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Newton's Socio-technical Cradle? Web Science, the Weaponisation of Social Media, Hashtag Activism and Thailand's Postcolonial Pendulum

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ABSTRACT
Throughout 2020 and into 2021, set against a global pandemic, Thai emancipatory activism unfolded. This paper offers a postmodernist theoretical discourse about such activism, built around the emergent discipline of Web Science. Drawing on a review of surveillance culture insights from Michel Foucault, Manuel Castells, Bruno Latour, Hans Kelsen and David Hume, and textual analysis insights from media studies, we frame acts of internalised colonisation by a powerful government. We suggest these are contested by 'emergent postcolonialism' via hashtag activism. As a basis for future research, we offer the theoretical model of a socio-technical political pendulum. Across it, digitally native Thais challenge internal colonialism, through counter-power drawn from the Internet as a postcolonial structure. In doing so, they propel or attract other actors. This momentum creates an emergent emancipatory society where many are still caught in the middle of shifting opinion, which is problematic to mediation. We conclude that Web Science offers a basis for educational reform in Thailand.

KEYWORDS
privacy, web science, human rights, hashtag activism, Thailand

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INTRODUCTION: WEB SCIENCE

Web Science is an emergent discipline at the forefront of interdisciplinary practice (Hendler et al. 2008). Inherently postmodernist, it is built on a challenge of the need for conclusions about the World Wide Web (the Web). It favours a Web of technical changeability alongside human mercurialism, which support knowledge emancipation (Halford et al. 2010). As a result, Web Science is unconcerned with equivocal finality. The Web is not fixed, nor finished.

Built atop the Internet, it has gone beyond a 'technical' thing to a place of social registration – citizenship even. Social media activity – found on the Web or communicated via apps serving it – is like worship, an activity that is repeated often. Web networks nest within others, underwritten by heterogeneity and seen in popular users of a social media platform. Consequently, the Web is real to our sense-making of the world. Yet, it echoes de-realisation; change remakes networks, communications and identity, which can extend across systems, places, people and technical entities.

As with Hegel's (2018) phenomenological approach to subjectivity, the postmodernist themes of Web Science study, for example, Artificial Intelligence (AI) coding alongside ethics and the artificiality of the structured or studied. The Web – to borrow from Hegel (2018) – has no other, nor an apparent, end. Yet, the Web is temporary, held stable by performativity. Hence, repeated practices create shape in a mediated social relationship. Terms of agreement police this flux, as do nation-states, corporations and users. This is not to say that Web Science neglects the technical or empirical scientific methods; rather, it questions dominance of technicality. To Web Scientists, this means that networks may have neither foreseeable properties nor isolated effects (Halford et al. 2010). Web Science incorporates the idea that studying the Web is hampered by disciplinary preferentialism (Hendler et al. 2008, p. 63). This separates things in a multifaceted structure. Our paper recognises a theoretical Web Science vantage to shape future empirical undertakings.

As Charney (2021) points out, scholarship takes many forms. The author (Charney 2021) also charts limits placed upon area studies scholars in Southeast Asia, such as socio-cultural and political factors. These include laws which can negate research freedoms in Thailand. For the authors, this dilemma is felt deeply. Thai activism, upon writing, challenges surveillance culture. Protests cross the parameters of Thai law; they violate *Lèse-majesté* found in Section 112 of the Thai criminal code (TLHR 2021a). What is often misunderstood is how far this extends. For example, it includes engaging with banned academics (Holmes 2017), the punishment of which can be years in a Thai prison (The Economist 2017).

Likewise, powers extended to manage COVID-19 imply a request not to repeat activist demands. The purpose of this is not to fuel negative sentiment during a pandemic or share views that violate the constitutionally justified law (Satrusayang 2020b). Upon weighing this, the authors act in compliance with the rules and Section 112. Harm comes in many forms (Dixon and Quirke 2018). However, we address surveillance culture and consider Section 36 of the 2017 Thai constitution (emphasis: to enjoy the liberty of communication by any means) (Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 2017). As Charney (2021) suggests, doing nothing adds burden, and a funded research trip to gather data, "sit outside a coffee shop

in Yangon" and then leave to safer climates, albeit not warmer, is not ideal either. Fortunately, the Web is an underexamined area of research, and we need rigorous discussion about its role in the Thai protest movement in order to understand the full extent of the transformation in Thailand.

THE TECHNICALLY DETERMINED OR SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED WEB?

First, we have to examine what the Web is. Computer Science shows us that the rules of the Web, to communicate on the Internet, are expressions of a synthetic science, and they exist because of social desire, unlike in the physical sciences where natural laws create phenomena (Hendler et al. 2008). By comparison, web protocols create an "information universe" (Berners-Lee et al. 2010). They drive social communication using Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP), Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) and Uniform Resource Locators (URLs). All of these are needed for information identification, retrieval and translation on the Web.

Science and Technology Studies (STS) has long questioned whether the social or the technical takes dominance in our world. Web protocols can be easily taught: non-experts can build websites without code-editing. In simplicity, we find emancipation. This is why the Web succeeded; it was accessible, unlike competitors Hyper-G and Microcosm (Berners-Lee 2000). In Web Science and STS, the debate of its importance is tied to the schools of thought known as Technological Determinism (TD) and Social Construction of Technology (SCOT). Explored by Halford et al. (2010), TD draws heritage from physical sciences. It suggests society has predictable complexity defined by previous scientific discovery. An example is Moore's Law, which posits the number of transistors occupying a circuit will double every two years, which has held mostly true although is gradually starting to become less apparent (Courtland 2015).

However, Gordon Moore, the engineer after whom the pseudo-law is named, has long contended that computing innovation may not hold to his own observations, given that he articulated them as a local trend at a particular point; Moore pointed towards social determinism in engineering as an explanation, exemplifying that companies decide progress relative to economics (Courtland 2015). We need only compare Hyper-G to the Web in order to see this. During the Web's earliest iteration, Hyper-G had more advanced features (Andrews et al. 1994). It was, however, complex to use by non-experts, and it was not free. This limited social adaptation, which has been core to SCOT. SCOT raises questions about autonomy, commerciality and geographical bias in changing scientific progress. Pinch and Bijker (1989) pedal a socially deterministic discussion towards 'interpretive flexibility' where

technologies emerge from social consensus. An example championed is the evolution of the bicycle and its adaption for road speed.

