Gender and Nationalism: The Concept of the Family Romance in Thommayanti's Novels

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Nationalism has been, for the past three decades, a topic of great interest among scholars in the field of Thai Studies. Most of these scholars have, however, neglected the issue of gender in their examination of Thai nationalism. This article attempts to address this oversight by examining *Thawiphop* and *Khu Kam*, two of the most popular novels by the famed author, Thommayanti. As a well-known nationalist and self-proclaimed feminist, Thommayanti has united the topics of gender and nationalism in these two works by representing female protagonists who attempt to play an active role in the nationalist effort. Close examination reveals, however, that the nationalism of both protagonists is based on the psychoanalytic structure of the family romance that ultimately leads to the subversion of their agency. Thus, despite Thommayanti's attempt to depict strong and independent women in her novels, her characters ultimately fall short of transcending their subordinate roles in the discourse of nationalism.

Keywords: gender, Thai nationalism, psychoanalysis, Thommayanti

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> Hamlet: Do you think I meant country matters?
> Ophelia: I think nothing, my lord.
> Hamlet: That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs.
> Ophelia: What is, my lord?
> Hamlet: Nothing.
> (Hamlet 3.2.115–119)

In the past three decades, nationalism has been a topic of great interest in the field of Thai Studies. Scholars, especially those working in the disciplines of history and political science, have investigated various aspects of the phenomenon and produced a number of works of importance, thus cementing nationalism as one of the most important topics in the field. In their investigations, these scholars have focused on such fundamental issues as when and how the sense of nationhood originates and develops (Charnvit, 1979; Anderson, 1991; Thongchai, 1994; Sturm 2006). They have examined different types of nationalism that emerged an ideology of the state such as the official nationalism of King Vajiravudh (r. 1910-1925) and the military nationalism of Field Marshal Phibun (1938-1944) (Greene, 1970; Charnvit, 1974; 1990; Thamsook, 1978a, b; Vella, 1978; Murashima, 1988; Barmé, 1993). They have also focused on the specific modes through which the nationalist ideology is transmitted (Nithi, 1990; 1991; Lakkhana, 1999; Sunait *et al*, 2009) as well as explored how nationalism has been, at various moments in history, a force of great political changes (Nakharin, 1990; Nithi, 1992; Copeland, 1993; Prajak, 2005).

What most scholars have neglected in their study of Thai nationalism, however, is the issue of gender and sexuality. Benedict Anderson, who touches on the Thai nationalist discourse in his widely influential book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, once admitted in an interview, for example, that "[his] books give the impression that there don't exist any women in the world" (Anderson, 2005). In an effort to account for this general oversight, Craig J. Reynolds, a prominent historian of Thailand, points to two main factors in his article "On the Gendering of Nationalist and Postnationalist Selves in Twentieth-Century Thailand."

The first is the strong association between Thai nationalism and the militarist ideology of the first Phibun's regime[1] (Reynolds, 1999, p.263), and the second is the general resistance among Thai scholars to Western theories of post-structuralism, post-modernism, and post-colonialism (Reynolds, 1999, p.264). Both of these factors seem, according to Reynolds, to limit the interpretative possibilities of the concept of nationalism within the field of Thai Studies, thus resulting in the furtive presence of such important issues as gender and sexuality in the study of Thai nationalism.

Reynolds goes on to argue in his article that there were, in the first decades of the twentieth century, two ways in which gender played a role in the nationalist discourse. The first was "the public debate about the social position of women" that took place in local women's magazines (Reynolds, 1999, p.267). One such magazine, *Satri Niphon*, "placed great emphasis on the participation of women in national affairs" and reminded readers of glorious examples of women who had played an active role in the nationalist effort by bravely fighting in national battles and wars (Reynolds, 1999, p.267). One of the women featured in the magazine was Thao Suranari or Than phu-ying Mo (popularly known as Ya Mo or Grandmother Mo), a commoner who was claimed to have "played a key role in the defeat of an invading Lao force during the early nineteenth century" (Barmé, 2002, p.236). Thao Suranari later reached the status of a national icon when a statue was erected in her honor in 1935. The monument served, as Scot Barmé argues, "to celebrate female heroism in time of war, a domain traditionally identified with men" (2002, p.238).

The inclusion of women as active participants in the nationalist project was, however, not restricted to the glorification of historical women who have shown their bravery on the battlefields. It also extended, according to Barmé, to the celebration of female heroism in the historical dramas of Luang Wichit Wathakan, one of the most active nationalist ideologues during the first Phibun

[1] Field Marshal Phibun or Luang Phibunsongkhram served as prime minister of Thailand twice. His first rule lasted from 16 December 1938 until 24 July 1944. He came back into power once again on 8 April 1948 and stayed in office until 16 September 1957.

government. One such drama was *L'uat Suphan* (The Blood of Suphan), which revolves around the Burmese invasion and occupation of the Suphan area of central Siam. In the drama, one of the Burmese officers, Mangratho, terrorizes Duangchan, a young and attractive Thai woman. Mangratho is eventually executed for his crimes, but his men later avenge his death by killing Duangchan's parents. Upon learning of her parents' fate, Duangchan bravely leads her fellow villagers in a courageous attack on the Burmese. It is clear, Barmé argues, that "Wichit sought to portray Duangchan [...] as the epitome of personal heroism and sacrifice in defense of the nation," (2002, p.240) a role that was more traditionally associated with men.

