Chapter 16
Turbulence in Thailand? The Thai Digital Civil Rights Movement and a 'Pro-Human' Contract for the Web

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Introduction

On 25 November 2019, a proclamation for 2020, from the inventor of the protocols that drive the World Wide Web (the web), Sir Professor Tim Berners-Lee, was made, with the support of the Web Foundation, a United States-based non-profit organisation advocating for web openness (Berners-Lee, 2019). Their latest agenda is a social 'Contract for the Web' of nine principles to further web governance (Sample, 2019). This chapter discusses if, like the campaign for a 'Web We Want' in 2015, led again by the Web Foundation and Berners-Lee, the concept of a 'pro-human web' that emerged as an idea in *Weaving the Web,* and was later developed as an educational framework, can be realised in Thailand during a politically turbulent period, to set an example for wider Internet freedoms in South-East (SE) Asia (Day et al., 2015; Web Foundation, 2014; Berners-Lee, 2000).

A pro-human web is an ambitious idea. The contract for it seeks a promise among users, technical entities, business forces and nation-states to play nice. It is, therefore, unrealistic. After all, five years on, even in democratic settings, we still do not have what Berners-Lee (2000) has long insisted the public wanted; a web free of control and full of personal empowerment. Of course, this is a vital idea. But, the further we look from democratic settings, towards those built on different social ideas about freedom of expression, justice, liberty and personal rights, the more difficult it becomes. In support of changing this, in July 2020, *The 2020 Manifesto for Web Science* was released by contributors aligned under The Web Science Trust, a charity promoting study of the web through the discipline of Web Science. An interdisciplinary endeavour, the discipline and manifesto seek 'inclusive, intelligence and sustainable futures for the Web' (Berendt et al., 2020).

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An impressive public relations (PR) slogan, the dream for the web put forward in the manifesto echoes this throughout; it speaks as to how the web must unfold to benefit everyone. Berendt et al. (2020, p. 1), the authors of the manifesto, champion pro-human web governance but, wisely, acknowledge that their 'observations occupy a particular point in time and are skewed towards our experience as Western scholars- a limitation that Web Science will need to overcome'. This, undoubtedly, is a considerable limitation that Web Science faces. While the ambitions and intent behind writing any form of pro-human web advocacy is admirable, such efforts are frequently driven from the safety of a western democratic setting, often by those seated comfortably in armchair academia. So, such efforts are far from globally realistic and seldom represented by diverse voices, which makes it difficult to truly speak for anything other than western ideas of entitlement. In SE Asia, human rights are not guaranteed; neither is an Internet connection, or the money for one, a particular problem in Myanmar, which has faced brutal terrorism aided by Internet repression at the direction of a military junta that consolidated power over 2021 and neighbours Thailand, the country and focus of our discussion in this chapter. Both share similarities in the culture of surveillance that governs much of digital life normalised in such a way to include and encourage peer-reporting of controversial online activity, alongside harsh decisions about personal privacy made by what is, upon writing, a military backed government. In SE Asia, publicly expressed opinion on the web yields data that produces an evidence trail of dissenting activity then used to prosecute citizens, much like academics who want to write about it and are arrested, or driven from their roles (Day & Skulsuthavong 2021a).

Now, more than a year on from Web Science's manifesto, we do not have any sense of 'pro-human inclusive governance for the web' in Thailand, a country split by public debate concerning rights to online expression, or even unmonitored usage access. With thousands of students engaged in protest, on social media initially, then out onto the streets, it has led to arrest warrants. Since 25 September 2020, this includes, allegedly, the arrest of children under the age of 16 for sharing, usually on social media, views that challenge pro-nationalist rhetoric and criticise social taboos (Thai PBS, 2020; Bangkok Post, 2020a; Khaosod, 2020). Sharing such views, or anything critical even in their same context, such as to advocate for the protests, violates a series of domestic laws. Attacking a widely revered Thai elite is an act of defamation punishable under a law known as *Lèse-majesté*, found in Section 112 of the Thai Criminal Code. This carries 3–15-year prison sentences for every charge issued, which, for example, can be applied to each message sent online. The view of the government is clear: do not speak, write, or post online negative views about certain topics, people, or freedoms, or popularise those who do by repeating their ideas (Voice Online, 2021).

There is, likewise, an unspoken expectation to ideologically condition students away from critical thinking and towards this and other conservative views whilst they are studying in Thai higher education, where it has often been implied, across 2020 and 2021, that academics should comply with nationalist views, and limit their own expression along with their student's thinking. This comes with a firm Rote pedagogy emphasis to encourage students to obey the law and for their teachers

to design learning so not to stir up any attitude otherwise. Unsurprisingly, Thailand graded E in the Academic Freedom Index released in March 2021, ranked low and alongside other authoritarian countries such as North Korea, South Sudan, Rwanda and Iran (Prachatai, 2021; Kinzelbach et al., 2020). The situation grew worse as international attention shifted to the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar over 2021, largely due to external scrutiny being drawn away to focus on mass-killings in the nation, which neighbours Thailand and itself has seen heavy repression alongside censorship of digital activity in an attempt to hide war crimes against citizens.

Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR, 2021) reported, as of mid-March 2021, that 70 people have been charged in Thailand under Section 112 in 60 cases, and 26 cases were founded by complaints from everyday citizens, four by the Thai Ministry of Digital Economy and Society (MDES) and the rest via police investigation, with four of those charged being under the age of 18. Amnesty International (2021) released a statement, again in March 2021, suggesting that the prosecution of 382 protest leaders, alongside everyday peaceful demonstrators, in 207 cases since 2020, was censorship of their rights. Hall et al. (2016), who are founding Web Scientists, often ask how the web can further humanity. In Thailand, this idea would be difficult to raise in public, or challenge as an academic process; to speak out regarding freedom and the web is dangerous (HRW, 2019). Thailand, unlike Europe and the USA, is a setting where students are met with authoritarian computer crime laws, meanwhile academics have considerable scrutiny of every act of research.

Across 2020 and 2021, as well as continuing into 2022, we can observe something akin to a Thai digital civil rights movement unfolding within Thailand. Indeed unhappiness amongst young people has been gaining momentum over the last decade. Led by more liberal Thai citizens, its goal is to achieve some sense of social, intellectual and personal equality, and an attempt to secure human rights for all Thais. Galvanised, we can note a distinct increase in civil disobedience, boycotts and protests at public monuments, as well as within universities. Likewise, there have been mass marches in the streets, all with a range of other non-violent activities not dissimilar to the United States (US) during efforts by African Americans to end institutional discrimination. A hallmark feature of the US Civil Rights Act of 1964 was to challenge segregation and recognise the need for greater education, combating unequal opportunity, within the political domain, alongside wider reaching aspects of social freedom, which included housing, universal healthcare and, notably relevant to our discussion, freedom of opinion and opportunity. Until this act, such ideas of expression were often met with the use of disenfranchisement and legislative repression, as seen in the Jim Crow laws that sought to prevent interracial marriage, social advancement, shared accommodation and even education. Do Thais, then, need a Digital Civil Rights Act of 2022? While not the same, there are similarities between then and what has unfolded in Thailand over 2020 and 2021; certainly, a powerful group of actors seek to ensure political disqualification of rivals, as well as limit education to prohibit suffrage, or even an interest in politics in the first place (Day & Skulsuthavong, 2021b).

Open Access to the Internet: A Contextual, not Universal, Human Right in Thailand?