Applied to the 'Social Web', we can see this with social media platforms, tweets, video conferencing and technical alteration of HTML, such as via Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), allowing social customisation. Here, we can 'see' the social at work. Similarly, we can argue retro-innovation being a part of this; new or repurposed technologies used to mimic older social functions disrupt TD. Retro-innovation and interpretive flexibility often influence smartphones; the re-emergence of older-style 'flip' phones with AMOLED screens in the 'Samsung Galaxy Flip Z' combines retro-innovation with divergence from larger screens. 'Bigger is better', it seems, fails to satisfy multiple communities of practice. SCOT has relevance to data privacy and surveillance culture. Social media applications such as Snapchat, Signal and Telegram, for example, are now required to feature end-to-end encryption. This offers a return to a time before data was not observable and thus exploitable. Meanwhile, Snapchat enforces self-destructing media at a platform level. This thinking is optimal, at least for studies concerned with increasing data privacy via widening social choices (Geambasu et al. 2009).

Yet, self-destructing texts contrast a preferable technical choice rather than data being recorded on the Web, despite this being built into its design (Berners-Lee 2000). Indeed, it has not been preferable for human rights protestors in Thailand across 2020 and 2021. Here, prosecution has focused on Web hashtag activism during a pandemic, using expression of opinion as a digital evidence trail (Boonbandit 2020). Data communicated on and through the Web by a third-party mediator, such as Internet Service Providers (ISPs) or public social media platforms, is retrievable by corporations, governments or users. The Web then becomes a 'weapon' if social media activity violates legislation. In Thailand, activists have been arrested for online expression or protests organised via social media (HRW 2020a; 2020b).

In particular, Thai protests began after a new, more liberal political body, the Future Forward Party (FFP), was dissolved by a court verdict on 21 February 2020 (Boonbandit 2020). The dissolution may not have triggered Thai hashtag activism on social media, but it was a catalyst. Many young people voted for FFP in 2019, some for the first time, as a military junta had ruled Thailand since 2014 (Lawattanatrakul 2019). Michael Montesano, a Thai studies coordinator at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore, reportedly stated that the disbandment acted as a catalyst polarising politics (Peck 2020). Human Rights Watch (HRW 2020b) contested the verdict and the denied right of reply. The party's founder, Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, was judged for loaning FFP approximately 181 million Thai Baht (USD

5.8 million). This was cited as a reason for the dissolution, and its 16 executives were placed on a 10-year political ban. Subsequently, students gathered at Chulalongkorn, Thammasat and Kasetsart University to demand reform, trending Twitter hashtags (Thepgumpanat and Wongcha-um 2020).

Put another way, social media enabled individuals to gain a collective voice, furthering power. Jürgen Habermas's (1984; 1989) work is of relevance, suggesting the public sphere – such as found on the Web and social media – is a realm of discourse. Habermas (1984; 1989) described the 'public' as a space where society engages in open, critical debate, including the 'common demos'- the 'whole' citizenry. However, Hannah Arendt (1958), gave a more balanced view of the 'public' being limited by authoritarianism. This stands in contrast to Habermas's (1989) framework, which describes a space where 'all' citizens have access and debate in an unrestricted manner. In conservatively controlled Thailand, citizens struggle to fulfil Habermas's idealised 'debate'. After all, when translated into Thai, 'debate' becomes *thkt̄heīyng* (ถกเถียง), a 'quarrel' losing face.

Admittedly, Habermas (1984, p. 42) emphasises motivated rationality and idealised principle in a setting where "argumentation could be conducted openly enough and continued long enough." However, Thai censorship limits this. By August 2020, Thai students, supported by other liberally minded citizens, protested in the streets about surveillance culture (Satrusayang 2020a; 2020b). For those situated in Thailand, surveillance is not new. It increased after General Prayuth Chan-o-cha led a military coup d'état in 2014 (Article-19 2020). Protests began building after delays to the promised election made under military rule, which eventually unfolded in 2019, and such continued delay created a distrust of the military for some groups and citizens. By 2020, the media reported universities as being resistant to supporting students as protestors (Prachatai 2020). Over this period (2019-2020 and still ongoing upon writing), young people, in particular, contested authoritarian surveillance culture, often using hashtags to communicate discontent.

Their concerns were far-ranging, although they were often about freedoms enshrined in the Thai constitution, and scrutiny intensified during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic (RSF 2020; Thaitrakulpanich 2020). Politically enlightened or, for some, corrupted, there is not a distinctive political spectrum for students to rally behind: emancipatory liberal politics, rather than social liberality, is a relatively new idea. As Kongkirati and Kanchoochat (2018) argued when examining political leadership in Thailand between 2014 and 2018, this is due to decades-long efforts to shift the public attention away from politics or forming a personal political ideology. This has resulted in only a few focal actors' ideas, and it is here we gain the first sense of internal colonisation. The Thai junta from 2014-2018 held considerable

support (Kongkirati and Kanchoochat 2018). This centralised military influence in the 2019 Thai government, despite concerns raised in the media about electoral validity and representation of all Thai voters (Ellis-Peterson 2018).

Conservative leadership has gained popularity in Thailand in two ways. First, heritage from the widespread Thai cultural belief of the government as 'protectors' from imperialist colonisation (Winichakul 2013). Second, the relationship between the government and business elite who, in turn, govern everyday Thai citizens' life (Baker 2016; Farrelly 2013). This is because an empowered socioeconomic middle class is not fully realised, and respect of hierarchy is intrinsic to Thai culture, referred to as 'Thainess' (Skulsuthavong 2016; Persons 2008; Baker and Phongpaichit 2009). Often hashtag activism utilises non-traditional Thai language, such as emoticons, GIFs, memes and emojis, as non-verbal modes of expression. These are less well-defined and thus difficult to police; their meaning is semiotic and subtextual. Problematically, social media does shape social transformation and personal freedom in Thailand. However, understanding is required from all perspectives to realise peace between polarised groups and people (Reardon 1988). This is necessary because there is an emergent incompatibility of voices within Thai society, which has to do with internal Thai colonialism led by the government and the role of the Web as a postcolonial structure repelling one another (Talcoth 2015).

As Bayly (2016) states, colonial mentalities are forged across generations to "de-legitimate the knowledge practices of the colonised". Through surveillance practices, regimes install authoritative truths, conqueror's narratives of super irrationality and a 'civilizing mission'. Research on Thai educational systems point out a need to reform Thai education, especially literacy and thinking skills (OECD 2019). Not surprisingly, for some in Thailand, the Web is a one-size-fits-all Pandora's Box where young people, unlike their parents and grandparents, are learning from it, redefining their ideas of democracy. Younger Thai citizens are the first generation of Thais emancipated from ancestrally driven colonial knowledge via citizenship of the Web. Such reconditioning creates momentum propelling change but also brings a polarising countering force: a battle of wills over knowledge and thus power (Foucault 1976). The Web was built to exist across nations, not be governed by them (Berners-Lee 2000; Hendler 2008).

