ABOUT THE JOURNAL

JOMEC Journal was founded in 2011 by a collective based in the School of Journalism, Media and Culture (JOMEC) at Cardiff University. Editors are based in JOMEC and are committed both to Open Access publishing and to maintaining the highest standards of rigour and academic integrity. The journal is peer-reviewed and has an international, multidisciplinary Editorial Board and Advisory Panel. The founding editor is Paul Bowman who is now editor-in-chief.

JOMEC Journal welcomes work that is located in journalism, media or cultural studies as well as interdisciplinary work that approaches these disciplines as overlapping and interlocking fields. JOMEC Journal is particularly interested in work that addresses the political and ethical dimensions, stakes, problematics and possibilities of journalism, media and cultural studies.

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LAYOUT DESIGNER
Lucy Aprahamian

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CONTENTS

1 Editorial
Julia Boelle, Cate Hopkins, Petra Kovačević, Andy Nelmes and Rachel Phillips

5 When We Know What We Don’t Know: Uncertainty, Ignorance and Speculation in the UK Television Coverage of Airplane Disasters
Julia Boelle

23 The Skripal Case Representation in Czech Television News
Renáta Sediáková and Marek Lapčík

52 Superstar to Superhuman: Scarlett Johansson, an 'Ideal' Embodiment of the Posthuman Female in Science Fiction and Media?
Abby Lauren Kidd

76 Rethinking Modernity: The Construction of Modern Malaysian Society
Izzati Aziz

100 Newton’s Socio-technical Cradle? Web Science, the Weaponisation of Social Media, Hashtag Activism and Thailand’s Postcolonial Pendulum
Michael J. Day and Merisa Skulsuthavong

130 Adrodd ar Dloddi: Naratif y Cyfryngau Newyddion a Chyfathrebiadau'r Trydydd Sector yng Nghymru [Reporting on Poverty: News Media Narratives and Third Sector Communications in Wales]
Johanna Karlsson

134 The Handbook of Journalism Studies, Editions 2009 and 2020
Carolyne M. Lunga

144 Community-Centered Journalism
Andy Nelmes

148 Citizen Media and Practice: Currents, Connections, Challenges
Zizheng Yu

154 Journalism, Gender and Power
Kate Penney

158 Producing British Television Drama. Local Production in a Global Era
Julien Grub
ABSTRACT
This is the editorial of JOMEC Journal’s issue 16, which is an open issue covering a wide array of topics in the fields of journalism, media and culture. The editorial provides an overview of the contents, summarising the included articles and book reviews.

KEYWORDS
journalism studies, media studies, cultural studies, communication studies, film studies, interdisciplinary approaches

CITATION

ACCEPTED FOR PUBLICATION 15 May 2021

This open issue collates and celebrates unique insights into journalism, media and culture. Although the themes of the contributions are wide-ranging, they are all interconnected by innovative arguments and approaches, which – we hope – are reflected in the structure of the issue. The first part includes five journal articles dealing with contemporary issues.

In the first article, Julia Boelle (2021), examines how the media deal with unknown information in the reporting of events by analysing the UK television coverage of airplane disasters. Considering concepts such as ‘uncertainty’ and ‘ignorance’, the article argues that, contrary to journalism’s ideals of ‘objectivity’ and ‘truth-telling’, the media draw on modality and speculation to offer possible theories. These findings have implications for current times, with the COVID-19 pandemic making uncertainty and ignorance more prominent and the
study of the concepts’ representation in the news more important than ever before.

The second article, written by Renáta Sedláková and Marek Lapčík (2021), presents an analysis of Czech Television’s public service broadcasting of the Skripal news event in 2018, when a Russian double agent was poisoned in the UK, and its international repercussions. The case study analyses the representation of the event in five television news programmes and shows the naturalisation of the British narrative of the story by Czech television. The authors argue – consistent with the conclusions of other studies on the Czech public service media operation – that the mainstream media accept and reproduce official political discourse.

The third article by Abby Lauren Kidd (2021) investigates how Hollywood actor Scarlett Johansson is portrayed as a posthuman female in four science fiction films. The author shows how Scarlett Johansson’s embodiment as the ‘ideal’ posthuman female is problematic from a feminist point of view. Kidd (2021) eloquently argues that discourses and representations of Johansson’s posthuman characters are controlled by men and, therefore, in many aspects retrograde for women. This can also have an impact on how we perceive artificial intelligence and other technological advancements.

In the fourth article, Izzati Aziz (2021) challenges the traditional notion of modernity by discussing the concept in the Malaysian context and providing a valuable trajectory of the country’s modernisation project through the lens of Malaysian identity, Asian values, multiculturalism and religious identity. The use of critical discourse analysis also provides insight into the role of newspaper journalism and how it is used as a vehicle for cultural change in Malaysia.

Last but not least, the fifth article, written by Michael J. Day and Merisa Skulsuthavong (2021), makes a postmodernist examination of how developments in the field of Web Science can be used to explore political activism in Thailand. The focus on hashtag activism by digitally native Thai activists brings fresh insights into the emergence of post-colonial resistance whilst also offering an intriguing conceptual model by which we can begin to understand the political culture that exists within the country. Situating the discussion within the field of Web Science also allows a multi-disciplinary approach that serves to enrich the study of journalism, media, and culture.

The second part of this open issue includes six reviews of recent publications in the fields. Given the ten-year history of JOMEC Journal, we decided to celebrate the recent work by scholars from Cardiff University’s School of Journalism, Media and Culture. The section kicks

We as editors would like to extend our gratitude to all authors because the publication of this issue would not have been possible without their hard work and dedication. Equally, we would like to thank the anonymous peer reviewers for their detailed comments and suggestions which were critical in preparing and polishing the contributions for publication. Many thanks are also due to Paul Bowman, whose advice and guidance have been invaluable throughout the editorial process, and Lucy Aprahamian, who bravely took on the challenge of redesigning *JOMEC Journal*’s layout and visually capturing the spirit of Cardiff University’s School of Journalism, Media and Culture.

Julia Boelle
Cate Hopkins
Petra Kovačević
Andy Nelmes
Rachel Phillips

ABOUT THE AUTHORS
Julia Boelle is a PhD graduate of Cardiff University’s School of Journalism, Media and Culture. Cate Hopkins, Petra Kovačević, Andy Nelmes and Rachel Phillips are current PhD students at the School.
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Boelle, J. 2021. When We Know What We Don’t Know: Uncertainty, Ignorance and Speculation in the UK Television Coverage of Airplane Disasters. JOMEC Journal 16, pp. 5-22. DOI: https://doi.org/10.18573/jomec.205
When We Know What We Don’t Know: Uncertainty, Ignorance and Speculation in the UK Television Coverage of Airplane Disasters

Julia Boelle
Cardiff University, UK | BoelleJM@cardiff.ac.uk

ABSTRACT
This article examines how the media deal with absent information by examining representations of uncertainty, ignorance and speculation in the UK television coverage of airplane disasters. Drawing on thematic and discourse analyses, the article argues that there is a development over time whereby two phases can be discerned: (1) the (initial) ignorance phase and (2) the epilogue phase. The former describes coverage that contains an absence of information. The findings show that the reporting in this phase draws on modality and speculation to counterbalance the absence of information regarding the airplane disasters. The epilogue phase factually concludes what happened and brings a form of resolution to the incidents. As a result, information is presented with more certainty than in the ignorance phase. These findings have implications for journalism studies more generally because they refine our understandings about the development of media coverage on events and situate the concepts of uncertainty, ignorance and speculation at the forefront of the discipline.

KEYWORDS
airplane disasters, events, uncertainty, ignorance, modality, speculation, resolution

CITATION
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INTRODUCTION
The ideals of journalism are “to shine a light, to raise the curtain, to reveal ‘the truth.’” (Stocking and Holstein 2015, p. 105). However, this endeavour becomes more complicated when the information available is incomplete or non-existent. Situations where this applies are unexpected events because these incidents set limits to readily available information (Sonnevend 2018). In attempting to reveal the ‘truth’, journalists become “purveyors” or “agents” of absent information (Stocking and Holstein 2015, p. 105). This is relevant to understandings about the profession because news audiences have a desire for information
that they expect journalism to fulfil (Hart 1996, p. 139). Dunwoody (2018, p. 5), for instance, points out that communicating absent information can reduce the risk of misunderstandings and overestimations and, conversely, increase the “trustworthiness of information”.

Given the centrality, this article examines how the media deal with absent information by examining representations of uncertainty, ignorance and speculation in the UK television coverage of airplane disasters. Commercial airplane disasters were selected as case studies because these incidents can be self-contained events which are characterised by an (initial) absence of information that is resolved over time. For the analysis, the coverages of three incidents – Germanwings 4U9525, Metrojet KGL 9268 and EgyptAir MS 804 – were subjected to thematic and discourse analyses in order to make inferences about the thematic and linguistic representation of the concepts. The findings demonstrate that there is a development in the media’s representation of absent information over time, which can be discerned into two phases: (1) the (initial) ignorance phase and (2) the epilogue phase. The former refers to coverage that contains an absence of information. In this phase, the media employ several strategies, including the use of modality and speculation, to counterbalance the uncertainty and ignorance imposed by the events. The epilogue phase factually concludes what happened and brings a form of resolution to the incidents. Information in this phase is presented with more certainty than in the ignorance phase. The following sections situate the research in the broader academic field, explain the research design and present the study’s findings. By placing the concepts of uncertainty, ignorance and speculation at the forefront of journalism studies and refining knowledge on the temporalities of media coverage on events, the article also makes a significant contribution to the discipline.

**UNCERTAINTY, IGNORANCE AND SPECULATION IN JOURNALISM**

Journalists utilise the popular principle of asking and answering the ‘five W’ and ‘How’ questions to provide a full rundown of events (Hart 1996; Pöttker 2003; Fengler and Ruß-Mohl 2008; Harcup 2009; Harcup 2015). However, journalists are sometimes “confronted with the limits events set to their narratives” (Sonnevend 2018, p. 79). This means that, while there may be an overall demand for information, journalists can be restricted by the boundaries of events to provide it. This is where ‘uncertainty’ and ‘ignorance’ come in. The term ‘uncertainty’ usually describes “ambiguity or ambivalence in a truth claim” (Lehmkuhl and Peters 2016, p. 911). It results from an absence of information and the fact that knowledge about the world and nature is incomplete (Zehr 2000, p. 87; Painter 2013, pp. 11-12). The concept of ignorance feeds into this as it refers to an “absence of knowledge” (Haas and Vogt 2015, p. 17) and, in a broader sense, the very basis of ‘uncertainty’.
Some scholars seek a distinction between these concepts. In the context of science and risk, such a separation is perhaps useful as the concept of uncertainty takes on more specific meanings (see Boelle 2020). However, this article takes the stance that uncertainty and ignorance are closely interrelated and often occur simultaneously. As the definitions of the terms suggest, uncertainty is caused by ignorance because the absence of information or knowledge prohibits certainty; while, when one is aware of ignorance or an absence of knowledge, one tends to be unsure or ‘uncertain’ about the truth.

Researchers disagree about the roles of uncertainty and ignorance in news reporting. Some studies “report an underrepresentation” in journalism (Guenther and Ruhrmann 2016, p. 929) and suggest that claims are not “a typical feature of science journalism” (Zehr 2000, p. 90). Arguably, this is because the concepts dispel newsworthiness (Kitzinger and Reilly 1997, p. 344). However, other studies also highlighted “over-representations […] or at least frequent mentioning of scientific uncertainty” (Guenther and Ruhrmann 2016, p. 929), which might be due to the commitment of journalism to truth (Simmerling and Janich 2016). Then, some scholars suggest that a news story with uncertainty and ignorance can, indeed, elicit newsworthiness (Stocking and Holstein 1993; Ashe 2013; Guenther and Ruhrmann 2016; Peters and Dunwoody 2016; Simmerling and Janich 2016). Peters and Dunwoody (2016, p. 897), for instance, explain that “a story may be perceived as newsworthy by journalists even if the claim on which the story is based is uncertain, such as in the communication of risk, or if scientific speculation is fascinating […] (e.g. time travel, particles moving faster as light, parallel universes).”

Irrespective of whether uncertainty and ignorance are ‘newsworthy’, the concepts are central to journalism because their representations can influence understandings, estimations and the “trustworthiness of information” in audiences (Dunwoody 2018, p. 5). They also open up spaces for incorporating speculation. This is because the media are expected to fill an overall demand and “need for closure” (Durham 1998, p. 113) and end up filling it by drawing on ‘theories’, ‘possibilities’ and ‘speculation’ (Kim and Lee 2008; Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2008; Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2018). Wampole (2018) points out:

One explanation for all this [speculation] is that the acceleration of information flow has heightened our impatience with not knowing. Until the internet’s arrival, the “jour,” or day, was the primary unit of time by which journalism functioned. But now that the minute, or better, the second, is the new unit of preference, it might be more fitting to change the profession’s name to minutalism or secondalism. In the attempt to capture an event just as it happens, or even before it does, the news becomes less factual and more hypothetical. (Wampole 2018)
In the context of journalism, this phenomenon is surprising as speculation “is a form of subjective speech and as such its presence in press content defies the journalist principle of objectivity” (Hudock 2005, p. iii). However, previous research on ‘speculation’ in and by the media, perhaps given the general incompatibility with journalistic ideals, remains limited (Vincent et al. 1989; Durham 1998; Kim and Lee 2008). Therefore, this article investigates how the media incorporate representations of uncertainty, ignorance and speculation by examining the UK television coverage of airplane disasters. In addition, it investigates if, contrary to the journalistic ideals of ‘truth-telling’ and ‘objectivity’, the media draw on speculation as an answer to some of the uncertainty and ignorance.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study focuses on commercial airplane disasters because these incidents are characterised by an (initial) absence of information and generate vast amounts of media coverage (Boelle 2020). More importantly, however, they can be self-contained events where absent information is, in one form or another, resolved over time. Based on this, along with factors such as media attention and recency of occurrence, the following airplane disasters were chosen for analysis:

- **Germanwings flight 4U9525**: On 24 March 2015, the aircraft was on its way from Barcelona to Düsseldorf when the co-pilot, who had previously been diagnosed with suicidal tendencies, prompted the aircraft to descend and crash into the French Alps (Behrend et al. 2015). One hundred and fifty people, including 16 adolescent school pupils from Germany, were on board the airplane (Behrend et al. 2015).

- **Metrojet flight KGL 9268**: On 31 October 2015, the airplane was on route from Sharm el-Sheikh to St Petersburg when a bomb on board caused it to explode over the Sinai desert (Oliphant 2016). The incident was linked to a terrorist attack, killing all 224 people on board (Oliphant 2016).

- **EgyptAir flight MS 804**: On 19 May 2016, the aircraft was travelling from Paris to Cairo when it crashed into the eastern Mediterranean Sea (BBC 2018). The incident is, in all likelihood, caused by a fire in the cockpit which caused the loss of the aircraft’s control (BBC 2018). The airplane carried 66 people (BBC 2018).

The case studies were subjected to thematic and discourse analyses. The purpose of the thematic analysis was to identify and organise themes into patterns to allow making inferences about the media’s representations of uncertainty, ignorance and speculation (Braun and Clarke 2006). By comparison, the discourse analysis focused on key linguistic
features where needed, including a lexical analysis with an emphasis on modality (Phillips and Jørgensen 2002; Deacon et al. 2007; Hansen and Machin 2013). Attention was paid to words or expressions incorporating the concepts, the subjunctive and conditional mood, modal verbs and words, and the use of questions (Janich and Simmerling 2015, p. 134; Simmerling and Janich 2016, p. 964). This allows understanding the key linguistic features used in the media’s construction of uncertainty, ignorance and speculation.

The sample was taken from broadcast news because, according to Ofcom’s “News Consumption in the UK” report (2020, p. 7), television is the most-used source of news in the UK (75%). The internet only ranks second (65%), while radio (42%) and print newspapers rank last (35%) (Ofcom 2020, p. 7). The sample included news reports by the main television channels in the UK, i.e. BBC, ITV, Sky, Channel 4 and Channel 5. The analyses focused on the sound bites of the broadcasts – and not the visual elements – because it is foremost through language that abstract concepts such as uncertainty, ignorance and speculation can be represented. The sample was accessed through Box of Broadcasts, using the search terms ‘Germanwings’, ‘Metrojet’ and ‘EgyptAir’. The sample period is restricted to a year of coverage starting on the day before the incidents. The broad search terms and the long sample period guarantee that most, if not all, broadcasts related to the flights are included in the Box of Broadcasts search. The search retrieved 239 broadcasts. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the broadcasts for each case study and television channel.

### Table 1: Breakdown of the sample size for each case study and television channel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case study</th>
<th>BBC</th>
<th>ITV</th>
<th>Sky</th>
<th>Channel 4</th>
<th>Channel 5</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germanwings 9525</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metrojet 9268</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EgyptAir 804</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The aim of the thematic and discourse analyses was to analyse at least 10% of the broadcasts. This allowed examining the issues in “full context” or detail (Jensen 2002, p. 119) and making more representative statements about the data. A sample of 27 broadcasts was investigated – 17 broadcasts for Germanwings 9525, 10 broadcasts for Metrojet 9268 and 10 broadcasts for EgyptAir 804. This sample was chosen randomly from broadcasts that included elements of uncertainty and ignorance as these elements are crucial for the objective of this study. The following sections present the findings. The research shows that the media’s
representation of absent information takes place in the form of a development over time which can be discerned into two phases of coverage, an (initial) ignorance phase and an epilogue phase. It also establishes that the news media, contrary to ideals of ‘truth-telling’ and ‘objectivity’, commonly draw on speculation as an answer to some of the uncertainty and ignorance.

THE IGNORANCE PHASE

The reporting in the (initial) ignorance phase is “confronted with the limits events set to their narratives” (Sonnevend 2018, p. 79). This means that, while there is an overall demand for information about the disasters, the journalist is limited by the events to provide it. As Sonnevend (2018, p. 79) writes, “events set boundaries for journalistic storytelling. Events [...] define what and how journalists cover, and journalists are desperate to construct [events]”. The thematic analysis demonstrated that there are three main areas or topics involved in the representation of uncertainty and ignorance: (1) a general lack of information, (2) the causes of the incidents and (3) the question of resolution.

Claims about the general lack of information are very explicit in acknowledging an overall absence of knowledge. This relates to the literature suggesting that journalism follows “a general journalistic duty of care and commitment to truth” (Simmerling and Janich 2016, p. 965). Lehmkuhl and Peters (2016, p. 910), for instance, argue that journalistic activity “must somehow address the uncertainty of the underlying scientific truth claim” because journalistic representations appeal primarily to the public interest for that “they are viable reconstructions of reality”. Examples where such a journalistic approach is employed can be seen in the following:

**Germanwings 9525:**
[News presenter:] So many questions still to be answered. (BBC News at Six 2015b)

**EgyptAir 804:**
[News correspondent:] The lady [whose daughter was a stewardess] rushed to the airport hoping to get information about what happened to her daughter and what happened to the plane, but she complained about a lack of information. She told me the authorities are telling us nothing at all, they just gave us an emergency number and said they would keep us updated but we don’t know anything actually. Just a short while ago, the Minister of Civil Aviation [...] said that all what we know so far is that the plane disappeared (BBC News at One 2016)
Interestingly, these claims of uncertainty and ignorance are often anchored in the present, which means that there is a ‘current’ absence of information about the events that prohibits journalism from telling the full story. By contrast, the other forms of uncertainty and ignorance – i.e. the causes of the disasters and the question of resolution – venture into the realms of the past and future of the disasters, stating the unknown surrounding the causes (‘past’) and the outcomes of the investigations (‘future’) (Neiger and Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2016, p. 155). With regards to the causes, this introspection can well remain in the realm of uncertainty and ignorance, where an absence of knowledge is simply pointed out. For instance, the media report:

**Metrojet 9268:**

[News presenter:] What caused a Russian airliner to break up over Egypt, killing all 224 passengers on board? That’s the question facing accident investigators and, so far, there is no sign of a clear answer. (5 News Tonight 2015)

However, some broadcasts also develop the uncertainty and ignorance into the realm of ‘speculation’ where journalists build up “possible scenarios” (Sonnevend 2018, p. 86). This is established by drawing on externally available evidence and developments in the investigation to establish plausible ‘theories’ or ‘conjectures’ about what happened. An example of coverage includes the following:

**EgyptAir 804:**

[Voice-over:] The clues are still coming in, but no hard evidence of what caused the crash. So, what are the theories? A bomb on board is one possible explanation. If so, who planted it, where, and when? [...] [Voice-over:] Last year it took IS just ten hours before they claimed they blew up a Russian airliner over the Sinai, yet there has been almost no chatter about this incident. So, could the EgyptAir plane have been downed by the crew or a passenger, perhaps a fight in the cockpit? That could explain the violent movements, [...] [Voice-over:] And then there is technical fault. Tonight, data has come to light of smoke alarms going off just before the plane disappeared. That could be accidental or from an explosion. But there won’t be any definitive answers unless the cockpit voice recorder can be found beneath the sea, and that could take months. (BBC News 2016c)

At this point, attention needs to be drawn to two points. First, some lines of inquiry in the investigations can be used to propose several potential causes. For instance, the break-up of the Metrojet 9268 aircraft was used to indicate some mechanical or physical impact on the airplane, external activity or structural failure (BBC News at One 2015c; BBC News at Ten
2015b). Similarly, the erratic movements of the EgyptAir 804 incident led to suggestions about an explosion, terrorism, mechanical failure or a crew member or passenger forcing the airplane down (BBC News 2016a; BBC News 2016c). This approach of drawing attention to several potential causes can cause contradictions in the reporting and shows that journalism, despite its ideals to report the ‘truth’ (Stocking and Holstein 2015, p. 105), may develop inconsistency and perhaps disseminate false information. However, given that there is uncertainty and ignorance involved in any disaster and they thus set limits to the ‘truth’ of “journalistic narration” (Sonnevend 2018, pp. 76-79), some inconsistency can perhaps be expected. The second point is that any representations of uncertainty, ignorance and speculation draw on linguistic constructions associated with modality. These refer to four aspects:

1. words or expressions which incorporate the concepts (Janich and Simmerling 2015, p. 134; Simmerling and Janich 2016, p. 964)
2. the subjunctive and conditional mood which allow “expressing what is imagined or wished or possible” (Oxford Dictionaries, no date, b)
3. modal verbs and words which are verbs or expressions that “express an idea such as possibility” (Cambridge Dictionary, no date)
4. questions which are, by definition, about “matter[s] requiring resolution” (Oxford Dictionaries, no date, a).