In addition to the glorification of these "militant women," Reynolds argues that gender also became part of the nationalist discourse when King Vajiravudh attempted, as part of his effort at modernization, to reconfigure the patterns of gender and sexuality. In her article "Romances of the Sixth Reign: Gender, Sexuality, and Siamese Nationalism," Thamora Fishel uses her analysis of two pieces of Thai literature, *Hua-jai Chai Num* (The Heart of a Young Man) by King Vajiravudh under the pseudonym Ram Chitti and *Si Phaendin* (Four Reigns) by M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, to explore this relationship between gender and nationalism. She observes that "in both works monogamy, patterns of socializing, and female behavior and appearance serve as key tropes of modernity and westernization," both of which were "inextricably linked to nationalism during Vajiravudh's reign" (Fishel, 1999, p.154). The changes in patterns of gender relationship, both in real life and in literary works, did not, however, grant women a truly active role in the nationalist effort. Fishel notes that the King's "focus on nationalism through groups such as the Wild Tigers Corps automatically excluded women," thus women might have a role in nationalism, "but it was always an adjunct one" (1999, p.158).

The conjunction between issues of gender and nationalism continues to feature in contemporary Thai literature especially in the novels of Wimol Siripaiboon or Thommayanti[2].

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[2] Wimol writes under several pen names including Rose la reine, Laksanawadee, and Kanok-Rekha. She is, however, best known for the pen name Thommyanti, under which the bulk of her literary works are published.

Thommayanti is one of Thailand's most prominent novelists and the 2012 recipient of the prestigious National Artist Award. She is well-known for her nationalist sentiments, which may have been influenced by the consumption, during her formative years, of Luang Wichit Wathakan's literary works (Visavanat, 2005, p.25). In the biography *Kwa cha tung wannee khong Thommayanti* (The Trials and Tribulations of Thommayanti), the famed author is quoted as saying, "Thai monarchs have saved and protected every grain of land in this country. As a servant of the land, I take it as my duty to safeguard it[3]" (Visavanat, 2005, p.8). "I have always believed," she continues, "that we have to make sacrifices in the name of the nation without hoping for anything in return" (Visavanat, 2005, p.8). Similar sentiments are expressed when Thommayanti declares, "it is not just my life that I am willing to sacrifice for the country, but if I were to have a hundred heads, I would willingly lose all of them. I am indebted to the land and have to repay that debt as a humble servant" (Visavanat, 2005, p.9).

In addition to her fervent nationalism, which is clearly palpable in several of her novels (Visavanat, 2005, p.9), Thommayanti is also noted for her feminist leanings. The author once proclaimed in an interview, "I have always thought that the world is driven by women. [...] Fathers may have given life to their children, but mothers give them their future. Thus, the future of humanity is in the hands of women" (qtd. in Bhattaraporn, 1995, p.5). She then lamented the current social status of women and invoked the popular saying that compared women to the "hind legs" of an elephant. She said, "I don't want to be the two front legs of an elephant. But why can't one of those front legs belong to women?" (qtd. in Bhattaraporn, 1995, p.5). Thommayanti concluded that interview by commenting on the goal of her literary works. She said, "In my writings, I want to light a fire in women's hearts" (qtd. in Bhattaraporn, 1995, p.5). In another interview, Thommanyanti portrayed herself as someone who advanced the causes of women. She declared, "I am a woman with the oppressive chains of society entwined around my neck. I will break those

[3] All of the translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

chains with my own hands, so later generations of women will be able to do the same" (qtd. in Bhattaraporn, 1995, p.50).

Given Thommayanti's nationalist and feminist sentiments, it should come as no surprise that several of her novels unite the themes of nationalism and gender and represent strong and independent women who refuse to take a backseat in the nationalist project. Two such novels are the immensely popular *Thawiphop* (Two Worlds) and *Khu Kam* (Sunset at Chaophraya[4]). Both of these works feature female protagonists who are deeply nationalistic and who attempt, through different means and to varying degrees of success, to play an active role in defending the country against the invasion and domination by outside forces. With such portrayals, Thommayanti seems to be following firmly in the footsteps of Luang Wichit Wathakan and the writers and editors of women's magazines in the early twentieth century. Psychoanalytic analysis of the two novels reveals, however, that the nationalism in Thommayanti's works has an implied structure of a family romance that ultimately undermines women's role in nationalism.

Defending the Mother(land): Nationalism and the Family Romance

Psychoanalytic theories, especially that of Jacques Lacan, have been used by a small number of scholars to explain the phenomenon of nationalism. Slavoj Žižek and Yannis Stavarakakis both rely, for example, on the Lacanian concept of "jouissance" to explain the mechanism of nationalism. Jouissance is often translated as "enjoyment," although the French term also has a sexual connotation that is missing from the English translation. In Lacanian theory, we were closest to a state of nature called the Real when we were infants, and it was in this state of nature that we experienced jouissance. Stavrakakis writes that "the real is the domain of [...] inexpressible enjoyment (jouissance)" (1999, p.44) The enjoyment or the jouissance that we experienced was "inexpressible" because Lacan believes that we are forever separated from the Real and the

[4] The English title *Sunset at Chaophraya* was first used in relation to the 1995 film adaptation of the novel. It has since been adopted by later publishers as well as adapters of the work. The Thai title *Khu Kam* can be more faithfully translated as star-crossed lovers.

jouissance associated with it when we enter into language or, what he calls, the Symbolic. In his lecture "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," for example, Lacan asserts that "jouissance is prohibited [interdite] to whoever speaks" (1999, p. 696).