For example, research in Thai academia countering conservatism is frequently not approved by those in positions of power in a university or seated on its usually state-aligned ethics board and, understandably, to journal outputs in the west, this kind of research is thus unpublishable. Thai surveillance culture and academic oppression, however, is not new; in 1976, students were massacred at Thammasat University, an elite university located in Bangkok, Thailand, for engaging in a protest movement tied to freedom of expression. In Thailand, various diverse cultural views circulate about the very idea of protest itself, ranging between ultra-right-wing conservatives who denounce it as un-Thai, to a young, Internet empowered generation, and everyone in between. This creates a variable political spectrum, more like a pendulum where groups polarise, antagonise and popularise each other, splintering any potential for mediation and moderation (Day & Skulsuthavong, 2021b).

Thailand has a high-context, sensitive culture; citizens are easily stirred by nationalist exposure to global otherness communicated through the web, with some affected akin to digital reverse culture shock when they realise how different freedoms are in other democratic nations. Fear of 'the other' and attempting to limit citizens' exposure to it has long been a feature of 'Thainess' that exists as a concept within Thailand to reflect deeply conservative pro-state behaviour and government policy. This has to do with conservative Thais encouraging an internally generated narrative over several decades and across educational policy focused around furthering the idea of never being colonised by foreign powers, which has led to commonplace xenophobia (Day & Skulsuthavong, 2021b). A point of considerable cultural pride, Thailand's self-driven champion-defender narrative has been described as ambivalent and self-Orientalist, in a culture of borrowing that adapts different cultures ideas and re-purposes them as their own, often in educational systems and to a point so extreme that outright misappropriation is considered acceptable, as is brutal hazing ritualism (Waters & Day, 2022). Usually, the Thai sense of social, political and educational narrative is driven by a nostalgic desire to create a mythic identity reinforcing conservative views, that permeates into all walks of life, including advertising, television, gender, sexuality and beauty (Skulsuthavong, 2016).

This is a setting where, after all, in 2021 it is not uncommon for female academics, as well as students, to still be required to wear skirts to universities, in order to look 'feminine' and this seeks to shape ideological values 'constructing' young people's identity in public universities. Most Thai university students are still required to wear a uniform not dissimilar to that found in western high schools. This seeks to reinforce gender roles and traditional conservative values, pushing both the objectification of the female form and the emphasis of a patriarchal dominance over women's bodies. There are likewise implications for transgender students and, indeed, such gender discrimination undoubtedly reduces wider acceptance of LGBTQ rights, roles and inclusion within Thailand. Meanwhile, in November 2021 the Thai Constitutional Court ruled that Section 1448 of the Civil and Commercial Code, which allows

only for a man and woman to get married, was legal. As such, it was stated as not violating of civil or constitutional rights for LGBTQ couples, suggested because it is felt, within conservative Thailand, that LGBTQ couples 'cannot reproduce or form a functioning family' and so should not be allowed to marry, as it 'is against nature' (Thai PBS World, 2021). Such prejudice and discrimination indirectly also echoes a traditional belief in Thailand that it is the role of women, in Thai society, to serve men, via acting as vessels for reproduction, which creates what is seen as a high status role but only within the context of the home and family units (Skulsuthavong, 2016).

loooseness-1Hence, in Thailand, protesters are one facet of a complex momentum of change, which extends in many directions with respect to social justice and equality, itself set back by decades of rigorous political control embedded into nearly every walk of life. Critics of this, and many other forms of social emancipation, are seen, as well as described in state-levied media, as anti-nationalist, and anti-Thai. Criticism of the government, then, is seen as an attack on the nation, because government politicians work hard to cultivate their ideologically enforced role, usually through educational policy and political design, as national protectors. To conservative advocates, negative expression about Thailand is akin to terrorism. Those who protest, in contrast, see themselves as digital citizens of the world, connected to it through the diverse heterogeneity found on and across the Internet.

Usually, in reply to outspoken calls for liberal civil rights, conservative forces frequently urge such young people to leave the country, if they are unhappy with it, thereby mortgaging the future of Thailand by limiting potential critical thought and seeking to desperately prevent any social desire for change (Thanthong-Knight, 2021). Acts of online protest, and opinions related to it, still exist, for many traditional Thais, as governed by a social contract of rules and regulations defined nationally (Bangkok Post, 2020a). There are, of course, no real laws or governments that can truly dictate the web. As such, what is essentially a free social and technical hybrid space that cannot be policed easily, is deeply disruptive to a system of authoritarian governance built on decades of ideological rhetoric and installed via a morally bankrupt educational system, in particular driven by university actors whose professional advancement is tied to state-approval and satisfaction. Indeed, it is not uncommon for Thai students sharing, online and off, opinions against their government to be described as nation-haters, even by their teachers.

Sedition is, after all, a criminal offence in Thailand, and even acts of expression can be seen as seditious intent, hence reporting any such intention curries favour (Day & Skulsuthavong, 2021b). Thailand has some of the strictest laws concerning free speech in the world. A culture rooted in authoritarian surveillance, repression of the self, more importantly, has an ideologically indoctrinated acceptance, in particular across older Thais long conditioned by a patron-client society. Put another way, many Thais expect and support an intrusive level of political observation. Domestically, this is often termed by Thai conservatives as having respect for the lasting 'Thai context' via social deference. This echoes a system of ordering that existed for hundreds of years, the Thai *Sakdina*, which is similar in nature to feudalism, but that lasted much longer, and, unfortunately, ran until only a few hundred years ago, prohibiting

speaking out about state-rhetoric of 'Thainess' or against those in a higher social class (Day & Skulsuthavong, 2021a; AFP, 2020a, 2020b; Beech, 2020).

This was a contributory factor that led to a strong military surveillance culture in Thailand, which now applies to the web, in particular after a military coup in 2014 eventually translated into the current political government, with many of the key actors still in power nearly a decade later (Laungaramsri, 2016). This has had a lasting impact on democratic and web freedoms. In October 2020, Twitter removed 926 surveillance accounts, alleged as run by bots, automated data collection tools, which were driven by the Thai government for surveillance and information operations against Thai citizenry, in the same period some government figures deemed posting photos online, of attendance at protests, as criminal dissent (Twitter, 2020; HRW, 2020). An eventful month, on 18 October 2020 approximately 10,000 citizens gathered at Victory Monument, a landmark in Bangkok, in reply, to protest human rights and military scrutiny (Bangkok Post, 2020b). Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (2019) argues that, often in the background of any such digital human rights debate, it is good PR to suggest proclamations and manifestos of pro-human digital change then ignored by 'megalomaniacs who will carry on doing their worst' anywhere that human rights are not assured. This is possible because the web is a decentralised, supranational entity, so it is very challenging to shape rules for it that work in every context.

Consequently, it is a philosophical challenge to universalise socially 'just' rules for a system developed to facilitate communication across different systems and between entities not limited by traditional nation-state boundaries. Meanwhile, a protest at Thammasat University on 10 August 2020 led government figures, including the Prime Minister of Thailand, General Prayuth Chan-o-cha, to be reported by journalists as stating students had crossed sociocultural and legal lines in their points of objection (Chetchotiros et al., 2020). Thailand's MDES were likewise reported in the same period as asking major web entities, such as Facebook, to remove anti-nationalist social media commentary (O'Connor, 2020; Tortermvasana, 2020). Legally speaking, both can do so under Thai law (Day & Skulsuthavong, 2021b). Indeed, the laws and legal system related to expression and communication in Thailand is very complicated, influenced heavily by the government and amended, as will be discussed, often to suit political demands in response to social upheaval.

