand where the urban structures are limited. They are not fully educated and, if they are, they have not been given the opportunity to hold important position in the government. Muslims living on the Thai-Malay border are entrenched in their customs and ensnared in Islam. They mostly speak Yawi, a language which provides a powerful attachment to Islam. Islam, local customs, and a sense of being an enclave in a region of mountains and forests have preserved the Yawi-speaking identity. They are also conscious of the past which is full of glory. The separatist movement is strong in the south. Some separatist movements justify their struggle by reference to the past as much as to religion. The author depicts the Muslims in the South as “potentially threatening” to the kingdom. However, contrary to author’s belief, there is no evidence to prove that Muslims have ever threatened the kingdom but they did ask for an equitable distribution of resources. In a later chapter, the author opines that Muslim respect the King greatly (p.109).

The third part of the book talks about a reaffirmation of Islam as faith and identity in Thailand. He argues that even if Islam is only a religion for a minority the fact that Islam has been part of the cultural heritage of Thailand should not be ignored and overlooked. It was during the reigns of King Mongkut and his son King Chulalongkorn when the Muslims were included in the Southern part of the kingdom and have become a majority there since then. He points out, however, that the rapid economic growth since the 1980s, the promiscuity that accompanies the urbanisation process, the democratic advance and the fear of being overwhelmed by the “dominant culture and Western culture” have reopened the question of identity forcing Muslims to “claim respect for and extension of Muslim individualism in dress, education, law and banking” (p. 105). These demands are seen to be excessive aims at modifying the rules of Thai society.

It would be wrong to say that the Thai government is not doing anything for Muslims. The author cites as examples the translation of the Qur’ān, the financial aid from the royal family given to the Muslims to build mosques, charities and sending the eligible Muslims to Persian Gulf region for training, the observer status of Thailand

in the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the like. In response, the author notes that “the Muslim community’s respect for the person of the king is very real” (p. 109). However, the fear of Thai domination remains. The reason: “Although Islam is permitted and protected in Thailand, it remains a minority faith. All the outward signs and official symbols, even down to postage stamps, are inspired by Buddhism” (p. 137). These policies force Muslims to reaffirm their faith and identity and to alert the Thai society especially the Thai government about their rights and the long time-span of their existence in Thailand. The Muslims in the South demand a form of representation which would defend their interests and be less accommodating to the central authorities. Denials of these demands have led to radicalism. The solution, according to the author, is: “Thai Buddhist nationalists and Muslims, if they want to avoid a rupture, have to learn the art of compromise, and accept that the country is diverse” (p. 143).

In sum, this book of 164 pages provides a good deal of information about Thailand and the problem it faces with its minority Muslims. It provides a bit of history, a bit of government policy towards the Muslims and some analysis without offering any solution to the problems that took a serious turn in 2004 and which continue. The book, however, reads more like a travelogue rather than a scholarly enterprise based upon hard facts. Nevertheless, the book reads well.