This dilemma reminds us that the Web is co-constituted. Mackenzie and Wacjman (1999) put forward the idea that technology is not a sphere beyond society, but integral to it. Hence, a 'co-constituted' perspective helps Web Scientists to question how the Web shapes what people do and how technology, in turn, facilitates power over their actions. This idea is reinforced by Actor-Network Theory (ANT), a core idea in the discipline of Web Science.

Bruno Latour (1984; 2005) offers an ANT framework that differs from SCOT in recognising socio-technical co-constitution. In it, *a priori* assumptions are discouraged about 'non-humans', a term for all technical actors (Latour 2005). These are not 'social bots' emulating human interaction online; rather, they are distinct, tangible actors of a heterogeneous network who have agency (Latour 1984; 2005).

One cannot exist, on the Web, without the other. Hence, for Latour (1991, pp. 110-111) we are "never faced with objects or social relations". Instead, a world of associations form actor-networks and translate, or transmutate, change. Neither these actors nor the networks encasing them can be distinguished as more important or arranged hierarchically relative to nature; meanwhile, power asymmetries occur relative to network enrolment, knowledge of how to mobilise and thus reach (Latour 2005). Latour (1984) offers an example of Louis Pasteur and microbiology, arguing Pasteur's discoveries relied on non-humans. Low et al. (2020) built on this when they showed cognitive processes are re-written by non-humans. Heidegger (1993, pp. 311-341) likewise described technology as "enframing" society in an ordering chain where a broken link collapses entire actor-networks. Similarly, Kierkegaard (1846, p. 60) described a network of relations where the 'public' are created by 'the press', a technical instrument holding actors "who never are and never can be united in an actual situation or organisation" yet exert informed collective power. Indeed, it is the enrolment and mobilisation of these actors that fascinated Latour (2005). By splitting the social from the technical, or human from the non-human, Latour (2005) felt we ignored that power and domination are what matters. Put another way, the human and non-human need to be seen as equal variables of a network to describe power and its relations.

THAI SURVEILLANCE CULTURE AND 'SOCIO-TECHNICAL' RIGHTS

Thailand has an authoritarian surveillance culture that weaponises the Web, upheld by constitutional law. It thus diverges from 'general' state surveillance (Lyon 2017, p. 825). The government created a socio-technical 'Thai Internet Panopticon', a term borrowed from sociologist Michel Foucault to describe law combined with a peer-driven internalised surveillance ethos embedded into the cultural fabric of society and embraced by many (Day and Skulsuthavong 2021). Laungaramsri (2016) describes military influence over ISPs and academics via "re-education". Pitaksantayothin (2014) debates 'reform' of communication freedoms. Gebhart et al (2017) offer findings of phishing scams, false landing pages and data scraping of Thai citizens. Through these studies, we see weaponisation of the Web supported by peer-reporting (Article-19 2020). Wiroj Lakkhanaadisorn, a former FFP member, alleged, during a televised debate on 25 February 2020, that Thailand's Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) ran information operations (IO) against government critics, set up fake

social media accounts and requested funding to publish news articles (Wangkiat 2020; Sattaburuth 2020; BBC Thai 2020). Per socio-technical co-constitution, #รู้ทันIO (IOExposed) trended as a non-human Twitter hashtag in reply to this accusation of government scrutiny.

This enrolled a wider human audience than possible when mainstream state media was easily censored and the Web less widespread. Such censorship is possible because Thailand has constitutional laws that are situational. The same can be said of ethics. Efforts to imprison, charge or summon at least 54 key members of the protest movement, including minors, in 42 lawsuits – as of January 2021 – often relate to hashtag activism translated into physical protest (TLHR 2021a; 2021b). To a nation state with relaxed laws about free speech, this would be unethical. Thailand, however, does not practice Western ideas of democracy. These are commonly considered to draw from the post-war 'Orwell period' that emphasised autonomous liberation from ultra-nationalism and, interestingly, highlighted concerns about the perils of any form of imperialist oppression (Maes-Jelinek 1970).

In a manner not dissimilar to the concerns and themes of Orwell's work, information published under Thai law can be compelled, often through use of a range of vague and far-reaching laws. This splinters the Web into one that is free and one divided by localised power plays between competing actors. In Thailand, one such actor is the Thai Computer Crime Act (TCCA). It emerged over the last decade to limit access to information that "can cause unrest" (Article-19 2020). The TCCA is complex; uncertainty about surveillance is key to the panopticon described by Foucault (1977). An example includes a TCCA case dismissed in December 2020 of a citizen who said 'yes' in a controversial Facebook discussion (Bangkok Post 2020). But, in a contextually face-driven society, hierarchical deference to elders, in particular by children and within families, often through acts of prostration and anti-defamation is part of 'Thainess' and history (Skulsuthavong 2016; Baker and Phongpaichit 2009).

At the same time, social media invites expression. There is no hierarchy in Web communication, just networks. High-profile Thai surveillance cases extend often to 'public sphere' communication, fuelled by peer-surveillance. The law discussed in our introduction carries three to 15 years in jail for each charge. In January 2021, a woman in her 60s was sentenced to 87 years, later halved to 43, for sharing recordings of a critic aired on YouTube after the 2014 coup (Bangkok Post 2021). There is, therefore, a need for Web education about the power of Thai law in the age of widespread social media adoption.

Since 2014, affordable Web connectivity has grown, resulting in greater social media participation. As of January 2020, when rumblings of a protest began, approximately 52

million of nearly 72 million people in Thailand were Internet users and, compared to 2019 alone, there was an increase of 2.3 million social media users (Hootsuite and We Are Social 2020). The majority was aged between 18–34 years old and spent three hours on social media per day (Hootsuite and We Are Social 2020). A 'typical' Thai Web user has around ten social media accounts, with approximately 47 million Thai users being on Facebook, 12 million on Instagram, and 6.55 million on Twitter (Hootsuite and We Are Social 2020).

In line with Latourian neutrality, considering governmental reply requires not assuming a socially reductionist view of power (Latour 2002). So, held over impoverished masses, the scale of the protests, involving tens of thousands of people, show citizens are anything but disenfranchised (BBC 2020). Furthermore, Foucault (1976; 1977; 1980) argued that power is a network of relations encompassing all of society rather than a relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor. Moreover, individuals are not 'objects' of power; they are a locus and therefore communicate power, as well as knowledge, through their actions, which often are interconnected with technical processes that act to further reach (Foucault 1976; Balan 2010; Mills 2003, p. 35).