Stavrakakis notes that the jouissance that we once experienced continues to play a role in our lives even though we no longer have access to it. According to him, it is the promise of recapturing our pre-Symbolic enjoyment that animates our desire and fantasy (Stavrakakis, 2006, p. 151). Since jouissance is forever lost to us, however, it becomes necessary to invent a set of rationale that explains why we are unable to reclaim it (Stavrakakis, 2006, p.152). That rationale often takes the form of an Other with "an excessive enjoyment," an Other who is fantasized as wanting "to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our way of life) and/or [...] [having] access to some secret, perverse enjoyment" (Žižek, 1993, p.203). Examples include "the black's superior sexual potency and appetite, [...] the Jew's or Japanese's special relationship with money and work" (Žižek, 1993, p.206). The invention of these Others not only allows us to convince ourselves that we really did, at one time, experience the jouissance that we no longer possess, but it also serves to falsely reassure us that we can reclaim our lost enjoyment if only we can win it back from those who have stolen it from us (Stavrakakis, 2006, p.152).

Stavrakakis attempts, in his article "(I Can't Get No) Enjoyment: Lacanian Theory and the Analysis of Nationalism," to use this concept of jouissance to explain the psychological and emotional processes that are behind nationalist feelings. He does so by arguing that every nation has its own myth of the Golden Age that is comparable to the original state characterized by excessive enjoyment or jouissance. Examples of this myth of the Golden Age are the kingdom of David and Solomon for the Jewish people and Byzantium for the modern Greeks (Stavrakakis, 2006, p.153). This original state of innocence is, however, believed to have been destroyed by an evil Other, thus resulting not only in the hatred of the enemy but also in the solidarity among the countrymen. These

powerful emotions are, according to Stavrakakis, the force behind the feelings of nationalism, which are sustained through the ritualization of practices that offer limited enjoyment or partial jouissance. These practices include national celebrations and the reproduction of the myth of the stolen jouissance, for instance, in history textbooks and historical films (Stavrakakis, 2006, p.153).

This narrative of the original state of jouissance that is subsequently stolen by an enemy Other does not only explain, as scholars such as Žižek and Stavrakakis have shown, the psychological processes that are involved in the feelings of nationalism. It also links such nationalist feelings with the the family romance that each individual goes through in the course of their psychosexual development. As mentioned above, a new-born baby experiences a state that is closest to the Lacanian Real. In this state, the baby has a special relationship with the mother who is typically its primary care-taker. It identifies itself with her to the point of experiencing her as a part of itself (Bailly, 2009, p.121). It imagines, moreover, that the mother is able to fulfill its every need, and it is able to do the same for her. Such a state of union and mutual fulfillment is characterized, as noted above, by the excessive enjoyment that Lacan calls jouissance. Bruce Fink writes: "We can imagine a kind of jouissance before the letter, before the institution of the symbolic order [...] corresponding to an unmediated relation between mother and child" (1995, p.60).

This dyadic relationship between mother and child becomes, however, triangulated with the introduction or intrusion of what Lacan calls "the paternal metaphor" or "the paternal function." Fink writes: "If we hypothesize an initial child-mother unity [...], the father [...] typically acts in such a way as to disrupt that unity, intervening therein as a third term—often perceived as foreign and even undesirable" (1995, p.55). In other words, the unity between the mother and her child cannot be sustained because the mother has to, at some point, leave the child. The child tries to account for this absence of the mother by blaming it on the father or some other member of the

household[5]. In so doing, the child imagines that the father or this other member of the household has something that the mother desires and that the child does not possess. Lacan calls this object of the mother's desire the Phallus.

The child's speculation that the father possesses the Phallus that the mother desires has two major implications. First of all, it marks the child's entrance into the Symbolic because it entails the acceptance of the father as the representative of the Law to which the child, like his mother before him, must submit. This role of the father as the representative of rules and prohibitions is implied in the play on words "le nom du père" (the name of the father) and "le non du père" (the no of the father) (Fink, 1995, p.57). Second of all, the acceptance that the father possesses the Phallus implies the child's acknowledgement that he himself does not. This acknowledgement is, in Lacanian theory, tantamount to a symbolic castration. In Freudian psychoanalysis, castration (as in the Castration Complex) refers to (the fear of) the actual removal of one's testicles (as punishment for one's desire for the mother). In Lacanian psychoanalysis, however, "castration is the acceptance that one is less-than-perfect, limited, not all-powerful and able to control or satisfy the world" (Bailly, 2009, p.80).