Meanwhile, when we turn to the tradition of Émile Durkheim, a forefather of the discipline of Sociology, it would be clear why we see resistant Thais uniting online, perhaps even breaking laws in response to nation-state oppression. Social entities act as they want in *anomie*, an idea that can be unpacked to suggest that when rules are not set by truly democratic, hence politicised, agreement it disrupts social conventionality (Çam and Irmak, 2014). Problematically, non-binding promises are informal words. So, if nobody governs the web then both pro-human and anti-human conduct is permissible. This, again, is because of such anomie. Berners-Lee, along with the Web Foundation, can disagree with this status quo all they want, but seem to imply a socially deterministic view of the web. Their ideology assumes, then, that social forces can govern technical protocols. This is natural because Berners-Lee invented the ones that drive the web (Sample, 2019). He did not, however, invent the

web as we know, see and experience today. The world did. The Web Foundation's (2020) nine non-binding principles, however, suggest a global agenda to be upheld, or perhaps enforced, as the first three are for governments, the second for companies and third for citizens to:

1. Ensure everyone can connect to the Internet.
2. Keep all of the Internet available, all of the time.
3. Respect and protect peoples' fundamental online privacy and data rights.
4. Make the Internet affordable and accessible to everyone.
5. Respect and protect people's privacy and personal data to build online trust.
6. Develop technologies that support the best in humanity and challenge the worst.
7. Be creators and collaborators on the web.
8. Build strong communities that respect civil discourse and human dignity.
9. Fight for the web.

There is no doubt that Berners-Lee gifted the world three reconfigurable protocols that enable communication atop the Internet: HTML, HTTP and URL are his version of a file-sharing network system that was used, in the first instance, by a culture of technical academics who were very experienced in shaping, as well as sharing, information (Berners-Lee, 2000). The web of 2021, however, has only a passing resemblance and is built in the dynamic and organic interplay of social and technical forces distributed as a network of networks globally acting in temporarily aligned, thus socio-technical, symbiosis. Hence, the web has grown far beyond the control, or opinion, of one person, or even academic group. The way society and technology evolve in such a manner is discussed at length by Mackenzie and Wajcman (1999) and Pinch and Bijker (1989). Both draw from Durkheim's (1933) far earlier idea of *organic solidarity*. This can be unpacked to suggest if social contracts, so consensus between individual units, for Durkheim (1933), or actors, for sociologist Bruno Latour (1984), in a society breakdown, or do not exist, it is because these actor-units want this to happen.

It is not, then, that a sense of technical 'mechanical solidarity has lost ground, but because all the conditions for the existence of organic solidarity have not been realised' (Durkheim, 1933, p. 364). Such thinking can be unpacked and understood as suggesting that there is not anything anti-human about the technical actors of a given society, nor are they less important than the human in networks. Both negotiate, create and then shape relying on each other. Without each other, there could be no phenomena in the first place (Latour, 1984). Applied to the web, and the Internet supporting it, technical actors enable social connectivity, communication and renegotiation. This occurs in a realm beyond traditional governance and, as a result, social ideology, justice, rules and unified agreement on pro-human usage. Such norms, therefore, ethically vary in each point, place and moment of connection, and change based on who facilitates such connectivity. On and in the web, then, actors can exist as socially norm-less units, organised by non-traditional forms of technical governance, and vice versa: URL, HTTP and HTML are protocols granting network access, not an entitlement to social justice or digital human rights as an idea recognised globally, in the same way using the web is.

Subsequently, no universal pro-human conditions have ever been agreed on, nor will global web governance be easy to realise. This is because of the same freedom these protocols allow: you do not have to be a nice person to play on the web, nor adhere to any particular view of morality within it. Rather, you just need to know HTML. Put another way, the absence of an initial state of web governance invited pre-existing, or more powerful, institutions with sufficient knowledge, hence power, to fill the vacuum. We now need the influence of Facebook, for example, to empower discipline and ordering of communication practice within one form of social media. This creates a digital nation, perhaps, in our global web society, where terms of usage fill the void of traditional nation-state laws, yet political influence cannot be denied. Meanwhile, if people were unhappy with Facebook, or their policies, they could leave, or opt-out from participating in that particular realm of discourse, at least in the view of Durkheim, because they can seek anew, in the endlessness infinity of communication and connectivity that the web offers (Çam and Irmak, 2014).

Durkheim refers to *social infinity* to describe a sense of boundless reality devoid of norms, and, likewise, *social affinity*, the search for kindred in this state of essential normlessness, so the absence of agreed norms, moral practices or ethical responsibilities, other than decided upon, in our context, by usage, users, or perhaps market forces (Durkheim, 1933). Across his work, Durkheim championed social justice by questioning its absence, and we cannot escape the fact that a lack of morally focused web governance invites broader forms of political abuse that furthers various forms of social injustice (Çam and Irmak, 2014). Merton (1938) built upon Durkheim's tradition, developing thinking with respect to Durkheim's anomie, the idea that deregulation of order erodes prior community practices and consensus, which includes undermining political governance (Merton, 1968). Such reasoning questions whether the absence of social order, or a sense of ethically driven democratic governance, is negative, or if indeed the absence of a universal 'conscience' promotes anti-human outcomes alongside liberality, itself a pro-human outcome (Çam and Irmak, 2014). Human rights, including access to the web, are defined, at length, by the United Nations (UN) but shaped, in reality, by situational context and legality, not any true social universality (Merton, 1968).

Therefore, such suggestive web social contracts, as argued for by the UN, or similarly by Berners-Lee and Web Scientists, are ultimately non-binding, despite being admirable conceptual ideas. Hence, they are worthless in settings where concepts of humanity and entitlement, as a living being, is suggested as not as important as that of politically motivated opinions of right and wrong. Often spoken by corrupt, abusive and military backed governments who, unlike the dinosaurs they resemble, have yet to become extinct. In SE Asia, the lives of those who protest are seen as cheap, disposable or destroyable. More importantly, human rights are not understood as something that need protecting, in certain authoritarian circles. Meanwhile, while common ideas of 'just' and 'justice' are influenced across, and decided by, consensus in all social levels- they can be overwritten by those with considerable political power (Pohle and Van Audenhove, 2017). Durkheim (1933) similarly infers that in anomie, the absence of traditional social ordering is not about democratic participation: the powerful influencing a society shape the status quo and decide acceptability for the

majority. To this end, it is impossible to determine what a just social contract is for the whole world, as well as for the web.

Thai Censorship: Digital Reverse Culture Shock as a State of 'new' Normlessness in Thailand?

Furthermore, different cultures all have different ideas of what being pro-human means; there is also no global agreement over what being anti-human means, nor justice (Merton, 1938). For conservative citizens in Thailand, protesting online, and off, is not pro-human. Durkheim (1933), in contrast, suggested that there is not anything 'wrong' with the absence of, or challenge to, traditional order, as resistance reshapes the norm and 'it is not sufficient for there to be rules, however, for sometimes the rules themselves are a cause of evil' (Durkheim, 1933, p. 374). Hence, it is fair to assume most in Web Science have, probably, never protested for human rights at the risk of imprisonment under Section 112 of the Thai Criminal Code, a law that if violated, or even interpreted as offending anyone in its framework, carries a prison sentence. In contrast, Thai students protesting in universities, some about digital rights and often resulting in imprisonment, then, seem to be doing a much more prolific job of advancing critical discussion about inclusive, sustainable and intelligent web governance, alongside Thai social inclusion, across the global stage.