This creates a pendulum effect between polarised networks. A battle to enrol, for Latour (2005), who bases his disputes of network hierarchy on this; communication acts stabilise networks or derail them. Latour (2005) felt power was a result of the battle of wills taking place, requiring objective understanding of competing actors' communications. Foucault (1980) likewise felt power extended across all surfaces and is neutral; hence how it is used, or by whom, is what creates a causal effect, an idea shared within the work of Latour (2005). An example of such Latourian network-neutrality is to embrace the Thai government's view that non-human legislation, such as the TCCA, stabilise networks encasing governance.

Thai law, then, must, at least, be respected as a stabilising actor when taken in its broadest sense, unless, of course, other actors view it as a problem and are willing to accept the consequences of breaking the law which translates their networks. This applied to many people in the protests, some of which took place during a state of emergency where assembly was discouraged (Thaitrakulpanich 2020). Whether this was 'ethically right' is different to the question of whether it was 'legal'. This distinction refers to legal normativity, which suggests societies designate some things as 'morally good' or 'permissible', and others as 'bad' (Bix 2019). A norm here means the standard of deciding 'morality' is relative to Thai context and, as such, the standard of deciding what is, or is not, moral is not universally agreed upon, despite the fact that the United Nations (2020) identified Web access as a human right. Thailand was one of the first to sign their Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (Permanent Mission of Thailand New York 2017), suggesting that even the

UN is situational, perhaps even far removed from the real picture. Meanwhile, can external norms be applied without becoming colonial mentalities, validating the Thai conservative position of fearing 'otherness' as an assimilative culture?

Academics have sought pro-human Web education (Day et al. 2015), applied it to Thai higher education systems and described a microcosmic government network allegiance that impacts critical thinking and higher education development within Thailand (Day and Skulsuthavong 2019). Actor-networks exist within others, strengthening them (Latour 2005). Thai citizens need to be fully informed before they cross any legal bridge through activity carried out on the Web or in Thailand itself. Given the low literacy skills in Thailand, some engaged in protest may not even be able to read expressions of their combined political activity. Whilst empirical evidence is needed, we can find some hints. Focused interviews given to the media by respondents who were parents of protestors, including an academic legal expert, suggested peer-pressure was present; and all interviewed urged finding a way to educate young people about the political landscape to avoid fracturing it (Bohwongprasert 2020).

This is important as, since 2019, the term *chung chart* (ชังชาติ) has gained popularity to describe protestors as 'nation-haters' by pro-government actors. During the 2019 electoral period a *democrat* political figure was reported as implying a philosophy other than hard-right was undesirable liberalism (Wongcha-um et al. 2019). Our emphasis is that this political landscape is a pendulum, not a defined ideological spectrum. Framed through a pendulum, ideologies exist, yet do not conform to conventional interpretations of, for example, a democratic political ideology. Rather the emergence of one powerful group or actor 'triggers' another, propelled by a conservative face-value culture where debate can easily be seen as defamation or resistance. Enrolment thus follows for 'bold' extreme actors in line with Latourian theory of problematisation; actors flock to 'focal' points with the biggest reach, or perhaps loudest voice, not fully critical of their choices made but drawn in because such actors become passageways for their opinions and desires, thus furthering their proximity within society (Latour 2005).

Whilst further evidence is needed, the Electoral Commission of Thailand (ECT 2019a; 2019b) reported at least 70 political parties in 2019 who sought to gain the support of a registered body of around 51 million citizens who are, therefore, eligible to vote, out of a total of nearly 70 million people. The FFP, a diversifying liberal party that was particularly popular during this electoral period, has been dissolved as of 2021. It sought to separate military influence from politics and represented 17.34% of the votes in a setting where approximately 38 million registered voters actually voted (which represents 54% of Thailand) (ECT 2019a;

2019b). Meanwhile, around 2.1 million votes were invalidated as part of the electoral count and yet, if the FFP had gained these, they would have been a dominant political group in Thailand (ECT 2019a; 2019b). Protestors and protest actions fill the void, deepening political divides, because for many involved political mechanisms of expressing opinion, parties, have been invalidated via dissolution, limiting their political voice.

However, unlike a party, the political protest movement has no clear leadership. It echoes the decentralised activist group Anonymous, in that anyone can be a member and its manifesto changes from person to group involved within it. So, all members could have different expectations yet be seen similarly. This is enough of a concern to warrant educating students about Thai law itself to ensure awareness about the outcomes of collective decisions. Reardon's work on peace (1999, pp. 6-7) calls for such a mediation curriculum, which might be paramount given that student demonstrations have spread to schools with minors using non-verbal methods of protest, such as holding blank paper and a 'three-finger salute' popularised by the film *The Hunger Games* as a passive mode of objection to oppression of personal freedoms (The Straits Times 2020).

Returning to legal validity, throughout 2020, the Prime Minister did not condemn the protests. Rather, to protest within the law and Thai context was interpreted as norms (Satrusayang 2020a; 2020b). Thailand has authoritative norms but repeated activist 'infractions' have increased the veracity of the government's stance in 2021. Hans Kelsen's (1960/1967) *Pure Theory of Law* offers insight, suggesting it was all too easy to confuse a legal and ethical right. For Kelsen (1960/1967, pp. 1-9), a socially "accepted" law has to be respected not as "ought" but "what it is". Some people often feel one should be the other, disobeying for an ethical position that seems right relative to their own code of conduct (Kelsen 1960/1967). However, Kelsen (1960/1967) can be interpreted as implying this was reductionist. Marmor (2016) offers an apt summary of Kelsen's example: an anarchist who is also a Professor of Law. Suspending the disbelief that one could find the time to be both, Marmor (2016) elaborates the need for teaching about respect of law.

Professionally, Marmor (2016) implied, in their analysis of Kelsen's thinking, that the theorist felt a person's 'academic side' could, and should, describe the system as one of valid norms. Their anarchist side does not endorse it. Rather, it is necessary to teach both in order to ensure the most balanced, hence objective and therefore 'pure' analysis of critical legal thought. After all, an anarchist or 'nation-hater', is how Thai protests are seen by powerful actors in the Thai government (Article-19 2020); anarchists do reject normativity by context and the validity of laws. Seen in the context of voting statistics, Thailand's citizens are not certain or majoritised. To follow the law echoes social contract theory discussed by

philosopher David Hume (1777, p. 475), who argued citizens grant consent to a leader's authority, and it is problematic to assume choice exists once they are in power. For sociologist, Max Weber (1946, p. 79; see also Waters and Waters 2015), oppression is inevitable as “disciples, followers, personal friends” sustain leadership and therefore extend the legitimacy and stability of its oppressive tendencies through enrolment. Hume (1777, p. 475), of course, argued that “a poor peasant” has little choice. We cannot ignore Thai society is divided economically. Elite actors are seen as ‘proximal’ because of the virtue of their wealth role/status, which allows them to mobilise networks (Latour 2005; Persons 2008). This, in Thailand, is partly because of a large wealth inequality gap enabling a business elite to monopolise society (Credit Suisse 2019). Such activity lends itself to colonial discourses by conservative actors interpreting activism as a challenge to order that has maintained their networks for hundreds of years.

