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Social justice, education and peacebuilding: conflict transformation in Southern Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Education is increasingly becoming central to debates about how to promote peace in conflict-affected societies. Equitable access to quality learning, promotion of social justice through educational reforms and conflict-sensitive curricular and pedagogical approaches are viewed as peace supporting educational interventions. Drawing upon the existing body of literature in the area of education, conflict and peace in Southern Thailand and reflecting on Nancy Fraser's theory of social justice and applying the 4Rs framework, this paper provides a critical analysis of inequalities, cultural repression and epistemic domination through education. The paper argues that the 4Rs framework usefully exposes underlying structural tensions in education but does little to show avenues for rupturing unequal power relations and hegemonies that reproduce systems of domination and social exclusion at the macro level. The real hope, however, lies in the potential use of the 4Rs as a tool for grassroots political socialisation.

Introduction

Education is one of the main areas of contestation in Southern Thailand. Historically, the Southern provinces of Thailand were part of the Patani Sultanate, constituted in mid-fourteenth century, that spread across parts of Northern Malaysia and represented one of the richest centres for Islamic culture and learning (Christie 1996). After the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909, this region formally came under the control of Bangkok that subsequently began a process of national unity through cultural assimilation along coercive Buddhist values, Thai language and Thai monarchy. Almost 80 percent of the population in these three provinces represents Malay Muslims who feel politically repressed because of their ethnic identity, and their right to practice religion and culture has been violated by the Thai state (Brooks and Sungtong 2015). They feel that 'they are treated as second-class citizens' and many 'harbor resentment for past and continuing human rights abuses' (Tan-Mullins 2009, 925) which fuels their motivation to join the armed resistance. Even though government schools are allowed to include Islamic subjects and integrate Malay language in teaching and learning, the national curriculum

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primarily requires schools to teach core subjects, such as mathematics, science, Thai language, social studies, as well as computers and foreign languages (Brooks and Sungtong 2016) which are aligned with the national vision of education. The national education framework is largely viewed by Malay Muslims as a process of cultural assimilation that it undermines their core religious and cultural history and ways of life. Amid the history of separatist resistance, re-emergence of cultural nationalism, grassroots revolt against the political repression and internal colonisation and more recently, purported connections with international terrorist movements such as Al Qaeda and Jema'ah Islamiya, the Southern Thai insurgency has the goal to establish a pure Islamic state governed by the Sha'aria and drive Thai Buddhists form the region (Chalermsripinyorat 2021; ICG 2017; Abuza 2009). Madrassas and *Pondoks*, traditional Islamic schools that are managed by Tok Guru (religious teachers and principals) mainly focusing on prayers, religious learning and memorising the Koranic scripture, that have been mostly outside the Thai state's control contribute to production of separatist ideology, serving as domains of rebel recruitment and promotion of Malay Muslim identity (Liow 2009). The Thai state views these schools as a threat to national unity and state security.

On 4 January 2004, an Army camp in Narathiwat province of Southern Thailand was attacked by an organised group of insurgents who captured over 350 weapons and killed four soldiers (Jitpiromsri, Waitoolkiat, and Chambers 2018; McCargo 2006a). This incident was followed by the declaration of martial law by the Thaksin Shinawatra government in the southernmost provinces of Thailand – Patani, Yala, Narathiwat. On 28 April 2004, 32 suspected insurgents engaged in a seven-hour-stand-off with Thai soldiers before all of them being killed while taking shelter in Krue Se Mosque. On 25 October 1978, Malay Muslim protesters in the border town of Tak Bai died of suffocation *en route* to a military base (Jitpiromsri, Waitoolkiat, and Chambers 2018). This series of incidents marked the resumption of violence in Southern Thailand leading to the Thai government's heavy-handed military response to the conflict and damaging the prospect of peace that had been gained through several years of negotiations between the government and insurgent groups. The government abandoned the peacebuilding recommendations of National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) that had suggested 1) recognition of Patani-Malay (Yawi) as the official language, 2) provision of Islamic law, and 3) establishment of a single administration for the three provinces (McCargo 2010a; Jitpiromsri, Waitoolkiat, and Chambers 2018). What followed in subsequent years were 'widespread and escalating human rights abuses by all sides' (Amnesty International Publications 2009, 4) and increased attacks by insurgents on security forces, Thai-Buddhist communities in the Southern provinces as well as on public institutions such as schools (Human Rights Watch 2012; Jackson 2013). Since then, Southern provinces have witnessed over 20,000 violent incidents, causing over 7000 deaths (Deep South Watch 2021).

Despite the central role of education in insurgency, the analysis of conflict in Southern Thailand has mainly focused on political relationships between the Thai state and the dynamics of insurgency, and there is limited attention to the way education interacts with the causes, processes and outcomes of conflict and prospects of peace. Hence, the aim of this paper is to fill this gap by reflecting upon conflict and peacebuilding debates and educational challenges in Southern Thailand and make some theoretical contributions

through application of Nancy Fraser's theory of social justice (Fraser 2008, 2009) and Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith (2017, 2019) 4Rs framework.