We must, therefore, inevitably question if developing grand agendas for the web and seeking to export them globally inclines a culture of western academics articulating ego-driven views for a phenomenon they have little control over, or even much influence with respect to. Or, perhaps, ask critically what the true motivations are for raising such questions in the first place, in an increasingly competitive academic landscape madly driven not for student welfare, but for stable windfalls. We likewise need to avoid the suggestion of what we might think of as digital colonialism. Each country has a different cultural attitude with respect to digital freedoms and social, alongside technical, rights. If we assume that change can be willed into the web, and the users, of countries we have never set foot within, then, we begin to lean back and become technically focused, deterministic and likely-AI-fascinated researchers. Computer Science has long seen digital human rights as one might a slow-moving horse. So, one that is all too easy to hitch a cart onto, possibly to advance a narrative, when timing suits, perhaps when a lab needed to fund their next timely research project, pay-to-play conference, academic research impact framework or promotion committee.

Anthony Giddens (2014), a sociologist concerned with globalisation, infers that as 'universal social ideals' shift, so does activity, risk, strain, acceptability, identity and reward, as a by-product of socio-technical 'unlimited' agency. It is no surprise this extends to academia. Across his work, the author echoes Durkheim's social infinity, which is found in and on the web; Giddens (2014) seeks to consider how ethical dilemmas produce wider, global network changes, though is less concerned with

adopting an absolutist view of what global society should look like. For example, Edward Snowden, a CIA analyst, exposed PRISM, a US government operation intercepting user data, which led to social changes in privacy expectations (Pohle and Van Audenhove, 2017; Kumar, 2017). Applied to the web, the data mined by industrial forces, or governments, might be unethical, but the ends could justify the means if it prevents, for example, terrorism. Or, alternatively, fuels educative services; Google often profile our search data and patterns to improve their services.

Therefore, to echo Mestrovic (1998), social contracts 'deemed worthy of respect by most of society's members will be regarded as just, and, of course, every society will have standards of justice peculiar to it in addition to some standards that might be termed universal' (Mestrovic, 1998, p. 194). Hence, if Thailand is split in opinion, and it is, over the protest movement and very concept of expression itself, with an older conservative majority set against an emancipated youth, then it is not all Thai society calling for pro-human digital governance. Few in Thailand know what the Web Foundation is, or why they should listen to them. Nor, in Thailand, can one easily teach about pro-human views of the web without risk of imprisonment (HRW, 2019). Freedom to use the web, to punish or liberate, is possible due to lack of governance in its original design (Kumar, 2017). When we look towards Giddens' position on justice, we find it subjective; consensus is not universal, and it is natural governments will determine certain norms, practices, and ideas of social acceptability with respect to expression (Tucker, 1998). Web governance is problematic; it is inevitably impeded by regional, geographical, cultural, economic, political and linguistic divisions.

These are but a few components widening not just a digital, but a socio-technical divide in Thailand. For Castiglione (2015), a philosophy of encapsulated interest produces an advantage. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) might control usage on behalf of a government in Thailand, but in exchange citizens can access the Internet, something that was far less widespread ten years ago. Growing web participation has led to increased military scrutiny. In one view, people are being pro-human by being pro-themselves. This includes the Thai government. The problem is, of course, there may be some confusion over what pro-human usage should mean. Indeed, in Thailand, education and critical thinking is still developing (OECD, 2019). For Thailand, as of 2021, we find a culture of digital paranoia, surveillance and an Internet Panopticon co-existing alongside a constitutional right to freedom of expression (Day & Skulsuthavong, 2021a).

This creates a confusing landscape for citizens seeking to mobilise social transformation, ensuring a state of deliberate uncertainty and fear inherent to a system of authoritarianism. A military coup-d'état occurred in 2014, then was ratified by a subsequently elected government in 2019, led in both instances by, upon writing, the now Prime Minister, General Prayuth Chan-o-cha. In what followed, changes to the freedoms with respect to the web occurred, as, likewise, did repression concerning sexual, political and social activity, that had been building as a result of conservative agendas to influence Thai society back towards older generational values that rely heavily on creating an ideological adherence in favour of nationalism (Shytov, 2015). Censorship in Thailand is seen as needed, by many conservatives, because a state of digital reverse culture shock among young people has led to political unrest;

connected via the web, unrest is a very real and an increasing problem for conservative forces.

New users of the web are the first generation of 'next-gen' Thais, those with a more global outlook, hence digitally emancipated from a previously tightly politically controlled education system with a heavy emphasis on Rote pedagogy, ancestral traditions, hazing that is built in a wider setting constructed around filial piety and deference to elders (Day & Skulsuthavong, 2021b). Given a significant socioeconomic divide, for many Thai citizens overseas travel, hence global exposure to contrasting practices that would have changed the way citizens think, was unthinkable. Such travel was reserved for the wealthy, who are often conservative in Thailand due to the centralised nature of business dealings operated nearly exclusively from the Thai capital, Bangkok. Family business dynasties are not uncommon, with a large amount of wealth held by a very small minority, and no clearly defined middle class, which has created a serfdom mentality for most working-class Thais; employers have much greater control over the private lives of Thai citizens and a national emphasis on Buddhist traditions encourages deference further, often out of fear of metaphysical punishment, a particular concern for many spiritually motivated Thais.

Therefore, advancement in Thailand previously required considerable political capital. The Internet, as a tool of democratic communication, expanded access to affordable 4G mobile Internet data, which has widened opportunities for Thais. The world was once a far-away place for many Thais. Now, citizens of a country with an economy built around serving tourism, and their government, can digitally travel the globe and, in doing so, connect with 'otherness', so new political ideas, identities and cultures. As a result, some Thai citizens return, in a manner of speaking, in reverse to their prior thinking; finding affinity online for views that had to be repressed, or were, prior to the web, ideologically punished by government-mandated educational ordering and elite-held power, has redefined their entire cognition (Low et al., 2020). This creates a state of psychological shock upon seeing the freedoms of others compared to their own. Subsequently, initiatives to prevent this have unfolded in the last decade. The Thai Computer Crime Act (TCCA, 2007) has been a polarising tool to this end, granting far-ranging, yet vague, powers over Web activity, which the 2019-elected government, allegedly, have used to police dissent against the legitimacy of their coup d'état or, starting from 2020, those who encourage protest (Pitaksantayothin, 2014; Kummetha, 2015).

Thailand's Internet 'Blue Pencilling' Doctrine?

What is fascinating, however, is that brutal punishment, such as imprisonment, for having controversial, or even just critical, opinions is socially acceptable to many conservative Thai citizens because the country has had an embedded attitude of surveillance, and a class-subordinated mentality, established over hundreds of years (Ramasoota, 2000). Controlling media, for example, can be traced, in one instance, to a government initiative to minimise Thailand's reputation as a sex trade

industry. Indeed, many ISPs still block pornography in 2021 despite the contradictory, yet widespread acceptance, of Thailand as a popular destination for sex tourism (Nuttavuthisit, 2007; Manokha, 2018; Boonchutima, 2009; McDowall and Ma, 2010). Often, what is suggested as protection of Thai citizens, or the nation, due to inexperience, or poor education, is part of government rhetoric. To this end, what we describe within this chapter as an 'Internet blue pencil doctrine' emerged in 2014 as an alternative social 'contract for the web' in Thailand; challenges to the constitution led to a radical rewriting of legal freedoms within Thailand, to legitimatise a coup against a democratically elected government that had agreed to hold another election, to enable dissatisfied citizens to vote for new leaders. The concept of 'blue pencilling' is found in westernised legal thinking to create legally valid adjustments of a contract, so allows a system of governance, such as a court, to change part of a pre-existing legislation without starting over (Pivateau, 2008).