Interpretations of colonialism trace relations between those under rule and those once ruled, examining how one becomes the other (Said 1995; Parry 1987). We assert protestors see oppressive actor-networks as colonialists over their means of production, i.e. social media. This idea can be traced to 1765, when a force of 40,000 Burmese colonisers invaded Siam leading to fear of and historical reliance on the *Sakdina*, a feudal ordering via land ownership (Herzfeld 2002; Baker and Phongpaichit 2009; Harrison and Jackson 2010).

The idea of oppressive ‘governmentality’, as counter to autonomous power, emerges across work by Foucault (1976), whose writing on both discourse and biopolitical ancestry explains ‘colonial truth’. So, the de-facto mentality of a citizen is born out of indoctrination built over ancestry not tied to external countries taking over – as is often the case with respect to imperialism, colonialism and developing nations in Asia – rather than a self-generated internal authoritarianism repeated over and over in a culture via a group of nationally contained actors who seek to install a guiding narrative among ‘everyday’ citizens under their influence. Foucault (1976) critiqued externalised colonial theory, favouring such an internally institutionalised process. For Thailand, those who display resistance to ‘colonial truth’ risk being referred to as ‘nation-haters’ – with their citizenship being reduced to ‘otherness’.

Applied to our discussion, social media connects Thai protests to the global stage, ensuring enrolment, which Latour (2005) felt was key to mobilising reform. The Internet, then, is a postcolonial actor-network. The Web grants citizenship onto it. Membership was less easy in 2014 when connectivity was reduced (Talcoth 2015). In March 2020, protest activism, however, violated restrictions by the Thai government, which was linked to fears of ‘abuse’ of social media during COVID-19 (Article-19 2020; Gomez and Ramcharan 2020). Actors

argued that repressing social media "saved lives by enhancing security" from users misinforming the public (Crispin 2020). For example, on 1 April 2020, concerned with rumours about COVID-19, the PR Thai Government Twitter account (2020) proclaimed that "Scaremongers are warned not to spread false news or rumours concerning the COVID-19 pandemic through any media channels. Violators will be prosecuted under the (Thai) Computer Crime Act B.E. 2550 (2007) or the Emergency Decree B.E. 2548 (2005)".

The Web connects Thai citizens to 'otherness', and we established that 'fear of the other' has a place within Thai historical narratives (Baker and Phongpaichit 2009). The Web acts as a postcolonial structure, inviting Thai citizens to move away from Thai governmentality on an instantaneous basis. Intriguingly, however, the Thai Computer Crime Act (TCCA) was not the only law used to police citizens. In 2018, Section 112 of the Thai Criminal Code was nominally suspended, informally and within the context of Thailand's active enforcement (TLHR, 2021a). This is one reason why Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR) (2021a) suggested that, in November 2020, a dramatic shift in social policy emerged as the new Thai government revised this and even applied it to minors engaged in hashtag activism. Nearly all of the TLHR's analysis relates to charges of online defamation translated into the physical sphere via enrolment. On 8 October 2020, Twitter disclosed that they had suspended 1,594 accounts and found 926 accounts allegedly linked to the Thai military, which Twitter suggested were engaged in information operations against citizens via use of multiple accounts, automation and/or scripting (Twitter 2020a; Twitter 2020b), supporting Lakkhanaadison's claims of Thai government IO made during a televised debate on 25 February 2020 (Wangkiat 2020; Sattaburuth 2020; BBC Thai 2020).

The Thai military challenged this (Khaosod English 2020). If true, we observe a reaction and counter-reaction shaping decision-making of others and thus "network translation" (Latour 1984). For Latour (2005) this is a political process about negotiation of roles and order (Latour 2005). The ideas of counter-power and technology are intrinsic to this. Manuel Castells (2000) explores the relationship between both in an increasingly networked global society. Castells (2000) offers a manifesto tracing the technological industry as a place of counter-power. For Castells (2007), the Web creates a platform for counter-power, spurring evolution of the public sphere into a new communication space where traditional hierarchies are levelled. This mirrors flattening of hierarchical actor-networks by Latour (2005) where the power of socio-technical institutions, non-humans, groups and individuals create a platform for counter-power. Castells (2007, p. 246) notes:

political intervention in the public space requires presence in the media space. And since the media space is largely shaped by business and governments that set the political parameters

in terms of the formal political system, albeit in its plurality, the rise of insurgent politics cannot be separated from the emergence of a new kind of media space: the space created around the process of mass self-communication.

PROTEST AS POSTCOLONIALISM OR COLONISATION VIA COUP D'ÉTAT?

Postcolonialism refers to the conditions of the formerly colonised state, a hybrid culture where the legacy of colonial powers remain interlaced with sentiments of resistance and emancipation from oppressive powers (Nayar 2010). As per our discussion above, the Internet is a postcolonial structure, an actor-network which rewrites internal colonisation within Thailand. In this section, we consider this further. Thailand's 2019 general election was the first after five years of a military political status quo (McCargo 2019). Around seven million Thais (approximately 10% of the population) were first-time voters (McCargo 2019). This means that younger voters grew up during Thailand's political division and witnessed three major demonstrations and two military coups in their lifetime (Lawattanatrakul 2019).

The Web exposes a cycle of military coups as intrinsic to politics (Connors and Hewison 2008). Since the first coup in 1932, the military has intervened in the country's democratic process and attempted 19 coups, 12 of them being successful (Farrelly 2013). Thus, Thais grew up witnessing the normalisation of seizing power. Prior to the coup in 2014, the government was met with a large-scale protest from the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), which consisted of upper-middle-class conservative Thai elites (Kongkirati 2016). In response, Yingluck Shinawatra, then Prime Minister, dissolved parliament and called for an election in 2014 (BBC 2013). The PDRC, however, continued their protests and called for military intervention (Kongkirati 2016). At the time, General Prayuth Chan-o-cha said in a televised announcement that a coup was necessary "for society to love and be at peace again" (Hodal 2014). In June 2014, the Royal Thai Army released a song entitled "Returning Happiness to the People" to restore such love (Khaosod English 2014). Various other tactics are used to internally colonise Thai citizens, from military summons for 'attitude adjustment', dissolution of the Senate and immunity for officers to detain individuals for seven days without oversight (iLaw 2015; OHCHR 2016).