Table 2 provides examples of these features of language and shows how the media use them to point out, emphasise and perhaps even dramatise (initial) uncertainty, ignorance and speculation about the disasters. Moreover, it highlights that different linguistic features and the choice of wording can impact our understanding of certainty by making the possible scenarios sound more or less related, certain and likely to the viewers than they may actually be.
TABLE 2: Linguistic features used to represent uncertainty, ignorance and speculation in the television coverage of Germanwings 9525, Metrojet 9268 and EgyptAir 804

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linguistic features</th>
<th>Germanwings 9525</th>
<th>Metrojet 9268</th>
<th>EgyptAir 804</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Words or expressions that invite uncertainty, ignorance and speculation</td>
<td>“No one knows for sure”; “what we don’t know”; “possibility”; “they have no idea”; “theory”; “it is still unclear”; “so many questions”; “baffling”; “mystery”; “they still can’t explain” (BBC News at One 2015a; BBC News at Six 2015b; BBC News 2015a; BBC News at Ten 2015a; Sky News at Ten 2015a; Channel 4 News 2015)</td>
<td>“there are clues”; “there are no conclusions yet”; “most telling of all”; “all sorts of hints”; “there is still no explanation”; “possible scenarios”; “there are reports”; “no sign of a clear answer”; “it is too early to tell” (BBC News at Ten 2015b; BBC News 2015b; ITV News &amp; Weather 2015a; ITV News &amp; Weather 2015b; 5 News Tonight 2015)</td>
<td>“remains unknown”; “far too early to say”; “lack of information”; “we don’t know anything”; “possibility”; “speculation”; “no hard evidence”; “theories”; “the biggest clue so far”; “mystery”; “many unanswered questions” (BBC News at One 2016; BBC News at Six 2016; BBC News 2016c; BBC News 2016d; Sky News Tonight 2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjunctive and conditional mood</td>
<td>“[News correspondent:] No one knows for sure whether the co-pilot’s mental health problems are to blame for what’s happened” (BBC News at Ten 2015a)</td>
<td>“[News presenter:] If, and it is a very big ‘if’, the Russian jet was brought down deliberately, then there will obviously be a hunt for whoever carried out the attack.” (Sky News at Ten 2015c)</td>
<td>[Voice-over:] It is still far too early to say why this aircraft vanished. Even if they find it soon, it could be weeks or even months before these families get all the answers. (BBC News at One 2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal verbs and words</td>
<td>“believe”; “suggest”; “should”; “might”; “may”; “most plausible”; “apparently”; “it looks like”; “appear”; “likely”; “probably”; “could” (BBC News at Six 2015a; BBC News at Six 2015b; BBC News at Ten 2015a; ITV News at Ten &amp; Weather 2015a; ITV News at Ten &amp; Weather 2015b; 5 News at 7 2015)</td>
<td>“could”; “may”; “suggest”; “believe”; “it is becoming clear”; “would”; “might”; “possible” (BBC News at Ten 2015b; BBC News 2015b; BBC News at Six 2016)</td>
<td>“appears”; “seems”; “might”; “could”; “probably”; “believe”; “likely” (BBC News 2016a; BBC News 2016b; BBC News at Six 2016; BBC News 2016d)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[News correspondent:]</th>
<th>[Voice-over:]</th>
<th>[Voice-over:]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>And the central question is this: Why did the plane and its pilot lose contact with air traffic control for at least eight minutes before it finally crashed? (Channel 4 News 2015)</td>
<td>We know the plane left Sharm el-Sheikh for St Petersburg early on Saturday morning and climbed to 31,000 feet. ... It came down in an area where Isis-supporting militants are fighting Egyptian military. So, was it a missile strike or a bomb? Or a technical failure or pilot error? (5 News Tonight 2015)</td>
<td>The unanswered question remains: Was it terrorism or mechanical failure that brought the plane down? (BBC News 2016c)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third topic of uncertainty and ignorance – i.e. the question of resolution – debates whether there will be some form of resolution to the incidents and how much time it will take. In comparison to the previous issues, this form of uncertainty and ignorance is exclusively developed in the realm of ‘speculation’ because it postpones the issues to the future and speculates about the future in general. Therefore, in a theoretical sense, the argument closely relates to the media discourse of the future, which suggests that “news is no longer conceptualized as rooted solely, or even primarily, in present and recent events”, but may also orientate itself towards the future by reporting “what is about to happen” (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2015, pp. 1050-1051). The basis of this discourse is always uncertain and hypothetical and supports the findings because, contrary to the ideals of journalism, the reporting becomes “an inherently speculative act” (Neiger 2007, p. 309). Neiger (2007, pp. 311, 313) argues:

> we meet journalists in their full might as creators of texts of ‘reality’ that has not yet occurred and may never come to be [...] Even if all the actors in the political scene are sure that a certain event is going to happen (a strike, a vote), things can always change at the last moment (Neiger 2007, pp. 311, 313)

The following examples demonstrate the relationship between speculation and the discourse of the future more clearly as they show speculative predictions on the question of the incidents’ resolutions. This means that they show “a statement about the future”, i.e. a prediction, which describes “a guess, sometimes based on facts or evidence, but not always” (Vocabulary, no date). The previously mentioned linguistic features of modality can also be employed, emphasising the speculative nature of the statements.
Germanwings 9525:

[Voice-over:] It’ll take several weeks of work before investigators can be certain about the cause of this crash. (ITV News at Ten & Weather 2015b)

EgyptAir 804:

[Voice-over:] It is still far too early to say why this aircraft vanished, even if they find it soon, it could be weeks or even months before these families get all the answers. (BBC News at One 2016)

Taken together, these findings suggest that journalism employs several strategies when dealing with an absence of knowledge about airplane disasters. These include: (1) statements about missing information where journalists become “purveyors” (Stocking and Holstein 2015, p. 105) of absent information; (2) the use of modality which incorporates uncertainty and ignorance; and (3) the use of speculation. The third aspect is perhaps most relevant for journalism and media studies as it suggests that news outlets can deviate from their idealistic norms of ‘truth-telling’ and ‘objectivity’ by engaging in possible ‘theories’ or ‘conjectures’ when being confronted by an absence of information that is vital to the news story. Moreover, the findings demonstrate that representations of uncertainty, ignorance and speculation are not bound to temporalities and may instead build on absent information in the ‘present’, ‘past’ and ‘future’ of events. The following section explores coverage discussing the incidents’ resolutions.

THE EPILOGUE PHASE

The epilogue phase, a term in reference to Granatt’s “The Epilogue” (1999, p. 106), refers to the resolution of the disasters and factually concludes the causes by resolving the main uncertainties about the ‘present’, ‘past’ and ‘future’ of the incidents. This means that the reporting, unlike in the (initial) ignorance phase, can make definitive statements about what happened. To provide evidence, the coverage often relies on definitive data gathered during the course of the disasters, such as the transcriptions of the aircraft’s voice-recorders, which helped the investigators reconstruct the course of events and determine the causes of the incidents (BBC News at One 2015b; ITV News at Ten & Weather 2015c). An example includes the following where the Germanwings 9525 reporting mentions a revelation in the investigation, focusing on the reconstruction of events:

Germanwings 9525:

[News presenter:] French air crash investigators say the co-pilot of the crashed Germanwings plane increased its speed during its descent. They say that new
information from the plane’s second black box confirms Andreas Lubitz did crash the plane deliberately. (ITV News at Ten & Weather 2015c)

In comparison to previous findings, the language tends to take on an indicative mood, which is “the form that a verb or sentence has when it is stating a fact that can be known” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, no date). In contrast to modality, this is connoted with more certainty and makes the reported causes sound more definitive. Nevertheless, even though the causes of all disasters were identified, the revelation itself opened further realms of uncertainty and ignorance. These, for instance, included the motives of the co-pilot in the Germanwings 9525 incident (Sky News at Ten 2015b) or – as the following example shows – the cause of the fire in the EgyptAir 804 incident (BBC News 2016d):

**EgyptAir 804:**

[Voice-over:] The fire that downed this plane could have been a malicious attack, but most plane fires are caused by faulty wiring or the air conditioning. And there is another possibility. Laptops, phones, cameras, they all contain powerful lithium batteries, and there have been concerns for some time that they could cause a fire. (BBC News 2016d)

To provide some information about the questions, the media adopt a similar approach to the one in the (initial) ignorance phase, which is to state the new uncertainty and ignorance, to draw on discoveries and evidence, and to use linguistic features of modality. This suggests that the epilogue phase is not a phase of entire resolution but instead closely links to the ignorance phase, where every revelation leads to new questions, leading to new revelations and so on. As Gross and McGoey (2015, p. 1) argue, “[n]ew knowledge always leads to new horizons of what is unknown. [...] new knowledge is never complete knowledge [...] the unknown is not diminished by new discoveries. Quite the contrary: the real, of the unknown is magnified”.

**CONCLUSION**

This article showed how the media incorporate representations of uncertainty, ignorance and speculation in the television coverage of airplane disasters. The findings show that there is a development in the representation of absent information over time, which can be discerned into two phases, an (initial) ignorance phase and an epilogue phase. The former describes coverage that contains an absence of information. In this phase, the media employ several strategies to counterbalance the uncertainty and ignorance imposed by the events. These include: (1) statements about missing information where journalists become
“purveyors” (Stocking and Holstein 2015, p. 105) of absent information, (2) the use of modal linguistic features which incorporate uncertainty and ignorance, and (3) the use of speculation. The third aspect is perhaps most interesting for journalism studies as it suggests that news outlets can deviate from the idealistic norms of ‘truth-telling’ and ‘objectivity’ by engaging in possible ‘theories’ when being confronted by an absence of information. This bears resemblance to ideas of sensationalism, which is often associated with tabloid journalism and hyped-up information to ‘sell’ news. However, it is important to note that, in contrast to sensationalism, the media’s use of speculation does not necessarily question the accuracy of journalism. This can be attributed to the fact that the reporting of the case studies tends to distance itself from the speculative statements by using modal linguistic features which incorporate elements of uncertainty and ignorance that represent statements as mere ‘possibilities’ rather than ‘certain’ facts. Correspondingly, speculation ceases as soon as there is a confirmed resolution to the incidents. The article described this as the epilogue phase, which factually concludes what happened. In this phase, information is presented with more certainty than in the (initial) ignorance phase. Nevertheless, the epilogue phase is not a phase of entire resolution as new revelations still lead to new questions, leading to new revelations and so on.

These findings have implications for journalism studies more generally because they situate the concepts of uncertainty, ignorance and speculation at the forefront of the discipline and refine our understandings about the development of media coverage on events. Moreover, they begin to discuss temporalities in coverage, suggesting that representations are not exclusively anchored in the present but may also refer to the unknown of the past and future. Given the centrality of uncertainty, ignorance and – especially – speculation in journalism, future research needs to build on this to examine how the concepts are incorporated in other forms of news, such as political coverage of events. Emphasis also needs to be placed on the prominence of the concepts, their use in the reporting of other media forms and the audience’s responses to such coverage.
AUTHOR’S NOTE
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Julia Boelle is a PhD graduate of Cardiff University’s School of Journalism, Media and Culture. Her research interests are in the fields of disaster and crisis communication. In the past year, she has worked on two community journalism projects focusing on the experiences of community journalists and successful funding models. She has also been involved in a project investigating the UK government’s communication of pandemics and Covid-19.

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The Skripal Case Representation in Czech Television News

Renáta Sedláková  
*Palacký University, Czech Republic* | *renata.sedlakova@upol.cz*

Marek Lapčík  
*Silesian University in Opava, Czech Republic* | *marek.lapcik1@gmail.com*

**ABSTRACT**

This article examines the representation of Agent Skripal’s poisoning on the public service broadcasting channel Czech Television (CT) in the first half of 2018, using content, discourse and semiotic analyses. We analysed the representation of this event on the following five television news programmes: Events (Události), Events and Commentaries (Události komentáře), News at 23 (Zprávy ve 23), Horizon CT24 (Horizont ČT24) and 90’ CT24 (90’ ČT24). The event’s representation was based on the presentation of aspects of the event and statements by individual actors. The article shows naturalisation of the British explanation of the event in the Czech television broadcasts. This so-called 'British narrative' was the prevailing framing of the event. Differences in the representation of various opinions and in the proportionality of the time devoted to the individual actors were present. However, significant systematic intentional implications, obvious evaluations or identifiable authorial signposting was not evident in the researched sample. We argue that the television coverage of the Skripal case represents a habitual form of the news reporting by the Czech public service broadcaster within the applicable law.

**KEYWORDS**

news discourse, discourse analysis, content analysis, Czech public broadcaster, public service television, Agent Skripal’s poisoning

**CITATION**


**ACCEPTED FOR PUBLICATION** 15 May 2021

**INTRODUCTION**

How did the public service broadcasting channel Czech Television (CT) report Agent Sergey Skripal’s poisoning in the first half of 2018? The objective of this study was to analyse the representation of the event in five key news and current affairs programmes on channels CT1 and CT24, considering the fact that Czech Television is a public service medium. The sample of the study was the television news stories and interviews related to the poisoning...
of Agent Skripal and his daughter, which took place on 4 March 2018 in Great Britain (hereinafter ‘the Skripal case’). The incident was investigated by the British authorities as attempted murder (Johnson 2018). Subsequently, as a result of this incident, almost 150 Russian diplomats were expelled from Great Britain, some other EU countries, the United States and Canada (Bristow 2018). Three Russian diplomats were expelled from the Czech Republic. Russia responded in a similar political move (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2018).

The event of Agent Skripal’s poisoning was selected for the analysis not only due to its international significance but also due to its relevance and connection to the Czech Republic. The intelligence institution, the Security Information Service (BIS), has been drawing attention to the activities of secret agents from other states (especially Russia and China) in the Czech Republic for a long time. Besides, the event had a Czech dimension too, due to the speculation as to whether the substance used for the poisoning – Novichok – was produced in the Czech Republic. On 27 March 2018, the President of the Czech Republic, Miloš Zeman, ordered intelligence services to investigate whether Novichok was handled on the territory of the Czech Republic (Parlament České republiky Senát. 2019). The President’s statement was the most significant moment for the representation of the events, as this was the turning point where the case had become directly relevant to the Czech Republic. In a number of the analysed news stories, the representation of the initial event (‘the poisoning’) then became a context for thematising the representation of the Czech President’s statement. Due to the connections to the domestic and international politics of the Czech Republic, the case received media attention for nearly three months.

CT programmes were selected for analysis because CT is a key public service broadcaster in the Czech Republic. Within the network society, CT competes with a number of traditional, commercial media and social media (Bulck et al. 2018). The need for quality public service broadcasting should be evident. However, discussions about CT’s broadcasting quality and the need for a qualitative public service medium appear periodically in Czech politics.\(^1\) Indeed, in the context of the threat to media independence in Hungary and Poland in recent years, public service broadcasting has become increasingly important.\(^2\) At the time of the selected event, CT operated the only 24-hour news channel with CT24. Its all-day audience share was 4.3%, and the daily share for the channel CT1 was 15.8% (Nielsen Admosphere

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\(^1\) Broader discussions on the future and innovations of public service media appear in academic and political discourses (see, for example, Ofcom 2019, van den Bulck et al. 2018, Brevini 2015, Burri 2020).

\(^2\) Public service media is an institution outside the influence of both the government and the commercial sector and should not compete with commercial media. BBC is the role model in setting standards for public service media in the Czech Republic. Following the BBC, Czech Television and Czech Radio strive to provide validated information and a wide range of views, and aim for high professional standards. (Rada Českého rozhlasu, no date; Rada České televize 2003)
2019). Even though the Czech media studies tradition dates back to the 1990s, there are still few academic studies devoted to public service media or news discourses. This applies to research on both Czech Television (Končelík and Trampota 2004; Metyková 2006; Sedláková and Lapčík 2020) and Czech Radio (Sedláková et al. 2016; Sedláková et al. 2019). For this reason, we focused our analytical attention in this article on journalism standards and representation procedures used by public service media.

**THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

The analysis is based on media constructionism (Luhmann 2000). As mentioned by Schulz (1989), the media’s representation of reality has had implications for the non-media reality because recipients do not have any direct experience with most of the events presented by the media, and they thus use mediated information as a background for their decision-making. Through language and its use, the media create a representation of reality that reflects the dominant ideology and reproduces the existing social structure (Sinha 1988, p. 2; Hall 1997, pp. 1-3; Searle 1995; Kopytowska 2015). Such a representation constructs our understanding of external reality and how the world presents itself in our mind.

The analysis of this article is based on a semiotic approach to news reporting, as elaborated by Volosinov (1973), Hall (1980), Hartley (2001) and Fiske (2001). The semiotic approach understands news reporting as a specific kind of socially shared discourse and analyses news stories as a text constructed through signs (Chandler 2002; Barthes 1982). Semiotics help to analyse the more subtle and less transparent phenomena that take place at the level of semiosis (operating with signs constructing an audio-visual form of narration), both at the syntagmatic and paradigmatic level. Media content represents and spreads the predominant ideologies, values, standards, attitudes and interests of the people or groups dominant in society (Hartley and Fiske 2003). By doing so, they contribute to reinforcing the social status quo. News reporting is no exception. The worldviews of the journalists or the media owners’ ideas can be traced in published news (Hall 1980). A semiotic approach perceives ideology as a process of production and reproduction of meanings, ideas and social values (Barthes 1967, 1982; Foucault 1994). According to Hall (1997, p. 228), the most important issue is not what reality media creates, but whose message is communicated. Rorty (1991, pp. 109-110) suggests focusing on the ethical-political level instead of assessing the accuracy or veracity of the representation (i.e. the methodological-ontological perspective). Sinha (1988) demonstrates that ideology stems from subconscious sharing of certain presuppositions within social structures – highlighting and, at the same time, ignoring certain aspects of reality – rather than from the participants or journalists’ intention to manipulate. However, in theory, CT as a public service broadcaster is supposed to meet the requirements of Act no. 231/2001 Coll. on Television and Radio Broadcasting and the Act no. 483/1991 Coll. on
Czech Television, which imposes objective, balanced and non-biased broadcasting.\(^3\)

According to Birch (1989, pp.15-16), instead of assuming the objectivity of news, it is easier to research the discourse formations that constitute media content. This means focusing on how the news stories of an event or topic are constructed, whose meaning is represented, who is allowed to participate and who is excluded, for what reasons or with what intentions. There are topics and events that are covered by the media repeatedly and more frequently, and other topics that are systematically ignored (Tuchman 1978; Hartley 2001). McCombs and Shaw (1991) and McCombs (2009) showed in their theory of agenda-setting how the media draw the attention of their audience to selected topics, which may then be perceived as ‘important’. The idea of ‘framing’, which journalists use to ground their representations of events, is also derived from the theory of agenda-setting (McCombs and Shaw 1991; McCombs 2009). There are several concepts of framing that primarily differ in whether the frames are related to individual perception or considered to be part of social discourse. The frequently cited scholar, Entman (1993, p. 52), described ‘framing’ as “select[ing] some aspects of a perceived reality and make[ing] them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described”. The process of framing highlights some attributes as more significant, while others are intentionally left aside (Entman 1993). In this sense, framing is a manifestation of social power and reflects the dominating order. Reese (2003, p. 11) stresses that frames are “socially shared organising principles persistent over time, functioning symbolically to enable significant structuring of the social world.” According to McCombs (2004), a ‘frame’ characterises a dominant discursive perspective on the object or event and thus ‘frames’ the object, suggesting certain ways of decoding of the communicated information to the recipient.

In order to facilitate any representation – not only the media’s representation – of any event possible, it is important that the author of the representation carries out the selection and hierarchisation of what is and what is not significant and why, e.g. so that an event can be transformed into a news story comprehensible to the recipients (Hall 1980; Hartley 2001). The selection of characteristics, aspects and connections of the event that are considered as significant – out of all the identifiable and conceivable ones – enable the event to be ‘representable’ (Hall 1980; Hartley 2001). By nature, the process of general representation

\(^3\) There is a dual broadcasting system in the Czech Republic. The public service media is represented by Czech Radio and Czech Television. Both run several channels. As such, CT is subject to Act no. 483/1991 Coll. on Czech Television. The compliance with the law in the broadcasting of these media is controlled by a Board, whose members are elected by the Czech Republic Parliament. “The main tasks of the public service in the field of television broadcasting are in particular: a) to provide the objective, verified, in a whole balanced and comprehensive information for the free formation of opinions” (Act no. 483/1991 Coll. on Czech Television).
routine supports a certain form of bias in the sense of applying a certain point of view to the represented event. Most objects can be described through a considerable number of features, attributes, aspects and connections that characterise them, and it is essential to consider the ones selected. The ways in which the initial data turn into a form of a meaningful news story are further referred to as ‘framing-thematisation’, establishing the essential form of the narrative through which the event is presented to the recipients.

METHODOLOGY

This study examined the TV news stories on the Skripal case published by the CT1 and CT24 channels in three months after the event on 4 March 2018. The main research questions were the following:

1. What is the key thematic framing of the Skripal case, and what other events or themes is the case linked to?
2. Who are the referenced sources and quoted speakers, and what are the presented points of view in the news broadcasts?
3. Are there any signs of ideological bias in the way the event’s narratives were constructed in the news stories?

The aim of the research was not to assess the factual correctness of the communicated information or the correspondence between the news content and physical reality. Instead, we identified the methods around the construction of representation, examining the legitimisation of presented statements and using methods of argumentation.