The revised version is meant to represent the original vision. So, not shift a negative to a positive, thereby allowing biased rectification. Indeed, we could argue that Thailand's constitutional charter has been blue-pencilled more than once; the 2017 constitution was approved, initially as a charter reform in August 2016, by approximately 60% of Thai voters. Though, at this time, dissent or disagreement about the proposed rewriting of the constitution led to a decade in jail (Ghosh, 2016). As of April 2017, six changes were made to then voter-approved charter and, allegedly, this was not known until after the public ratification, suggested by the government as acceptable because of the 'complexity' of the changes (Bangkok Post, 2017; Bangprapa, 2016). Internet blue pencilling is used, in this chapter, to describe the self-appointed reactive adjustments to relevant laws, and the constitution, by countries, such as Thailand, who favour increasingly harsh penalties tied to speaking out online and with respect to the web. Usually, against specific actors and concerning advancements in the sophistication of their usage and expression of opinion via social media channels. Thus, it is a doctrine that must keep up with advancements in citizens' socio-technical behaviour, so is inherently reactive.

Global social infinity and affinity of the web was, to a government led by predominately older generation conservative Thais newly elected in 2019, a complicated threat to tackle. These same leaders were central in the military junta in 2014, which is why many changes have been reactive because the widespread adoption of the Internet has only, and easily, emerged in Thailand over the last decade (Pitaksantayothin, 2014). Indeed, there is a matter of generational expertise. The Prime Minister, General Prayuth Chan-o-cha, drew considerable media interest in 2019 when he was reported as suggesting, at a UN assembly, that use of Google was an innovative tool for 'executives' and hence something that many 'everyday' Thais had yet to master (Bangkok Post, 2019). Internet blue pencilling grew as web infrastructure developed; now, in 2022, Thailand is at a point where 5G is widely available. Thus, a cycle tied to freedom of expression and a need to limit this has unfolded, followed by retrospective pencilling of rules and a race, by users, to find methods to circumvent censorship, data surveillance and page-blocking (Laungaramsri, 2016; Bunyavejchewin, 2010; Gebhart et al., 2017).

This creates a Thai Internet arms race, where one set of actors constantly responds to the other, creating new ways to prosecute, or share and populate, views that go against values deeply embedded within the conservative fabric of Thai society. Discussing them even abstractly is considered taboo, or treason worthy of imprisonment (HRW, 2019). Some argue Kafkaesque rules are applied in Thailand and, indeed, as area studies scholars the authors are unable to repeat controversial views under Thai law, which is so far reaching it includes describing them academically (Streckfuss, 2011; ONI, 2012). More accurately, confusion arises because acts of expression are constitutionally protected, so free. Citizens can have an opinion and have a right to expression but, legally, some acts of expression are also simultaneously criminal (Srinuan et al., 2011).

There is likewise a cultural component. It is no surprise Thais seek to use the web to speak out; expressing negatively, in person, acts against being *Kreng Jai* (เกรงใจ), the cultural practice of consideration and respect, often by repressing one's feelings, even in the face of attack, which is embedded in a framework of 'Thainess' and a 'face' culture (Wyatt and Promkandorn, 2012). Therefore, for some, speaking out in public domains about Thailand, or figures within it, is inherently un-Thai; anonymity afforded by the web forced the Thai government to adjust the TCCA, from 2014 onwards, to regulate negative, globally reaching political opinion voiced by citizens within Thailand, which was potentially driven by fears of it affecting 'Thailand's face' (Farrelly, 2010; Shklovski and Kotamraju, 2011; Gebhart et al., 2017). ONI (2012) has long argued that human rights violations are a feature in Thailand. This was very clear at the time of the 2014 coup (O'Brien, 2014). Therefore, the widening reach of the TCCA after 2014 to stop junta dissidents, seen in increases of blocked pages and malicious tracking used to prosecute citizens for criticising what was then a military regime (Laungaramsri, 2016; TCCA, 2007; Gebhart et al., 2017).

The continuation of these methods of censorship after a 2019 democratic election was a catalyst of much of the political resistance that was seen among everyday citizens in 2020 and 2021. However, it is a mistake to assume all social contracts need to be democratic, because a social contract is, often, first a governance contract, so one intended to create order and prevent anomie. So, it entails submission between the people and governing force implementing it. Put another way, in Thailand, it is the Prime Minister, General Prayuth Chan-o-cha, who defines 'the terms on which society is to be governed: the people have made a contract… which determines their relations with him' (Gough, 1936, pp. 2–3). Consequently, the nine ideological points to better the web, described by Berners-Lee, clash with the TCCA and leave Thai citizens vulnerable to harm, rather than promoting pro-human outcomes. This is problematic and highlights why western views of web freedoms do not necessarily translate to other nations, with different cultural systems and social agreements. Therefore, can we even consider such a web contract to be pro-human, in Thailand?

For Durkheim (1933) disagreement shapes division, which can be 'a source of social cohesion' and efforts, therefore, to limit activity often increase it (Durkheim, 1933, p. 395). Indeed, culture is shaping of cognition (Low et al., 2020). Cycles of resistance, then, shape social transformation. Yet, to challenge authority is to

challenge being Thai, for many citizens; Thai media outlets have long been influenced by the military, or conservative powerful elites in strong business positions, which further embeds conservative rhetoric into the fabric of Thailand and rules that govern daily life (Talcoth, 2015). For example, the Thai Emergency Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situation (B.E. 2548–2005) grants power, during any crisis, over all communication (Article 19, 2020). Such a state has been in effect since Coronavirus (COVID-19) spread to Thailand; as a hub of tourism for Chinese tourists, Thailand had an estimated 20,000 visitors early in the global pandemic (Wipatayotin, 2020). Given the age of the act, the word 'web' is seldom mentioned in the translation. Its terminology instead covers any form of media likely to terrify the public or is distorted to bring about a misunderstanding (TCCA, 2018).

Comprehensive digital literacy education about the web is still low within Thailand. Thus, this sometimes is used as a justification for a need to control online information, by the government. This has been seen during the COVID-19 crisis, when opportunists sought to exploit a state of crisis and created several states of localised panic (Talcoth, 2015; Rojanaphruk, 2019; Day & Skulsuthavong, 2021a). While government censorship could be debated as unethical, philosopher David Hume (1777) felt it is not an issue if people 'pay obedience more from fear and necessity, than from any idea of allegiance or of moral obligation' (Hume, 1777, p. 472) and we could argue that by following the Thai government, as a citizen, rather than renouncing citizenship and leaving Thailand, 'every individual has given tacit consent' to authoritarian governance (Hume, 1777, p. 475). Indeed, within Thailand public opinion over a right to privacy, expression and social compliance often is divided politically, economically, intellectually and across generations. There is no Thai consensus, yet there are often dynamic efforts to try to instal a conservative ideology.

Prohibition of 'Dangerous' Temptations or Dominating Deviance?

In 2015, the Thai *Prevention and Suppression of Temptations to Dangerous Behaviours* act proposed to blue pencil Section 287 of the Thai penal code, so reinforce TCCA rules against criminal, and more vaguely, deviant sexual behaviour. It began, commendably, as an act to stop child pornography; a pro-human undertaking by the Thai government, one acting of a pro-human social contract. Kummetha and Areerat (2015), however, argued that the terminology included vague ideas that could be interpreted widely as covering group sex, bondage, as the harm of physical form, or the sale of sexuality, in a country with an already socially stigmatised sex worker industry. Interestingly, many articles were once searchable about it, yet, upon writing, are not easily found when you search within Thailand; this might be a result of the rapid increase of search engine data, or the possibility of compliance from ISPs in Thailand, who have long been influenced by the Thai government, including

in November 2020 when MDES banned Pornhub, a popular online pornography website, along with 190 others, leading to a spike of 640% in searches for Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to circumvent the ban, compared to the September–October daily average (Reuters, 2020).