The paper is based on secondary research, critiquing a broad range of educational literature focusing on conflict and education in Southern Thailand from a social justice perspective. Firstly, some theoretical debates in the field of education and conflict are presented and the social justice theory and the 4Rs framework: redistribution, representation, recognition and reconciliation (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith 2017) are discussed. This will be followed by some necessary contextual analyses of educational development to demonstrate how educational reforms have undermined socioeconomic divisions and the prevalence of religious and ethnic discriminations in Southern Thailand. Then, the 4Rs concepts are applied to develop a critique of educational processes from a peacebuilding perspective. Finally, the paper will make theoretical advances by critiquing the normative aspiration of the 4Rs framework to point out that oppressive power structures are unlikely to be transformed only through liberal policy prescriptions and hence, would require a grassroots movement to redress inequalities, marginalisation and suppression of minority populations.

The nexus between education, conflict and peace

In recent years, a growing body of educational literature has revealed educational causes of violent conflicts and argued for reconfiguration of education systems to promote peace and social transformation (Novelli and Higgins 2017; Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith 2017; Pherali 2016a; Lopes Cardozo and Shah 2016; UNICEF 2011). Omoeva and Buckner (2015, 3) show, 'countries with higher levels of horizontal inequalities in terms of mean years of schooling have been substantially more likely to experience violent conflict'. This means that regional disparities in education within the nation state is a strong predictor of conflict-related fatalities in the areas that are less advantaged in terms of access to and outcomes in education. The evidence around links between unequal distribution of education, horizontal inequalities and incidents of conflict (Omoeva and Buckner 2015; Langer and Kuppens 2019) suggests that equity in access and outcomes in education are crucial to mitigate conditions of ethnic conflicts and violent group mobilisation (Ukiwo 2007).

The global campaign for universal access to education and the barriers many conflict-affected countries face in meeting educational milestones has expanded research priorities, tasked with investigating 'what works' best in providing education in conflict and crisis (Burde, Lahmann, and Thompson 2019). Consequently, education and conflict has emerged as a pertinent field of theory, research and practice. Firstly, education is often perceived as a victim in conflict (GCPEA 2018; Pherali 2016a) as schools, representing the political authority through which the state maintains and reproduces its political goals, are deliberately attacked as a soft civilian target. In many contexts, education is caught in the middle of violent conflict between warring parties (Watchlist 2005; GCPEA 2018). Due to large-scale displacements caused by armed conflicts such as the Syrian war, ongoing violence in Somalia, 'war on terror' in Afghanistan and Iraq, ethnic violence in South Sudan and more recently, attacks on Rohingyas in Myanmar, children's right to learn has been severely disrupted. In contexts of mass displacement, host countries' reluctance and/or inability to accept refugee children into their education systems as well

as the failure of international agencies to provide adequate funding has resulted in learning crisis among refugee populations (Piper et al. 2020; UNHCR 2019).

Secondly, a plethora of research in education and conflict focuses on the idea of politics of education in conflict-affected contexts elucidating complex relationships between education, conflict and peace (Sonoda 2020; Pherali 2019; Lopes Cardozo and Shah 2016; Paulson 2011; Novelli and Lopes Cardozo 2008; Davies 2005). Even though there is robust evidence around the negative effects of conflict on education as well as on the ways the content and delivery of education can fuel conflict (e.g. biased history, stereotyping, cultural and linguistic repression and exclusionary policies) (see Davies 2005; Bush and Saltarelli 2000), claims about how education can contribute to peace are articulated based on presumptions about the 'normative power of education' rather than rich empirical evidence (Paulson 2011, 8). King (2014, 6) also argues that most of the work on education and conflict deals with education mainly referring to peace education programmes in which a particular attention is given to education's role in improving 'perception of peace, the importance of grassroots education in overcoming weaknesses in peace agreements, the role of public education in addressing the emotional and symbolic roots of conflict and education's impact on one's propensity to forgive'. The challenge to claim education's measurable contributions to peacebuilding arises from the complex history and legacies of conflict, diverse political and social dynamics and difficulties to measure outcomes of educational interventions in conflict-affected contexts. However, recent scholarship on education and peacebuilding problematises the predominantly technical and liberal approaches to education and makes a case for education to rupture structural inequalities both within education systems and beyond and promote a culture of peace (Shah and Lopes Cardozo 2019; Pherali 2019; Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith 2017).