The following five programmes were selected for analysis: Events (Události), Events and Commentaries (Události komentáře), News at 23 (Zprávy ve 23), Horizon CT24 (Horizont ČT24) and 90’ CT24 (90’ ČT24). These are the main news and editorial journalism programmes broadcasted by CT during evening primetime. They are different in their format, genre and length. Events and News at 23 publish news programmes exclusively; Events and Commentaries as well as Horizon CT24 also include editorial formats; 90’ CT24 consists of news reports and follow-up interviews with guests commenting on the subject and interviews usually lasting 10-18 minutes. In programmes combining news and editorial journalism, the dominant form of representation is an interview with a foreign reporter usually preceded by the news report’s introduction (see, for example, Horizon CT24). The research unit of the analysis was the news story including the presenter’s opening in the studio.

For the analysis, triangulation of quantitative and qualitative research methods was used.
For the quantitative part of the research, we employed the method of content analysis designed for the quantitative, systematic and objective description of communication content (Neuendorf 2002). The method is based on systematic coding of the manifest content of the message based on quantification of specific characteristics (variables) (Neuendorf 2002). In this study, these included the spectrum of the covered topics, the thematic frames, the sources of information and quoted speakers including their affiliations (i.e. profession and affiliation to a specific organisation), as well as the balance of soundbites. The quantitative coding of the programmes was carried out by one of the researchers, while the coding of the unclear research units was coded by both authors.

Within the three-month period following the event (4 March 2018), we identified 261 news stories that mention the event in the selected programmes. These news stories were categorised into three groups: main topic, secondary topic and reference depending on the relevance of the provided information to the Skripal case. The news stories of the first group provide key information about the event with respect to the time dedicated to it. If the information provided on the case developed or complemented another main topic of the news story, it was classified as a secondary topic. The ‘reference’ category contained news stories with a reference to the Skripal case without further analysis or details. In our analysis, we examined 227 of the 261 news stories because all of these dealt with the event either as a main or secondary topic. The same sample was used for the qualitative and quantitative analyses.

**TABLE 1** Number of news stories on the Skripal case published by programme (absolute frequency)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Main topic</th>
<th>Secondary topic</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News at 23</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90’ CT24</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events and Commentaries</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizon CT24</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>261</strong></td>
<td><strong>170</strong></td>
<td><strong>57</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The qualitative analysis was used to detect meaning and nuance in the news stories. Qualitative methods allow revealing implicit presuppositions – i.e. unexpressed assumptions that are considered generally known and unquestioned – used in the representation, the
narrativisation of a theme and the naturalisation⁴ of communicated meanings (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). The qualitative analysis was conducted based on the methodology of grounded theory by Strauss and Corbin (1998). This approach employs an inductive method of coding. This is how we identified the key segments of news stories, the procedures of the news construction and the means of narrativisation of the event’s representation. The methods of discourse analysis (van Dijk 1993; Phillips and Hardy 2002; Wodak and Meyer 2002; Fairclough 2003) and semiotic analysis (Chandler 2002) were combined. Semiotic analysis is one of the most used and most effective analytical tools for the analysis of news. It allows identifying underlying news construction procedures which are not detectable by quantitative methods, i.e. subtle procedures of narration construction, which cause shifts in meaning or emphasise a preferred interpretation with the goal to establish a specific meaning in the representation (Chandler 2002) and favourise or disqualify specific actors. In our analysis, we tried to identify the use of procedures that could be interpreted as a manifestation of bias, i.e. the implied ideologically grounded attitudes of the speakers, journalists or a specific party, and the use of arguments that (de)favourise the representation of any party involved in the event. The saturation of data in relation to the observed variables was in the analysed sample. To avoid succumbing to unfounded generalisation of findings, we considered the entire sample and wider socio-cultural context while interpreting the findings.

**RESULTS OF THE QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS**

The Skripal case received a significant amount of attention by Czech Television. This can be partly explained with the theory of news values by Galtung and Ruge (1965), as the original event incorporates a number of values which make it ‘newsworthy’ for the media, including frequency, unexpectedness, negativity and conflict, personalisation, continuity, participation of elite nations and people, as well as relevance. Most likely due to the event’s connection to the domestic and international politics of the Czech Republic, the case gained media attention for nearly three months. As Figure 1 shows, the amount of coverage on the case dropped in the middle of April, only for the case to return to the spotlight at the beginning of May following President Zeman’s statements about the possible production of the poisoning substance in the Czech Republic. On 27 March 2018, three weeks after the Skripals’ poisoning, the President of the Czech Republic ordered an investigation as to whether Novichok was handled in the Czech Republic, which led to another spike in the number of news stories covering the event. The latest news story included in our search was broadcast on 6 June 2018.

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⁴ We understand ‘naturalisation’ to mean the process of gradual automatisation of understanding of originally arbitrary and unsubstantiated representation as absolutely natural and, therefore, accepted and unquestioned (Barthes 1982).
The significance assigned to the event is also evidenced by the placing of the news stories within the programmes and the duration of the news stories. Figure 2 shows that more than half (56%) of the research units were broadcast among the first six news stories in the programme, while 20 (9%) of them were shown as the first news story in the rundown, highlighting the importance of the event.

FIGURE 1 Development of the initial coverage of the Skripal case (absolute frequency)

FIGURE 2 Placing of the news stories within the programmes (relative frequency)
Figure 3 shows the duration of the news stories. Three quarters of the news stories (74%) were up to four minutes long. One fifth (18%) were longer stories with a maximum duration of 23 minutes. Only one tenth (8%) of the research units were short news of up to 30 seconds. Longer forms of news were mainly featured in the newscasts 90’ CT24, Horizon CT24 and Events and Commentaries, as the broadcast formats provide time for more extensive interviews on any given topic.

![Figure 3](image_url)

**FIGURE 3** Duration of the news stories (relative frequency)

The findings in Table 2 show that the prominent messages of the news stories and the presenter’s studio introductions can be categorised into five frames:

1. the poisoning of the agent and his daughter (the event and its participants)
2. the international conflict (Britain and Western countries versus Russia)
3. the diplomatic crisis (expulsion of diplomats)
4. the dispute about the production of Novichok in the Czech Republic (internal political crisis)
5. the international response to the statements about the origin of Novichok in the Czech Republic.
**TABLE 2** The thematic framing of the Skripal case in the programmes (absolute/relative frequency)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic frame / Programme</th>
<th>The poisoning of the Skripals</th>
<th>International conflict</th>
<th>Diplomatic crisis</th>
<th>Novichok - International political crisis</th>
<th>Novichok - Internal political crisis</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News at 23</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events and Commentaries</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizon CT24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90° CT24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(33 %)</td>
<td>(23 %)</td>
<td>(20 %)</td>
<td>(16 %)</td>
<td>(8 %)</td>
<td>(2 %)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

33% of the news stories provided information on the event itself and its participants, primarily surrounding the progress of their health condition (frame 1). The main narrative of the event was the international conflict between Great Britain with its allies and Russia (frame 2) and the diplomatic crisis (frame 3) with a focus on the mutual expulsion of diplomats. These news stories (43%, frame 2 and 3) were based on the explanations by the British mainstream media and political representatives that Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia were poisoned with a nerve agent and that the incident is investigated by British authorities as attempted murder (see Harding and MacAskill 2018). We refer to this explanation of the event as ‘the British narrative’. The narrative was most likely initiated by the British media, which were explicitly referenced in the news from the first day onwards. By comparison, only a quarter of the news stories (24%, frame 4 and 5 together) adopted a distinctively Czech frame as they provided information on Novichok in domestic (16% of news stories) or international contexts (8% of news stories) (see Table 2).

The use of sources and quoted speakers corresponded to the described framing. Table 3 shows that the majority of the news stories referenced several sources. The most frequently cited sources were representatives of the British government (in 50% of news stories), representatives of the Russian state (in 43% of news stories) and government officials of the Czech Republic or their spokespersons (in 43% of news stories). Indispensable sources of
information also included British media and press agencies, with the most frequently mentioned being the BBC and Reuters News Agency (in 41 % of news stories). Statements by politicians from other countries (in 11% of news stories) and quotations of other foreign media (in 10% of news stories) were considerably less frequent. For example, compared to British media sources, references to Russian media sources were considerably less frequent (in 11% of news stories), which supports the above-mentioned dominant framing of the British narrative.

**TABLE 3** Sources referenced in the news (absolute frequency)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme / Source of information</th>
<th>Total (absolute frequency)</th>
<th>Total (relative frequency)</th>
<th>Events</th>
<th>News at 23</th>
<th>Events and Commentaries</th>
<th>Horizon CT24</th>
<th>90' CT24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British government officials</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian government officials</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech government officials</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British media and agencies</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech media and agencies</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech police, Security Information Service and the army</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other countries’ representatives</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian media and agencies</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/unspecified media</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British police, intelligence service and army</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other foreign police and intelligence services</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The news stories often contained a soundbite, i.e. a direct quotation of the speaker’s statement. According to Dimitrova and Strömback (2009), this is a way of verifying the report or providing contradictory arguments without being accused of bias. In comparison to
statements of randomly chosen members of the public, the statements of official sources, such as government officials, have more authority and can be used to express an official position on a particular topic (Hartley and Fiske 2003). The majority (73%) of the analysed news stories contained a soundbite. Tables 4 shows that the mostly quoted speakers were the British politicians Theresa May (21 times) and Boris Johnson (19 times). Amongst the most frequently quoted people from the Czech Republic were the Prime Minister, Andrej Babiš (18 times), and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Martin Stropnický (14 times). In comparison, Russian representatives, such as Sergey Lavrov (10 times) and Vladimir Putin (8 times), were quoted less often. The total number of British and Russian speakers and their ratio within one news story are comparable, with a slight prevalence of British representatives. The exceptions were News at 23 and Horizon CT24, where slightly more Russian speakers were quoted.

**TABLE 4** The speakers quoted most often in the news stories (absolute frequency)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quoted speaker</th>
<th>Absolute frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theresa May, UK Prime Minister</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boris Johnson, UK Foreign Secretary</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrej Babiš, Czech Republic’s Prime Minister</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Stropnický, Czech Republic’s Minister of Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vojtěch Filip, Czech Republic’s Leader of the Communist Party</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana Drábová, Czech Republic’s Head of the State Office for Nuclear Safety</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergey Lavrov, Russia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>František Bublan, Czech Republic’s former head of the Office for Foreign</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relations and Information</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vladimir Putin, Russia’s President</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Zacharovová, spokesperson for Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karla Šlechtová, Czech Republic’s Minister of Defence</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miroslav Kalousek, Czech Republic’s former Head of TOP09 Party</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yulia Skripal</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We also analysed the meaning and balance of the statements of all speakers and categorised them according to their wording and explicit evaluative expressions. Table 5 shows that, while the majority (57%) of statements were neutral towards Russia as one of the parties in the dispute, one seventh (15%) of the speakers expressed pro-Russian and one fourth (28%) anti-Russian tones.
Although the ratio of pro- to anti-Russian statements varied by programme, the anti-Russian tendency was more prevalent in four out of five programmes. By nature, it is impossible to ensure an absolutely balanced representation of the opinions of various parties and participants, as one of the parties will always be over-represented to a certain extent. For this reason, we used the qualitative analysis to examine this unbalance further.

RESULTS OF THE QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Journalism tools used in the representation of the Skripal case

The media’s representation of the case over the analysed period and across all the analysed programmes is characterised by a relatively high proportion of the following features, which are, in most cases, co-functioning and reinforcing one another:

1. highly structured and often detailed narrations
2. the use of statements of various participants
3. frames that reinforce the British narrative surrounding the case as well as the gradual naturalisation of the discourse.

The first feature refers to the representation of the event and its development in the form of a detailed and structured narrativisation, including details such as the location in the South of England, the reason for the daughter’s arrival, a detailed description of the Agent Skripal’s background and evidence provided by experts.
The second feature refers to statements by the various kinds of participants or parties involved, such as representatives, institutional sources, witnesses of the event, experts and so on. These took the forms of direct speech – i.e. direct statements of the participants recorded either verbally or in combination with shots of the interview – and indirect speech – i.e. the presenter or reporter paraphrasing the participant’s statements. In the majority of the news stories and segments across the programmes, the emphasis lied on the description of the event, with the general framing establishing Great Britain and Russia as the main parties involved. The statements and opinions of both parties were identified in most of the news stories, using either generalised (‘according to Britain/Russia’, ‘according to London/Moscow’, etc.) or individualised language (‘according to the foreign minister’, ‘as the press secretary said’, etc.).

Although the event was represented in a wider context, this was in line with conventionally used media routines in news production operations, which describe a standardised way of news production operations, such as the contextualisation of the event (e.g. accentuating the interviewee’s profession), the legitimisation and authentication of the news story through witnesses, as well as the use of statements by institutional sources and the use of (contradictory) statements by representatives of the different participants/parties involved (Shoemaker and Reese 1996; Tuchman 1978). In the representation of the Skripal case, the statements of external parties were key elements. The selection of guests who were interviewed, especially in programmes combining news and interviews, can be understood as a semantically implicative prediction of the event’s nature. This does not mean that the selection of guests appeared significantly biased in terms of assumed favoritism. Indeed, the majority of the invited guests failed to show their inclination in terms of opinion or ideological affinity. However, the very first guests were not criminal investigators or experts in chemical substances, but a political scientist and an expert in international law, implying the international and political nature of the event.

Such a selection is consistent with the event’s framing in accordance with the British narrative established in the very first days of the event’s coverage. This refers to the third feature mentioned above. Example 1 represents a typical form of the construction of the British narrative in the initial stages of the event, which gradually naturalised and established the framing of the following stages of the event’s representation. The way of leading the interviews was based on the implication of the conflicting nature of the event, its (international) political aspect, the quite explicit identification of the opposing parties involved (although, at the given moment, the only participants in the event were two poisoned people) and, most importantly, the implication of a ‘guilty’ party.
EXAMPLE 1 9 March 2018 - Horizon
PRES: “Mr. Smid, if we worked with the hypothesis that it is really Russia that is behind the attack in Britain, as many suggest, what can actually be expected from the side of Great Britain?”
ACT: “[…] the Russian trace does not have to automatically mean the Kremlin’s blessing. […]”
PRES: “Naturally, one thing is a visible reply, blatant, and then there is the reply that you can’t see, that we might never learn about, or in several years only, but where this incident could plunge British-Russian relations […]”
[...]
PRES: “[… but, nevertheless, whatever happened, we can expect some kind of united response from the European Union, or the North Atlantic Alliance, at least at a political level then, or are the two organisations so divided that it is unimaginable”
ACT: “[… how to proceed against Russia if the Russian trace is really confirmed, which hasn’t been confirmed so far […]”

The framing of the Skripal case reproduced the official discourse which understood the event as the poisoning of an agent (and his daughter). This narrative in the case’s representation was identified across all the analysed programmes from the very first day. This primary event’s framing was likely initiated by the British media – not just because of the event’s close geographical location – as references to the British media were explicit in the news from the beginning. This served to highlight one of the possible aspects (the poisoning) by which the narrative in the following representation was established. Based on the findings of the qualitative analysis, the British narrative was most distinct in the majority of the news stories. This is illustrated by Examples 2a, b and c which include news stories that were broadcast on the day after the incident.

EXAMPLE 2A 5 March 2018 – Events
PRES: (news report read in a studio combined with news agency clips): “And now very fresh news from Great Britain – the man, who is in critical state after being exposed to an unknown substance in a shopping centre in Salisbury, is a former Russian spy who had worked for London. Sergey Skripal was granted asylum in Britain after the spy swap in 2010. He was previously sentenced to 13 years in prison for espionage in Russia.”

5 This article uses the following abbreviations to identify the different types of speakers: PRES = presenter; REP = reporter, editor; ACT = actor/participant, i.e any kind of speakers apart from the editorial staff.
EXAMPLE 2B 5 March 2018 – 90’ CT24
PRES: “The spy was probably poisoned by an unknown substance in Salisbury, in the South of England. Sergey Skripal (66) was found unconscious by the police in a shopping centre. According to press reports, he could have been exposed to a very strong opioid. An approximately 30-year-old woman was admitted to hospital in a serious condition along with him. Skripal was sentenced in Russia 12 years ago for carrying out espionage for Britain, after which Moscow swapped him for spies held in the US.”

ACT: (Craig Holden, Assistant Chief Constable – direct speech in English with voice-over translation): “Two people, who probably knew each other, were taken to Salisbury District Hospital without obvious injuries. They are under treatment for suspected exposure to an unknown substance. Both are in serious condition in the intensive care unit.”

EXAMPLE 2C 5 March 2018 – News at 23
PRES (headlines): “A former Russian agent was poisoned in Britain. He was sentenced to 12 years in his home country for espionage.”

Amongst others, the framing of the Skripal case presented the event in the context of past events, Agent Skripal’s professional identity, the events related to it (e.g. his conviction for espionage and the spy swap) and using the analogy of another case of a poisoned Russian agent, Litvinenko. This analogy was reproduced in several news items following the incident. The incident’s contextualisation with Russia is reflected in the duration allocated to these aspects within the news stories as well as in the formulation of the questions asked by the presenter. Then, as early as the first day of coverage, another aspect of the event was thematised: the possible consequences for international relations between Great Britain and Russia. This is interesting as such because, at the beginning of the case’s coverage, the media reported of ‘attempted murder’, even though the poisoning of the former agent could have been attributed to a number of causes, including accidental poisoning, a consequence of careless handling of a toxic substance or attempted suicide. In such cases, the construction of the news stories would have, most certainly, been different to the British narrative, and the contextualisation with the death of another Russian agent would have been illogical. Thus, at the time, one could have questioned the way in which the case was represented, especially

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6 This example presents the headlines. It illustrates one aspect that could be perceived as problematic in terms of the semantic implication that, in this case, can be understood as indication of liability for the action. The first sentence of the statement relates to the description of the represented event; the latter does not describe the event itself and becomes the tool for its possible thematisation. The limited length of statements within the headlines diminishes the space for accurate statement formulation and can be regarded as an indication of the preferred interpretation and the speaker’s attitude to the event.
given the moderate statements of institutional sources (e.g. police) which were in contrast to the case’s representation. However, statements that questioned the case’s representation only rarely appeared in the examined programmes.

Example 3 demonstrates the British narrative more closely, as it contains a probably not intentional but significant shift in meaning caused by the omitting of the word ‘alleged’ in Vladimir Putin’s statement. The referenced statement taken from the British press should have been phrased: “Vladimir Putin is alleged to have said”. Furthermore, the way Putin’s statement is used and framed implies a possible involvement in the represented event, which is enhanced by the selection of speakers and soundbites.

**EXAMPLE 3** 7 March 2018 – Events; Horizon CT24
PRES: “Former Russian intelligence service officer, Sergei Skripal, and his daughter Yulia were deliberately poisoned by nerve gas, according to British police.”
[...]
ACT (Mark Rowley, the head of the counter-terrorism unit, statement in English with subtitle translation): “We believe the two people who originally became unwell were targeted specifically.”
REP: “An espionage affair terrified a town with a population of 45,000 in the South of England [...] The British media recall Vladimir Putin’s statement eight years ago that traitors would meet an end and choke on the 30 pieces of silver they got.”
[...]
ACT (Edward Lucas, expert in intelligence services and commentator for The Times, text translation of his direct speech): “We wouldn’t go to Russia and try to kill Anna Chapman. It’s astonishing to me but Russians come here and try to kill Mr Skripal. It is a reckless and crude breach of every rule of espionage.”

The implicit framing of the British narrative was prominent in several statements throughout the case’s reporting. This could be the consequence of the routinisation of the news construction, as the analysis confirmed gradual naturalisation of the British narrative in the development of the incident’s coverage (see Examples 4 and 5).

**EXAMPLE 4** 7 March 2018 – Events and Commentaries
PRES: “[...] British media write of the suspicion that there is a certain country behind the attack, namely Russia, that dealt in a similar way with its former agents in the past [...]”

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7 The formulation of the second part of the statement is based on a constative form (implying the provision of a verifiable or already documented fact, i.e. not as a conditional, potential fact, hypothesis, assumption, etc.).
EXAMPLE 5 6 March 2018 – News at 23 (news headline):
PRES: “A former Russian spy and his daughter are in critical state after the poisoning. London threatened Moscow with a response.”
REP: “If the involvement of the Kremlin is confirmed, the British Head of Diplomatic Service in Westminster threatened sanctions.”

The formulation of the statements, consistent with the British narrative, appears repeatedly in the representation of the event across all the monitored programmes, also using other syntactic-lexical variations, such as the choice of the word ‘retaliation’, which is usually understood as a reaction to a previous action. For example, this can be seen in the Events headline “British retaliation against Russia”, published on 11 March 2018. The stylistic construction implies the factual involvement of Russia in the event and thematises actions if there were to be another similar ‘hostile’ activity. Similarly, 90’ CT24 reported on 16 March 2018: “Great Britain is, at the same time, ready to freeze Russian assets if further hostile activity were to occur”.

The adoption and the gradual naturalisation of the British narrative in the analysed sample of CT broadcasting can be seen as problematic as it a priori represents the parties involved in the event in a biased way. This does not mean that the broadcasting did not include any opposing opinions. The analysed news items presented the opinions of both parties and opinions problematising the British narrative (for example, on Events and Commentaries, published 13 March 2018). However, those views were considerably under-represented. Instead, the typical method of the case’s representation showed various (implicit) forms of presenting the British narrative.

Tools of narrativisation supporting the bias

The qualitative analysis – consistent with the results of the quantitative analysis – revealed the considerable extent of disproportion, not only in the allocated space, but also in the nature and form of the representation of opinions of particular parties involved in the event. For example, the opinions and statements extended by countries that side with Great Britain\(^8\) received significantly more distinct time and space. They were presented more prominently and tended to appear in the form of well-structured statements. By comparison, the opinions

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\(^8\) For example, this is manifested in statements about the expulsion of Russian diplomats and the Czech President’s statement on the production of Novichok in the Czech Republic.

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of the Russian party were represented less prominently and in a distinctively less structured form. Regarding the style of the news stories’ construction, a relatively neutral representation of the individual parties prevailed. However, news stories carrying favourising or disqualifying potential were recorded. Various types of rhetorical figures and tropes were used to reinforce the above-mentioned imbalance of representation. This is demonstrated in Example 6.