Sex work is hardly uncommon in Thailand; the government has long-driven agendas to eradicate Thailand's reputation as a place of sexual service to maintain Thai face and limit potential for embarrassment at a nation-level, an idea that many Thais are deeply concerned about because of a strong nationalist pride that is held, in particular, among ultra conservatives in positions of power (Boonchutima, 2009). There is, then, a mixture of ethical points, as well as implications for social contracts within Thailand; certainly, attempting to limit the harm of children is important. The proposed challenge and increase of prosecution related to this could yield greater pro-human outcomes. However, without the ability to freely use the web to arrange, vet and be paid for sexual services, blacklisted by ambiguousness of the proposed reforms, potentially alienates an already vulnerable minority, sex workers, within a wider, highly conservative Thai culture. Some sex workers, of course, could ignore the law, but this chapter has discussed, at length, that Thailand has a punitive and authoritarian view of violating laws rooted in 'Thainess'.

Therefore, ignoring the rules after the Thai government launched campaigns to rehabilitate Thailand's salacious sex worker image is unwise, and indeed many legitimate sex workers narratives can be lost among arguments concerning trafficking and criminality that prevail in discussions about sex work and gender equality in Thailand (McDowall and Ma, 2010). Hence, Thai sex workers cannot exist online, nor can they safely operate without potential security afforded by using the Internet freely. This creates a context of empowerment, control, economic need and affirmation, as also argued by a contract for the web. Likewise, these are suggested as reasons for engaging in sex work, in countries where prejudice and, indeed patriarchal dominance, in particular over women, rules as a dominant political force (Robinson, 2012). It could be said that Thailand is one such country. Although, of course, not the only gender of a sex worker in Thailand, the public role of women, and gender equality, is often state-constructed, or, at the very least, strongly influenced by traditional television and print media that, in turn, is influenced by political forces (Skulsuthavong, 2016). These often conservatively dominate much of the public sphere, as well as design of learning found in mainstream education systems that lack considerable development compared to international standards, because they do not really champion equality, use of the web to access diverse learning material, or critical thinking skills, so offer a direct contrast to the way learning is being reshaped in western settings and institutions (Web Foundation, 2020; Crooks and Baur, 2011; Fongkaew, 2017).

Undoubtedly, in Thailand, liberation found in sex work helps circumvent patriarchal views in Thailand of men being served by women, via their sexuality being tied to marriage and duty to the home. However, sex work is often met by counter-power moves by Thai political coalitions and public groups, motivated towards the position that is the right of society to dictate women's behaviour: sexually, politically, economically or socially (Buranajaroenkij, 2017). Sutherland (2004) offers an analysis of

sex work in developing nations, such as Thailand, which questions the objectification of the sex worker as relying on sexuality for survival. In their view, this stigmatises sex workers' sexuality, as if to proscribe a lack of it therein. Cases of Thailand's traffic-driven sex work, discussed by Barry (1995), describe stories of the dehumanisation of Thai women. However, a complex socio-technical economy surrounding the sex trade, and the empowerment of women through it, in Thailand, emerged in the 1970s, with the posting of US soldiers, and evolved into an industry furthered by technology (Bishop and Robinson, 1997). There is, as a result, a digital sexual free market in Thailand, not just binaries such as victim/agency, danger/pleasure or even poverty-stricken streetwalker/'high-class' escort (Robinson, 2012).

The Internet has played a central role in furthering Thai sex work and alternative feminist studies argue some sex workers can even use it to engage in being trafficked, demonstrating power, rather than structural coercion as objects, or victims (Ruenkaew, 2002; Ferreira, 2015). Others engage in sex work as industrialists; they connect via social media, and other web driven methods, with sex tourists, with whom they can travel, or even relocate abroad with and then seek work legitimately, if they have sufficient education to do so (Resurreccion, 2017). Consequently, Thai sex workers targeted by Internet prohibition are seen, within such conservative reform, almost as disposable objects, victimised by theme-park thrill-seeking sex tourists and therefore in need of protection by a male-dominated Thai government, in turn seeking to protect the reputation of Thailand and thus extend the mythos sought by conservatives (Nuttavuthisit, 2007). However, in some, perhaps even many, instances, these are workers who act as business owners invested in their own personal development, not anthropomorphised theme-park characters posing for photos. So, we contend that they should not be disadvantaged, rather recognised inclusively as professional agents.

Studies of social media technology and sex work affirm that sexuality and health education is enhanced through freedom to use the web (Weaver, 2018; Phuengsamran et al., 2018). Social media dating applications, for example, are one way used to better vet clients (Visrutaratna et al., 2018). Within the UK, one study suggested that many sex workers felt that the web, and social media, improved conditions and reduced their workload because the growing popularity of BDSM and webcam services offered new sources of income (Sanders et al. 2017). Therefore, it is not as clear-cut to suggest that using the web for sexual servicing is anti-human, as is sought by social contract and governance in Thailand. An open web is thus important to Thailand's future, and repression of sexuality with respect to it is problematic, potentially detrimental. The web empowers counselling about sexual rights, grants health information, while dilutes, through connective affinity, the impact of stigmatisation in Thai state-levied conservative media, which historically has impacted inclusive equality for the Thai LGBTQ community (Kille et al. 2017).

As of 2016, there was an estimated 300,000 sex workers in Thailand (Muangjan et al., 2016). UNICEF Thailand, supported by Mahidol University, investigated pressures on young people in education, with respect to sex, and found that 31.7% of young women agreed with the statement 'a woman cannot refuse to have sex with her

husband because it is her duty' (Center for Health Policy Studies, Mahidol University, 2016, p. 25). Within this same study, it was found young people of sexually active age, engaged in mainstream education, lacked a correct understanding about sexuality, menstruation and contraception, as evidenced via incorrect multiple-choice responses when compared to their own estimation of their understanding of sexuality. In Thailand, the web offers an evidence trail to those seeking to target vulnerable groups; sexual deviance, such as sex work on the web, is seen by conservative nationalists as damaging society (Skulsuthavong, 2016; Phaka, 2014).

The TCCA and Emergency Act grant powers to arrest people for any communication seen to convey harm to Thai citizens. For some, in Thailand, the Thai government's approach could even be seen as a 'just' social contract, keeping order based on one set of patriarchal cultural values that have long been established and, for many, are preferred. Yet, social transformation within the parameters of pre-existing law begins by teaching about, as well as discussing, the web and considering pro-human principles, which is challenging given a lack of emphasis on critical thinking, a problem within Thai education (OECD, 2019; Day, 2019; Day and Skulsuthavong, 2021a). Meanwhile, the governing effort to maintain a decades-old way of conservative thinking does little to help matters. However, within the waves of protests, younger generations of Thai citizens have demonstrated that the power of conservative ways of thinking is not just diminishing, but is no longer relevant. This has a lot to do with them gaining, through digital reverse culture shock, a much broader mindset of what their freedoms, hence critical thinking, should be.