Educational reforms and peacebuilding: a social justice approach

Educational inequalities are associated with the greater risk of conflict. These inequalities may be manifested in social, cultural and political barriers that obstruct many children's access to schools, inequities in distribution of educational resources, and unequal educational outcomes among people representing marginalised ethnicities, castes and religions, and across socioeconomic divisions. Stewart (2002, 3) argues that 'an important factor that differentiates the violent from the peaceful is the existence of severe inequalities between culturally defined groups' which she defines as 'horizontal inequalities,' a notion different from 'vertical inequality', 'which lines individuals or households up vertically and measures inequality over the range of individuals'. She argues that

> Horizontal inequalities are multidimensional – with political, economic and social elements (as indeed are vertical inequalities, but they are rarely measured in a multidimensional way). . . . horizontal inequalities affect individual well-being and social stability in a serious way, and one that is different from the consequences of vertical inequality. (Stewart 2002, 3)

Stewart's horizontal inequalities (HI) theory posits that unequal distribution of power and socioeconomic resources across different cultural groups adversely impact on individual welfare of the underrepresented communities whose cultural identity, over and beyond their individual position, becomes a determining factor of marginalisation. She

further argues that 'where there are such inequalities in resource access and outcomes, coinciding with cultural differences, culture can become a powerful mobilising agent that can lead to a range of political disturbances' (Stewart 2002, 3). In educational terms, unequal access to educational opportunities across different social and cultural groups, unequal access to and quality of learning could lead to collective underperformance of marginalised groups in society. Along these lines, Langer and Kuppens (2019, 42) have added 'education' in the HI theory to argue that educational inequalities may

(1) engender severe grievances among disadvantaged groups which in turn could fuel (violent) group mobilisation;
(2) create, maintain or worsen existing socio-economic divisions and inequalities between groups;
(3) both directly and indirectly worsen disadvantaged groups' access to political-administrative power and position as well as their perceptions of the prevailing objective political HIs; and
(4) also contribute to conflict by failing to accommodate cultural diversity.

Similarly, the hegemonic control and omission of cultural, historical and religious values and imposition of non-native language of instruction on disadvantaged groups could reduce their chances of educational success and their capabilities to participate in key realms of the society. This could lead to production and perpetuation of grievances of such groups who are likely to resent such an education provision.

The idea of social justice in conflict settings is underpinned by what Galtung (1976); Galtung (1990) terms 'positive peace' that not only works towards prevention of physical violence but also deals with indirect violence such as poverty, social exclusion, discrimination and other forms of institutionalised discriminations. Education is central to the debate about building 'positive peace' as the education systems that are inclusive and sensitive to conflict can reduce social divisions; redress grievances of marginalised groups and promote mutual respect and collective sense of belonging (Novelli and Higgins 2017; Pherali 2016b; Lopes Cardozo and Shah 2016).

Justice represents the claims for both redistribution of resources to address the problem of exclusion and marginalisation; and recognition of diversity, by combing both claims for social equality and claims for the recognition of difference (Fraser 2009). In neoliberal societies, economic injustices involve exploitation of labour, deprivation and economic marginalisation of the poor, leading to wealth accumulation in favour of corporations; hence, 'these injustices require a politics of redistribution which attempt to reduce the obstacles caused by socio-economic inequalities through either eliminating economic barriers or reallocating resources to redress the deficit' (Power 2012, 475). In terms of cultural injustices, inequalities are manifested through hegemonic domination and non-recognition of local cultures and 'authoritative representational, communicative and interpretative practices' which can only be redressed through 'a politics of recognition' (Power 2012, 475). The unequal access to positions of power and processes of decision-making also harden existing economic inequalities by maintaining privileged groups' monopoly over economic resources. Political injustices often contribute to systemic exclusion of minority cultural groups who are 'deemed outside the legitimate political community' (Power 2012, 475); and hegemonic state structures

demand assimilation, integration and transformation of indigenous cultures into dominant values and practices rather than their recognition and representation in the process of decision-making. In educational terms, curriculum, language of instruction and educational goals are imposed upon socially and politically disadvantaged groups that are coerced to accept state defined educational agendas. These processes are perceived by cultural minorities as a threat to their indigenous cultures, histories, values and identities and hence resist, sometimes violently.

Fraser (2008) argues that injustices are multidimensional – cultural, economic and political; and proposes a three-dimensional view of social justice focusing on the notions of redistribution, recognition and representation. This approach underpins the perspective of participatory parity, i.e. the way that everyone has the chance to participate as equals. In education, the notions of redistribution, recognition and representation are mutually reinforcing in terms of equitable access to quality education for all, recognition of cultural and social diversity in the curriculum and meaningful participation of diverse groups in educational decision-making. Fraser (2008, 282) uses the slogan – 'No redistribution or recognition without representation' which calls for progressive political restructuring to address the problem of exclusion and elitism. Keddie (2012, 15) argues that Fraser's model of social justice is 'a productive lens for thinking about and addressing some of the key ways in which different dimensions of injustice are currently hindering the schooling participation, engagement and outcomes of marginalised students'.