After this symbolic castration, a male child will shift his identification from the mother to the father in the hope that, one day, he too will acquire the Phallus and will then be able to satisfy the mother. "Because the desire of the child is to have the Phallus for the mother, so in later life, this desire may be transformed into the desire either to have it sometimes for its own sake, or to be the possessor of it for a new beloved object" such as one's girlfriend or wife (Bailly, 2009, p.130). It is this desire to possess the Phallus that is "the motor behind much of human activity" (Bailly, 2009, p. 124). For a female child, the symbolic castration leaves her with two choices. She can either try to be like the father and acquire the Phallus, which is the same path opened to her male counterparts.

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[5] Lacan uses the term "Name-of-the-Father" to designate this person, who intervenes in the mother-child relationship, precisely because s/he does not have to be the child's biological father. S/he simply has to appear to the child as the bearer of the Phallus and the representative of the Law, to which the child must submit.

Alternatively, she can continue to identify with the mother and hope to be given the Phallus first by her father and, later on in life, by other men who possess the Phallus (Bailly, 2009, p.147).

As the above summary makes clear, the psychoanalytic explanation for nationalist feelings that is offered by scholars such as Žižek and Stavrakakis involves the same processes that we all went through in our psychosexual development. The Golden Age is, for instance, comparable to the pre-Symbolic phase, during which we had a close and blissful relationship with our mothers. The theft of national jouissance by an enemy Other is akin to the disruption of the pre-Symbolic enjoyment by the father. Finally, the speculation that the enemy Other must have something that we do not or must be able to enjoy something in a way that we cannot is equivalent to our attribution of the Phallus to the father. As will be shown in the following analyses of *Thawiphop* and *Khu Kam*, Thommayanti not only evokes this psychoanalytic explanation of nationalism in both novels but also makes explicit its connection with the heroines' psychosexual development. Since this developmental process implies the structure of a family romance that involves the heroines' desire for (the Phallus of) the father, however, the author's attempt to represent strong women who actively participate in the nationalist project seems to be subverted by the very structure of that nationalism.

Becoming a Proper Lady: The Domestication of the Female Protagonist in *Thawiphop*

Thawiphop was first serialized in a women's magazine *Sakulthai* before being published in book-form in 1987. It has since been reprinted numerous times as well as adapted for both the small and the big screens. The most recent television adaptation was aired in 2011, and the latest film adaptation was released in 2004. The novel tells the story of a modern-day woman named Maneechan, who discovers that she can travel back through time to the tumultuous period during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868-1910). Maneechan believes she has been tasked with the nationalistic mission of "saving" Siam from entering into disadvantageous agreements with Western

countries, which would later lead to the loss of parts of the country's territory[6]. As she tries to fulfill this mission, however, Maneechan meets and falls in love with Akkharathepwarakorn, a young government official who would later become the first Thai ambassador to the United States. In the end, she has to make the difficult decision whether to remain with Akkharathepwarakorn in the realm of the past or to rejoin her family and friends in the world of the present.

Maneechan's journey to the past is not only the most distinguishing feature of the novel but is also what allows the heroine to get in touch with her nationalist feelings. Maneechan discovers, for instance, that the reign of Chulalongkorn to which she returns is akin to a "golden period" that is marked by excessive enjoyment. In Thai historiography, the Kingdom of Sukhothai is often imagined as the Golden Age of the country[7], but the golden period in the novel seems to refer more loosely to the past that was prosperous and peaceful. Thommayanti describes, for example, that the past that Maneechan visits is "quiet and cool. Birds are chirping and flowers are blooming" (2008b, p.254). In this kind of atmosphere, "Maneechan often catches herself thinking that she is in a dream. From far away she hears the sweet melodies of a Thai flute" (Thommayanti, 2008b, p.514). These idyllic characteristics of the past are portrayed as lost in the fast-paced world of the present. Maneechan tells Akkharathepwarakorn that "it's a real shame that we don't have any of this beauty and this blissfulness left. [...] You wouldn't want to know what the present looks like" (Thommayanti. 2008b, p.463).

The loss of the blissfulness of the past is, in *Thawiphop*, attributed to the Western Other. At the beginning of the novel, Maneechan represents a modern-day Thai woman who is very much influenced by the West. She has, after all, spent much of her life abroad, calls herself by the foreign-

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[6] In mainstream Thai historiography, the fact that Siam was never formally colonized by imperial powers is attributed to the skillful diplomacy of the Thai monarchs especially King Mongkut (r. 1851-1868) and King Chulalongkorn. The loss of part of the territories is portrayed, in this master narrative, as one of the sacrifices that the monarchs had to make in order to save the country from the clutches of the threatening European powers (Thongchai, 2011, pp.22-23).

[7] See, for example, Thongchai Winichakul's "Siam's Colonial Conditions and the Birth of Thai History," in which he details the significance of the ancient kingdom of Sukhothai in Thai historiography. He argues, for instance, that Sukhothai serves, in the Thai imagination, not only as the origin of Siam but also "of the timeless, ideal characters of Thai society," (Thongchai, 2011, p.33) which includes a benevolent king who ruled his subjects like a father does his children, free trade, and natural abundance.

sounding name "Manie," and is more familiar with Western etiquette and manners than with Thai ones. After she has traveled back in time to the golden past, however, Maneechan realizes that these Western influences have alienated her from her motherland and its local culture. She admires, for instance, the traditional houses during the reign of King Chulalongkorn and remarks: "It's a shame that we have completely neglected traditional architecture. There are European and Spanish-style houses, but where are the Thai-style ones?" (Thommayanti. 2008b, p.415). The heroine expresses the same sentiment when she has a chance to put on a traditional Thai costume. She says: "It's too bad that local cultures such as this have been cannibalized by Western influences. It's really the Western clothes that are ill-suited to the tropical climate" (Thommayanti, 2008b, p.418).