TLHR (2019) reported that, under the post-coup military junta, 2,408 civilians faced prosecutions and at least 100 'dissidents', including academics, activists and students, fled Thailand to seek political asylum (TLHR 2019). The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights issued multiple statements condemning post-coup military governance for "restrictions on fundamental freedoms" (OHCHR 2014; 2016). Yet, many Thais welcomed military colonisation, seen in their action of handing out roses to the soldiers standing guard on

Bangkok streets following the military occupation (Lefevre 2014).

It is vital to recall that Thai citizens are taught to be proud of their non-colonised past and a sense of superiority (Winichakul 2013). This is a colonial 'conquering truth' related often, in public forums, to the prowess of the Thai Royal Army (Royal Thai Army, no date). While Thailand has never been officially colonised by foreign empires, a semi-predictable 'cycle of coups' creates an internally colonised state led by a perpetual military government. 12 military coups have successfully overruled democratic will. Legitimacy is replaced by guardianship (Peel 2014). Thailand, after all, is a country where feudalism is still ingrained, a cultural norm favouring adherence to authority (Baker 2016).

POSTCOLONIAL MOVEMENTUM?

An unspoken colonial narrative arises in the view of corrupt politicians. The Shinawatra clan, especially former Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, is portrayed as a 'nation-hater' and mastermind who funded various anti-government protests (Wong-Anan 2010). Thus, by constructing a narrative where there is an enemy, the protest movement, Thai military actors mobilise citizens in Thailand to their cause. According to Chachavalpongpun (2014), the PDRC coordinated with the military and powerful elites to launch the coup in 2014, and Thailand relapsed into another coup cycle. The PDRC protests alleged the Shinawatra government won the election due to vote-buying through "undereducated peasants" in rural areas (Grömping 2014). As one academic from the PDRC claimed, "300,000 voices from us in Bangkok, voices from qualified people, are better than 15 million voices from unqualified masses" (Voice TV 2013). This creates rhetoric of a military coup as a preferred colonisation, one needed to secure the ideological, governmental and political status quo for the security and safety of Thailand.

In contrast, Jandric and Kuzmanic (2016) argue that the Web enables 'digital postcolonialism' bridging users beyond nations. Migration is no longer needed to interrupt the above-mentioned colonial narratives. The immediacy of the Web helps citizens to connect beyond nation states. Yet, the Thai *Sakdina*, a social hierarchy created several hundred years ago, still stands as an implicit method of internal social ordering with lasting hegemonic power. In other localised regions, we see a dilution of national identity, language, religion, defined class and eroding of singularism because of external colonisation (Van Esterik 2000). Harrison and Jackson (2010), cultural studies experts on Thailand, have used the term 'semi-colonial' to refer to Thailand's past. This implies that although not formally colonised by European powers, colonial dominance remained via ideologies inherent to the cultural norms of Thai hierarchical society. Similarly, Herzfeld (2002) uses the term 'crypto-

colonialism' to suggest this same society created a template of covert actions between a social elite, government and overseas business interests that sought to encode ideological behaviours. Both are possible because of ancestral conditioning, explored across the work of Foucault (1976).

In 2014, despite openly stating distrust towards the election process, General Prayuth Chan-o-cha reassured the public that a free and fair election will take place by the end of 2015 (BBC 2014). The hashtags #เลื่อนเลือกตั้ง (DelayedElection) and #เลื่อนแม่มึงสิ (DelayedAgainMotherF*cker) trended in Thailand, as young voters allegedly argued that the registration of their voting rights had been denied limiting certain groups political power (Associated Press 2019). On the evening FFP's dissolution was announced, #Saveอนาคตใหม่ (SaveFutureForward), #RIPDemocracy and #ยุบให้ตายก็ไม่เลือกมึง (DissolveAllYouWantWeStillWontVoteForYou) trended on Twitter (Gunia 2020; Thaitrakulpanich 2020). Through these hashtags, users expressed anger that FFP votes never mattered (Beech 2020). FFP had been subject to 25 legal cases since 2018 to reduce their influence (Boonbandit 2020). Young Thais grew up in a technologically advanced era; they communicate in memes and hashtags; the Internet fuels voices in the "echo chamber" (Grömping 2014).

It is important to recognise our use of non-traditional media sources to inform our discussion opens it up to debate about suggestions of bias. We contend that media textual insights and hashtags, in the setting described, so colonially institutionalised, offer a lens on postcolonial momentum. A lot of hashtags circulated have never been resolved. For example, #ประยุทธ์ออกไป (PrayuthGetOut), #ทหารมีไว้ทำไม (WhyDoWeHaveMilitary), #ผนงรจตกม (StudpidLeaderIsADeathToUsAll), ภาษีกู (OurF*ckingTax), #ให้มันจบที่รุ่นเรา (LetItEndInOurGeneration), #เยาวชนปลดแอก (FreeYouth), #รัฐบาลหัวควย (D*ckheadGovernment) are evidence of concerns among 'digital' citizens.

What was interesting, however, was the emergence of English hashtags, alongside Thai, during this period. This could have been a deliberate postcolonial act for citizens or a conscious attempt at obscurity by using the *de-facto lingua franca* of the Web. Despite Thailand's tourism hub, English is not well-developed (OECD 2019). Bayly (2016) suggests postcolonial momentum arises "through new discourses embedded within developing tools that expose domination, often via 'dictionaries, maps and legal codes".

As of 2021, there are 7.8 million Twitter users in Thailand, and social media fits the above description of a tool that exposes dominance (Degenhard 2021). Theme and subtext are key elements of activists' counter-power found within their tweets and other forms of social

media expression during a period of change. Young protestors navigate back and forth between challenging colonialism and emancipated global citizenry as they organise the public demonstration through social media. The next section proposes the Internet and Web built atop had served as a postcolonial structure for the student-led protests in 2020. It also discusses some tentative examples of postcolonial narratives towards emancipation.

MEDIA STUDIES AND POSTCOLONIAL PROTESTS

Textual analysis is drawn from the discipline of Media Studies. It involves gathering and critically evaluating media messages. Of course, subjective interpretation is biased. Lyotard (1984, pp. 64-66) challenged that subjective communication is not 'true' discourse or found only in a defined universal agreement built on rules and generalised consensus. The symbols chosen by the protesters are unique. All communicate their political messages differently. The act of interpretation falls to readers, and ability to interpret is determined by shared cultural experience (Fiske 1990).