Expanding on Fraser's three-dimensional model of justice and engaging with debates about post-war peacebuilding (Hamber and Kelly 2004; Opotow 2001) as well as the ways education and social justice are intertwined (Connell 2012; Robertson and Dale 2013), Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith (2017) incorporated 'reconciliation' as an additional component for educational analysis in conflict settings. The 4Rs framework, as they call it, particularly draws the notion of 'transformative remedies' (Fraser 2008) that require restructuring the underlying generative mechanisms of injustices, and also utilises Galtung's (1976) notion of 'positive peace' and theories of transformative peacebuilding which address the deeply rooted causes of structural inequalities (Lederach 1995). Most importantly, the 4Rs framework contends that education can make a significant contribution to sustainable peacebuilding by enhancing security and reducing political, economic and social inequalities and injustices. Its focus transcends 'negative peace', a stable social condition that conceals pervasive structural violence and injustices (Galtung 1976), to social transformation through education policies and development programmes. The first 'R' of redistribution is concerned with the analysis of horizontal and vertical inequalities relevant to education by particularly paying attention to resource allocation and educational outcomes across diverse social groups. It also involves the assessment of the extent to which national and global educational policies such as decentralisation and privatisation of education impact on ethnic minorities, indigenous populations and educational access for girls. Secondly, recognition pays attention to unequal status of different social groups in terms of their language, ethnicity, religion, social class, gender and age and their representation in the education system. These may be reflected in policies relating to language of instruction, recognition of cultural diversity and religious identities in the curriculum to promote their 'full interaction in institutionalised cultural hierarchies' (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith 2017, 28).

Thirdly, the idea of representation emphasises on the importance of equitable participation of diverse groups in shaping educational policies, governance and administrative systems that are responsible for educational decision-making. Finally, reconciliation engages with processes of repairing the damage of social fabrics, rebuilding trust and addressing the legacies of conflict by bringing people together from across dividing lines. The primary objective is to prevent a relapse into conflict by facilitating meaningful dialogues to promote truth, reparations and transitional justice.

The following section provides some necessary contextual analyses of education, conflict and peacebuilding in Southern Thailand before examining educational difficulties through the social justice lens.

Southern Thailand: cultural diversity, conflict and education

The Southern provinces of Thailand – Narathiwat, Pattani, Yala and Songkhla that border Malaysia, were incorporated into the Thai state in 1909 as part of the Anglo-Siamese Treaty negotiated with the British Empire (McCargo 2006b). More than 80 percent of 1.8 million people living in these provinces are Yawi (Patani Malay dialect) speaking Malay Muslims, accounting for around 65 percent of Thailand's total Muslim population (UNICEF 2014). The Malay language, Islamic culture and their historical connection with Patani Sultanate that once served as an influential centre of Islamic studies in Southeast Asia shapes their cultural identity. The modernisation policies that were initiated in the early twentieth century marked the onset of the state-sponsored national homogenisation project that manifested 'the state's attempt to monopolise the means and articulate the ends of education' (Liow 2009, 24). In 1920s, government schools were introduced in Southern provinces through the 1921 Compulsory Education Act that legislated four years of state-prescribed compulsory primary education, reducing the provision of Islamic studies to only two hours per week. The government introduced National Educational Plan 1936 'to control the institutes, to administer examinations to students' in order to create persons 'considered to have the knowledge which a Siamese citizen should have . . . a citizen who is able to earn his [sic] living by having an occupation; he knows the rights and duties of the citizen, he will prove himself to be useful for his country by means of his occupation' (Dulyakasem 1981, 83, cited in Liow 2009, 24).

After the Compulsory Education Act was introduced in 1920s, the government authorities considered abolition of the *Pondok*, the religious institutions whose graduates supposedly lacked in knowledge about Thai history, language and necessary technical skills that would enable them to access economic opportunities and secure stable livelihoods. The Thai state was also concerned about threats to national unity 'arising from suspicions that the *Pondok* perpetuated Malay-Muslim narratives of resistance and separatism' (Liow 2009, 26). However, to avoid widespread resistance to such a policy, the government pursued 'a more cautiously calibrated approach of easing Thai language instruction into the *Pondok* through the dispatch of Thai teachers and educational materials to the South' and in 1960s, the state adopted a policy of registration of the *Pondok* which would receive 'much-needed financial resources to improve their infrastructure and facilities, improvement of the curriculum and pedagogy of Islamic education, and the creation of a proper system of assessment and evaluation' in return of their

registration and alignment of their operation as per the instructions of the Ministry of Education (MOE) (Liow 2009, 25–27).