Despite the fact that she blames the West for the loss of the jouissance associated with the golden past, Maneechan does, at the same time, find this Western Other irresistibly alluring. The female protagonist discovers, as she travels back in time, that Thai men of the past play the role of "leaders, protectors, and bread-winners" (Thommayanti, 2008b, p.562). They enjoy, therefore, full sexual freedom, which they often exploit by taking several mistresses[8]. Akkharathepwarakorn is, however, described in the novel as being averse to taking up mistresses to fulfill his sexual needs. He prefers instead the company of an intellectual equal like Maneechan, whom he promises will be the only one for him. This quality that sets Akkharathepwarakorn apart is tellingly attributed to his Western education. Maneechan says, for example, that "if he hasn't spent time abroad and been exposed to foreign cultures, Akkharathepwarakorn would probably have taken a wife and had several babies before he ever meets her" (Thommayanti, 2008b, p.669). Thus, the allure of the West that attracts even a staunch nationalist such as Maneechan seems, in the novel, to originate from the perceived liberal stance towards gender equality.

[8] Polygyny was a common practice during the reign of King Chulalongkorn. Men were allowed to have several wives, who were classified into the categories of major wife, minor wife, and slave wife (Loos, 2002, p.137). Polygyny was eventually outlawed in 1935 (Loos, 2002, p.178).

The above dynamic not only explains Maneechan's nationalism but is also inextricably linked with her psychosexual development. Much like the way the Thai people enjoy a golden period of blissfulness and bountifulness, for instance, the female protagonist also has a relationship with her mother that is characterized by excessive enjoyment. Maneechan expresses this enjoyment by showering her mother with affectionate words and kisses. Thommayanti describes, in one scene, how Maneechan "repeatedly and vigorously kisses her mother's arm," while telling her that she loves her (2008b, p.14). Before leaving the room, she also "kisses the fragrant arm again" (Thommayanti, 2008b, p.16). Given Maneechan's exceptionally close bond with her mother, she unsurprisingly views her father as an enemy Other who threatens to take the mother away from her and deprive her of her jouissance. Thus, when Maneechan's mother tells her that she has been called by her husband to join him abroad, Maneechan "sends her father the evil eye" and pleads "I have things to do and can't go with you. Please stay here with me" (Thommayanti, 2008b, p.18).

Despite Maneechan's child-like pleadings, her mother insists that she has to follow her husband's request and join him abroad. This compliance with the father's wish is perceived by the female protagonist as a favoring on the mother's part of her husband over her daughter. Maneechan accounts for this act of favoring by concluding that her father must be able to satisfy her mother in a way that she cannot. Since her father is a seasoned diplomat who is well-respected among his peers (Thommayanti, 2008b, p.601), Maneechan naturally assumes that the Phallus that the father possesses and the mother desires is the power to dictate the fate of the nation. Maneechan consequently dreams of being able to do the same. She complains, at one point, about the half-hearted attempt of society women to solve serious social problems such as poverty: "We had the wrong values from the beginning, right? If we were serious about fixing our problems then, it would have been better by now" (Thommayanti, 2008b, p.24). When her mother argues that everyone did their best at the time, Maneechan disagrees and says: "If I had been born then, I would have done a spectacular job" (Thommayanti, 2008b, p.25).

Maneechan's desire to acquire the Phallus like her father converges, in the novel, with her nationalistic impulse to save the country from foreign domination when the heroine discovers that she can play a role in the country's negotiations with Western nations. Maneechan realizes, after her first few trips back in time to the reign of King Chulalongkorn, that her time-travel not only leads her to her soulmate, but also gives her a chance to dictate the future of Siam (Thommayanti, 2008b, p.208). The heroine is, consequently, determined to fix past "mistakes" and change the course of history. In order to do so, she hopes to rely not only on "the historical knowledge and the wisdom of someone who was born ninety years later" but also on her diplomatic skills, which she describes as being potentially as powerful as military might (Thommayanti, 2008b, p.208). With these knowledge and skills in her arsenal, Maneechan believes that "the future of Siam is in her hands. She can fix it, she can change it" (Thommayanti, 2008b, p.209).