Conclusion: A Thai Digital Civil Rights Movement? Inclusive Futures in Thailand

With a global mindset cultivated and empowered by Internet connectivity, young protestors have been calling out for a more inclusive society. One where minority groups, such as LGBTQ, for example, are respected for their differences and sex workers are no longer criminalised. To those outside Thailand, it may seem strange that for many Thais, reality is a harsh and uncaring inferno, rather than paradise. Such views are lost, perhaps in what is an easy to mistake to make. So, Thai social and political mild tolerance to gain tourist-driven economic advantage, then, is not the same as a liberal and a global perception of sex work, or social expression based around democratic liberality, built by the respecting of marginal groups. Hence, as of 2022, the Thai government allowing certain acts to continue is really a tool to reap the benefits of economic tourism and creates a reality where those who seek to champion the welfare of different groups advocating against the government, which includes many points raised in protests, actually are met with hostility and repression (Thongnoi, 2020). This slows reform to a point of regression, as those who seek change are often imprisoned for violating rules deemed as such by a conservative majority in powerful positions. Inevitably, Thailand is highly conservative and those

that exist beyond that sphere are persecuted, behind the scenes; conservative media and public figures have challenged such movement towards greater equality. For example, in the case of advocating for sex workers rights and welfare, as is discussed above, conservative Thai critics usually offer reply, at a political level, as uninformed and misguided. The more hostile conservatives have gone so far to suggest that those who advocate, or protest, are hiding an intention and desire to be a sex worker (AFP, 2020c).

Such an idea may seem far-fetched, perhaps even amusing. However, as established in the opening of this chapter, an intrinsic feature of 'Thainess' is the creation of myths, often by conservative figureheads, who then seek to write a narrative of themselves as champions, protectors or guardians of Thailand, thereby protecting it from some kind of deviance that requires challenge. Actually, this is intended to preserve historical ordering, so perpetuates further cycles of ancestrally indoctrinated, highly ritualised ideas that determine what is, or is not, acceptable to Thai culture, in the view of Thai 'high society' that controls much of the wealth, and, as such, lives, of everyday Thai citizens. Over time, this becomes 'built' into the nature of being Thai (Low et al., 2020). This, likewise, provides the perfect excuse to engage in a Thai coup-loop, whereby a coup is periodically justified as needed to protect conservative values, anytime progress is felt, or measured, towards democracy or liberality. Mestrovic (1998, p. 194) argues that such values-driven egoism erodes society, but it can likewise construct it by polarising groups and drawing opponents together. Thailand is a high-context culture; linguistic interaction, even on social media, such as Tweets, are scrutinised for meaning, and the slightest offence leads to peer-reporting because of a sense of personal attack, with conservatively indoctrinated citizens quick to defend their leaders out of a concern for their presumed loss of face.

Thus, there is little concern for the welfare of other humans in a shared democracy, rather support of a successful government driving surveillance culture in Thailand to protect everyone from anything and anyone that might seek to disrupt the sustained loops of mythic stability. However, this Thai 'culture of looping' and mythos is one supported by wider consensus of agreement among citizens about historic nationalism, Thainess and protection of the nation as a justification for many actions. Undeniably, to borrow from noted sociologist Max Weber (1946), many Thais still obey the government because they 'believe in the leader' General Prayuth Chan-o-cha, and in doing so further devotion to 'his disciples, his followers, his personal party friends' creating a myth 'oriented to his person and to its qualities' (Weber, 1946, p. 79). We can find many examples of this in Thailand. For example, upon writing, when an executive assistant within the Thai Prime Minister's Office reported a criminal charge against an everyday citizen, whose social media Tweet criticised their leader for illegitimately seizing power, then alleged that they are unable to do the job they took via a legitimate-yet-contested election (Ngamkham, 2021).

This lends weight to the idea that even a single critical Thai voice is seen as dangerous, dissenting and disturbing of the created myth, perhaps even cult. Hence, it is a criminal offence to say otherwise, and the web is thereby a disruptive presence because social media enables distribution of such ideas beyond casual

whispers between citizens in their homes. Politically, those who protest are eradicated from society entirely, along with anyone who spreads such views (Ngamkham, 2021). After all, if we return to classical ideas found in thinking about a state and social contract, we find that it is thus interconnected with the personalities of those governing, and these people state where the law is, can or should not be applied, often with little consistency (Gough, 1936; Waters and Waters, 2015). Consequently, can Berners-Lee's contract exist in Thailand, without creating injustice? Perhaps we should move away from promoting and calling for web governance based on humanistic values, asking instead what changes bring stability. This echoes the neutrality of Actor-Network Theory (ANT).

Articulated by Bruno Latour (2010), ANT seeks to step away from moralistic bias, tracing instead the problems in networked relationships, which are never just socially constructed by one actor, such as the Thai government or its political leader. Instead, ANT positions a grand relational symmetry unfolding between humans and non-humans. Therefore, an actor-network is defined by Latour (2010) as the sum of 'moving parts, and you have a whole. And then the only remaining question is to find a possible solution to combine or reconcile the parts with the whole' (Latour, 2010, p. 8). Echoing Donna Haraway (1985), socio-technical cyborgs are in the driving seat of our web in Thailand, and the conservative Thai political elite see themselves as a resistance movement. Meanwhile, there are perhaps too many complex actor-networks to count, at least within Thailand and affecting web freedoms. We could still try to follow the ideas of the Web Foundation. However, this group once, at the Southbank Centre, London, UK, in 2014, sought to disperse their social contract as ideas via soliciting the public in awareness campaigns and leaflets for a web, they claimed, the world wanted, ironically at the same time as the current Thai political elite took power in a coup then repressed the Internet. As of 2022, it seems, such a UK public were largely unconcerned with the points being raised to them by the Web Foundation, who seek pro-human governance for everyone (Web Foundation, 2014).

It would be interesting, perhaps amusing, to see if this kind of social empowerment campaign could even be recreated in Sukhumvit, Bangkok, Thailand; a popular point of tourism, like Southbank, it is famous for soliciting a very different kind of engagement and entertainment. The infamous Soi-Cowboy, a popular location within this district, is a free market for outsider sexual deviance (McDowall and Ma, 2010; Barme, 2002). However, in such a location, as in many parts of Thailand, disciples of Berners-Lee and those seeking to narrate what the web should be, according to western values, will more-than-likely encounter a scene akin to Weber's (1958) often used quote from *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism.* So, not a deeply concerned public but 'narrow specialists without mind, pleasure-seekers without heart; in its conceit, this nothingness imagines it has climbed to a level of humanity never before attained' (Karlberg, 2005, p. 124). Thus, if Web Science wants an inclusive, intelligent and sustainable web, less 'safely situated' agendas describing what the web should be, or could be, are needed. Rather, as this chapter intends, a reality is check is required, one suggesting it needs to engage more readily, and directly, with the here, now and those most persecuted, without digital

rights or welfare. Especially given that much of the narrative discussed at present in the domain of digital web futures is, at best, hypothetical technical futures about machine learning masquerading as intelligent, 5G telecoms agendas and what, to some situated far and away from a western setting, might be easily mistaken as digitally Orientalist, so, undoubtedly, colonial. After all, what is an advocacy manifesto or contract for the web? Essentially, the views of digitally empowered, academically privileged actors, maybe even better seen as colonisers, who are seeking to impose a sense of religion, language, economics, myth, ethics and other cultural practices as akin to west-is-best, when, in reality, calling for inclusive web governance is a far flung idea, if attempted in Thailand (Berendt et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2016).

Meanwhile, we face a time when Thai students, upon writing, are protesting for human rights connected to the Internet, and challenging historical dominance of expression, all in a culture built around principles of surveillance, hierarchy and patriarchy (Chetchotiros et al., 2020). Their movement is a turning point for Thailand, but it creates turbulence. Even giants such as Facebook are not immune from being rocked. This was seen when the social media network took down a controversial political group, in late August 2020, at the request of the Thai government and then replied with the suggestion of legal action, as Thai protesters expressed disappointment and a sense of betrayal linked to their favouring of big business over the rights of users in Thailand (Beech, 2019, 2020). Consequently, in this landscape, we must remember no contract for the web can be an effective universal script. A wider, more dominant set of conservative forces influence decision making and social transformation for many Thais, who willingly and openly embrace their governance, seeing it as good leadership and not oppression (Day & Skulsuthavong, 2021a, 2021b).

