

of these countries cannot deny their colonialist past through which they economically exploit nations that now suffer from economic under-development, with devastating consequences on their ability to establish the rule of law and curtail corruption and abuse of power. The group was nevertheless conscious that such reasoning might easily degenerate into polemics of the ‘religious East’ versus the ‘secular West’, so it was also highlighted that the West in fact is currently witnessing religious revival, while some parts of the East are declining into materialism and consumerism. The encounter between East and West has also reached such a degree that, as one group member noted, “The East has already internalised the West.”

The third group addresses how faith can influence power in a globalised world mired in crises. The said crises are numerous – food, financial, environmental, energy, nuclear and others. A group member said that in fact faith is *already* influencing power, whether with positive consequences, as when government leaders promote global religious solidarity, or with negative ones, like when military campaigns are waged under the pretext of religion. So the more appropriate question to be asked is, “How can faith prevent power from being abused resulting in various global crises?” The reformulation of the problem thus offers preventive rather than remedial measures by which relatively minor problems can be resolved before they spiral into a global crisis. Such preventive measures can be done by instilling consciousness through education that also emphasises deeds and actions, so as to inculcate the habit of self-restraint. Faith also needs to be translated into knowledge by rationally examining the suppositions of one’s belief. In a sense faith also *requires* knowledge because to even have faith in something implies that one is properly acquainted with what exactly this something is.

The workshop offered crucial perspectives in understanding how faith and power interact and presented significant insights on the role through which spirituality and religion can co-opt and confront power.

**Interview with Professor Chaiwat Satha-Anand  
at the International Workshop on Faith and Power  
(George Town, Penang, Malaysia, 5-6 March 2012)**

*Tengku Ahmad Hazri, IAIS Malaysia*

Professor Chaiwat Satha-Anand is a renowned political scientist and peace activist from Thailand, concerned especially with Islam and non-violence, as well as Islam in Thailand. He is currently Professor of Political Science at Bangkok’s Thammasat University, Thailand. The following interview was conducted after the International Workshop on “Faith and Power”, 5-6 March 2012, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Penang, during which he presented a paper (see Event Report), arguing that violence

impoverishes faith because violence is anti-politics and anti-power. As a case study he drew on Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) to analyse how public perceptions on faith and violence are constructed through the use of media images.

*In your presentation, you mentioned that violence impoverishes faith because violence is essentially anti-power and thus anti-politics, which is an interesting reversal of conventional wisdom which sees violence as an extension of politics. The classic statement of that is of course from Carl von Clausewitz, "War is the continuation of politics by other means" and Mao Tse-Tung's "Politics is war without bloodshed. War is politics with bloodshed." How useful is such a reversal in understanding the realities of power today?*

To answer that question, we need two perspectives: the theoretical and the empirical. I begin with the empirical perspective. The empirical perspective is about changes that have taken place in the world since the last century. Many people would say that the things that marked the twentieth century were World War I, World War II, the atomic bomb and things like that. That's to look at the world from a violence perspective.

On the other hand, you can look at the other changes that have taken place, such as the demise of the Soviet empire. One has to link that with the opening up of Europe, which began with a strike in Poland. This I would look at as people's power to dismantle the Soviet power. You look at of course the changes that have taken place in South Africa to uproot the apartheid systems, and then put Nelson Mandela out of jail and put him as the president of South Africa. You look at Argentina: the 'Mothers of the Disappeared' who fought against tyranny for a long time and then the Berlin Wall collapsed. Look also at the Philippines in 1986 [with the People Power Revolution]. What you see in all these changes is the exercise of power without the use of violence to change society, but which is no less dramatic than, say, World War I or World War II. World War I ended with the defeat of Germany, but that defeat gave rise to a new war which then exploded in 1939, that is, World War II. Adolf Hitler was a soldier in World War I and was thus very upset about the arrangement made between the French and the Germans after the war. So as a result of this, I would say that the ending of World War I with violence gave rise to World War II. And I would say that the ending of World War II gave rise to the Third World War which people do not talk about. What is the Third World War? The Third World War is known by the name of Cold War – the proxy wars in Africa, in Latin America and in Southeast Asia (the Vietnam War for example). And to say that these are 'Cold Wars' is a euphemism because for them – the people of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam – war has never been 'cold'; it's always very heated and burning. So, looking at it this way, violence gave rise to further violence.