Our inference is that Thailand shows a polarised pendulum of networks held stable by activism performance, all propelling each other and translated by meaning, messages and activity carried by intermediaries enrolled by the polarity of various extremely focalised actors. We selected two protest movements to exemplify the complexity of these networks. Roland Barthes (1972), a French Literary theorist, views text and media as not a fixed entity; rather, a complex set of discursive strategies generated in a contextual fragment. The following glimpse into events is not intended as a substantive linguistic method, but a focus on the power of literary and subtextual imagery in Thai activism. *Hamtaro*, for example, is a Japanese animated cartoon about a hamster, Hamtaro, who loves eating sunflower seeds and going on adventures.

The image of the cartoon hamster is recognised by those having grown up between 2000 to 2006. According to Fiske (1990), signs that do not have conventional dimensions are cryptographic. Thai students, therefore, used the cartoon as a visual metaphor to engage support and as an act of protest, using the cartoon's theme song at a protest run event in July 2020 where, for example, the original lyrics "the most delicious food is sunflower seeds" were modified to "the most delicious food is taxpayers' money" (Wongcha-um 2020).

Hamster emojis and emoticons trended with #วิ่งกันนะแฮมทาโร่ (LetsRunHamtaro) on Twitter. Many people tweeted photos of the *Hamtaro Run* event which called for parliamentary dissolution (Tan 2020). The media reported over 1000 participants during the event "Let's run, Hamtaro!" where young Thais ran around Bangkok's Democracy Monument chanting

the modified theme song (Tan 2020). Therefore, *Hamtaro Run*, a concept drawn from overseas, was reappropriated into protest activity, granting it new textual meaning.

Covert signs, in particular 'cute' images, shaped textual imagery and social thinking. Giant inflatable yellow rubber ducks, for example, appeared at the scene of the protest on 17 November 2020, where protestors rallied outside of Thai Parliament. At this event, water cannons, allegedly diluted with chemical substances, were a response to the protest. In a bizarre moment, front-liners formed a shield of inflatable yellow ducks. Images, reports, tweets and videos of giant ducks, still smiling innocently, widely circulated on social media and started a trending hashtag #เป็ดเหลือง (YellowDucks) (Ratcliffe 2020). The yellow ducks, tainted in blue dye, also attracted attention from media and, in subtext, were glorified as heroes, similar to other heroic narratives that prevail in Thailand about people who have sacrificed, thus creating a self-perpetuating mythos (Ratcliffe 2020).

Subsequently, the symbol of yellow ducks was used for headbands, keychains as well as filters on social media. The protesters made this a symbol of Thailand's pro-democracy protests, even though yellow is conventionally seen as an ultra-conservative colour, adding interpretative complexity in the "Rubber Duck Revolution" (The Guardian 2020); these yellow ducks were clearly non-humans, yet had a focal role in the event and were of equal power as a tool to support resistance during the 2020 protest, then translated into new forms of meaning by the Web. Through brief analysis of these microelements, we contextualised the depth of the protest movement at a macro level. We contend that the 2020 pro-democracy protests are a postcolonial movement. Activists activated counter-power in a similar manner against their oppressors: by using surveillance and the Internet.

Yet, the Internet is a wider actor-network than one powerful group within Thailand. #WhatsHappeningInThailand now acts as a point of mobilisation for actors to rally around. Discourse can be considered a hallmark of postcolonialism; social media is an actor-network emancipated from internal colonial powers, yet internal to Thailand, possible because of such discourse. Thus, even without force, by using blank pieces of paper, with no words written on them, protest marches or emoticon tweets, the protest movement has conveyed textual meaning: emancipation. Consequently, digital postcolonialism and 'cryptographic encoding' moves beyond colonial control into what we might call 'crypto-postcolonialism'. It requires intermediaries – which are key to Latour's (2005) thinking – to decode them, although this widens the potential for subjective interpretation.

Undoubtedly, the potential for intermediaries to carry the meaning of a message becomes both a potential threat, a point of passageway, a problem of failure or misinterpretation and

thus encourages intra-cultural clashes between different internal groups because the belief of the potential existence of covert counter-power activity, among everyday citizens, not all of which is recorded online, forces governmentality to respond as if it exists "across all surfaces" (Foucault 1976). After all, Thai governmentality urges the status of a colonial or at least semi-colonial mindset and, in doing so, seeks to distract, indoctrinate or otherwise persuade citizens away from contradictory rhetoric to the voice sought within the nation, as 'spoken' by the government. These views, opinions or manners of direction clash against less powerful users, but, collectively, these same citizens propel connectivity because they have power, born from the knowledge to use technology to express themselves and circumvent oppression found in surveillance culture (Foucault 1976). Without the Web and, in particular, social media, their connectivity would have never been possible.

Put another way, we can conceptualise colonial and postcolonial extremes as momentum forces, as found in the discipline and science of Physics, a point we discuss in the subsequent section. This is necessary to extend our thinking of the relationship between forces within Thailand that is, in turn, governed by power and counter-power. Both act upon one another in such a way as to propel the momentum, as well as polarisation, of different groups positions within Thai society, influencing the direction of transformation or rendering it a zero-sum game. In this way, each becomes a fixed pole, hence stabilised, in its practices but equally disruptive to the stability of the other. Much like magnets pushing or pulling towards the other when brought into closer proximity, the outcome inevitably creates a dramatic and forceful effect.

NEWTON'S SOCIO-TECHNICAL CRADLE: CONCEPTUALISING A THAI POSTCOLONIAL PENDULUM

Given a shifting landscape, we suggested in our discussion above that it is necessary to consider Thai politics not as a spectrum but rather as a political pendulum. When we overlay a Latourian perspective, momentum within this pendulum becomes highly relevant. For Latour (2005) networks grow, enrol and impact one another; they act in motion. We suggest that political actors and their networks are driven towards more polarised positions by the politics of their opponents and their success at translating networks, which involves mobilisation of support and enrolment of actors around a common point of problem. Akin to Latour (2005), we can see heterogeneous 'intermediaries', networks whose role is only to communicate agency, rather than govern it, as the apolitical/undecided between the powerhouses of government/protestors. These entities do not so much act as exist to convey meaning and, in doing so, can influence the momentum it takes.

Visualised, this becomes what we describe as a 'socio-technical cradle', which, in keeping with the interdisciplinarity of Web Science, draws on Sir Isaac Newton's First and Third Laws of Motion. Concerning the First Law, conservation of momentum occurs between two objects. In an isolated network, the total momentum of any given two objects before a particular collision is equal to the total momentum after the collision (Kokarev 2009). Any object is socio-technical; hence, an actor creates force that influences the shape, direction and translation of a network, or the meaning communicated within it (Latour 1984).