Of course, moving towards a more pro-human web in Thailand means we should follow the advice of Web Science to secure an 'inclusive, intelligent and sustainable' dialogue and promote education systems to reflect the growing digital shift among young people, by reinventing education and establishing principles for web education (Day, 2019; Day et al., 2021). However, this needs to be more than stirring manifestos from the safety of the side-lines. After all, on 25 March 2021, the Thai political Minister for Higher Education was reported as suggesting that academic freedom, in Thai higher education, is conditional and subject to nationalist expectations, hence anyone of critical view should not be in the Thai academic community (Voice Online, 2021). Indeed, both authors of this chapter followed his advice a year before, in part due to the shifting landscape of academic repression and pedagogical regression that required adherence to principles that were inherently un-academic. Furthermore, the culture of racial, gender, and sexual stigmatisation in Thailand now extends, as of 2022, far beyond academic culture, and towards an intrinsic ideological feature and war of indoctrination that has reshaped many Thais, helped through and by ancestral conditioning inclining service and servitude towards those more wealthy, hence seen as powerful (Low et al., 2020).

Therefore, changing the web in this setting might require much more human rights mediation beyond the limited, though ideal, scope of thinking found in Berners-Lee's contract. The time for manifestos, contracts or conferences is, however, probably long past in SE Asia. Web Science now concerns itself with intelligence that is artificial,

and at best still algorithmic, so lacks sentience. Yet, there are sentient Thai students currently sat in very real, so distinctly un-hypothetical, prisons, which are widely considered to be some of the most brutal in the world. Their sentences will last for decades. To these students, a contract for the web communicated just in English and ultimately unbinding in law is of little help; not everyone in Thailand can read English and, indeed, literacy levels are generally considered to be some of the lowest in all of ASEAN (OECD, 2019). However, the digital future is approaching, and young digital Thai natives have already been prepared. They seem to be more-than-ready, perhaps even beyond that of academics, to challenge what they believe is unjust. Yet, as they do so, the harder and longer the government or conservative voices try to resist, or more brutally they reply in force.

Hence, this conflict will not only prolong the disruption of change, along with social transformation, but it will also be seen as making the very citizens of Thailand an enemy, and the focus of a dominant military government fully prepared to prosecute any individual that operates beyond the values and myth they seek to create, cultivate and maintain in a cycle of repetition. This is less than ideal, in a period that could instead be fostering not only a Thai digital renaissance, which Thailand seems primed for given an explosive development of 5G connectivity and a growing start-up culture of technological entrepreneurship, but also social inclusion and sustainable growth that comes from being able to connect, facilitate and build lives through the Internet (Day & Skulsuthavong, 2019). Now, as Web Scientists and digital rights activists, we need to be engaging with people in places where the web is not free, rather than universalising rules for it without ever having been to such places. What is clear is that the educational systems of Thailand are not without issue, or perhaps, even, are complicit in the status quo and for this reason essentially serve a government not concerned with allowing critical thinking or freedom of expression to exist within Thailand (Day et al., 2021). After all, if Thais become 'aware' of the world, then this highlights the gross inequality many live in on a daily basis, even within a major capital city like Bangkok.

It is possible, then, that Thai academia and educational development is part of the problem, not the solution. Such systems determine the future of Thai society. Teachers within education will set out, to the future young voters and citizenry public, what is, or is not, acceptable to say, do, think, or express. In such a setting, with an Internet empowered and increasingly emancipated youth, we foresee a potential for civil and economical division widening, not narrowing. Worsening digital reverse culture shock is equally problematic. Political governance and indeed, big businesses, still control much of how Thais communicate. Hence, we must be careful in articulating universal rules for a system that was built without any in mind, beyond the tools needed to communicate. There is no consensus on what acceptable web usage looks like within Thailand, so by championing a particular set of views we risk ignoring that cultural standards and personal values are seldom unified, nor should they be. At the same time, driving towards a pro-human web is still instrumental, as are the views raised by those in Web Science and Berners-Lee. Consequently, finding a way to bridge such a striking divide and difference of opinion, in order to further mediation without demanding moderation is vital for the future of Thailand.

This begins by improving how we educate about the web and reducing the stigma about its freedoms, as well as fears of reverse cultural shock. Understanding what the web is, and why change with respect to it need not be threatening, indeed, instead, can be constructive to stimulating debate in the public forum to create a more diverse society, is a vital first step towards reuniting a society that has been fractured, not united, by the Internet. Therefore, collaboration between government, companies, universities, schools and citizens is mandatory to cultivate a communal space, accessible by all, where everyone is given freedom of expression. This is a good place to start. However, this seems like a far-fetched utopia, especially for Thailand at present, where, upon writing, critical thinking, inclusion and liberty are considered threatening to the government. Beyond this government, social elites now see everyday citizens as threats, as evidenced by the examples discussed in this chapter. When one group of powerful people view the Internet, and social media found within the web, as a tool of resistance, simply because it has introduced a hallmark of democracy, that is democratising knowledge and power among citizens by enabling them to create a public sphere and voice, we find overall social progress, along with transformation, stalled. Another significant problem is that a now shocked younger generation of Thais sees the web as a tool of empowerment and a space where voices are heard, so increasingly flock to it for an escape. So, they become less defined by their domestic citizenship, and more by life as digital citizens (Day, 2014).

Therefore, socialdivision and violent clashes in Thailand will continue to be inevitable, whilst driving out more and more liberal voices. The cycle of disruption will fuel the Thai system of looping violence, which will continue until 'blue pencilling' of doctrine turns into ink, perhaps signed in blood. After all, with respect to many of those targeted for expression online, we find the future of Thailand, namely young people. Because these same younger people have experienced the web and now feel that their opinions should be respected, they will continue to protest. At the same time, they will be charged with criminal offences. For some with power, the opportunity to imprison people further strengthens the myth of being a protector of the people. Left unchecked, what is likely going to occur is clear. There will be a generational schism that results in entire families displaced from one another, simply because of expression on the Internet. After all, a Thai citizen was reported, during the junta period that began in 2014, by their parents under digital crime laws related to personal expression on social media (Prachatai, 2014).

Web education may be the least obtrusive alternative solution to equip younger generations of citizens with the skills to be more strategic and legally informed in their web usage and, ultimately, to fight for their digital rights. They should not, however, fight alone, which raises a spotlight onto agendas similarly sharing their objectives, a free and open web, but situated far and away from the front lines of the brutal situation in Thailand. Thus, for such advocates, they are free of any consequences with respect to championing a pro-human web. Despite rights to expression, Thai citizens are increasingly prosecuted by Internet blue pencilling that wants to retrospectively adjust digital activity and communication laws to militarise online activity. We have argued, across this chapter, that this particularly affects those in vulnerable fringes of Thai society. Much as it did for other racial groups in other civil

rights movements. Subsequently, we have witnessed, in the last decade, considerable political efforts born from prejudice that, for all intensive purposes, are seeking the revocation of Thai suffrage as expressed through the right to democratic opinion expressed in online public communication. This, in a very real sense, has denied Thai citizens freedoms of speech, privacy and the opportunity to grow into global participants in the wider world. Until such a time, however, that digital rights are respected, it seems young people in Thailand will continue to be treated as not only separate, but far from equal in a society built around surveillance.

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