But the use of non-violence through people's power also created all kinds of changes in the world. And I use all of those examples without using the example

of Gandhi at all. In that sense, what I'm saying is that empirically, you can see lots of powerful people's movements that unseated traditional power. Normally people think of guerilla warfare and the use of violence, but these are not the case. In fact if you look at the Philippines as one of the most dramatic cases, it is the people's power that intervened and stopped the Philippines from falling into civil war between two military camps – one supported Ferdinand Marcos' regime, the other supported Corazon Aquino and her group (Fidel Ramos, for example). The people's power is in between. Who are these people? People from the church, people from business, people from the media, from academia, all of these things. This is power, and not violence. When power fails, I would say, that's when politics fails. That's the empirical side.

The theoretical side is the distinction between violence and power. Power in traditional political science is to make other people do as you want them to do. The underlying assumption is that the other party is also a human being, or to put it in sociological terms is also a moral agent who can choose to follow you or not to. The moment that you stop thinking of the other person as a moral agent, you are looking at him as an object. That is an objectification of the other, turning the other into something which is less than human, which means that you can do anything you are pleased with him, and that's why you look at him for example as an instrument to further something else. In that sense, either you don't care about him or you look at him as an instrument, not as an end in itself. This is not the way politics is conducted since classical times; not even in democratic ways. If that is the case, when violence takes place, what is at issue is the instrumentality of violence itself that relies on what I call instrumental rationality rather than other forms of rationality (practical reason or other reason – the Kantian notion). When I use violence against the other side, I'm thinking of that as a target, as something that I'm doing to attain something. I am holding you hostage so that I am teaching you a lesson. I am bombing the department store so that you will then feel the moral pain that I do. These then are the instrumental reason that characterised violence, which is not power.

*But with the dissociation of violence from power, there is a risk that violence perpetrated by the state is not being seen as such. For instance, the war against Iraq is not seen as terrorism but as 'war on terrorism'; the massacre of innocent civilians is seen as 'civilian casualties'. They are not seen as violence but are seen as something else. The transposition of acts of violence into something else can possibly legitimise the use of violence by the state. How can the dissociative approach serve as a counter-narrative against that?*

By drawing a very clear line between what constitutes violence and what does not, and therefore delegitimising anyone who is going to use violence. One has to of course start with the definition of violence. You can have what I would call a 'contracted' notion of violence or 'expanded' notion of violence. Contracted notion of violence would mean physical violence, psychological violence, and threat thereof. Expanded

notion of violence would mean also structural violence like poverty, malnutrition as well as cultural violence, legitimisation of violence in many other forms.

Let's focus on the contracted notion, that is, physical violence and the threat thereof. By calling these things violence, I think you leave no room for the state to say, "What I'm doing is not violence." You leave no room for any other group to say that "what I'm doing is justified." So when a country invades another country, saying that "I'm invading the other country because I'm trying to save the people of that country from the tyrant," the question is, "What are the means that you use?" You have to answer whether it's violence or not violence. If the answer is violence, you have to then give the justification. The question then becomes whether you buy that justification or not. "The US is invading Iraq because the US wants to create a new Iraq, which is much more democratic" – do you buy that? Or is this about oil? Is this about resources? When a group of insurgents blow up a temple, one has to say that this is violence. What do they want? They want independence? But this is the means which they use. So it is very clear in that sense: if you disentangle violence from power, you now are saying, when you use violence, then power disappears.

In fact what I am also arguing is that violence is not a sign of strength at all. It is a sign of desperation and hopelessness. When everything else fails, then you use violence. To give you a very empirical example: the case of rape and sexuality. Rape is not a form of sexuality. Rape is the *failure* of sexuality. That is why the rapist forces himself on someone else. It has nothing to do with love. It has nothing to do with sex either. It is power relations; it is oppression.