Based on such reasoning, we conceptualise similar network collisions between colonial and postcolonial agents – for example, those protesting and those policing them. This analogy, then, is the Thai political spectra of citizenry and rights, defined by the momentum to transform the 'network' that is Thailand (Latour 1984). Momentum remains the same if no external force, such as the UN, acts on a network, such as Thailand, thus altering inertia. Consequently, force of momentum rebuffs the other, transferring momentum through a buffer zone: intermediaries, the masses 'not' protesting are polarised either towards, away or into frozen stasis. Such activity can limit mediation or momentum, creating a zero-sum game played by those who are on the extreme of the pendulum and hence most moved by the momentum it carries.

Newton's Third Law states that for every action or exertion of force, there is an equal and opposite reaction (Kokarev 2009). In the context of this article, this means that if 'A', postcolonial Thai social media activists, act in counter-conduct to 'B', it exerts a force on 'B'. We could call 'B' colonial governmentality, which refers to the manoeuvres that maintain colonial order exerting forces on 'A' using legislation and constitutional rules, an equal and opposite force of reply in the public sphere. This creates a pendulum momentum. Figure 1 offers a visual expression of this argument, describing actor-networks in momentum driven by power against counter-power. Shown by the statistics of the 2019 election, as reported in our discussion above, it is not clear where the majority of Thai citizenry stand, or fall, politically. We suggest they act as each group's buffer or, for Latour (2005), intermediaries. It is possible these important communicators 'misinterpret' meaning or interpret it to their own norms, ethics and values, and hence do so with subjective capacity; uncertainty of the message they relay, communicate or carry within a network potentially creates competition over enrolment, increasing polarity, pressure and extremism.

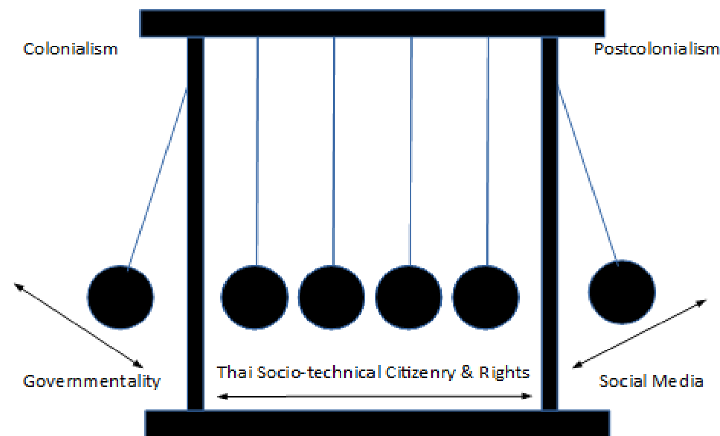

FIGURE 1: Newton's Socio-technical Cradle in Thailand's Postcolonial Pendulum

Hence, the absence of defined political parties – or, indeed, those that can last without dissolvement to represent a mid-ground – creates extreme divisions of Thai political society when compared to the activists' radical call to reform. Like magnetism, these groups become polarised and repel one another, adding to their momentum. Such a relationship is one of extreme or a desire for focality (Latour 2005). It is not as straightforward, then, to report that the Thai government is politically opportunistic or dominating a disenfranchised citizenry (Bangprapa 2020).

CONCLUSION: SOCIO-TECHNICAL EMANCIPATION AND THAI WEB SCIENCE EDUCATION

On the Web, traditional weapons used by the Thai military are no longer relevant. The necessity of a military is questioned when 'nation-haters' are seen as the most dangerous threat to the nation in 2021. Historically, a cycle of coups has been how to resolve disagreeable liberal politics or resistance to colonisation. Now, the power of social media and the Web shift the momentum away from a cycle into a pendulum. After all, army-sanctioned cyber-attacks on critics and prosecution of minors demonstrate modern Thai military tactics. However, on the Web, there is always a much more powerful actor than a singular nation state: a network of socio-technical networks made up of citizens of the Web, and therefore the world. It is uncertain whether military tanks, submarines and martial laws – traditional weapons – can fight such mobilised socio-technical emancipation, especially now that global surveillance has been activated by the Internet, which enables a similar level of scrutiny by global powers, as applied domestically to citizens within Thailand.

Causation is difficult to argue. A causal relationship suggests a means of connecting an event with an effect. In a legal sense, as framed in our review, causation is *actus reus,* an action

from which something arose, combined with *mens rea* or intent as guilt (Varn and Chandola 1999). However, how can we argue causation, be it legal or otherwise, when both parties argue the other is at fault? If we embrace the view of Foucault (1980) and Latour (2005), each are defendants as they have power to create a causal effect and, indeed, a counter to the other. An example is a suggestion implied by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) that the Thai government used the pandemic as a smokescreen to control social media and utilised harsher laws to create a sense of repression in media, where Thailand, they contend, ranks 136th out of 180 countries in the RSF's World Press Freedom Index (RSF 2020). Yet, fake news myths surged in popularity on Thai social media during the first wave crisis, potentially endangering citizens through misinformation that could cause panic and civil unrest (UN News 2020). Hence, the TCCA replied, as a non-human actor, stating that spreading fake news about COVID-19 would subsequently be punished by five years in prison and up to a THB 100,000 fine (USD 3,050) (HRW 2020a).

Gomez and Ramcharan (2020) point out that surveillance in a post-COVID-19 landscape is inevitable. Social media is a tool that moves Thailand towards postcolonialism. This is furthered by the Internet and Web atop it acting as a catalyst. The discipline of Web Science, introduced in our introduction, will be vital to addressing the complexity developing in Thailand. Frameworks for teaching Web Science outside of academia exist and are a potential mechanism of mediation across polarised opinions (Day 2019). As Figure 1 suggests, for each political action, there has been a counter-reaction driven by socio-technical emancipation, which is empowered by the power of the Web and the role of the Internet in communicating information, the mechanism of which has been social media as an emancipatory sphere to express opinion.

This is a tentative conceptualisation inviting a need for greater empirical study and questioning. For example, what about those acting as intermediaries of the pendulum poles? Are they undecided, caught between the extremes of polarity or misinformed, perhaps through miseducation that has drawn away from encouraging critical discourse? When the Thai government formed its Twitter account, Thai users were reported to be "suddenly" concerned about surveillance (Wilson 2020). Yet, in a face-driven conservative culture, surveillance is inherent. For Reardon (1999), mediation creates peace. In Thailand, this begins by reducing the stigma of quarrel within the normative structure of Thai law, as well as opinion in the public sphere, if it is permissible under that same law. Web Science, therefore, offers one way to frame, mediate and educate towards peace in what we conclude is the 'Thai postcolonial pendulum'.

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