Despite her initial desire to "save" the nation, Maneechan gradually discovers, through the course of the novel, that there is not much she can do that has not already been done by the Thai people of the past. As a result, the female protagonist is forced to shift her allegiance from the father and his nationalistic mission to the mother and her function within the domestic sphere. During her stay in the realm of the past, Maneechan enjoys the company not only of Akkharathepwarakorn but also of his mother, Sae. The two women gradually develop a close bond, and Maneechan describes her feelings for the older woman as being akin to the love that she has for her own mother (Thommayanti, 2008b, p.515; 647). For her part, Sae enjoys teaching and grooming Maneechan. As mentioned above, Maneechan is a modern woman who knows nothing about being a proper Thai lady (Kulsatri). She needs, therefore, to be taught and groomed by a mother figure like Sae. Thommayanti describes, for instance, how "every morning Sae has her work sent to her on the veranda. True, no one asks [Maneechan] to help out, but someone as curious and inquisitive as she is simply can't help it. Little does she know that [Sae] is passing her tips and tricks on to her" (Thommayanti, 2008b, p.574). Maneechan's tutelage under a mother figure like Sae is in the

service of making her attractive to a Phallus bearer like Akkharathepwarakorn. Thus, Maneechan can be said to go from a capable woman who attempts to *acquire* the Phallus by actively defending the nation to a proper lady whose main goal is to attract someone who can *give* her the Phallus.

Sleeping with the Enemy: The Castration of the Female Protagonist in *Khu Kam*

In the equally popular novel *Khu Kam*, Thommayanti similarly depicts a strong and independent woman whose nationalism is based on the psychoanalytic model of the family romance that serves, in the end, to undermine her nationalistic effort. *Khu Kam* was serialized in a women's magazine called *Sri Siam* in 1965 before being published in book form for the first time in 1969. The novel has since been reprinted numerous times. It has also been adapted for the small and the big screen, the latest adaptation being released in theaters this year. Similar to *Thawiphop*, the novel *Khu Kam* is also set against the backdrop of a turbulent period in Thai history, in this case the Japanese occupation of Thailand during the Second World War. Angsumalin, the female protagonist, is an ardent nationalist who vehemently condemns the Japanese invasion and occupation. She is, however, forced by extenuating circumstances to marry a Japanese naval officer named Kobori, who has been taken with the female protagonist ever since they first meet. Angsumalin gradually realizes, through the course of the novel, that she too is in love with the young man, but tragedy strikes at the end of the novel when Kobori is violently killed in an air raid.

Even though *Khu Kam* does not evoke the vision of the golden Thai past, the novel does open with scenes from the protagonist's homelife that clearly imply a sense of oneness with the land. In these scenes, we see Angsumalin not only bathe in the Choaphraya river but also dive down to catch a few shrimps for breakfast. We see her climb a Neem tree in order to retrieve its young leaves and flowers to eat with the sweet paste that her grandmother makes. We also see her taste the orange from the orchard that is the main source of their income. Even the scene where her childhood friend confesses his love for her and asks her to wait for him while he pursues his study abroad takes place underneath a mangrove apple tree that grows on the property. All of these scenes

demonstrate the close ties between the protagonist and her motherland/mother's land. They are the ties that grow stronger through the years as she comes to depend on it as a source of food and income and as it bears witness to the most important moments in her life. They are also the ties that Angsumalin feels are violated by the invasion of the Japanese.

Angsumalin's feeling that her home country is being invaded and her close ties with it are being torn asunder is evident in her castigation of the Japanese. In a conversation with her mother, Angsumalin says heatedly: "I hate the Japs!" (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.105). Even when her mother tries to placate her, the headstrong Angsumalin insists that "they should go back to Japan, where they will be left alone. This is our country, our home" (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.105). Given her attitude towards the Japanese, it comes as no surprise that Angsumalin refuses to sell them the fruits from her orchard. Thommayanti describes how the Japanese officers often come by Angsumalin's property since it is close to the shipyard where they are stationed. They are only able to buy the fruits, however, if they happen to run into Angsumalin's mother. If they run into the young woman herself, they will only meet with a deep frown and a stern refusal to sell (Thommayanti, 2008a, p. 149). Angsumalin's adamant refusal is, in a way, an attempt to preserve the ties to the homeland that she feels should be exclusive to her people. It is, in other words, a declaration that access to the land and its products should be reserved for the Thais and should not be granted to outsiders such as the Japanese.

Angsumalin's hostile attitude towards Japanese officers naturally extends towards Kobori, a lieutenant who is in charge of the small shipyard not far from the heroine's place. In their first few encounters, Angsumalin refuses to say more than a few necessary words to the young man. She tells her mother: "I don't want to talk to him. I hate him" (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.114). When her mother protests that she should always be nice to those who are nice to her, she replies: "When I hate something, I don't want to be anywhere near it. That guy is a Japanese, so no matter how nice he is, I still hate him" (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.115). Angsumalin professes her hatred for Kobori

again after he has ordered what she deems to be a barbaric punishment of two Thai men who have stolen fuel from the shipyard. She says of the young lieutenant: "I hate him. I hate him. I want him to die in combat. I will pray for his demise everyday" (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.134). Even after she is forced into marrying Kobori, Angsumalin makes her feelings clear to the young man. She tells him point-blank: "Even though I am marrying you, I hate you. If I have a child, I will teach it to despise you too. I will teach it the meaning of hatred before it ever knows the feeling of love" (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.521).