*You talked about the objectification of the 'other'. Isn't that what power is all about? Power is to exercise authority over another to do as the powerful wants. The moment that authority is asserted, that other becomes subjugated to the powerful...*

The point is, what power is trying to do is to make the other do as the powerful wants, but there are many other means [other than violence] by which this can be done. The more important thing is that if it's real power, then the other side has to believe that "I'm following you." If I want someone to fall in love with me, I have to do all kinds of things to make that person fall in love with me. If I want that person to fear me, I have to do all kinds of things for that person to fear me. That is power. If I want people to believe me, I have to exercise my authority. And my authority comes from all kinds of things. That's why when you want to interview me, or when I stand at a podium, people come up with all kinds of introductions, and say that Dr Chaiwat is this and that, has done this and that. What is that? That's to establish the authority of the speaker. Once the authority is established, what happens is that the audience then decides whether it will listen to him or not. Now if the audience accepts that authority, then the audience will say, "This person is respectable because he's a university professor." Those credentials then become the basis of power that the person has

over the audience. Failing that, he could come up on stage and say, “Don’t introduce me” (which I do sometimes). So how is the audience going to believe him? Then he has to persuade the audience through reason, argument and evidence. That’s what academic discourse is about. Academic discourse is about power, isn’t it? You write a dissertation, you write a research paper, you submit a paper for a journal. What are you doing? You are saying, “I have something to say and this is what I have written and I’m submitting to you.” You are submitting your research for the journal. The journal will then exercise its power. You say, “You should accept my work because my work is solid, my work has a thesis, my work has evidence, no one has written this before....” This is power. Love is power. Belief is power. Community is power. Business is power.

*Now if we take that argument to its next natural conclusion, this form of power is in fact more effective than violence in perpetrating tyranny for example, because when the subject exercises a willingness to be oppressed, exercises a willingness to be subjugated and dominated, then that serves as a more sinister and subtle form of power than violence.*

Possible; because I do not use the term power positively or negatively but neutrally. I am merely stating the difference between violence and power. If power is that permeating, or as prevalent as you say, then it is very likely that tyrants and states would use it. And in fact in history, they have used power much more than war and violence. Why do you follow traffic lights for example? You follow traffic lights because power is at work. No one comes to take you to jail immediately if you don’t follow. But it creates a habit in you that when you see red light you stop almost automatically. That’s power. Everything is power. This is actually a Foucauldian understanding of power. So power exists everywhere. It produces things, it produces a subject. So yes, it can be used by tyrants, but you have to see power for what it is. When you disentangle violence from power, the next step is then you try to find out how power works.

*How power works – let’s take a case study because you’ve alluded during your presentation to the power of images, the ‘spectacle perspective’ by which certain ideas about violence and its effects on faith are propagated. Can you elaborate further on this? Do you see this as propaganda?*

To call this as propaganda, although it is right, will somehow make it difficult for us to see the complexity of what has transpired. If you follow, for example, John Gray’s analysis in *Al-Qaeda and What it Means to be Modern*, I think Gray has an interesting perspective to look at the terror network of al-Qaeda. And he said all kinds of things that we consider modern about al-Qaeda as a terror network – their communication technique, their organisation, their efficiency, the methods which they used, but the most interesting feature of al-Qaeda is the way in which they recognise the image

that they are constructing and the way in which that image will be then put through the media for all the world to see. So it's the spectacle itself that glues people to the TV and then is played and re-played again in broad daylight. So it's not only the symbolic attack of the World Trade Centre or the Defence Department, the Pentagon, but the spectacle that makes it much more modern. And that's where the society of the spectacle is that we are in, in that regard. So we are now looking at things and we are now being constructed by the images that we consume. For example, elections: you will never find a photograph of a politician slapping a child [during election campaigns]. The only image that you will see is the politician holding a child lovingly, or kissing the child. What is this? This is not real. But it's so produced that you believe that this guy is good. And then you go and cast your vote. This is the power of image.