Currently, the education system in the southernmost provinces consists of four types of schools: Government schools, *Tadikas* (primary schools and supplementary religious schools), *Pondok* (religious schools), and Islamic private schools. Government schools, serving less than 30 percent of Muslim children, are managed by the MOE and follow the national curriculum (UNICEF 2014). *Tadika* schools primarily operate in the evenings and over the weekends in mosques and provide an integrated education combining religious and secular subjects with financial assistance from the state and/or private charities (Liow 2009). In *Pondoks*, Tok Guru/Tok Kuru primarily emphasises on religious education whose role is 'to create a moral person with a Muslim religious outlook who possesses a feeling of brotherhood with other Muslims, and who applies Shari'a law to his *[sic]* earthly life' (Porath 2014, 308). Unless they take additional classes in the national curriculum which is available in some government-registered *Pondoks*, graduates from these schools are not assessed through the criteria set by the MOE and hence, do not qualify for entry into tertiary institutions (Liow 2009). Many *Pondoks* have refrained from registering with the MOE because of the anxiety that the registration would lead to erosion of traditional religious education, while the Thai state seems to be determined about incorporating *Pondoks* in the mainstream education system. As Liow (2009, 2) notes '… secular governments, for whom education is an efficacious tool of modernity, increasingly demand that these religious institutions produce students who can contribute to the instrumental ends of economic prosperity and national development in the name of the 'greater good'. However, in traditional Islamic culture,

> … knowledge has never been an end unto itself. Nor has the role of educational institutions been envisaged as a production line churning out individuals equipped to contribute to the bureaucracies and economies of the modern nation-state and global capitalist enterprise. Instead, Islamic education has two overarching objectives at its core: the transmission of Islamic heritage and values on the one hand, and the spiritual, moral, and ethical transformation and advancement of Muslim societies on the other. (Liow 2009, 2)

Such a moral objective of education has been violated by the instrumentalist notion of education as defined by global capitalism and policies of the Thai government that view the purpose of education in economic terms and constantly pressurise *Pondoks* to recalibrate their educational goals in line with national political and economic visions. As the Muslim communities increasingly feel the economic pressures, Muslim parents have been attracted to a growing number of *Islamic private schools* to find a balance between the moral (preserving the traditional Islamic values) and the instrumental (equipping their children with necessary attributes to succeed in a modern economy). However, as Porath (2014, 305) notes, schools in Southern provinces have generally become spaces of contestation characterised by 'religious, cultural and political points of influence, ranging from modernising Islamic influences emerging from the Middle East, national development, secular modernisation and national integration, to Malay religio-ethnicist, separatist counter-ideology'.

The contemporary violent conflict in Southern Thailand dates back to deeply seated 'historical grievances' and subsequent 'failure to address broad structural problems in the relationship between the southernmost provinces and rest of the country' (Melvin

2007, 3). More recently, the growth of radical Islam and jihadist ideology in the region and the Southern Thailand's favourable conditions (e.g. Sunni minority, a narrative of non-Muslim domination and persecution of Thai Buddhist state on Muslims) also raise concerns for *jihadist* expansion by mobilising historically marginalised people against the state (ICG 2017). However, there is no evidence of 'any association between Malay-Muslim insurgents and foreign jihadists' and the resistance of Malay-Muslims in Southern Thailand 'may be characterised as an irredentist or "nation-oriented" *jihad*' (ICG 2017, 1).

The global political landscape since 9/11 has also increased microscopic surveillance of Islamic schools that are viewed as complicit in perpetuating the extremist ideology, which provides a political justification for the Thai state to maintain control over education in Muslim-dominated southern provinces. Secondly, the tensions between political forces in Bangkok and 'harsh policies' adopted by Thai governments in recent decades also help reproduce the narratives of grievances (Melvin 2007, 4). Ethnic and religious differences between the south and rest of the country are manifested through unequal economic development, lack of linguistic and cultural representation in the Thai national identity and poor handling of the peace process by the Thai state (Engvall and Andersson 2014). For example, the southern provinces constitute the poorest region in the country and the economically deprived areas inhabited by Malay-Yawi speaking Muslims who are likely to experience the highest incidence of violence (Engvall and Andersson 2014).

Several separatist groups such as National Revolutionary Front, Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), the Patani United Liberation Organisation (PULO) and many other newly formed rebel groups have historically been active in the region and their activities are motivated by a number of reasons. Firstly, state schools that represent the Thai Buddhist state are perceived by Malay Muslims as a cultural invasion of Malay Muslim identity by imposing centrally designed curriculum, language of instruction, and accreditation of learning. This is depicted as injustice on the majority of populations living in the Southern provinces, which is caused by the lack of 'representation' and 'non-recognition' of their Islamic way of life (Fraser 2009). Secondly, schools suffer collateral damage during rebel attacks on Thai military forces that are stationed to protect schools and the military personnel guarding educational institutions also has negative impact on school leadership as the school principals have 'no control over MoE policies or military planning' (Brooks and Sungtong 2014, 376; UNICEF 2014). Security forces raid Islamic schools and carry out arbitrary arrests of teachers and students on suspicions of their activities that promote the separatist ideology, whereas insurgents target ethnic Thai Buddhist teachers who work in government schools as well as Islamic school administrators who resist insurgents' incursions on schools for political campaigns and rebel recruitment (UNICEF 2014; Liow and Pathan 2010). Thirdly, attacks on schools as soft targets are used as a propaganda tool by the insurgents to resent state authority and assert their control in the area. Finally, the Thai Buddhist teachers are attacked as 'hegemonic' agents (Aronowitz and Giroux 1993) who are complicit in the Thai state's assimilative political agenda.