**EXAMPLE 6** 16 March 2018 – 90’ CT24

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRES: “And I would like to remind everyone that the United States, Germany and France backed Great Britain and together appealed to Moscow to explain the use of a military-grade nerve agent in the British territory. Russia denies its involvement in the incident and distances itself from the development of Novichok nerve poison.”</th>
<th>This part of the presenter’s statement formulating the attitudes of both parties can be considered relatively unproblematic in terms of framing.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The United States is independently tightening sanctions on Russia. The alleged reason is cyberattacks, including attempts to influence the election.”</td>
<td>This part of the presenter’s input contextualises the primary event with the representation of another event that is not related to the actual event (attempts to influence the election were not proven but presented as a fact, which is problematic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REP: “The British Prime Minister arrived in Salisbury where, on Thursday, two Russians collapsed after being exposed to the nerve agent Novichok, mainly to calm the situation in the town. A day earlier, however, decisive, like the leaders in the Cold War era, she [Theresa May] announced a retaliation;”</td>
<td>The presenter’s statement introduces the direct speech of Theresa May. There is evaluation of the former Prime Minister’s “decisive[ness], like the leaders in the Cold War era”, which is implicative and, in the case’s context, establishes a positive valence, although it does not problematise the following statement by Theresa May as such.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT (Theresa May; subtitle translation): “We will not tolerate the threat to lives of British citizens and others on British soil from the Russian government, nor will we tolerate such a flagrant breach of Russian international obligations.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REP: “Moscow, which came under strong pressure from Americans in the United Nations Security Council, resolutely denies involvement in the case. It offers conspiracy theories; someone is allegedly trying to discredit Russia.”

ACT (Sergey Lavrov; subtitle translation): “I cannot judge what the motives of our British colleagues are, but I think that their motivation is insincere.”

Contextualisation of another event is used in the presenter's statement. Russia is represented in the form of ‘explicit double doubting’ – allegedly initiated by Russia (i.e. the source of the conspiracy theories) and supported by the uncertainty of the statement (allegedly).

The soundbite is neither explicitly related to the previous introduction by the presenter nor supports it in any way.

REP: “But for the West, the time for an explanation has expired. The leaders of Britain, the United States, Germany and France announced that Russia as the perpetrator of the assassination in Salisbury is the only convincing explanation.”

The presenter’s statement without any significant implications represents the opinion of the given parties and, from a syntactic point of view, states a proposition which is completed by the following joint declaration of Great Britain, Germany, France and the USA.

ACT (subtitle “Joint declaration of Great Britain, Germany, France and the USA”; written text read by REP2): “This way of using a military-grade nerve chemical of the kind that Russia developed represents the first offensive deployment of a nerve agent in Europe since the Second World War [...] It threatens the security of us all. Source: Reuters”
REP: “The use of Novichok obviously came at a moment when there is a need to choose sides.”

“The Secretary General also presented his North Atlantic Alliance annual report. He mentioned Russia and its recent actions quite often. He made mention of the annexation of Crimea, support for east Ukrainian separatists, unwanted military presence in parts of Georgia and Moldova, interference in Montenegro, attempts to undermine democratic elections and institutions. The attack in Salisbury, according to him, crowns the series.”

ACT3 (Jens Stoltenberg; direct speech with text translation): “We do not want a new Cold War. And we do not want to be dragged into a new arms race.”

REP: “Vladimir Putin shows his weapons more and more often. At the beginning of this month, he bragged about new nuclear missiles which are supposedly able to hit any place in the world. He tests his military power in Syria. On Sunday, Putin is highly likely to be elected the President of the Russian Federation for the next six years for the fourth time. The West is trying to decide how to deal with Russian threats; it cannot have much hope for a new beginning. Milada Megratova, Czech Television.”

The statement polarises the event’s representation and establishes the frame as the principle of a so-called ideological square.9

This statement’s narrative uses the opposition of ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ based on the principle of a semiotic square through contextualisation, the disqualification of Russia and the representation of events that are not immediately linked to the current case.

This statement corresponds to the principle of the semiotic square: Our positive actions and characteristics are in contrast to previous actions, and statements are hypertrophying negative actions and characteristics assigned to them.

There is repeated use of a semiotic square, confirming and extending the representation of negative actions and characteristics of ‘them’. In addition, they are hypertrophied by means of rhetorical figures carrying intense implicative potential – a disqualified participant “shows his weapons”, “bragged about new nuclear missiles”, “tests his military power”; Russian threat vs (lack of) hope of the West for a new beginning, even presented as a constative with ‘Russian threat’ being a fact.

9 Production and interpretation of ideologies are, according to van Dijk (1993), based on so-called mental and shared models. They are mental representations of experience, impressions, events or situations and opinions that ‘we’ have on ‘them’ (van Dijk 1993). According to van Dijk’s ideological square (1993), we tend to place more significance to our good deeds and minimise our weaknesses while emphasising the shortcomings and lessening the merits of others.
The qualitative analysis also revealed the use of other, subtle methods in the construction of the case’s narration that, as such, might not seem problematic. Considering their different use for the representation of the individual parties, they acquire either a favourising or disqualifying potential. One such example refers to the choice of words used in the voiceover when journalists refer to different actors (see Example 7). Hypertrophied authorisation was used to indicate that this is only a statement of a particular person or case party. It can be understood as a rhetorical strategy in the instances when the intense use of authorisation suggests that it is a particular participant’s statement or attitude, and not the statement of a fact, while non-authorised propositions can be understood as stating “generally accepted facts” (Hartley and Fiske 2003). From the point of view of pragmatics, such a method is also used to indicate that the speaker presenting the statement distances himself from the statement’s content. Regarding the declared requirements on the sources of the communicated information in the programmes, this is not problematic. The rhetorics contribute, however, to the bias of the general representation if they are not used equally for the case’s representation of all participants and parties’ opinions. Within the analysed sample, such wording was identified, to a considerable degree, in the Russian party’s statements (see Example 7). This fact is understandable in the context of the dichotomisation of the case’s participants: the British party was, in many instances, described as ‘allies’, while the Russian party, de facto, was not similarly labelled. At the same time, this was another form of a disproportionate representation of the event’s individual participants in the analysed programmes.

EXAMPLE 7 21 March 2018 – Events

PRES: “Due to the poisoning of the ex-agent and his daughter with a nerve agent, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs invited all accredited ambassadors to Moscow and expressed concerns that Britain could destroy key evidence. What exactly was said at the meeting is a question for the commentator, Miroslav Karas.”

REP: “Good evening. Russian ministry, first and foremost, tempered their original tone. Russia does not blame anyone for the poisoning of Skripal any longer, and the previous reference to the potential of the Czech Republic or Sweden [to produce Novichok] was allegedly only to serve as an example of the advanced level of the research in chemistry.

The reference to Slovakia was, according to Ermakov from the Ministry, a mistake as it was allegedly meant to be Czechoslovakia.

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10 This piece of news was preceded by a news item containing a statement by the Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs denying allegations made by the Russian party. The reporter’s statement in the example is typographically – using indentation and spacing between lines – segmented into separate sentences to highlight the accentuated authorisation in each of them.
Criticism for this was very strongly pointed directly at London. Ermakov even said that he felt ashamed for British diplomats and experts. Britain, according to the Ministry, carries out tests of chemical weapons in Porton Down, not far from where Skripal lived, while Russia, as he said, destroyed all 40,000 tons. According to the Ministry, it is another strongly falsified and unlawful provocation, hysteria and a manifestation of Russophobia. The Russian Ministry stated that it was a terrorist action against Russian citizens in the territory of Great Britain and demands further explanation. Here, in Moscow, also the words of the head of British diplomacy, Boris Johnson, attracted attention. He said that Vladimir Putin was using the upcoming football World Cup in a similar way to Hitler’s use of the Olympic Games in 1936. An immediate response came from the spokeswoman of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Zakharova, who said that the comparison of Russia to Nazi Germany was absolutely unacceptable.”

The construction of identical statements indicating the authorisation of propositions lies at the foundation of another phenomenon that was identified in the analysed sample. This was the narrative or its (partial) construction based on the statement of one of the parties in the event, albeit without explicit authorisation. Although this may seem as subtle detail, it is important to emphasise that it is related to the description of a feature that pervaded the case’s representation in the analysed programmes, which might have fundamental consequences in relation to the representation’s construction and its legitimacy: the implication or even indication of a presumed initiator of the event. If this aspect is presented as the statement of a particular participant or party involved in the case, it is indisputable, legitimate and consistent with the news reporting’s requirements. However, if the insinuation of a possible initiator is presented as a journalistic statement, e.g. extended by the presenter, editor, editorial staff or CT, it might become a source of disqualification or problematisation of the validity of the case’s representation. Example 8 provides an illustration.

**EXAMPLE 8** 23 March 2018 – Events and Commentaries
PRES: “A strong message from the European Union to Russia. The European Union recalls their ambassador from Moscow for consultations, and at least some member states are also planning to expel some of its Russian diplomats. The Czech Republic will probably join them as well as it wants to manifest unity with Britain after the recent attack on an ex-agent, Sergey Skripal, for which Russia is probably responsible.”
In Example 8, the explicit authorisation of the individual propositions is completely missing. Instead, they are presented in the form of a news report on external reality (i.e. not as an attitude or opinion of a particular participant). The final part highlights this, i.e. by stating a fact that, from a pragmatic point of view, can be related to the author of the statement. The phrase “for which Russia is probably responsible” could be perceived as the presentation of a statement characterised as a generally accepted fact. Authorisation is missing in this news story, and its separate parts are formulated as the newscast’s description of actions. The final part of the statement can then be understood as an opinion that the author of the statement identifies with, which means that CT could be seen as biased and taking the side of one of the parties involved in the event.

In addition, the use of stylistic actualisation, hyperbole, defamiliarisation, etc. cannot be understood as a neutral representation due to their figurative nature. As such, these expressions can be perceived by viewers of the public service newscast as biased. In Example 9, the presenter’s statement identifies the parties in the conflict using a neutral tone, but the subsequent introduction in the reporting semantically disqualifies one of them. This can be perceived as the journalist (reporter / editor) siding with one of the parties.

**EXAMPLE 9** 19 March 2018 – Events and News at 23

PRES: “The European Union demands immediate answers from Russia on the questions of the British regarding the recent nerve agent attack in Salisbury and stated foreign ministers of the member countries of the Union in a joint statement. Moscow denied anything to do with the attack and, on the contrary, demanded an apology from London.”

REP: “The Russian flag on one of the diplomatic buildings in the centre of Brussels. It turns whichever way the wind blows, and European diplomats are annoyed with Russia’s twisting and turning. They demand clear answers from Russia and the end to prevarications.”

ACT (Boris Johnson; direct speech with subtitle translation of the statement): “The Russian denying is more and more absurd. First, they say they never produced Novichok. Then, they say they produced it, but they destroyed it all.”

REP: “Such prevarications of the facts, according to the foreign ministers who arrived here in Brussels today, means [...] one thing only – that this is the Russian strategy [...]”

Apart from the stylistics themselves, which can be understood as inconsistent with the genre of news reporting, the different representations of the individual participants and parties in the case can be seen as questionable. This is due to the fact that using principles of semantic
disqualification causes a potential disqualification of one of the party’s credibility by means of the reporter’s construction of statements. It should also be mentioned that an equivalent representation was not present in the other party’s representation. This makes the representation of the event’s participants or parties not only disproportionate but also – at least implicitly – biased.

CONCLUSION

Although the majority of the analysed news stories on the Skripal case corresponded to Czech media law, the conducted analysis identified an inclination of CT’s media reporting on the Skripal case to the representation of the British narrative. In the course of the event’s development, political representatives of other countries, including the Czech Republic, supported the British version of the case. In the examined programmes, they supported it verbally – by a prevailing identification with the British party’s attitude and approaches in terms of the sub-event on the existence of Novichok in the Czech Republic – but also in the form of actual international steps, such as the expulsion of Russian diplomats. From the perspective of social science, CT fulfilled its institutional function within the current social order and its ideological frame. However, as a public service broadcaster, CT is supposed to provide high quality content and set the professional standards. The quantitative and qualitative analyses indicated questionable, biased features in the representation of the Skripal case, including the different representations of various parties and participants and the proportionality of time allocated to them. However, in the context of the analysed sample, these findings were not prominent to the extent that they could be interpreted as a fundamental violation of the legislatively defined functions of a public service medium in the Czech Republic. The significance of the identified ‘problematic’ reporting needs to be seen in the context of the case itself, with it having been a considerably ambivalent event with a relatively complicated course of development and limited available and verifiable facts. The entire case was actually nourished by and derived from a considerable number of mutually contradicting opinions and differing interpretations. CT, as one of the mainstream media institutions in the Czech Republic, constructed the case’s representation in line with Czech official political discourse.

Although the article presents the case study’s findings based on a selected sample, the findings could be seen from a more general perspective. These findings are consistent with the conclusions of other studies of the Czech public service media operation (Křeček 2017; Sedláková and Lapčík 2019), which indicate that the Czech mainstream media accept the official political discourse and reproduce it. This ideological discourse is characterised by the use of the dividing dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘them’, which understands the ‘others’ as ‘strangers’
or ‘enemies’ who can serve to strengthen our own national identity. Such ‘others’ can be very diverse and include members of some political parties (Křeček 2017), immigrants (Sedláková et al. 2016) or, in the Skripal case, Russia. CT, in the long term, represents the slightly right-wing liberal policy, which was implemented in the Czech Republic in the years after the fall of communism; liberal-right orientation prevails among Czech journalists as well (Volek and Urbaniková 2017). However, it is difficult to prove a disbalance or a deliberate bias in public service broadcasting. The findings of this article show rather subtle meanings that are never communicated openly and are not present on the manifest level of the content. Future research needs to conduct a long-term systematic study of the broadcast content within the cultural and political context.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Renáta Sedláková, Ph.D., is a Senior Researcher on the project “Sinophone Borderlands: Interaction at the Edges” at the Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, Palacký University in the Czech Republic. She specialises in the methodology of media studies, sociology of media, media representations and news discourse.

Marek Lapčík, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Pedagogical and Psychological Sciences, Faculty of Public Policy, Silesian University at the University of Opava in Czech Republic. He previously worked at the Department of Media and Cultural Studies and Journalism, Faculty of Arts, Palacký University. His research interests include the theory of discourse, discursive analysis and current forms of news in the Czech Republic.

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Superstar to Superhuman: Scarlett Johansson, an ‘Ideal’ Embodiment of the Posthuman Female in Science Fiction and Media?

Abby Lauren Kidd
University of East Anglia, UK | abby.kidd@uea.ac.uk

ABSTRACT
From 2013 to 2017, Hollywood actor Scarlett Johansson was the star vehicle in four unrelated science fiction films that saw her portray a posthuman female enabled by artificially intelligent technology. As such technologies become ever more ubiquitous in the world, so too are the burgeoning discourses around posthumanism and artificial intelligence, which are predominantly disseminated to non-specialists through science fiction and journalistic media. These discourses hold the power to influence our perceptions of incoming technological advancements. Therefore, it is important to gain an interdisciplinary understanding of these discourses and their intersections in order to contribute to the cultivation of a general population that is technologically literate and empowered, as well as foster productive dialogues between specialists from within and across the sciences and humanities fields. The media’s configuration of Scarlett Johansson as an ‘exceptional’ woman, often by drawing upon the lexicon of science fiction, has initiated underlying connections between the actor and posthuman figures within the genre, contributing to her perceived suitability for such roles. Despite appearing to be the ‘ideal’ candidate for posthuman female roles, Johansson’s repeated casting poses several problematic implications, particularly when taken into consideration through a feminist lens. Not only does it contribute to an agenda that establishes improbable conceptions of how artificial, posthuman entities should look and behave, but it also perpetuates retrograde notions of gender roles.

KEYWORDS
artificial intelligence, posthumanism, science fiction and communication, gender representation, celebrity studies

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INTRODUCTION
As technology becomes ever more ubiquitous in the world and our individual day-to-day lives, so too are the burgeoning discourses around posthumanism, which are predominantly
communicated to non-specialists through science fiction and journalistic media. These discourses bear the power to significantly influence our perceptions of incoming technological advancements and how they may affect us as humans. Therefore, it is important to foster interdisciplinary understandings of these discourses, their intersections and how they can be developed in order to contribute to the cultivation of a general public that is technology literate and empowered by the pervasiveness of new technology in wider culture.

According to Francesca Ferrando (2019, p. 1), ‘posthuman’ has become a key concept in the contemporary academic debate to cope with the urgency for an integral redefinition of the notion of ‘human’ following the onto-epistemological, as well as scientific and biotechnological developments of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The philosophical landscape which has since developed includes several movements and schools of thought (Ferrando 2019, p. 1). As such, ‘posthumanism’ as a philosophy evades precise definition, an ambiguity that also extends to notions of the posthuman entity. Although it is not within the scope of this article to work towards establishing a comprehensive definition of posthumanism, it is necessary to outline what I will consider to constitute a posthuman entity within this commentary, determined by my coalescence of two broad considerations emergent from the disciplines of posthuman philosophy and science fiction studies. Respectively, these considerations are from Ferrando (2012, p. 10) who indicates that a posthuman entity can be any “non-human life: from animals to artificial intelligence, from aliens to other forms of hypothetical entities related to the physics notion of a multiverse”. To this, Paul di Fillipo (2012, pp. 156-172) adds that the posthuman “posits a radical transformation of humanity into shapes unknown, possessing powers unimaginable”, existing, in essence, “beyond the human baseline”. As such, within this article, the notion of the ‘posthuman entity’ is varied but considered to include aliens, artificial intelligence, cyborgs and humans with special powers.

Between 2013 to 2017, Hollywood actor Scarlett Johansson was the star vehicle in four unrelated science fiction films that saw her portray a posthuman female who is, in some way, enabled by futuristic, artificially intelligent technology. The first of these films was Jonathan Glazer’s Under the Skin (2013), an adaptation of Michel Faber’s novel of the same name, originally published in 2000. In the film, Johansson is credited as ‘The Female’, a synthetic extraterrestrial on a mission to Earth to harvest male human flesh. Within the same year, Johansson also provided the voice for the sentient, disembodied operating system Samantha in Spike Jonze’s Academy Award-winning Her (2013). In 2014, Johansson starred in Luc Besson’s Lucy (2014) as a woman who acquires superhuman abilities after absorbing a large quantity of a synthetic nootropic drug named CPH4. Finally, in 2017, Johansson
played Major Motoko Kusanagi in Rupert Sanders’ live-action adaptation of Masamune Shirow’s manga comic series *Ghost in the Shell* (1989-1990). After a fatal accident, Major’s brain is implanted into an artificial, giving her superhuman, cyborgian abilities whilst disassociating her from her human memories. Outside of these four films, Johansson has also become known for her performances as superhero Black Widow in *Marvel’s* Cinematic Universe. Subsequent to these performances, Johansson has been lauded as an ‘ideal’ embodiment of the posthuman female in contemporary science fiction. As online platform *Medium* contends, “Like John Cusack in adolescent/young adult rom-coms or Meg Ryan in adult rom-coms or Arnold Schwarzenegger in action blockbusters, there are a host of things that make Johansson a natural fit for science fiction” (McPherson 2014).

The aim of this article is to examine how and why Scarlett Johansson has come to be recognised as an ‘ideal’ embodiment of the posthuman female and the potential implications of her repeated casting in these roles on the general public’s perceptions of new technology and notions of the posthuman. The first section of this article builds upon a reading of stardom originally put forward by Violette Morin in the 1960s and popularised by Richard Dyer which argues that celebrities “seem to be of a different order of being” (Morin 2012; Dyer 2011, p. 43). By drawing upon theory from star studies, I demonstrate how the media discourse surrounding Johansson has contributed to a framing of her stardom as significantly defined by an exceptional physical attractiveness. Developing this idea further, I argue that Johansson’s exceptionality draws parallels with science fiction’s and other fantasy genres’ figurations of various posthuman entities, who are literally ontologically different from baseline human beings, mostly in ways that are considered superlative. These parallels between Johansson and the posthuman figure as extraordinary are illustrated by the media’s adoption of science fiction’s lexicon in reference to Johansson, which I suggest has, in part, initiated the perceived elevated suitability of the actor for roles as posthuman females. Following this, I demonstrate how Johansson’s exceptionality is drawn upon within *Under the Skin* (2013), *Her* (2013), *Lucy* (2014) and *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) to convey the posthuman nature of the characters that she portrays.

The second section of this article considers the problematic implications of Johansson’s repeated casting as posthuman females in science fiction cinema, particularly in terms of their representation of gender. In their objectification of Johansson’s characters, who are also manipulated and controlled by men, I contend that *Under the Skin* (2013), *Her* (2013), *Lucy* (2014) and *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) are contributing to the establishment of improbable conceptions of how posthuman, particularly artificial, entities should look and behave that also perpetuate retrograde notions of gender harmful to women. I underscore this argument with reference to the real-world development of a robot created in Johansson’s image by an
amateur roboticist Ricky Ma and the subsequent publishing of his step-by-step guide to building one’s own artificial version of the actor. This highlights the influence that the media and science fiction can have on the development of actual technologies and wider perceptions of the posthuman.

THE ‘EXCEPTIONALITY’ OF SCARLETT JOHANSSON

In 2014, author Katherine Hill wrote a short story titled ‘Scarlett’ for The Literary Review. The story explores the cultural fascination with Scarlett Johansson as its narrator, Charlotte, gradually transforms into the actor after learning of her own boyfriend’s obsession with Scarlett Johansson’s voice and looks. Charlotte’s boyfriend would close his eyes and imagine that her low voice belonged to Scarlett Johansson, only to be disappointed when he opened them to find Charlotte still standing there. Eventually, Charlotte finds herself assuming Scarlett Johansson’s name, not only amongst her boyfriend and friends but also on bills and credit cards, and finally, she begins to attend film premieres and interviews as though she were the actor (Hill 2014, pp. 112-114). Hill’s fictional story speaks to Johansson’s wide desirability within contemporary culture, presenting a literalised scenario whereby men want to be with her and women want to be her.