Despite her professed hatred of Kobori, Angsumalin cannot help admiring him for his uncompromising sense of justice and his unwavering humanity. When Kobori discovers, for example, that two Thai men have been stealing diesel fuel from the shipyard, he punishes them by having as much diesel poured down their throats as they can possibly bear. Shortly thereafter the young lieutenant learns that the officers in his unit have gotten drunk, thrashed around in Angsumalin's orchard, and devoured most of the bananas without permission. Even though Angsumalin's mother does not want to press charges, Kobori insists on administering the same punishment and ordering his officers to eat one banana after another until they reach their utmost limit. Angsumalin is initially disgusted with Kobori's cruel and unusual punishment, but she finds herself unable to argue with her mother, who points out that he is simply being fair in doling out the same punishment to anyone who has done wrong (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.147). Kobori does, moreover, volunteer the services of the navy doctor when he learns that Angsumalin's grandmother has fallen ill with malaria. When Angsumalin protests that the doctor does not bear any responsibility towards them because they are not Japanese, Kobori reveals his unfaltering sense of humanity when he replies: "But your grandmother is a person. It doesn't matter if she's Thai or Japanese. As far as I'm concerned, medical ethics are the same everywhere" (Thommayanti, 2008a, pp.171-2). It is instances such as these that make it difficult for Angsumalin not to admire and even to fall in love with the young man despite what he stands for and what it means for her country.

Angsumalin's growing admiration of and love for Kobori naturally lead to an intense internal conflict that is only resolved at the very end of the novel. We see this conflict when Angsumalin asks herself after Kobori has saved her from serious injuries during an air raid: "Do you love that man? That man who is an enemy, a foreigner, a..." (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.445). Angsumalin trails off and "bites down on her lips, her fists tightly clenched, beads of sweat appearing on her forehead. 'No! I hate him. Hate! Hate!'" (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.445). When Kobori drops by to pay a visit to the recuperating Angsumalin, Thommayanti describes how the heroine "quickly closes her eyes, all of her emotions bubbling up to the surface, hatred, begrudging gratitude, mixed with glee" (2008a, p.447). Angsumalin experiences the same conflict of emotions when Kobori saves her from yet another air raid. Thommayanti writes: "Angsumalin wants to let her weariness and misery roll off her and disappear. She wants to let herself be embraced and protected from what is happening around her" (2008a, p.520). At the same time, however, "something akin to *a thin but impenetrable veil* separates her from him" (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.520; emphasis added). Thommayanti describes how Angsumalin's obstinacy and pride force her to confront the fact that "no matter how warm and protective that embrace is, that pair of arms still belongs to a foreign enemy!" (2008a, p. 521).

The above dynamic not only characterizes Angsumalin's nationalism and all of the complications that come with it but is also inextricably linked with the heroine's psychosexual development. It is important to note, however, that because her parents divorced when she was very young, Angsumalin's development does not quite follow the pattern of those who grow up in a "normal" household. While "normal" girls enjoy a primary blissful state where they are one with their mothers, for example, the initial state of enjoyment for Angsumalin is actually the period early in her life when her father was still there and they were still a family. Thus, we see her sneak glances at the old pictures in the family photo album. Thommanyanti describes how "Angsumalin feels bitter sweet every time she looks at the album. Nevertheless, she would sneak in to take a peek

whenever her mother isn't looking because, at the very least, the pictures in the album remind her how she was once loved by her father" (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.12).

This initial state of bliss that Angsumalin used to enjoy parallels the period in which the heroine and her countrymen take pleasure in the close and exclusive bond with their motherland. Both of these states are, however, disrupted, the former by the desertion of the father and the latter by the intrusion of the Japanese. The heroine of *Khu Kam* reacts similarly to both of these events. She does, as we have already seen, openly declares her hostility towards Kobori and other Japanese officers and try to keep them out of her country. After her father has left, Angsumalin similarly professes her hatred towards the man and attempts to keep him out of her life. Thommayanti describes how the heroine has watched her father's new family from afar. What she sees "multiplies the hurt that she feels and gives rise to a kind of quiet stubbornness, which is akin to *a vast wall* that separates her from her father. So even though her father expresses his love and concern for her every time they meet, Angsumalin has always responded with nothing but coldness" (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.38; emphasis added).

As we have seen, Angsumalin treats both her father and Kobori in very similar manners. Thommayanti even uses comparable metaphors of a vast wall and a thin but impenetrable veil to describe the chasm that exists between the heroine and the two men in her life. This parallel continues when Angsumalin imagines that her father is, much like his younger counterpart, in possession of the Phallus that somehow renders him superior. This Phallus or this superiority seems, in the case of Angsumalin's father, to be inextricably connected with his active role in defending the nation. Junior Lieutenant Luang Chalasinthuras is, first of all, a naval officer. It is not clear whether he has ever been engaged in actual battles, but we learn in the course of the novel that he is, through his collaboration with the Free Thai Movement, actively involved in an effort to defend the

country[9]. Angsumalin's admiration for her father's involvement in the nationalist effort does, however, inevitably lead to an intense internal conflict much like the one she experiences in relation to Kobori. The heroine confides to her best friend, for example, that "on the one hand, [she] hate[s] [her father]. Hate[s] him so very much. But, on the other hand, [she] love[s] him" (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.41).