Approaching education from a social justice lens in Southern Thailand

The analysis of the nexus between education and conflict in Southern Thailand reveals concerns relating to redistribution: horizontal and vertical inequalities in terms of

educational inputs, resources and outcomes (Stewart 2002; Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith 2017); dominance of political hegemony and authoritarianism undermining democratic principles and representation; failures to recognise diversities, contested histories and cultural identities in a bid to promote national homogenisation along the centrally defined nationalistic and economic goals. Most importantly, there is little effort to promote processes of reconciliation to ensure that existing grievances are addressed through educational reforms.

Firstly, Southern provinces have been historically marginalised in terms of resource allocation in education which produces 'horizontal inequalities' (Stewart 2002) between the South and rest of the country (NRC 2006). The lack of coordination between educational programmes supported by international organisations (UNICEF 2016; Jitpiromsri 2019) does little to bring about systemic change within the education system. Secondly, Thai government's education policies pay inadequate attention to local history, language, religion and culture (McCargo 2008; NRC 2006). However, some schools do offer localised curricula in addition to the national curriculum (Arphattananon 2018; Pongpajon 2018) but the success of these initiatives is largely unknown. Despite some initiatives on bilingual education, there is unwillingness both on the part of the MOE and separatist groups who treat the 'other language' as a threat to their political goals. The acceptance of Yawi in schools is more to do with improving learning outcomes in the national curriculum rather than recognising it as part of local identity and culture (Arphattananon 2011, 2018).

Thirdly, the importance of Malay Muslims' representation in education policymaking has been historically ignored (McCargo 2008; NRC 2006). *Chularajmontri* (head of Thailand's Muslim Community) who is appointed by royal decree is responsible for advising the government on Islamic matters including, education but, since the reintroduction of this office in 1945, no Malay-Muslim has been appointed for the role and the local Malay Muslims do not see their aspirations being represented by this office (Liow 2009; Yusuf 1998). The Islamic Centre of Thailand functions under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Education and the provision of *Chularajmontri* is aimed at control rather than recognition or autonomy of Muslim affairs (Joll 2010; Yusuf 1998).

Finally, the education sector has the potential to support a bottom-up approach to peace, but there is little or no recognition of education as a vehicle for peace and reconciliation. Few and sporadic peace education programmes, usually supported by international organisations, are fragmented and lack in coordination with MOE officials and community leaders, and the fragile security environment further impedes effectiveness and scalability of such initiatives (UNICEF 2014). Additionally, the prevalence of divided schooling – government schools and Islamic/private schools reinforces existing sociocultural polarity between Malay Muslims and Thai Buddhist populations (Brooks and Sungtong 2016; McCargo 2008; Pongpajon 2018). Most importantly, unless the 'separatist movement' is understood as a 'political struggle' against Bangkok administration's monopoly in social, political and economic affairs in the southern provinces (Panjor 2019), peace and reconciliation is difficult to be sustained (Table 1).

The politics of redistribution contradicts with the global economic landscape that promotes capitalism and neoliberal policies, which underpin the Thai government's national development agenda. As Ayres (2000) argues that liberal democracy and free market policies do not transform unequal socioeconomic structures and fail to explain

Table 1. Analysis of education in Southern Thailand using the 4Rs framework.

4Rs Concepts	Education, conflict and peace in Southern Thailand
Redistribution (Addressing inequalities)	The Thai government has increased funding to education in Southern provinces to improve access (McCargo 2008), but it is unclear how such reforms contribute to equity in access and quality. Increased funding to Islamic private schools that balance the offer of both general subjects and Islamic religious education has seen conversion of a large number of *Pondoks* in to Islamic private schools, resulting in an exodus of Muslim students from government schools (e.g. 90% of Muslim students attending Islamic private schools) but there are concerns about quality of learning (Brooks and Sungtong 2016; Liow 2009; McCargo 2008). Privatisation of education may reproduce social and economic inequalities within Muslim communities, fuelling drivers of conflict (Brooks 2015).
Recognition (Respecting difference)	Education reforms should involve a participatory approach by involving local religious leaders and the wider community (NRC 2006; Pongpajon 2018). The MOE's willingness to support multilingual education policy and to include Islamic education in government schools needs to be implemented effectively and institutionalised (Arphattananon 2018). NRC's (2005–2006) recommendation to adopt 'Pattani Malay as a working language in the deep south' (McCargo 2010a, 83) needs to be systematically implemented to recognise local identities.
Representation (Encouraging participation)	Thai government's decentralisation policy in education can potentially facilitate local ownership of education and give a positive signal to insurgents that devolution of power could be achieved peacefully through reforms in policies (UNICEF 2014). The NRC was elitist in its composition, and the representation of minority Muslims was weak both in number and their voice. It lacked 'clear goals and was rather disappointing in its achievements' (McCargo 2010a, 75).
Reconciliation (Dealing with past, present and future injustices)	*Santisuk* school programme inspired by the 'schools as zone of peace' initiative in Nepal was implemented in six government elementary schools but could not be scaled up due to escalation of violence (UNICEF 2014). Peace education needs to be part of broader peacebuilding education that addresses structural inequalities (Pongpajon 2018). Effective steps towards the recommendations of NRC could help reconciliation (Wheeler and Chambers 2019) – 'Establishing a fund for reconciliation and healing; Devising procedures to deal quickly with complaints against government officials in the region; and Promoting dialogue with militant groups' (McCargo 2010a, 83).