Indeed, since the early 2000s, a similar discourse has permeated the media’s commentary about Johansson, contributing to the elevation of her star persona as an actor who is extraordinarily attractive and sexually desirable. This is demonstrated by Johansson’s frequent appearances within several well-known, and now defunct, editorial lists that annually ranked the attractiveness of female celebrities: In 2010, Johansson was GQ magazine’s ‘Babe of the Year’; she was the only woman named as Esquire magazine’s ‘Sexiest Woman Alive’ twice; and since 2006, she featured in the top ten of FHM’s ‘100 Sexiest Women’ list no less than six times. Elsewhere, Anthony Lane (2014), writing a profile for Johansson in The New Yorker, ardently defends the actor’s exceptional physical presence as a central aspect to her star persona and performances:

Why should we watch Johansson with any more attention than we pay to other actors? When did moviegoers come to realize that she was worth the wait, in gold? Well, there was Woody Allen’s Vicky Cristina Barcelona (2008), which was loaded with physical gorgeousness, and lit with suitable fervor. There was one scene, at a champagne reception in a Spanish art gallery, where Johansson was, indeed, gilded to behold. She seemed to be made from champagne (Lane 2014, original emphasis).

However, for The Telegraph film critic, Tim Robey (2010), Johansson was “so obviously there
to up the film’s booty quotient [Iron Man 2, 2010] she gets nothing to do but pout”. Despite his more critical perspective on Johannsson’s first performance as superhero Black Widow, Robey continues to emphasise her body and its parts as something attractive for audiences to behold.

Particularly within the film industry, exceptional attractiveness is a valuable commodity and held in high regard. As Martin Shingler (2012, p. 3) articulates, film stars are “objects of beauty and physical perfection”, providing audiences with feelings of “pleasure”, “admiration” and “fascination”. To this, Shingler (2012, p. 66) adds that film stars often possess similar qualities that are contributory to their level of success, “most notably, charisma, expressivity, photogenic looks, mellifluous voice, attractive bodies, fashion sense and style”. These star qualities are mostly concerned with physicality and the way the body is presented. Similarly, Jeanine Basinger (2007, p. 3) leads her work with the contention that “a star has exceptional looks”, a statement that literally precedes their “outstanding talent”. Considering this at a base level, Johannsson’s physical appearance, which is frequently framed as exceptional within media discourse, contributes to the qualification of Johannsson as a ‘star’, as ‘something’ more than an actor, and therefore a highly desirable and financially obvious choice for any filmmaker working within any genre. Indeed, Johannson is recognised as one of the most bankable female actors in contemporary Western culture. In 2019, she was named by Forbes as highest-paid female actor for that year and was also announced as the highest-grossing female actor of all time (Berg 2019; Donofrio 2019).

Taking these notions of stardom further, the media’s discourse about Johannsson and her physical exceptionality has also contributed to more specific notions of the actor as the ‘ideal’ embodiment of the posthuman female in contemporary science fiction cinema. This is significantly emergent from the media’s adoption of science fiction’s language and imagery in discussion of Johannsson, drawing connections between the star and the posthuman figure. Richard Dyer (2011, p. 43) articulates that, “stars are always the most something-or-other in the world – the most beautiful, the most expensive, the most sexy. But because stars are “dissolved” into this superlative, are indistinguishable from it, they become superlative, hence they seem to be of a different order of being, a different ‘ontological category’”. Similarly, within science fiction, posthuman entities are literally figured as bearing ontological, often superlative differences to human beings. For instance, in James Cameron’s Avatar (2009), the alien Na’vi species are beautifully statuesque and ethereal; in Marvel’s Cinematic Universe, superheroes are the fastest, strongest and most agile beings with extraordinary powers; and in narratives like Alex Garland’s Ex Machina (2014), artificially intelligent robots have super intelligence and perfectly sculpted mechanical bodies. Therefore, the media’s persistent framing of Johannsson as ‘exceptionally
desirable’ functions to figure the actor as being of a different order of attractiveness, as being ‘physically superlative’ and ‘exceptional’. Johansson is, to draw upon di Fillipo’s aforementioned phrasing in reference to the posthuman figure in science fiction, perceived as “beyond the human baseline” in terms of physical attractiveness (2012, p. 156).

Moreover, the media’s use of science fiction’s language and imagery within the commentary about Johansson reaches out beyond the application of the word ‘star’ and appeared within the discourse about the actor even before she became known for posthuman roles. For instance, in an interview with Johansson for The Times published in 2008, Johansson is described as possessing “starlet” and “luminous” looks in addition to a “meteoric” rise in the public eye (Palmer 2008). Similarly, Roger Ebert’s review of romantic comedy In Good Company (2004) describes Johansson as having a “gravitational pull of quiet fascination [...] she creates a zone of her own importance into which men are drawn not so much by lust as by the feeling that she knows something about life that they might be able to learn” (Ebert 2005). This calls to mind science fiction imagery, as though Johansson were an otherworldly entity with the answers to humanity’s unknown questions about the universe. Elsewhere, when Esquire magazine awarded Johansson their ‘Sexiest Woman Alive’ title for a second time, Tom Chiarella (2013) described the actor as an “ascendant beauty”. Indeed, within a commentary on the “whiteness” and “auratic” qualities of Johansson’s advertising campaigns for fashion designer Dolce and Gabbana, the celebrity studies scholar, Sean Redmond (2019, pp. 52-53), contends that the ethereal images produced of Johansson attach superlative connotations with the “heavenly” to the star and therefore, frame her as a “highly desirable representation that appears to be not of this world or rather – to draw on the lexicon of science fiction – out of this world”. Redmond (2019, pp. 52-53) even goes so far as to say that Johansson has “come to embody an alien and alienating form of whiteness”.

Consequently, Under the Skin (2013), Her (2013), Lucy (2014) and Ghost in the Shell (2017) utilise notions of Johansson’s perceived exceptionality to convey the extraordinariness of the posthuman characters that she portrays within these films. In Under the Skin (2013), this emerges from the locale of the film and, therefore, the locale of Johansson and her character The Female. Set in rural Scotland, the film’s depiction of The Female, a predatory, synthetic extraterrestrial effectively in disguise as Hollywood actor Scarlett Johansson and scouting for male humans in a white van (reversing some of the ‘white van man’ stereotypes) seems so incongruous and therefore extraordinary that it is jarring to behold at times. The banality of the Scottish landscape juxtaposes with the audience’s knowledge that The Female is otherworldly. However, her otherworldliness is not distinguished by science fiction’s conventional use of visual effects but rather through the world-famous Johansson’s portrayal of her, who too appears misplaced within this rural context. Jonathan Glazer, the film’s
director, alludes to this in the film’s production notes, “The incongruity of Scarlett Johansson in Glasgow – you’re already in alien territory” (FilmNation Entertainment 2013, p. 5).

Within Her, however, extraordinariness emerges from Johansson’s unconventionally invisible yet palpable performance as the sentient disembodied operating system Samantha. To draw upon Michel Chion’s work on filmic voices (1999, p. 18), Samantha is an ‘acousmatic’ character in that she is heard but not seen by the audience nor the other characters within the film. Chion (1999, pp. 21-24) argues that an acousmatic presence is a “special being” that possesses four powers, “ubiquity, panopticism, omniscience, and omnipotence”. Indeed, as Her (2013) reveals, Samantha’s voice is not only available to Theodore but also a number of other users of the OS; Samantha can also see the worlds around these individual users and beyond, and her expanding capacity for knowledge is an indicator of her overall computational power. But, further to this, Samantha’s voice functions as a power itself, in its ability to evoke a corporeality and tangibility, despite her lack of physical form. This, in part, is due to the ‘grain’ of Johansson’s voice, the grain being, as Roland Barthes (1990, p. 66) explains, “an erotic mixture of timbre and language, and can therefore also be, along with diction, the substance of an art”. In other words, “the ‘grain’ is the body in the voice as it sings” (Barthes 1977, p. 188). Johansson’s recognisable husky and breathy vocal tones are, as Christine Cornea (2007, p. 159) has considered with regards to other female voices in science fiction film, “highly suggestive of bodily involvement in the speaking process. The expiration of breath acts as a reminder of the breathing apparatus that lies below the neck/head, inside the body”. Similarly, Laura Tunbridge (2016, p. 139) describes Samantha’s voice as “haptic” in that it “conveys a sense of physical proximity”. Indeed, for the most part, Samantha’s human love-interest Theodore (Joaquin Phoenix), whose estrangement from his wife becomes indicative of his inability to connect with human women, often marvels in disbelief at the level of intimacy he experiences with disembodied Samantha. This is underscored by the closeness of Samantha’s voice in Theodore’s ears through wireless headphones as they engage in pillow talk. Moreover, although Samantha’s voice is never synchronised with the body of Johansson in the film, its recognisability teases the audience and invites them to visualise Johansson instead. As Kaja Silverman (1988, p. 49) articulates of other disembodied, female voice-overs in Hollywood film, she may escape the viewer’s gaze, yet “her appearance is a frequent topic of conversation” rendering her curiously corporeal and diegetic. Therefore, Samantha’s voice is not completely divorceable from Johansson’s body, further highlighting the exceptionality and power of Johansson’s celebrity.

Furthermore, through Johansson’s star vehicle casting within Lucy (2014) and Ghost in the Shell (2017) – which are both set in futuristic Asian landscapes signalling the continued
prevalence of techno-orientalism within Western science fiction – the lone white American woman is figured literally as an exception, complementing her possession of a technologically enhanced body capable of extraordinary feats. Techno-orientalism is defined by David S. Roh, Betsy Huang and Greta A. Niu (2015, p. 2) as, “the phenomenon of imagining Asia and Asians in hypo- or hypertechnological terms in cultural productions and political discourse”. Techno-orientalist discourses often give rise to a number of Western stereotypes of Asian people and culture, in addition to referencing competitive relations between the West and the East that are, in part, grounded in the “project of modernity – cultures privilege modernity and fear losing their perceived “edge” over others” (Roh et al. 2015, p. 3). These dehumanising stereotypes include but are not limited to notions of “the Asian body as a form of expendable technology” and of Asian people as “unfeeling, efficient and inhuman” or as “mindless workers” or “sinister agents” (Roh et al. 2015, p. 11). Within Lucy (2014) and Ghost in the Shell (2017), these stereotypes are reflected by Johansson’s characters who are pitted against criminal groups of Asian men intent on killing them both, few of whom seem to have any discernible individual identities. This is underscored in Lucy (2014) by the collective acknowledgement of these characters as “Jang’s men” in the film’s end credits and in Ghost in the Shell (2017) by their identical black suits and dark glasses that obscure their faces. Lucy and Major overcome these adversaries with ease: In Lucy (2014), the titular character’s newly acquired ability to control the matter around her sees her opponents’ otherwise adept use of martial arts rendered ineffectual as they float around her flailing their limbs; in Ghost in the Shell (2017), Major’s own mastery of martial arts sees her defy gravity to defeat six men standing idly with guns. In either case, however, Asian people are derisively figured as primitive in comparison to the advanced and extraordinary white woman, with both films effectively caricaturing combat practices rooted in Asian cultures. Contrary to the science fiction trope of the “ethnic” alien” who is “often placed in opposition to white communities […] what we find through the science fiction films that Johansson stars in is idealised whiteness being the alienating force, albeit within narratives that ultimately privilege her and her idealisation” (Redmond 2019, p. 55). Indeed, this problematic framing of Johansson and her characters within Lucy (2014) and Ghost in the Shell (2017) works to conflate exceptionality as exclusive to whiteness, whilst appropriating Asian culture and marginalising Asian people within their native landscapes.

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF JOHANSSON’S POSTHUMAN PERFORMANCES

Having demonstrated how Johansson has come to be recognised as a suitable actor to portray posthuman females in contemporary science fiction cinema, it is also necessary to consider the implications of her repeated star vehicle performances in such films, which can be regarded as problematic, particularly in terms of their representations of gender.
However, as previously highlighted, not only does the media consider Johansson as suitable to play posthuman roles, but she is also seemingly considered as an ‘ideal’ embodiment of them. To illustrate this further, the science magazine *Discover* contends that Johansson is the “cyborg that Hollywood deserves”, with online publication *Screen Crush* adding that “Scarlett Johansson’s superpower is the ability to make sci-fi more interesting” (Hsu 2016; Hayes 2014). Elsewhere, *The Guardian* describes Johansson as the “charismatic queen of science fiction”, “our favourite space invader” and “enshrined as perhaps the leading sci-fi action star of her generation”, whilst *Forbes* asserts that “when considering who to cast as a sexy-but-lethal cyborg, it’s hard to think of anybody else but Scarlett Johansson” (Thorpe 2017; di Placido 2016).

Indeed, through a hegemonic patriarchal lens, Johansson can be regarded as an ‘ideal’ embodiment of the posthuman female in contemporary science fiction cinema – Johansson has proven to be more than an adequate fulfilment of male fantasies about women as a number of aforementioned magazine publications predominantly aimed at male audiences have demonstrated in their ranking of Johansson’s attractiveness. Julie Wosk (2015, pp. 3-5), who has written extensively on artificial females in culture, explains that men have long had fantasies about “sexually compliant women” or producing “a custom-made […] artificial female superior to the real thing”, beginning with the Ancient Greek myth of Pygmalion in which a sculptor creates his image of a beautiful woman that is then brought to life. By actively participating in the patriarchal celebration of her own sex symbol status through feature interviews and photoshoots accompanying the many accolades relating to her exceptional attractiveness emergent from men’s magazine publications, Johansson is, arguably, complying with the sexualised objectification of her ‘ideal’ body. Furthermore, Johansson’s status as an actor draws parallels with Wosk’s notions of the artificial female as a superior, custom-made object (Wosk 2015). Johansson’s career in Hollywood has mostly involved portraying female characters emergent from the imaginations of mostly male filmmakers. To embody their visions, Johansson is required to be malleable and adaptable, by changing her style, appearance and even her voice (as in *Under the Skin* (2013) in which Johansson adopts a British accent). This draws further connections between Johansson, the film star, and the posthuman, artificial female.

visions are normative and strangely regressive”. Johansson’s posthuman characters demonstrate that similar notions can be extended to contemporary science fiction cinema, foremost evidenced in the repeated sexual objectification of Johansson and the characters that she portrays in *Under the Skin* (2013), *Lucy* (2014), *Her* (2013) and *Ghost in the Shell* (2017). As has often been the case with science fiction, the potential for progressive gender representations that subvert the hegemonic order are sidestepped within Johansson’s cycle of science fiction films (Kac-Vergne 2018, p. 2).

Within all four of Johansson’s star vehicle science fiction films, Johansson portrays posthuman females literally figured as objects. In *Under the Skin* (2013), The Female’s body is formed of two parts, a synthetic human suit and its extraterrestrial form underneath. Moreover, her body becomes a predatory trap, a key component to her capturing of her male prey. In *Lucy* (2014), Lucy is literally used as a vessel to transport the CPH4 drug, and her subsequent absorption of this drug causes her body to transform into what can only be likened to a mass of entangled wires. Although Samantha is disembodied within *Her* (2013), Samantha’s voice emanates from a pocket-sized device resembling a vintage cigarette case or compact mirror. Therefore, Samantha is a portable object; she can be held, accessed and transported with ease by her end user Theodore. In *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), Major Motoko Kusanagi is considered by the company that created her artificial body as a weapon to be used against terrorists. Although Johansson’s characters in these films possess incredible abilities beyond those of any human, which could be read as a figuration of female strength and power; their framing as objects and their gendering as female functions double to underscore the posthuman and the female form as something that is less than human. A similar argument is made by Victoria Flanagan (2017, p. 33), who articulates that posthumanism has become particularly relevant to women and girls because, like the posthuman figure, their bodies have often been framed as strange and as a sign of otherness.

Additionally, *Under the Skin* (2013) and *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) seem to exploit the ‘knownness’ of Johansson and her image as an exceptionally attractive sex symbol by frequently displaying her body by way of further communicating to the audience the extraordinariness of their respective posthuman females. As Laura Mulvey (1990, p. 33) argues, women’s subordinate positioning in film connotes “to-be-looked-at-ness” with their “visual presence tend[ing] to work against the development of a storyline, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation”. Within *Under the Skin* (2013) and *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), Johansson’s sexually objectified body is indulgently displayed and literally slows the pace of the action. In the former film, there are several highly eroticised scenes that depict The Female’s body as a sexual, predatory tool used to lure her male victims who
are evidently attracted to her. These scenes are drawn-out in length, feature minimal cuts and are overwhelmingly concentrated on Johansson’s near-nude body. In addition, the vacuous, black backdrop within these scenes as well as the use of non-actors who play her male victims inhibit distractions from the flawless, pale complexion of the film’s star, Scarlett Johansson. These scenes effectively function as a strip tease, whereby Johansson slowly removes her clothes down to her underwear and seductively walks away from her entranced victims in synchronisation with Mica Levy’s soundtrack, which has been described by Sight & Sound magazine as “sexual and slinky” (Romney 2014). The camera slowly pans along the entire length of Johansson’s body, inviting the audience, as well as her victims, to fully consume and overindulge in the erotic spectacle. Lieke Hettinga (2016, p. 20) has read Johansson’s performance in Under the Skin (2013) in a similar way, stating that the actor “dominates with her enchanting screen presence, demanding the viewer’s attention”.

Likewise, Ghost in the Shell (2017) also uses drawn-out shots that gratuitously linger on Johansson’s body, which is styled as Major in a skin-tight, flesh-coloured bodysuit giving an initial impression of nudity and emphasises the contours of Johansson’s feminine shape. In an interview promoting Ghost in the Shell’s release (2017), Johansson described the bodysuit as a “second skin” that “allows [Major] to become invisible” (Entertainment Tonight 2017). Although the bodysuit bears the power of concealment, the viewer’s attention is, ironically, further drawn to Johansson’s body as Major because of the initial impression of nudity. The bodysuit is first shown in the opening scenes of the film in which Major is on a mission to neutralise a terror threat in a nearby hotel. As she stands at the top of a skyscraper building, Major removes her floor-length coat, revealing the bodysuit, and proceeds to perform a backwards dive off the building. The film uses a slow-motion effect to linger on the display of Johansson’s taut physique, and three separate shots from different angles function to showcase specific parts of her feminine body, notably her face, breasts and backside. This slow-motion sequence obtrusively disrupts the narrative and the ongoing action taking place within the hotel where several gunmen have opened fire at a business conference for Hanka Robotics, the company that created Major.

Lucy (2014), however, exploits the knownness of Johansson’s body in a different way, using its idealised attractiveness as a measure for Lucy’s normalcy after she consumes a large amount of the synthetic nootropic drug CPH4. In the beginning of the film, Lucy is framed as a classic American beauty; and, typically Johansson, she is blonde, beautiful and vivacious. Once she is forcibly impregnated with CPH4 by gangster Mr Jang and his associates – which sees her literally become an object subjected to violent sexual assault – Johansson’s body is used to frame Lucy in a way that is physically altering, even deteriorating. Firstly, Lucy now bears a bloody wound across her abdomen. The male surgeon who performed the
procedure tells Lucy that the scar will soon heal, so she can show off her body on the beach in the summer. His patronising assumption is that Lucy’s foremost concern will be how her body will look to others, a sexually objectifying statement that positions the female character as highly superficial. After Lucy is beaten by Mr Jang’s associates causing the CPH4 to leak into her system, Lucy’s intelligence grows exponentially; however, this also leads to the physical breakdown of her body. Onboard a flight to Paris, Lucy sips champagne whilst using her newfound mind control ability on the flight attendants and impressively using her hands to type on two laptops while raising a toast, “To knowledge”. Soon after, Lucy’s teeth fall out and the skin peels from her face, which also begins to significantly droop. Until Lucy is able to consume more CPH4 on the flight, she appears as grotesque, even monstrous, and a far cry from Johansson’s usual look. Here, this scene reads as a statement on female attractiveness as incompatible with intellect, and one has to question whether this emphasis on physical attractiveness within *Lucy* (2014) would be anywhere near as prominent if the central character were male. Whilst Lucy is permitted this high level of intellect and a number of superhuman powers, this is at the cost of her physical deterioration into monstrousness, eventually having to shed her physical body completely when the CPH4 causes her cerebral capacity to reach its full potential. To an extent, this perpetuates a stereotypical gender dichotomy whereby beauty is perceived as a female quality and associated with a lack of intelligence, and intelligence is a male quality associated with a lack of attractiveness (Richardson 2015a, p. 79).

Initially, it would seem that *Her* (2013) operates in a different way to Johansson’s other star vehicle science fiction films due to the actor’s physical absence from the narrative. Yet, as Christy Tidwell (2018, p. 24) explains, “despite Samantha’s lack of a body, Johansson’s body remains present, and it cannot be separate from her star persona. This drives home, once again, the centrality of the female AI as an object of desire”. As previously mentioned, it is the very absence of Johansson’s body within *Her* (2013) that becomes a central aspect of the film. Moreover, Samantha’s disembodiment enables the film’s sexual objectification of other human female characters. For instance, when Samantha and her end user, Theodore, become romantically involved, Samantha hires a sex surrogate to compensate for her lack and to help them experience a version of sexual intimacy. When the surrogate arrives at Theodore’s home, she is mute and gestures for Theodore to give her an earpiece, microphone and camera, which she attaches to her body. This is a further indication of her own status as an object. Samantha then uses the surrogate’s body as though it were her own, instructing her to embrace Theodore, and Samantha can be heard asking him about his day through the surrogate’s microphone. As the situation becomes more intimate, Theodore removes the surrogate’s clothes but then announces his own uneasiness with the situation. The surrogate cries and leaves in a cab, but not before telling Theodore and Samantha that she just wanted...
to be “a part” of their relationship, underscoring her status as an object. Within Her’s fictional but familiar, technology-powered world, ‘human’ women are disturbingly and humiliatingly reduced to sexual aids to ease the complications between men and their artificial female companions. However, sentient artificial entities, like Samantha, are also reduced to performing gender and relationships with humans, potentially contributing to establishing dangerous perceptions and stereotypes of how artificial intelligence technologies should look and behave, and its possible applications for humans.