Despite these mixed emotions, it is clear that Angsumalin aspires to be like her father and to acquire the Phallus that he possesses. This aspiration converges with the heroine's nationalist zeal against the Japanese when Angsumalin discovers that she has a chance to save a prisoner of war from the clutches of Japanese officers. After one of the air raids, Angsumalin returns home to find a Westerner by the name of Mr. Michael Walden hiding out in her house. She later learns that he has been held by the Japanese as a prisoner of war and has only managed to escape from his warden during the commotion caused by the air raid. His only chance of survival is to get in touch with members of the Free Thai Movement who should be able to help smuggle him out of the country. After learning that her father is part of the movement, the heroine agrees to help orchestrate Mr. Walden's escape. By so doing, Angsumalin is able not only to further the nationalist causes of the Free Thai Movement but also to defy the Japanese. When her mother asks what would happen if Kobori finds out about the POW, Angsumalin replies: "I want him to find out. I want him to know that I am the one who helped his enemy" (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.543).

Angsumalin's attempt to acquire the Phallus through her fearless nationalism is so successful that she is often perceived, by other characters in the novel, as a phallic woman. Her grandmother remarks, for instance, that Angsumalin's "fault lies in her lack of feminine gentleness. She is too strong-willed for her own good" (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.178). "But a woman is still a woman," the grandmother reassures herself, "Perhaps [Angsumalin] will learn a lesson or two about who she

[9] The Free Thai Movement or Seri Thai was a real underground movement that took shape during the Second World War after the Japanese forces had invaded and occupied Thailand. It consisted mainly of overseas students who were recruited to help the Allies in their opposition of the Japanese military presence in their home country. Because of the effort of the Seri Thai movement, Thailand was able to escape the fate that befell countries that sided with the Axis powers.

really is" (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.178). Kobori is of a similar opinion. He says to Angsumalin: "You're stubborn and naughty like a little boy" (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.413). "If you were a Japanese woman," he continues jokingly, "you would have to be smacked and reformed" (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.413). Even Mr. Walden, the POW Angsumalin helps escape, comes to the same conclusion about the heroine's character. He tells Angsumalin: "You are brave, headstrong, and resolute. [...] If you were a man, you would qualify as bold and reckless. Many an officer with similar qualities has won medals of valor" (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.389). "But," he cautions, "you're a woman" (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.389).

As the above remarks make clear, Angsumalin's success in attaining the Phallus and playing an active role in the nationalist effort generates a universal desire to "castrate" her and turn her into a proper woman. Kobori acts on this desire by raping and impregnating Angsumalin. In the course of their psychosexual development, two paths are, as we have already seen, open to little girls. They can either identify with their fathers and attempt to acquire the Phallus or they can continue to identify with their mothers and hope to attract someone with the Phallus. Sigmund Freud argues that, in the latter case, "the wish for a penis[10] is replaced by one for a baby, [...] that is, a baby takes the place of a penis in accordance with an ancient symbolic equivalence" (1953-74, p.128). Thus by impregnating Angsumalin, Kobori is forcefully transforming her from a phallic woman into a woman whose desire for the Phallus is symbolically fulfilled by the presence of her child. Towards the end of the the novel, we see a hint of how Angsumalin's baby comes to replace her nationalism as that which gives her life meaning. After almost suffering a miscarriage, Angsumalin realizes that "the love, concern, and possessiveness that she has felt towards everything else doesn't amount to half of what she feels for the life that she [thinks she] has lost" (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.865). For the heroine, "others' lives, no matter how many, doesn't equal the one life that [she assumes] has

[10] Freud uses the term "penis," as in "penis envy," to refer to the actual male genital organ whereas Lacan prefers the use of the term "phallus" precisely because he does not mean the biological organ but rather its function within human fantasy.

perished" (Thommayanti, 2008a, p.865). It seems, therefore, that Angsumalin's ardent nationalism is ultimately undermined by its own psychoanalytic structure that involves the relegation of women to the role of a wife and a mother.

Conclusion

Women may be generally confined to a passive and subordinate role in the nationalist discourse. As we have seen, however, there are notable exceptions within the Thai context. Not only are historical female warriors widely celebrated for their bravery on the battlefields, but fictional female characters are also portrayed by Luang Wichit Wathakan to actively participate in the nationalist effort. Possibly influenced by Wichit's nationalism and impelled by her own feminism, Thommayanti similarly depicts strong and independent heroines who play an active role in defending the nation. Maneechan attempts, for instance, to prevent the loss of part of the Siamese territory in *Thawiphop* by relying on her linguistic and diplomatic skills, while Angsumalin furthers the nationalist causes of the Free Thai Movement in *Khu Kam* by helping a prisoner of war escape from the clutches of Japanese officers. As has been shown, however, the nationalism of the two heroines is based on the psychoanalytic model, whose implication of the family romance inevitably leads to the subversion of their agency. Maneechan's identification with her father and her subsequent nationalist aspiration are, for example, eventually undermined by her tutelage under a mother figure and her desire for the male protagonist. Similarly, Angsumalin's attempt to actively participate in the nationalist effort like her father is, in the end, displaced by her role as a mother. Thus, even though Thommayanti tries to follow in the footsteps of Wichit by portraying dominant female characters in her novels, her reliance on the psychoanalytic model of the family romance means that her characters ultimately fall short of transcending their subordinate roles in the discourses of nationalism.

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