the relationship between tradition and modernity. Hindrances to granting political autonomy to Malay Muslims stem from the reluctance of elite groups to relinquish their hegemonic control or even the perceived potential risk of national disintegration (McCargo 2010b). The political elitism as well as grievances of the oppressed are normalised in such a way that privileged groups fail to recognise perpetration of 'symbolic violence' on the poor or ethnic minorities. This undermines the problem of structural and horizontal inequalities fuelling social injustices, cultivating a culture of non-acceptance of and disengagement with conditions of structural denial. More often, the response to educational failures is limited to narrow technical causes such as teacher training, peace education, increased funding for educational resources and building new schools with an inertia to much needed transformative policies that could enable disenfranchised groups to participate in educational decision-making. Hence, policy prescriptions to address inequalities tend to focus on investment in more of the same arrangements that aim to treat the symptoms of educational issues rather than the structural causes.

Epistemic domination, hegemony and liberal peace: the 4Rs framework as an aspiration

The Thai state's assimilationist policies in education represent epistemic domination of Thai Buddhist culture and market orientation of educational processes on the Islamic culture and educational traditions of Malay Muslims in Southern Thailand. The idea that education should serve the purpose of national economy; contribute to cultivate loyalty to the legitimised version of national identity; and promote values of the dominant Thai Buddhist culture offer little space for the purpose of Islamic education that has very different epistemic foundations and cultural visions for individuals and their society in general. The understanding of educational reforms is also located in the idea of development in economic terms, and the discussions around access, equity and quality are measured against the template of education's role in preparing learners for a job market rather than aligning with the lives, experiences and concerns of the oppressed. As a result, the epistemic oppression of marginalised Muslim populations is reproduced through policy discourses in education amid the 'hegemonic hold,' 'epistemic privilege' and 'successful positioning of the dominant groups' (Vaditya 2018, 273) whose worldview is deeply entrenched in production and legitimisation of knowledge about what an ideal Thai society should look like. This has led to systemic subjugation of Malay Muslims' social and cultural ways of understanding the world and their 'daily context of exclusion, humiliation, structural inequalities, injustice and exploitation, in both material and cultural senses' causing 'epistemic exclusion' of the very community that educational policies are aimed to serve (Vaditya 2018, 273). Rather, the focus is on building 'liberal peace' (Paris 2004), a process that has a tendency to follow the majority people's control over decision-making and allegiance towards stability and 'negative peace' (Galtung 1976) rather than social transformation. Hence, even the education reforms through the provision of *Chularajmontri*, increased funding for Islamic Private Schools and revisions of Islamic studies curriculum in Southern Thailand represent assimilationist orientation with little hope for redressing Malay Muslims' grievances that are deeply entrenched in the quest for autonomy of their cultural identity.

Even though the 4Rs framework enables researchers and policy makers to identify inequalities and injustices within education as well as the way educational processes interact with political, economic and social structures, it should be 'treated as a starting point for critical reflection rather than a normative and simplistic endpoint' (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith 2019, 74). In the contexts where national education policies and the processes of development are governed by global capitalism and neoliberalism, social justice oriented redistributive policies which require affirmative actions to promote positive discrimination in favour of the poor and historically marginalised populations may find little currency. The growth of private schools in Southern Thailand appears to be an interesting phenomenon as it is perceived to be less threatening to the Thai state because of private schools' focus on Thai secular curriculum combined with Islamic education as well as to many Malay Muslim parents who feel assured about these schools' focus on religious education while providing the knowledge and skills that can potentially enable young graduates to enter the economic market. Unlike *Pondoks*, the Thai state has a greater level of control over Islamic private schools in relation to their educational activities as they receive government funding in the form of capital allowances as well as per capita grants based on the numbers of students (McCargo 2008).