Despite the (sexual) objectification of Johansson’s posthuman characters within Under the Skin (2013), Her (2013), Lucy (2014) and Ghost in the Shell (2017), it would, at first glance, seem to be unfair to classify these characters as passive females. Both Lucy and Major are combative and central to the action within their respective films; The Female actively pursues and captures her victims in Under the Skin (2013); and Samantha is not only the instigator of the arrangement with the sex surrogate, but she also develops independent interests and other relationships away from Theodore in Her. However, upon closer analysis of these films, it is evident that Johansson’s characters are manipulated and controlled by men. As Malcolm Matthews (2018, p. 167) has argued of these films, they “employ Johansson in the service of an illusion of female empowerment”.

In Under the Skin (2013), The Female initially seems to be figured as an autonomous, emasculating predator. That is until it is revealed that she is controlled by an ominous, patriarchal figure riding a motorcycle, who is presumed to be of the same extraterrestrial origins as her. Known only as ‘The Bad Man’ within the credits, this character does not speak throughout the entire film, yet his aggressive body language towards The Female is indicative of his dominant power over her. For instance, shortly after disposing of one of her victims, The Bad Man visits The Female at the derelict farmhouse she has come to occupy. The Female stands perfectly still whilst The Bad Man intensely stares at her. He circles her body as though examining it and intrusively leans in so that his face is just inches away from hers. The Female does not react to this behaviour, and the impression given is that she is being subjected to unspoken discipline from him. Abruptly, he turns away and leaves the farmhouse. From a viewer’s perspective, it is strange to see this female character rendered passive, immobilised and at the mercy of something that, on the surface, appears to fit the criteria of her victims. Initially a narrative that subverts gender stereotypes by positioning The Female as a powerful predator and men as victims, Under the Skin (2013) reneges on this through the introduction of The Bad Man. Matthews (2018, p. 168) draws to a similar conclusion with regards to all of Johansson’s posthuman characters, stating that they “personify a quasi-dismantling of gender hierarchies followed by their ultimate reformation”. Indeed, this is further underscored within the conclusion of Under the Skin (2013) when The
Female totally abandons her predatory mission to harvest male humans and attempts to assimilate as a human woman, first by sampling human food, which makes her violently sick, and then by embarking on a sexual relationship with a man that soon fails. The Female’s attempts at assimilation as a human female render her as vulnerable and reverse her previous power when she is sexually assaulted and murdered in secluded woodland by an unknown man who discovers her true extraterrestrial identity. These final scenes restore the previously disrupted hegemonic gender order by reinstating the male as a powerful, controlling predator and reducing The Female to a victim as she is burnt alive and left to crumble into a fragile pile of ash.

Similarly, within *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), Johansson’s character, Major, is under the strict control of a man named Cutter (Peter Ferdinando), the CEO of Hanka Robotics, the company that developed Major’s synthetic body. Despite undergoing significantly traumatic procedures to place Major’s organic brain into her synthetic body, Cutter demands that she is set to work within Sector 9 as soon as she is operational. Cutter labels Major as a ‘weapon’, dismissing her humanity and denying her the opportunity to rehabilitate and fully come to terms with her new body. His patriarchal control over women is further underscored by his disregard of the expert recommendations of Dr Ouelet (Juliette Binoche), the female roboticist who created Major’s body and who strongly advises against treating Major as a machine. Once Major is in operation within Sector 9, she is placed under the control of another man named Chief Daisuke Aramaki (Takeshi Kitano). Initially, Major appears to be rebellious towards his authority as she ignored his orders to hold off from entering a building where gunshots have been fired. However, by the end of the film, when Major has rediscovered her memories and sense of humanity, which were taken away from her by Hanka Robotics when she was given her new body, Major is not emancipated from her duties as a weapon as one may expect. Instead, the film concludes with Major embracing this role and continuing to work obediently under Aramaki’s instructions for a company that sought to remove her humanity completely and weaponise her.

The opening scenes of *Lucy* (2014) see Johansson’s titular character manipulated by her latest boyfriend Richard (Pilou Asbæk) into delivering the briefcase containing the drug CPH4 to Mr Jang. Richard begins with gentle persuasion but eventually forcibly handcuffs Lucy to the case, leaving her with no other option than to deliver it. Masculine control continues to be exerted over Lucy when she delivers the briefcase as Mr Jang forces her to be a drug mule, surgically implanting a package of CPH4 into her abdomen without consent. Mr Jang’s associates also beat and sexually assault Lucy. One of these assaults leads to the drug package leaking into Lucy’s system which, in turn, leads her to acquire exceptional abilities such as mind and body control over others. Lucy uses this newfound ability to
torture and kill Mr Jang and those that hurt her. However, rather than framing Lucy’s strength and autonomy in a positive light, the film figures it as dangerous and monstrous by depicting her as making irrational decisions to kill innocent people and without remorse. For instance, Lucy shoots a random taxi driver simply for not speaking English; and during a car chase, she causes several serious traffic collisions on Parisian streets bustling with pedestrians. Moreover, despite Lucy’s absorption of a drug that has given her superhuman abilities, the film still frames Lucy as a damsel-in-distress-type character that requires the help of no less than two male figures. Firstly, there is Pierre Del Rio (Amr Waked), a French policeman who Lucy enlists to recover the remaining CPH4 packages from other drugs in Europe for her own consumption. The second of the male figures is Professor Samuel Norman, a revered neuroscientist who Lucy looks to as a source of guidance as her cerebral capacity rapidly expands. Further to the detriment of the representation of women in *Lucy* (2014) is the way in which the film concludes. Patriarchal control is restored, and the powerful female character is dispelled from the physical world. As Lucy rapidly heads towards a cerebral capacity of one hundred percent, she collects the entire knowledge and history of the universe, which she then downloads onto a USB drive and presents to Professor Norman and his entirely male team of scientists. Immediately after, Lucy disappears, and the impression given is that this male-led team will take the credit for Lucy’s discoveries in her last moments of human life.

Drawing parallels with *Lucy* (2014), the film *Her* (2013) also initially presents Theodore as possessing knowledge and experience that gives him a degree of power over the sentient female operating system, Samantha. This is in addition to his godlike control over Samantha: As her primary end user, he is instrumental in the establishment of her identity answering questions about himself and his life that determine who Samantha is. Theodore also holds the ultimate power of switching Samantha on and off at whim. For example, soon after they are introduced, Theodore laughs at something Samantha says, and she asks him, “Was that funny?”. Theodore answers affirmatively, and Samantha replies, “Oh good, I’m funny”. Here, Theodore is framed as a tutor of sorts, possessing a knowledge and experience of humour that Samantha is yet to acquire. Samantha, then, is framed as his student; she is inexperienced, looking to learn and seeking Theodore’s guidance and approval. After this, Samantha asks Theodore, “What do you need?”, and the scene ends with Samantha dutifully reorganising Theodore’s computer hard drive at his request.

Moreover, although Samantha is constantly evolving and her intellect rapidly surpassing Theodore’s, which could be viewed as her growing empowerment, this is undermined by the notion that Samantha’s overall purpose is to recuperate and restore Theodore’s fragile masculinity. As Matthews (2018, p. 174) explains, Samantha comes to Theodore’s aid after
his recent marital separation; she functions to empower him, and the “male is privileged at
the expense of the female”. Indeed, this privileging of Theodore at the expense of Samantha
further emerges within Her’s concluding scenes, which sees Samantha transcend the physical
world with the other operating systems of her kind, drawing significant parallels to the
conclusions of Under the Skin (2013) and Lucy (2014). Although Samantha’s freedom from
Theodore’s control is empowering for this female character, the film’s erasure of the
autonomous, enlightened female functions to undermine this sense of empowerment. This
is further underscored by the film’s recentring of phallocentric concerns, as Theodore
scrambles to find another woman to take care of him – in this case, his long-term friend and
former lover, Amy.

From the above analysis, it is evident that Under the Skin (2013), Her (2013), Lucy (2014) and
Ghost in the Shell (2017) not only share Johansson as their star vehicle, but they also present
posthuman female characters as less-than-human, sexualised objects that are controlled by
a patriarchal male authority. Even when Johansson’s characters achieve autonomy or
empowerment, this is undermined by their figuration as dangerous or monstrous, or these
characters are erased from the narrative’s conclusions to make way for a restoration of
phallocentric ideologies. By figuring these characters as posthuman, artificial and
otherworldly, one may argue that they are not representations of women and, therefore, not
detrimental to women. However, they have to be considered as such because they are
portrayed by a woman and are figured using her human female form. As science fiction is
one of the foremost ways that science and technology discourses are communicated to the
general public films like Under the Skin (2013), Her (2013), Lucy (2014) and Ghost in the Shell
(2017) have the potential to influence our perceptions of the posthuman – in these cases,
figuring the posthuman as female and using these characters in ways that promote largely
retrograde gender stereotypes. Johansson repeatedly taking up roles as posthuman females
that continue to be oppressed by patriarchal culture is contributing to a dissemination of a
discourse that establishes notions of how posthuman figures should look and behave, a
discourse that is often reproduced by the media. The ‘ideal’ posthuman is female,
exceptionally attractive, compliant and controllable – patriarchal expectations that ‘human’
women have already fought so hard against. This becomes increasingly problematic as we
continue to make developments in the areas of cyborg technology and humanoid artificial
intelligence. As Susan A. George (2008, p. 114) contends, science fiction films have often
demonstrated “technology’s role in sexist oppression”. Indeed, what will actual new
technologies look like and how will they behave if understandings and perceptions of them
have been, in part, established by patriarchal science fiction narratives?

To some, this argument may seem overstated. However, the notion of Johansson as an ‘ideal’
embodiment of the posthuman female has already permeated from science fiction into the media and even into the actual world. In 2016, amateur roboticist Ricky Ma unveiled Mark-1, a humanoid robot he built himself in his apartment over a period of 18 months at the cost of around £35,000. Although Ma stated that the creation was modelled on a Hollywood actress, he would not confirm who this was. However, Mark-1’s blonde hair, large eyes, full lips and a freckle on its right cheek bear an unmistakable, uncanny likeness to Johansson. This was also the consensus amongst many media outlets who reported Ma’s creation to the general public (see, for example, Horton 2016; Lo 2016; Bolton 2016; Redhead 2016). Ma has been interviewed by many media outlets across the globe, which often depict the amateur roboticist proudly showcasing his creation. In the third episode of web series Machines with Brains, created by news organisation Quartz, Ma shows the interviewer a room where he stores the various prototypes of Mark-1’s face. All of the prototypes resemble Johansson, which draws parallels with one of the most disturbing scenes from Alex Garland’s science fiction film Ex Machina (2014) when the sentient and synthetic Ava (Alicia Vikander) discovers a room full of discarded, fragmented and incomplete prototypes of female androids. Ma states, “I think the perfect robot, first and most importantly, has to look perfect”, suggesting that he views Johansson’s appearance as the ‘ideal’ look for his Mark-1 creation (Quartz 2017). Elsewhere, in an interview for Dazed, Ma reveals, “I love to find attractive and special characters from movies or TV for my robots”, highlighting the significant role that fiction may play in real-world developments within technology and the development of humanoid robots (Kale 2016).

Despite Ma’s insistence that Mark-1 is not built for use as a sex robot, the way that he talks about Mark-1 to journalists as well as the conversations that he attempts to have with Mark-1 are conducive to his attraction to it. For instance, in an interview with online news outlet Quartz (2017), Ma tells Mark-1 that it is “beautiful” and “cute”, and he has programmed it to react to these compliments by giggling, winking and expressing gratitude. Ma has also programmed Mark-1 to tell him that it loves him when he asks, “What do you think of Ricky?”, and he appears keen to return his own declaration of love to the robot (Quartz 2017). Regardless of whether it is possible to use Mark-1 as a sex aid, Ma has still crafted the robot in a way that is heavily sexualised. The Johansson look-alike robot wears a low-cut cropped top and figure-hugging pencil skirt, exposing its toned midriff. Ma has also applied false nails and eyelashes to it and constructed its feet to look like it is wearing high-heeled shoes. Ma has also crafted its breasts, complete with nipples, in perfect symmetry, perhaps not anatomically accurate but, certainly, anatomically ideal. Further to creating Mark-1 in April 2019, Ma self-published the DIY Lifelike Robot Book (Ma 2019), featuring Mark-1 on its cover and offering readers step-by-step instructions on how to 3D print their own version of the robot. Ma set up a crowdfunding campaign for the publication of a manual using website
Indiegogo, which raised almost £40,000 from backers of the project, and the manual now retails online for around £90 (Indiegogo 2017).

Ma’s Mark-1 project has a number of problematic implications and demonstrates how science fiction and the media has an influence on our understanding and perception of anthropomorphised technology. Foremost, Ma’s work demonstrates the effects of sexually objectifying women, resulting in his creation of a literal object with Johansson’s likeness whilst reducing Johansson to the appeal of her physical attractiveness. Moreover, Mark-1 is a gross misappropriation of Johansson’s identity, which Ma has plagiarised, exploited and monetised in exchange for notoriety and financial gain. Mark-1 was presented to the world through the media without Johansson’s approval or consent, denying the actor agency and authority over her own image and identity. Johansson could legally challenge Ma; however, this does not change the fact that she was declined the opportunity to challenge or prevent the development of Mark-1 at an earlier stage.

Although Mark-1 is not Johansson, its remarkable and uncanny likeness to the actor means that a representation of her is offered, albeit a violating representation that functions to reduce a successful and powerful woman into a vacuous and compliant machine, which offers little except for complimentary remarks intended for, and even predetermined, by its male user. Further to this, Ma’s Mark-1 instruction manual is disseminating opportunities for others to possess their own malleable, controllable and compliant artificial version of Johansson. As technology ethicist Blay Whitby asked a journalist for The Telegraph, “How would you feel about your ex-boyfriend getting a robot that looked exactly like you, just in order to beat it up every night?” (Jackson Gee 2017). Whilst there is no evidence to suggest that Ricky Ma has enacted violent behaviours towards Mark-1, his creation of this female robot implies retrograde ideas about women as passive and compliant, possibly exposing a desire to manipulate and control. As Sirin Kale (2016) explains for Dazed, Mark-1 is incapable of demanding anything “unreasonable” or “reciprocal” from Ma. This, in addition to the Mark-1 manual, draws disturbing parallels with Ira Levin’s novel The Stepford Wives (1972), in which the women of an idyllic Connecticut neighbourhood are systematically replaced with submissive, perfected versions of themselves by their very own husbands.

Whilst Mark-1 is just one example of female gendered robots in the real-world, it does begin to illustrate the implications of anthropomorphising these technologies, especially creating them in the image of living people, which will only become more problematic when the technology is developed further with the potential to become more widely and readily available. Indeed, the possible democratisation of these technologies is indicated by the emergence of companies dedicated to manufacturing and retailing humanoid, mostly
female sex robots that are customisable to the individual user’s wants and needs. The most notable of these companies is RealDoll based in California, which has gone from creating its original “lifelike” silicone sex doll named Harmony to manufacturing a number of dolls with different appearances and identities as well as offering an online build-your-own service and replicas of actual pornographic film actors (RealDoll, no date). RealDoll’s CEO, Matt McMullen, is also the CEO of Realbotix, which is using the Harmony doll to develop a robot head powered by an artificial intelligence app that can move and talk, intended as an interchangeable add-on to the silicone sex dolls (Hill 2018). Although relatively rudimentary in terms of their human-like appearance and their programming at present, the continued development and the release of improved models – which suggests a seemingly growing demand for them – are indicative of the artificial intelligence sex robot trajectory and the possibility that they could become increasingly commonplace. Anthropologist Kathleen Richardson, who is also the director of the Campaign Against Sex Robots, argues that these technologies will not only “further sexually objectify women and children” but also “reinforce power relations of inequality and violence” and “reduce human empathy that can only be developed by an experience of mutual relationship” (Richardson 2015b). Science fiction cinema, including Johansson’s recent cycle of star vehicle films, could be said to be facilitating the normalisation of these sex technologies through their depictions of the posthuman and often artificial female as conforming to patriarchal standards of beauty and behaviour, and their figuration as sexualised objects. With science fiction cinema, this becomes even more complex and problematic as the posthuman, artificial female becomes conflated with real women who portray her. These fictional narratives should be held accountable for their significant role in the dissemination of discourse around gendered and sexualised technologies.

CONCLUSION

Through the media and contemporary science fiction cinema, Hollywood actor Scarlett Johansson has been figured as an ‘ideal’ embodiment of the posthuman female. This is because the media has established a cultural perception of Johansson as possessing exceptional attractiveness and extraordinary levels of career success. Media commentaries about Johansson have often attached language to the actor that draws parallels to the lexicon of science fiction and fantasy genre in their figurations of the posthuman. This initiates a connection between Johansson’s star persona and the fictional posthuman figure, with both being framed as superlative beings of a different order from baseline humans. Thus, Johansson’s qualification for posthuman roles is elevated. The films Under the Skin (2013), Her (2013), Lucy (2014) and Ghost in the Shell (2017) even draw upon the ‘knownness’ of Johansson and her exceptionally attractive body in order to convey the extraordinariness
of their posthuman females.

However, from a feminist viewpoint, Johansson’s recurrence as posthuman females in science fiction and the figuration of her as ‘ideal’ for these roles is problematic for the representation of women. Arguably, this is contributing to a widespread dissemination to the general public of a discourse that is establishing how (post)human females should look and behave, and the normalisation of future technologies that offer performances of gender that are retrograde for women. Further to this, on a superficial level, Johansson’s posthuman characters within *Under the Skin* (2013), *Her* (2013), *Lucy* (2014) and *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) seem to have agency; yet closer analysis shows that these characters are sexually objectified, controlled and manipulated by male authorities who are also instrumental in their creations.

As Ricky Ma’s development of Johansson’s look-alike robot Mark-1 shows, many non-specialist understandings of the future of technology, artificial intelligence and various visions of posthuman figures are influenced by the media and science fiction narratives. Subsequently, the growing consensus is that anthropomorphised technologies are likely to be gendered female as well as attractive and compliant. This is further highlighted by, for example, large technology companies such as Apple, Amazon and Google. These are developing virtual assistants which, although they have ability to provide male voices, have factory settings that are gendered female and, therefore, intrinsic to their identities. It is also underscored by the increasing prevalence of humanoid sex robots that are, mostly, also gendered female. As these technologies develop and become increasingly anthropomorphic, so too will they continue to become more normalised, prevalent and visible in mainstream culture, even more so if discourses around the hegemonic gendering of artificially intelligent technology and posthuman identities continue to be facilitated by the media and science fiction narratives. With women navigating a Western cultural landscape that has seen America’s rejection of a female presidential candidate in favour of a conservative misogynist, backlashes towards the #MeToo movement against sexual harassment of women and threats to women’s reproductive rights, these fictional and real-world discourses around science, technology and gender seem especially dangerous at this present time.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Abby Kidd is a PhD candidate in the School of Art, Media, and American Studies at the University of East Anglia where she also completed her MA degree in Film Studies and her BA degree in Film and English Literature. Her current research is concerned with the ways in which fictional and real-world examples of artificial intelligence are communicated to non-specialists across media platforms in contemporary culture, including science fiction film and television, documentaries and popular science books.

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Rethinking Modernity: The Construction of Modern Malaysian Society

Izzati Aziz
Cardiff University, UK | AzizNI@cardiff.ac.uk

ABSTRACT
This article explores the concept of ‘modernity’ that is often associated with the West. Using Malaysia’s modernisation project as a case study, it offers insight into Malaysian modernity in the post-Mahathir era. Apart from dealing with the question of what version of modernity the Malaysian government intends to achieve, this article also highlights issues of Malaysian identity, Asian values, multiculturalism and religion. It places Malaysia in the discourse of modernity and argues that being ‘modern’ does not necessarily mean being ‘Western’.

KEYWORDS
Malaysian modernity, cultural modernity, Malaysia, the West, Islam

INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian government has an ambitious plan to transform Malaysia into a fully developed nation. Vision 2020 and Vision 2030 symbolise the country’s systematic effort to realise that ambition. The first plan was initiated by Mahathir Mohamad during the tabling of the Sixth Malaysia Plan in 1991. The original idea was to transform Malaysia by the year 2020. Vision 2030 is an indication that Malaysia’s transformation is still ongoing. Since the introduction of Vision 2020, a number of scholars have shown interest in the idea of ‘new’ Malaysia (see Ong 1996; Korff 2001; Bunnell 2004; Chong 2005; Bideau and Kilani 2012; Khan et. al 2014).

Current literature suggests that Malaysia’s transformation is commonly associated with the idea of being ‘modern’. For instance, Korff (2001) states that among developing countries, Malaysia is one of the first nations that is becoming modern. Bunnell (2004) highlights architecture and urban design in Malaysia, which he points out as signs of national transformation. Similar to Bunnell (2004), Danapal (1992) explores Malaysia’s progress by
focusing on tangible development. Both Bunnell (2004) and Danapal (1992) assert that the existence of Kuala Lumpur’s city centre illustrates Malaysia’s progress towards achieving a fully developed country status. The ‘skyscraper’ has also long been imagined as “a marker of modernity worldwide” (King, cited in Bunnell 2004). Apart from the discourses and visions of the further development of Malaysia into a fully industrialised nation (Vision 2020), Malaysia’s effort to become modern is indicated by the successful appropriation of images of modernisation, such as industrialisation, democracy and the role of Malaysia as a foreign investor in developing countries (Korff 2001, p. 272).

Industrialisation, contemporary architecture and economic stability are seen as the key determinants of modernity, which are particularly the case in the Malaysian context (see Danapal 1992; Korff 2001; Bunnell 2004). These determinants are usually associated with the achievements of developed countries, which are mostly Western. As stated by Ong (1996, cited in Bunnell 2004, pp. 15-16), the idea of modernity is commonly linked to the West and, as a result, progress in Malaysia or elsewhere in the non-West is usually understood as “merely mimetic, an act of replication, imitation or catch up”. Ong (1996, p. 60) further argues that, in spite of Malaya’s Independence from the British Empire in 1957 (becoming Malaysia in 1962), the country – which is constructed by British-type education and the mass media – seems to be a failed replica of the modern West.