In Malaysia, for example, there is a competition of faith as an image. So I would say that the competition relies on the proximity between political parties and religious agenda that each party is trying to promote. That is the construction of the image. So, one party would claim that this is an Islamic party. The other one, although not born as an Islamic party, has to have some Islamic credentials. So, all of this is the construction of the image that you talk about. And we live in that period, in that kind of society that I talked about in the paper.

*You are also a peace activist, concerned largely also with issues about Islam and Muslims in Thailand. How applicable are the theoretical and empirical issues that we have discussed so far to the current plight of Muslims and Islam or peace-building in Thailand as you see it?*

My work in the last two decades on Islam has been on two fronts. One is to analyse Muslims in modern societies; how they live as Muslims given the commodification of all kinds of things that we have seen. The other side that I'm interested in is the notion of the use of non-violence and Islam. This is something that is so dear to my heart because I work in the field of non-violence. When I finished my dissertation on non-violence, one of the things that my teachers told me was that eventually you have to face the fact that the issue of Muslims and violence will have to come to the fore. And I took up the challenge with my first research. The book was called *Islam and Violence*.<sup>1</sup> It's a study of the insurgents and their justification of violence. So I did a study of how they justified their use of violence in southern Thailand. That was the period of 1977-1980. It was published by the University of Southern Florida in 1987 and then again in 1990. It's a small monograph. I wanted to understand why is it that Islam is being used so easily to justify violence. My take is that, I don't believe that Islam or any religion can be used to justify violence. I come from a Buddhist society. The first precept of Buddhism is to abstain from taking the life of any living beings. That's the first precept that any lay Buddhist should subscribe to. And yet in Thai history, in Sri Lankan history, in many histories, you see history

of war. Siam, Ayutthaya and Burma had war for 400 years. So it's a history of war, and on both sides you are talking about Buddhism. I don't subscribe to the idea that Buddhism is more peaceful than others. I would argue that any religion can be used to justify violence. If Buddhism can be used, any religion can. You look at the history of Christianity. Jesus preached, "Thou shalt not kill," and yet the history of European imperialism, history of European wars, you go back to the Thirty Years War, you go back to the thirteenth century until the seventeenth century, you have wars in Europe among Christians. Most brutal perhaps is war between different sects. The conclusion is that in any religion, we can find certain things that can be used to justify the use of violence.

So I tried to do the same for Islam and I found certain things in there. The interesting thing is this: most of the things used are very good things. The secret about violence is that the justification used for violence is normally something quite good, like you are fighting for justice, you are doing this because you want freedom, you are doing this so that you can liberate people – the Fanon notion is basically that. All of these things could be used to justify violence. That's why I'm more interested in the justification. My take after that work is to find non-violent elements within Islam that can also be used to justify alternatives to the use of violence, and that has been my work since 1986.

## Notes

1. Chaiwat Satha-Anand, *Islam and Violence: A Case Study of Violent Events in the Four Southern Provinces, Thailand, 1976 1981* (Tampa FL: Department of Religious Studies, University of South Florida, 1986).

### **Visit to IAIS Malaysia by a Delegation from the Royal Thai Embassy and Government (28 March 2012)**

*Christoph Marcinkowski, Berlin, Germany*

“The real issue is not between Muslims and non-Muslims, but between the moderates and extremists of all religions. [...] It is time for moderates of all countries, of all religions, to take back the centre, to reclaim the agenda for peace and pragmatism, and to marginalise the extremists,” said Malaysia's prime minister Najib Tun Razak on 27 September 2012 at the United Nations General Assembly where he also called for the formation of a Global Movement of Moderates.

In order to find out more on what this kind of moderation can mean *in practice* for the troubled deep South (where Malay Muslims are in the majority) of majority-Buddhist Thailand,<sup>1</sup> a high-profile delegation from the Royal Thai Embassy and