Reframing representation means rebalancing distribution of power across different groups, particularly to increase access of marginalised groups in positions of decision-making. A meaningful representation requires more than participation in the policy space, to a level that ensures their influence in agenda-setting and policy formulation. In a top-down formulaic policy prescription, the idea of representation, as framed in the 4Rs framework, could be buried in the 'liberal framework for peace' (Paris 2004) in which equity in distribution of power can merely become a rhetoric. The idea of representation also challenges the hegemony of the political elite who are threatened by reconfiguration of distribution of power and loss of their control over decision-making. Even in the decentralised structure of educational governance, the elite members of the school management committees or civil society organisations might be indifferent to transformative change and monopolise the decision-making process whilst the voice of margins is suppressed. In political discourses, reconfiguration of power structures may be securitised as 'an existential threat' (Waever 2008) to dominant groups and therefore resistance to empowerment of the marginalised is justified for the sustenance of the status quo, thereby justifying meritocracy over equity and inclusivity.

To pursue the policies of recognition, one of the key challenges is around the absence or assertive articulation of marginalised voice in education policies, curricular reforms and pedagogical practices, and reorganisation of locations of power. There is always a risk of recognition being tokenistic and members of marginalised communities responsiblised for their inability to harness social, political and economic opportunities within the functioning and supposedly, accommodative political system.

Challenges around reconciliation in conflict-affected contexts often relate to contested interpretations of the causes of conflict and different narratives about peace. The privileged class that benefits from unfair social and political structures fails to recognise different forms of injustices that are experienced by the minoritised communities. The former is more concerned about the disruption caused by the conflict, which costs them their privileges drawn from the system. For them, reconciliation may mean reparation for the loss caused by violence; self-criticism of and/or retribution against the rebelling actors; and resumption of the structures that have been challenged by the dissident groups. This may result in a potential capture of the reconciliation process by the political elite, abandonment of the agenda of social transformation and the need of mending social fabrics damaged by the conflict.

As the national and global education development paradigms are fundamentally based on neoliberal capitalist ideologies, I would argue that the 4Rs framework is more promising as a resource for political activism at the grassroots educational movements, among the marginalised populations, rather than as a top-down framework for educational reforms. National governments do not want to be advised by external actors for transformative change whilst the entire global system of development is based on the neoliberal agenda. The marginalisation of religious, racial, ethnic and regional groups and reproduction of inequalities is part of their political project, and they are cognisant of this enterprise. A critical analysis of these issues at the upper levels of policy space is likely to create discomfort and an unwelcome response. However, working with the 4Rs ideas amongst social justice movements at the grassroots levels, unions and political organisations can build power from below and a policy space for transformative actions. Transformation does not come of a vacuum and there is often self-serving inertia within the ruling class for

progressive change, so it has to come from the political opposition and political organisations. Transformations through social movements may take longer, but they do create the conditions for which policy spaces open up and are likely have the long term political and social effects. Hence, the strategy for implementation of the 4Rs should aim at how to mobilise marginalised communities for social justice in and through education.

Conclusion: building peace with social justice

This paper has broadly examined the relationship between education, conflict and social injustices in Southern Thailand and attempted to highlight the ways that Malay Muslims' educational visions have been undermined by the national educational policies. I have argued that Thai state's educational policies have failed to address the causes of conflict and their focus on promoting stability and cessation of violence without necessarily addressing broader problems of structural inequalities has produced little or no peace outcomes. Educational outcomes for politically repressed populations in the Deep South are unlikely to improve unless there are substantive reforms in the education sector alongside progressive economic policies and political transformation to enhance the local autonomy. Educational processes that undermine religious and cultural identities of the local communities are likely to produce feelings of discontent and injustices that fuel violent conflicts (Pherali 2016a).

Peace is a contested concept – 'peace' as a goal for stability in Southern Thailand under the existing socio-political conditions dominates the notion of 'peace' as a process of social transformation (UNICEF 2011). Education is largely promoted as a vehicle for serving the economic market and political stability rather than as a means to promote social justice and transformation. Due to economic and political alienation over several decades and ongoing violence, the Malay Muslims in the Deep South have strong feeling of grievances. The fundamental tension lies in the process of nation building – Malay Muslim identity, language and culture have clashed with the Thai governments' aspirations to build national unity characterised by Thai language, history and Buddhist values. In contrast, the people in Southern Thailand are concerned about the role of state education in promoting national homogenisation at the cost of their religious and cultural identity. To this end, the separatist groups manipulate the education sector to mobilise resistance against the state and also to serve their own political goals. Hence, education has become a battlefield of assimilative and separatist agendas of the contesting political forces.

Finally, the 4Rs framework serves as a useful analytical tool to expose injustices in education but it does not offer solutions about how to enable change in contexts where authoritarian regimes monopolise power and resources; hegemonic cultural groups dominate discourses about national identity; elite political class resists representation of marginalised communities in educational decision-making; and the terms of reconciliation are hijacked by those who control power. However, the 4Rs framework could potentially serve as a peacebuilding approach to inform processes of political negotiations, peace agreements, and reforms in education through grassroots mobilisation. Education's role in peacebuilding may depend upon the extent to which it serves marginalised communities in fostering their political consciousness.

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Disclosure statement

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