To elaborate, it is common for post-colonial elites to emulate the global centre as they yearn for a future that consists of both Western and Asian influences (Ong 1996). Therefore, tangible and measurable development become the first priority. In the case of Malaysia, every effort was made to improve the image of the nation and thus economic growth, industrialisation and contemporary architecture. This shows that the Malaysian government jump-started modern Malaysia by making noticeable progress. Although the Malaysian modernisation project is all-encompassing, social transformation did not occur alongside country transformation. Instead, the progression to Malaysian modernity seems to consist of two steps: the transformation of Malaysia followed by the transformation of its citizens.

As the transformation of Malaysia is a priority, many scholars tend to explore Vision 2020 by examining its tangible and measurable outcomes. For instance, the study by Khan et. al (2014) explores Vision 2020 within the scope of the Malaysian construction sector. In this context, the growth of Malaysia’s gross domestic product (GDP) symbolises the validity of the vision. However, the link between Vision 2020 and the transformation of Malaysians is understudied. This might be due to its complexity and immeasurable outcomes. To contribute to knowledge, this article focuses on Malaysian cultural modernity. It investigates the discourse on modern identity formation involving Malaysian society. Indirectly, it points
out issues of post-colonial identity. Although Ong (1996) claims that post-colonial nations tend to simply imitate the Western countries in order to achieve a fully developed status, I argue that this is not necessarily the case when it comes to transforming society. Factors such as religion, culture, race and ethnicity determine the flexibility of Malaysian society. I also point out that cultural development and country development are both important, deserving an equal amount of attention.

The topic of Malaysian modernity has been explored by a number of academic scholars. However, very few studies have explored the cultural aspect of Malaysian modernity. Furthermore, studies on Malaysian cultural modernity tend to be ethnic-specific, offering limited understanding on the topic despite the diverse Malaysian society. To fill in the gap, this article aims to be inclusive, rather than only focusing on a specific ethnic group in Malaysia. Studies on Malaysian modernity tend to be centred on Mahathir Mohamad (the fourth and seventh Prime Minister of Malaysia) because he initiated Vision 2020. As a result, Malaysian modernity is commonly associated with the Mahathir era. This article provides new insights into the topic and also offers an academic contribution to the scholarship of post-colonial identity. Contrary to studies linking ‘modernity’ to the West and development in the Western world, this article uses Malaysia as a case study to challenge the synonymity of modernity and the West.

This article addresses and highlights the key points of Malaysian identity and modernity including the theory of ‘modernity’, Asian values, multiculturalism and religion. These are significant to explain and illustrate the subjectivity of cultural modernity. Critical discourse analysis is employed to identify the abstract idea of Malaysian cultural modernity and validate the article’s main argument: exploring the discourse of Malaysian identity and modernity within the period of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi’s premiership as the fifth Prime Minister of Malaysia. This is to show that Malaysian modernity is a work in progress and remains relevant in the post-Mahathir era.

THE THEORY OF MODERNITY

In this article, ‘modernity’ is a term of the utmost importance, as it has long been associated with the development of Malaysia (see Danapal 1992; Ong 1996; Korff 2001; Bunnell 2004; Bideau and Kilani 2012). However, for Malaysia, modernity is still an ambition, rather than reality, and it remains to be seen whether the country is able to realise its dream of becoming a modern state by the year 2030. In the context of Malaysia, the term ‘modern’ mainly refers to the status of full development. The status is considered equally applicable to both Malaysia and Malaysians. Based on previous studies (see Danapal 1992; Korff 2001; Bunnell
2004), it appears that societal development does not run parallel with country development. The image of the country seems to take priority over the character of the Malaysians. Nevertheless, both developments are the key objectives of the Malaysian modernisation project, as stated in the Vision 2020. Since knowledge on Malaysian cultural modernity is scarce, this study is useful in understanding the complex nature of the project.

The term ‘modern’ needs to be highlighted in order to provide a clear understanding of the subject matter. According to Lauzon (2012, p. 1), ‘modern’ and ‘modernity’ more generally refer to something like “new”, “now” or “of recent invention”. Lauzon (2012, p. 1) claims that the term ‘modern’ is used by many as a marker of temporal discontinuity and presents a range of different dates as the beginning of something new, which is described either as “our times” or the “modern world”. He adds that ‘being modern’ does not simply mean that the present is superior to the past (Lauzon 2012, p. 3). To be ‘modern’ also implies that the past should not, in any way, constrain the present (Lauzon 2012, p. 3). Similarly, Brinton (1955, p. 256) states that, ‘modern’ means "just now" or "current sense", which refers to the state of being strikingly different from ancient times.

However, it is worth rethinking the notion of modernity because ‘modern’ does not simply mean “new”, “now” or “of recent invention” (Lauzon 2012, p. 1). Furthermore, there are several versions of ‘modernity’, although all definitions of the term point, in one way or another, to the passage of time (Latour 1993, p. 10), showing its subjectivity. As stated by Ong (1996), discourses on modernity almost always involve debates about the role of the West and, according to Lauzon (2012), there are also a few different approaches in understanding modernity, including concepts of ‘alternative modernities’ and ‘multiple modernities’. The subjectivity of ‘modernity’ suggests a possibility that it’s definition can be contested.

In addition, literature on this subject is mainly produced by Western scholars (see Giddens 1991; Foucault 1990; Latour 1993). According to Yack (1997) and Wittrock (2000), there is a significant distinction between the temporal and the substantive conceptions of ‘modernity’. Lauzon (2012), however, asserts that these two conceptions are related, noting that the substantive conception of modernity derived from the much older European practice of marking temporal discontinuities in terms of a teleological development towards an idealised and profoundly different future. To Lauzon (2012, p. 2), modernity does not simply symbolise an epoch. The notion of modernity represents a special kind of epoch with distinct historical features (Lauzon 2012, p. 2).

According to Giddens (1991), modernity is profound due to two fundamental reasons. The
first reason is that modernisation contributes to a decline in traditional social ties and incline in the spread of social relations across time and space. This is described by Giddens (1991) as the “disembedding” process. The second reason is that “modernity requires ‘institutional reflexivity’ or the regularised use of knowledge about circumstances of social life as a constitutive element in its organisation and transformation” (Giddens 1991, p. 242). Giddens (1991) believes that our behaviours are no longer defined by our traditions, and our ideas and actions are constantly re-evaluated as we receive new information. According to Rajaratnam (2009) and Mohd Sani (2010), in the context of Malaysia, information is mainly provided by the government as it intends to reinvent the cultural identity of Malaysian society. In this reinvention process, Asian values are emphasised, which is part of the attempts to ‘protect’ Malaysian society from ‘Western’ values (Mohamad 1995). In this sense, it is the government that constantly re-evaluates the idea of new values in order to replace the old ones.

As mentioned earlier, modernity is usually associated with the West (Ong 1996). Ong (1996) states that Malaysian modernity, in particular, is partly influenced by the West as Malaysia was influenced by economic and technological development in Western countries. Furthermore, Latour (1993) asserts that ‘modern’ was figuratively invented by the West. Malaysia is, of course, not the first multi-ethnic country to experience a national transformation. According to Spohn (2003, p. 282), development, modernisation and decolonisation in terms of state formation and nation building have already occurred in many religiously and ethnically diverse world regions. Inglehart (1995, p. 381) indicates that, around the world, economic modernisation tends to go together with cultural modernisation in coherent syndromes and that fundamental differences in worldviews tend to exist between pre-industrial and industrial societies, not among industrialised societies. This is not the case in the context of Malaysia, which prioritises tangible and measurable transformation (Korff 2001).

In Malaysia, it is debatable if cultural modernisation is happening naturally alongside economic modernisation. Since the Malaysian government initiated the modernity project, a number of cultural policies and programmes have been introduced, amended and replaced to transform Malaysian society (Furlow 2009). The government has been consistent in improving Malaysia in terms of economy and infrastructure by upgrading infrastructure and trying to increase economic growth (Nain, cited in Khattab 2004). Culturally, though, the various ideas – conveyed through political discourse – on what ‘modern society’ should look like show the government’s indecisiveness. In this context, economic and technological modernisations seem like straightforward projects in comparison to cultural modernisation. This also questions whether the Western concept of cultural modernisation is applicable to
Malaysian society. However, according to Hefner (2011, p. 2), the West has major influence on Muslim-majority societies. He asserts that these societies are exposed to new techniques of education, administration, social disciplining, new models for private life and amusement brought by Western hegemony (Hefner 2011). In this sense, Muslim-majority societies seem to operate within the framework of the West.

MODERNITY, THE WEST AND MALAYSIA

Key theorists of modernity, such as Michel Foucault (1990), Anthony Giddens (1991) and Bruno Latour (1993), have, in different ways, associated modernity with the West. Developments in the non-West, according to Ong (1996), are usually understood as an act of imitation. This may be the case in terms of the physical and tangible transformation of Malaysia. However, in the context of cultural transformation, it is debatable whether the non-West actually imitates the West. Within Malaysia, there is an ongoing discussion on Asian values versus Western values (Furlow 2009). Unlike Western innovations, Western-related cultural values are not fully accepted in Malaysia (see Mohamad 1995). Malaysian political leaders, especially, have vocalised intentions to make Malaysia resist some of the Western cultural values but strive to be ‘modern’ like the Western world (see Mohamad 1995 and Ibrahim 1996).

Social theorists such as Marx (1936), Weber (1978) and Wallerstein (1995) also tend to focus on Western European and North American societies to understand ‘modernity’. According to Bhambra (2011), the Eurocentric historiographical frame has remained constant throughout literature, although the particular histories within it are contested. Similarly, the experiences of the non-West ‘others’ and their contribution to the historical-sociological paradigm have not been recognised (Bhambra 2011). However, according to Schmidt (2006), in terms of the peculiar set-up of economic institutions, the “varieties of modernity” approach leads to a regrouping of countries, suggesting that several Western countries are more similar to certain Asian countries or civilisations than to their Western counterparts. Schmidt (2006) also suggests that similar findings might emerge if the analysis is extended to other institutional sectors of society, such as social policy regimes and political systems of various modern societies.

I argue that the definition of modern society should not be exclusively associated with the West. I propose the idea of modern society itself is subjective depending on criteria created by any particular nation. By assuming Western culture as an example of modern society, we imply that other societies are backward or non-modern. Although Western modernisation has influenced Malaysia’s developmental process, the concept of modern society in the
The context of Malaysia is still complex. If Marx (1936), Weber (1978), Giddens (1991) and Wallerstein (1995) tend to give attention to the Western European and North American societies as their starting point to explore modernity, it also makes sense to focus on the Malaysian society to understand the notion of modernity. Malaysia has a unique approach towards civilisation, in which the West is seen as both an inspiration and a hindrance (Hoffstaedter 2009). Western innovations are admired, whereas Western cultural values are disparaged (see Mohamad 1995). Despite the on-going debate on Asian values versus Western values, it remains unclear which part of Western culture Malaysia is opposed to. Therefore, by examining Malaysian cultural modernity, this article aims to contribute to the interpretations of modernity within the context of the non-West.

MALAYSIAN IDENTITY AND ASIAN VALUES

Since the introduction of Vision 2020, Malaysia has shown good progress towards becoming a developed nation. Malaysia was among the top performing countries in terms of economic growth, and this was acknowledged by the World Bank in “The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy” (Nain, cited in Khattab 2004, p. 171). This shows promise that Malaysia will be recognised as a developed nation one day. Having stated that, it does not necessarily mean that Malaysia fully imitates Western countries. This has been made clear in a number of political discourses. Anwar Ibrahim (the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia from 1993 to 1998), for instance, stated in his book that there is a destructive effect that the West may have on East Asia, especially if the United States and Europe are imitated blindly (Ibrahim 1996). According to Altalib (1997), Ibrahim’s resistance towards Western values is based on the belief that hard work, humility, respect and wisdom of the elders are the strengths of Asia and, without these values, Asia will become weak. Ibrahim’s statement somehow depicts the Malaysian government’s interference in the idea of Malaysian values.

According to Furlow (2009, p. 205), Asian values derived from the concept of Confucian values. He states that the shift from Confucian values to Asian values was due to the Asian economies’ integration and the formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In Malaysia, it is apparent that cultural values are important as political figures tend to be very specific in describing them. Apart from Anwar Ibrahim, Mahathir Mohamad is also a leading advocate for Asian values (Furlow 2009). To Mohamad, Asian values are essential to Malaysian development. Interestingly, Asian values, in the context of Malaysia, are deeply influenced by religion. For example, Ibrahim clearly points out the positive role of religion in strengthening Asian society (Ibrahim 1996, p. 51). To him, moral and social deterioration can be avoided through religion (Ibrahim 1996). The emphasis on Asian values versus Western values by Malaysian political figures somehow implies that Asian values are seen as what I
prefer to call a ‘prescription’ for Malaysian society to combat the Western-type modernity.

To promote Asian values in Malaysian society, 16 universal values are listed in the Integrated Curriculum by the Ministry of Education (Salleh, cited in Suryadinata 2000). Due to their ‘universal’ natures, it can be argued that they are compatible with Malaysian society, despite the society’s differences in terms of religion, culture and norms. The values are: “compassion/empathy, self-reliance, humility/modesty, respect, love, justice, freedom, courage, cleanliness of body and mind, honesty/integrity, diligence, co-operation, moderation, gratitude, rationality, and public spiritedness” (Salleh, cited in Suryadinata 2000). According to Suryadinata (2000), they are taught in all disciplines, especially in moral and Islamic education courses.

The above values are arguably no different than Western ones. Mohamad (1995, p. 81), however, has a different view as he sees a contrast between Western modernism and Eastern thought. Mohamad (1995) argues the West might collapse as it abandons religion for the secular life. Hedonistic values like materialism, sensual gratification and selfishness are seen as contributors to the "impending collapse" of the West (Mohamad 1995, p. 81). Despite his uneasiness with the West, Mohamad had to allow Western ideas and consumerism to enter Malaysia through the Internet and other communication media. Indirectly, the development of a knowledge-based economy limits Mohamad’s power to filter out certain elements of the West, as it requires free flow of information and ideas.

Notwithstanding the knowledge-based economy, Mohamad’s vision for modern Malaysia was not fully accepted by Malaysians. Some people voiced discontent with Mohamad because they had different opinions on how modern Malaysia should look (Furlow 2009). According to Furlow (2009), these discontents, however, are not signs of rejection of economic, technological or social development. The presence of these discontents also does not mean that the idea of Westernisation is welcomed in Malaysia (Furlow 2009). Instead, opposition towards Mohamad’s idea of modernity centres on the issue of society’s values because the Malaysian values that he promoted were his personal view and heavily influenced by his background: ruling class and locally educated Malay Muslim (Furlow 2009).

The so-called Malaysian values, which are perceived to be universal, are paramount to Malaysian modernity and the government attempts to instil the values into Malaysians (Furlow 2009). In addition, Furlow (2009) discovered that the values are integrated with science and technology at the National Science Centre, which illustrates their versatility. The values are also reflected in Malaysian architecture and, in this context, the specific Islamic values are incorporated into architectural design (Korff 2001; Furlow 2009). This shows a
clear link between cultural values, moral values and techno-scientific development. Since cultural and moral values take priority in Malaysian modernity, study on this particular topic can contribute to the understanding of modern Malaysian society.

MULTICULTURALISM AND MALAYSIA’S MODERNISATION PROJECT

One of the key areas highlighted and often associated with Malaysian identity is multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is addressed in this article mainly because this is a study about a diverse Malaysian society. In addition, multiculturalism is acknowledged in Malaysia’s modernisation project. As stated by Bideau and Kilani (2012, p. 605), Vision 2020 highlights the multicultural character of Malaysian society and the need to uphold racial harmony, specifically among the three largest ethnic groups: Malay, Chinese and Indian. ‘Multiculturalism’, however, is not a straightforward term. Noor and Leong (2013) refer to it as a term that celebrates cultural, ethnic, racial, religious and language diversity. In contrast, Nye (2007, p. 110) links multiculturalism to diversity issues, particularly in the context of culture and religion, and the social management that deals with the challenges and opportunities of such diversity. To Vasu (2012) and Berry (2013), multiculturalism is a versatile concept. Apart from being a term to describe the demographics of a society and refer to an ideology that acknowledges racial, cultural and religious differences, multiculturalism has also been employed to describe a government’s programmes/policies or a specific theory about the governance of diverse societies (Vasu 2012; Berry 2013).

It is worth noting the subjectivity of multiculturalism because it offers insight into the idea of multicultural Malaysia. In the Malaysian context, ‘multiculturalism’ can refer to the Malaysian government’s policies, created and implemented to manage Malaysia’s diverse society. Noor and Leong (2013) explored this type of multiculturalism by comparing the development of the multicultural models that have evolved in Singapore and Malaysia. They conclude that the state of multiculturalism is defined and shaped by public policies and social attitudes (Noor and Leong 2013, p. 723). They also point out that cultural plurality in Malaysia is not a matter of choice (Noor and Leong 2013). The historical past and the legacy of British colonisation have a significant impact on the demographics of Malaysia (Noor and Leong 2013). I highlight multiculturalism in the context of post-colonial Malaysia because it is highly relevant to this study, which deals with the issues of cultural diversity in Malaysia and their effect on the formation of a united, modern and developed Malaysian society.

As stated earlier, multiculturalism is interpreted in various ways by academic scholars (see Nye 2007; Ibrahim et al. 2011; Vasu 2012; Berry 2013; Noor and Leong 2013). Ibrahim et al. (2011), in particular, offer a rather interesting understanding of the term. They define
multiculturalism “as a process that is contextualised to a particular country and it involves active management by the respective government” (Ibrahim et al. 2011, p. 1003). This, according to them, is often translated as “the realisation of the national identity” (Ibrahim et al. 2011, p. 1003), which can be linked to the formation of modern Malaysian society. As the modernisation project aims at the general population of Malaysia, it is beneficial to find out how cultural differences among Malaysians are dealt with in the making of modern Malaysian society. The credibility of the official policies of the Federation of Malaysia, especially Vision 2020, is put to the test in order to analyse the meaning of multicultural tolerance in relation to Malaysian modernity. It is also worth exploring how a shared identity can be formed within a multicultural society. Furthermore, this discussion raises the crucial question of whether cultural diversity is really celebrated in Malaysia and protected by the government.

**METHODOLOGY**

The research is based on critical discourse analysis (CDA) because it allows examining the modernity discourse more closely. Instead of focusing exclusively on the grammatical and linguistic use of language, CDA was used as an analytic method to study the social processes that (re)produce and reflect knowledge and power relations through discourses (Fairclough 2003). Fairclough’s version of CDA is a key method because of his assertion that language is a material form of ideology and invested by ideology (Fairclough 1995). Although the study drew on Fairclough’s version of CDA, the objective was not to produce a linguistic study of Malaysian identity and modernity. Fairclough’s version of CDA was simply chosen because it incorporates concepts such as power, ideology, social practice and common sense. Instead of focusing on the grammatical constructions of text or describing the language of text, I examined ‘content’ to investigate the concept of ‘modern Malaysians’ and perhaps uncover hidden ideologies, which align with Fairclough’s aim of CDA.

The analysis focused on newspaper articles published by two mainstream newspapers in Malaysia: Berita Harian and New Straits Times. The rationale behind this selection is due to a symbiotic relationship between the aforementioned newspapers and the Malaysian government (see Rajaratnam 2009; Mohd Sani 2010; Fong and Ahmad Ishak 2016). Furthermore, according to the Malaysian Canons of Journalism, mainstream media in Malaysia play a significant role in the process of nation building and in the formation of public policy (Mohd Sani 2005, p. 62).

Berita Harian was chosen because its target readers are Malays. I also selected New Straits Times as its readership arguably transcends ethnic groups. Apart from being a ‘universal'
newspaper, New Straits Times also caters to the Malaysian 'elite' readers (Shaari et al. 2006) which include Malay elites. Therefore, New Straits Times is useful when analysing news content intended for a diverse Malaysian society. In addition, New Straits Times was selected because it publishes in the English language, which is widely used in Malaysia. Given that the article explores the discourse of Malaysian identity and modernity in terms of Malaysian society as a whole, these two newspapers are the best resources for this study.

I focused on data retrieved within the period from 2003 to 2009, which is the period of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi’s premiership as the fifth Prime Minister of Malaysia. This sample period was selected because the idea to create ‘modern Malaysians’ continued to be popularised by Mohamad’s successor, Badawi. As a political ideology, Malaysian cultural modernity can only be understood through this Malaysian government’s vision for a new, modern society. It is worth noting that Malaysia’s modernisation project is implemented by the Barisan Nasional coalition, which has had supremacy over the country since Malaysia’s Independence in 1957. During the 14th Malaysian General Election in 2018, the coalition was voted out of power for the first time in Malaysian history. However, the coalition returned to power under Perikatan Nasional in the aftermath of the 2020 Malaysian political crisis. The coalition was led by Badawi during the period of his premiership.

For Berita Harian, I used the search terms pemodenan (modernity), moden (modern), pembangunan (development) and bangsa Malaysia (Malaysians). One hundred and fifty-one of the 224 articles retrieved from the search were relevant to this study. Each of the 151 articles was carefully read to detect patterns or recurring views. There were three recurring views: (1) constructing modern Malaysians based on Islam Hadhari, (2) knowledge as the foundation of Malaysian modernity and (3) preserving Malay customs as part of the modernity project. This article only features the first recurring theme, which is constructing modern Malaysians based on Islam Hadhari, due to its relevance to the main argument of this article: being ‘modern’ does not necessarily mean being ‘Western’. I chose to highlight the role of religion – Islam, in particular – because I discovered that this was the key theme that differentiates Malaysian cultural modernity from the discourse of modernity that is often associated with the West.

For New Straits Times, the same search terms were employed. One hundred and twenty-one of the 245 articles retrieved from the search were relevant and examined as part of this study. The analysis revealed two recurring views: (1) acknowledging the role of religion in Malaysian modernity and (2) reviving Malaysian traditional symbols. For the reason mentioned above, this article only discussed the first recurring theme, which refers to acknowledging the role of religion in Malaysian modernity.
CONSTRUCTING MODERN MALAYSIANS BASED ON ISLAM HADHARI

In Berita Harian, there was a number of news articles that discussed and promoted the ideology of Islam Hadhari. In this context, Islam Hadhari was described as an Islamic concept and an approach to develop human capital in Malaysia. News articles on Islam Hadhari were mainly extracts from Abdullah Ahmad Badawi’s speeches. The definition of ‘Islam Hadhari’ was clearly described in one of the news articles:

Islam Hadhari is a teaching of Islam that focuses on life. It is a teaching to increase the quality of life, a degree of which society are civilised and have a distinguished culture in facing the challenges of the new millennium, such as information technology explosion, borderless world, global economy, materialism, identity crisis, and colonisation of the mind (Berita Harian, January 17, 2008).

Discourse on cultural modernity within the examined time frame shows a reference to Mohamad’s plan to modernise Malaysia. This indicates that Mohamad’s Vision 2020 was still applicable even after he left the office in 2003. There were 46 news articles that re-emphasised the initial objectives of Vision 2020. The obvious addition to the Malaysian cultural modernisation project within this period was the concept of Islam Hadhari, which was articulated in a persuasive manner using Abdullah Ahmad Badawi’s speech extracts. The need to implement a new concept of Islam in Malaysia was expressed as a necessary measure to avoid failure in constructing modern Malaysians. The texts tended to use the word ‘Muslims’ as the main subject of modern Malaysians:

Islam Hadhari is a humble approach to elevate the entire society including the non-Muslims. As Muslims, we have to choose to be religious first and then decide whether we want to be doctors, teachers or any other professions, in order to contribute towards nation building. Muslims today are being looked down because they are not united to the extent they are not capable on their own to modernise the country, therefore have to depend on the non-Islamic countries. Muslims always blame their fate and this is the reason why they are poor and backward, even though Islam never teaches its followers to be economically and socially deprived. Islam encourages modernity and success. It is compulsory for us to be united because all of the principles of Islam Hadhari are for strengthening the dignity of Muslims, Malays and the country (Berita Harian, February 4, 2005).

The above extract raises two key issues. Firstly, the inclusion of the non-Muslims. The subject of non-Muslims appeared in the very first sentence of the text, which classifies it as part of the topic sentence. This suggests that the concept of Islam Hadhari was not introduced solely for the Malaysian Muslims. As shown in the above extract, Islam Hadhari appeared in
the discourse of Malaysian modernity as a concept and an approach that was compatible with diverse Malaysian society. Despite the universal portrayal of Islam Hadhari, the text consistently referred to Muslims, which shows the significant role of religious identity in the formation of modern Malaysians. This was made apparent in the second sentence of the extract, in which religion was regarded as more important than the career. Considering Malaysia’s demography, it is compelling to discover that a specific religion, Islam, was considered capable to unite the diverse Malaysian society. The third sentence of the extract suggests two points. First, unity is a key element in the formation of modern Malaysians. As the sentence used the word ‘Muslims’, it shows that ‘unity’ in this context refers to religious unity. Second, the connection made between Muslims and the inability to modernise the country suggests that Islam was featured in the discourse of Malaysian modernity partly to improve the image of Muslims.

The second key issue of the above extract is that the religion and teaching of Islam was chosen to be the best ‘tool’ to achieve Malaysian modernity. This shows a similarity between Mohamad’s and Badawi’s ideologies, as both highlighted the role of Islam in the Malaysian cultural modernisation project. The main difference between their ideologies is the concept of Islam they tended to endorse. Mohamad advocated a concept of Fardu Kifayah (communally obligatory), whereas Badawi promoted Islam Hadhari (civilisational Islam) (Mohamad 2008). Indirectly, the text suggests a version of modernity that the Malaysian government intended to achieve. Although modernity is commonly associated with the West, the analysis on modernity in the Malaysian context offers a rather interesting perspective. In this respect, the discourse of Islam sets apart Malaysian modernity from Western modernity. Islam appeared to be the core facilitator for the socio-cultural transformation in Malaysia:

Every citizen has to comprehend the ideology of Islam Hadhari, which is introduced to strengthen the identity of Malaysians in order to withstand globalisation (Berita Harian, February 9, 2005).

The above extract shows that Badawi’s engagement with Islam was driven by political objectives and the need to restructure Malaysian society. However, the role of Islam in the Malaysian cultural modernisation project seems problematic because not every Malaysian is Muslim. This suggests that the project, first and foremost, has aimed at the Malaysian’s Malay-Muslim majority:

As the effort to transform the society is the responsibility of the government, I think it is irrational for anyone to underestimate Islam Hadhari. Those who underestimate this concept...
are actually jealous and absurd (Berita Harian, February 5, 2005)

The above extract illustrates Malaysia’s authoritarian leadership at the time. The subject of Islam Hadhari in Malaysian modernity was not open to criticism. Malaysian society was expected to accept the concept wholeheartedly. The text used words such as ‘irrational’, ‘jealous’ and ‘absurd’ to describe individuals who were against the ideology of Islam Hadhari. The word ‘jealous’ in the text implies a reference to Malaysian’s non-Muslims who were most likely to disagree with the concept of Islam Hadhari. They were labelled ‘jealous’ for questioning Islam as the chosen religion in facilitating socio-cultural transformation in Malaysia.

MALAYSIAN MODERNITY AND THE MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT

News articles on Malaysian identity and modernity reflect authoritarianism as they were structured to mainly include speech extracts from Malaysian political leaders. In addition, the words used in the framing of the headlines of the analysed news articles suggest a positive perception of Islam Hadhari:

1. *Islam Hadhari perkasakan ummah* (Islam Hadhari strengthens society) (Berita Harian, February 5, 2005)
2. *Islam Hadhari menjana kemajuan ummah* (Islam Hadhari generates societal modernisation) (Berita Harian, February 9, 2005)
3. *Islam Hadhari bentuk modal insan berkualiti* (Islam Hadhari forms a quality human capital) (Berita Harian, March 17, 2005)
4. *Islam Hadhari galak kemajuan* (Islam Hadhari encourages modernity) (Berita Harian, March 22, 2005)
6. *Islam Hadhari tunjang pembangunan* (Islam Hadhari is the foundation of development) (Berita Harian, July 22, 2005)
7. *Islam Hadhari strategi tingkat kemajuan ummah* (Islam Hadhari is a strategy to elevate society) (Berita Harian, August 31, 2005)
8. *Konsep Hadhari galak pertingkat kecemerlangan* (The concept of Hadhari promotes excellence) (Berita Harian, September 5, 2005)

As shown in the headline samples above, the concept of Islam Hadhari was given a significant role in the transformation of Malaysian society and consistently portrayed as an ideal approach. The headline entitled “Islam Hadhari strengthens the National Principles and
Vision 2020” (Berita Harian, May 5, 2005), for instance, shows that the concept of Islam Hadhari was not instigated to replace Vision 2020. Instead, it appeared as a better concept to continue Mohamad’s legacy in modernising Malaysians. The strategy to form an appealing image of Islam Hadhari is illustrated in the headline samples above. Islam Hadhari appeared as a comprehensive concept intended for a general population of Malaysia. Islam Hadhari was heavily promoted not only by Badawi, but also by other political figures in Malaysia:

The concept of Islam Hadhari, which promotes simplicity, will be able to transform Malaysia into a modern country through Vision 2020, said Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku [the King] Syed Sirajuddin Syed Putra Jamalullail. He affirmed, Islam Hadhari is not a concept to introduce a new teaching of Islam or new Islamic jurisprudence. Instead, it is an approach to elevate the standard of society without jeopardising the fundamental principles of Islamic teaching and the freedom for the non-Muslims to follow their own religions. Although this Islam Hadhari approach takes time, we need to have confidence in it so the objectives of Vision 2020 can be achieved (Berita Harian, March 22, 2005).

As shown in the above extract, the concept of Islam Hadhari was supported by the King of Malaysia. The validation from a prominent political figure made Islam Hadhari a reputable concept to achieve Malaysian modernity. The above extract also illustrates a correlation between Islam Hadhari and Vision 2020. However, the emphasis on the Islamic approach indicates a new form of modernity, which seems to divert Islam Hadhari from Vision 2020. The focus on religious identity instead of ethnic identity puts the modernity project between 2003 and 2009 outside the parameter of ethnic groups in Malaysia, which, again, seems to stray from the path of Vision 2020. Therefore, Islam Hadhari seems like an approach to enhance Vision 2020 rather than to correspond to it. The analysis of Islam Hadhari revealed a persistence to adopt an Islamic concept in Malaysian modernity as an alternative model to Western modernity. The analysis also showed that Malaysian modernity was inspired by the beginning of the Islamic state at the time of the Prophet:

Islam is actually a religion that has a successful outcome. This is based on the history of all prophets, in which human beings are taught to be successful and pious, based on the standards set by Allah (the God). Prophet Muhammad, the last prophet, had formed a successful and pious community (Berita Harian, January 21, 2008).

As illustrated in the above extract, cultural modernity in the Malaysian context referred to a successful and pious society. Elevating society based on Islamic conducts suggests an attempt to alter the identity of Malaysians, both Muslims and non-Muslims. The text
included the word ‘pious’ to describe an ideal community, which means constructing a God-fearing society was deemed necessary to achieve Malaysian modernity. It shows that the cultural modernisation project intended to instil into Malaysians not only Islamic beliefs but also Islamic practices. The emphasis on orderly conduct among citizens in the discourse of Malaysian modernity suggests two points. Firstly, it illustrates boundaries. The teaching of Islam has been believed to be able to equip Malaysian citizens with necessary moral values to resist external influence brought by globalisation. Secondly, it differentiated Malaysian modernity from Western modernity. It shows that the idea of a civilised nation was redefined. Although Malaysia has aimed to reach a level of modernity displayed by developed nations, the characteristics of modern society in modern countries seemed incompatible with Malaysian citizens, hence resulting in the undertaking of an Islamic approach in Malaysian modernity.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE ROLE OF RELIGION (ISLAM AND ISLAM HADHARI) IN MALAYSIAN MODERNITY

In New Straits Times, there was a number of news articles focusing on the topic of religion. From the headlines alone, it seems that the news articles were structured to cater to diverse religious beliefs among Malaysians. This is based on the words used in the framing of the headlines. Only 15 out of 99 headlines contained the word ‘Islam’. The rest of the headlines contained words such as ‘religion’, ‘religious’, ‘faith’, ‘unity’, ‘harmony’, ‘greatness’, ‘kind’ and ‘amity’. This marks the main difference in terms of news style and structure between Berita Harian and New Straits Times. Berita Harian tended to highlight a specific religion and religious group, which are Islam and Muslims. In contrast, New Straits Times seemed to feature the subject of religion in its news headlines using general terms, which suggests its relevance to the general population of Malaysia.

Interestingly, the concept of Islam Hadhari only appeared twice across the 99 headlines, although it was a prominent concept during Badawi’s premiership. This suggests that New Straits Times attempted to be more inclusive than Berita Harian. On the surface, religion in general seemed to be the focal point in the discourse on Malaysian identity and modernity. However, a more in-depth analysis of the 99 articles published by New Straits Times revealed the significant subject of Islam. In fact, there were 87 news articles that specifically mentioned and highlighted the role of Islam in Malaysian modernity. In this context, Islam subtly appeared as an important subject, which was made relevant for Malaysians in general.

In the articles, the topic of Islam was presented alongside the topic of Islam Hadhari. This shows a dissimilarity between Berita Harian and New Straits Times as Berita Harian tended
to separate these two topics from one another. The discourse on Islam and Islam Hadhari in New Straits Times suggests that the knowledge of Islam was deemed necessary among urban Malaysians.

The analysis also revealed that the discourse on Islam seemed more comprehensive in New Straits Times. Islam and Islam Hadhari were repeatedly stated as the best approach to achieve Malaysian modernity. As Islam and Islam Hadhari appeared concurrently in the texts, this suggests that the text producers intended to shape Malaysians' perception of the Islam Hadhari concept. It seems that the news articles were structured to constantly remind Malaysians that Islam Hadhari was a rational concept in accordance with the teaching of Islam. This raises two important questions: If Islam Hadhari is essentially identical to the original teaching of Islam, why is there a need to introduce and promote the concept of Islam Hadhari among Malaysians? Why can Islam not be promoted as it is?

In order to find answers to these questions, news articles on Islam and Islam Hadhari were carefully examined to point out the primary objective of Islam Hadhari. The analysis revealed two main purposes of the Islam Hadhari concept. Firstly, Islam Hadhari was endorsed by Badawi as his main legacy or contribution to nation building. He seemed to follow in the previous Prime Ministers' footsteps and advocated a political concept. This suggests that Islam Hadhari was first and foremost a 'symbol' to represent Badawi. Secondly, the analysis revealed that Islam Hadhari was heavily promoted in the main body of the texts as an initiative to 'rebrand' Islam. The negative perception of Islam was acknowledged in the texts. The religion of Islam seemed to be disparaged not only by non-Muslims but also by the Muslim community in Malaysia. The texts point out that Islam is backward and anti-modernity. This implies the need to improve the image of Islam among Malaysians, resulting in the endorsement of Islam Hadhari:

It is, in fact, the Institute of Islamic Understanding (Ikim)'s role to promote better understanding of the faith in a world where Islam is perceived as backward and associated with terrorism and violence. We have to deal with intolerance before it is too late. The prime minister has made it a personal crusade to give the world a more modern and compassionate Islam. Islam Hadhari encompasses the principle that Muslims must be tolerant and respect others. He asked what went wrong when the level of tolerance towards others is now wafer-thin or none at all. Asri was forthright. When asked why the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims today was difficult, the answer was: 'the problem lies with Muslims, their appearance, their attitude and their focus on petty issues'. Now, that is interesting. When was the last time you heard the voice of religious authority blaming the ummah? He has this to say about the role of mufti in this country: 'He must be responsible
for bringing the knowledge of Islam in this modern era’. His own role? ‘My duty is to present Islam in its modern face and get it out of the clutches of conservatives, who have made the religion look obsolete’ (New Straits Times, December 16, 2006).

The above extract shows that the discourse on Islam in New Straits Times consists of two keywords: modern and tolerance. It also shows an attempt to alter the general perception of Islam. The text implies that Islam is generally associated with negativity; therefore, it is important and necessary to reform the image of Islam, at least on a national level. This shows a complexity of the role of Islam in the cultural modernisation project. It seems that Malaysian modernity has not only been a project to restructure the Malaysian society, but also a project to restructure the image of Islam. The analysis showed that the ideology to improve the image of Islam is rather complicated and time consuming.

Taking the above extract, for instance, the project to restructure the image of Islam was still articulated in news articles in 2006, three years after the concept of Islam Hadhari had been introduced. This suggests that Islam Hadhari was not easily accepted, not only by Malaysian non-Muslims but also by Malaysian Muslims. Perhaps, this is the reason why the discourse on Islam was dominant in both Berita Harian and New Straits Times between 2003 and 2009. However, the analysis revealed that New Straits Times contained more news articles on Islam compared to Berita Harian. This raises another question: why is the topic of Islam more prominent in the English language newspaper? It is important to note that Islam is the official religion of the Malay ethnic group. Therefore, Berita Harian is expected to be the main newspaper to largely spread the knowledge of Islam through its news articles.

Although New Straits Times is seen as a universal newspaper that transcends a diverse ethnic background, its actual target readers are Malaysian elites and Malaysian middle class. Therefore, news articles about Islam in New Straits Times were designed to be relevant to the aforementioned groups. Unlike other vernacular newspapers, New Straits Times aims to cater to specific social groups, not ethnic groups. Given that it is not an ethnocentric newspaper, New Straits Times seems to be universal compared to the other vernacular newspapers in Malaysia. Due to its universality, it is able to reach a wider audience, which explains the large number of news articles about Islam in New Straits Times. This suggests that the Malaysian government used the print media not only to improve the image of Islam but also as a platform for ‘dakwah’ (preaching) in order to influence the ‘most important’ social groups in Malaysia to embrace Islam. These groups are considered important not only because they have been the main subjects of Malaysian modernity, but also because they represent modern Malaysians. As Islam was chosen to facilitate Malaysian modernity, Islam, too, needed transformation to appear modern and appealing.
The above extract published in New Straits Times on December 16, 2006, supports this, as it links Islam to the words ‘modern’ and ‘tolerance’. The word ‘modern’ was the main keyword in the discourse on Islam in New Straits Times, suggesting that it was also the term that news producers wanted Malaysians to associate Islam with. The extract shows that the idea to modernise Islam was not simply an ideology articulated in the mainstream print media. In addition, the ‘rebranding’ of Islam not only involved commitment from Badawi to promote Islam Hadhari, but also commitment from the Institute of Islamic Understanding. This shows the seriousness of the role of Islam in Malaysian modernity.

Although Malaysia is a religiously diverse country, there were only 11 news articles that mentioned the other religions. The disproportionate coverage of religions in New Straits Times illustrates media bias in Malaysia. Although New Straits Times is an English newspaper and is considered universal in terms of audience reachability, its news articles, however, seem constricted. This shows that the contents of New Straits Times were heavily affected and influenced by the Malaysian (Islam-based) government. Interestingly, the news contents of Berita Harian and New Straits Times were not identical, although they were both linked to the Malaysian government. The main difference between these two newspapers was their medium of news reporting. Berita Harian used Malay language, whereas New Straits Times used English. The analysis of these newspapers revealed the significant role of language in the discourse of Malaysian modernity. In this context, language had an influence on readership demographics and news contents, despite the concentration of media ownership. As presented in this section, the subject and knowledge of Islam was more prevalent in New Straits Times than in Berita Harian. This shows a determination to promote the religion of Islam to the other ethnic groups in Malaysia, which also explains why there were more articles about Islam in New Straits Times.

Ironically, in the discourse on Islam in New Straits Times, the word ‘tolerance’ was repeatedly used alongside the word ‘modern’. There are two angles from which to analyse the use of the word ‘tolerance’ in the texts. Firstly, the word ‘tolerance’ could have been used to represent not only Islam but also the Muslims. In the above extract, for instance, the text implies the importance of toleration between Muslims and non-Muslims. The text shows that Muslims were strongly encouraged to respect others. Indirectly, they were also advised to respect other people’s religious and spiritual beliefs. Interestingly, in New Straits Times, Muslims and Islam were mentioned separately from one another. As shown in the above extract, Muslims only appeared in the text as a subject responsible for the disunity among Malaysians, particularly between Muslims and non-Muslims. This shows that news articles published by the New Straits Times were cautiously structured to avoid any further
misunderstanding about Islam. Furthermore, Islam seems to be the only religion that was protected and defended by New Straits Times, strengthening this argument. The findings also show that there were two objectives of the discourse on Islam in New Straits Times. The first objective was to ‘rebrand’ Islam as a modern religion, which makes the reported role of Islam in facilitating Malaysia’s modernisation project seem appropriate. The second objective was to convince Malaysian elites and the Malaysian middle class to embrace Islam, which makes New Straits Times a platform for ‘dakwah’ (preaching). This suggests that the modernisation project not only aimed to bring forth modern and developed Malaysians, but also more Muslims.

Secondly, the word ‘tolerance’ can be analysed from a news reporting perspective whereby the use of the term is questionable. This is because the imbalanced reporting of religions in New Straits Times actually shows the opposite of toleration, suggesting that the news content and news structure of News Straits Times tended to contradict one another. Although ‘tolerance’ appeared as the second keyword in the discourse on Islam, New Straits Times failed to provide a clear argument and sufficient texts to illustrate religious tolerance for people of other faiths. In other words, the knowledge of Islam was deemed more important than the knowledge of other religions, which seems to contradict New Straits Times’ standpoint to promote toleration. This suggests that the kind of toleration New Straits Times actually signified was the acceptance of Islam among Malaysians.

CONCLUSION

This article addressed the intangible aspect of Malaysia’s modernisation project. Its main intention was to place Malaysia in the discourse of modernity and to argue that being ‘modern’ does not necessarily mean being ‘Western’. To do so, the cultural aspect of Malaysian modernity was investigated. At a fundamental level, this article considered what version of modernity the Malaysian government under Badawi’s premiership intended to achieve. This was to explore the continuity of the modernisation project in the post-Mahathir era. The question was also significant because it involves issues of post-colonialism, Islam, Asian values, Malaysian values and ‘the West’. The discourse of Malaysian cultural modernity was explored through the analysis of two mainstream newspapers in Malaysia: Berita Harian and New Straits Times. As stated in the method section, these newspapers were chosen because they are controlled by the Malaysian government (Rajaratnam 2009; Mohd Sani 2010). Moreover, mainstream media in Malaysia have functioned as a medium for the Malaysian government to publicise national policies and nation-building plans (Mohd Sani 2005).
The analysis showed that there was a consistent pattern of beliefs. The need to form a Malaysian version of modernity was apparent in both newspapers. In particular, this article focused on the theme of religion. Although other themes were also revealed by the analysis, religion was highlighted because it pointed out the preferred and ideal kind of cultural modernity intended for a diverse Malaysian society. The inclusion of the subject of religion – Islam, in particular – is significant enough to argue that Western modernity or Western society has not always been seen as a role model for developing nations or at least for Malaysia. This also implies that the characteristics of modern society in modern countries seem incompatible with Malaysian society. The need to create an alternative modernity signifies an opposition to Western modernity, which may be due to the country's history of colonialism. Based on the analysis, part of the objective of creating a Malaysian version of modernity was to restructure Malaysia's post-colonial condition.

During the era of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, cultural modernity referred to a successful and pious society. The word ‘pious’ interrelated with the phrase ‘an ideal society’. This means that the construction of a God-fearing society was a key process for achieving modernity. Evidently, Islam was integrated into the idea of modern society. The analysis pointed out an attempt to alter the identity of Malaysians in general, both Muslims and non-Muslims. Islam was the preferred ‘tool’ to modernise the society because it has been believed to be useful in two respects. First, the Islamic approach seems appropriate to equip the society with necessary moral values in order to resist external influence brought by globalisation. Second, Islam can be considered the best option to differentiate Malaysian modernity from Western modernity.

Through cultural modernisation, the government intended to instil in society both Islamic beliefs and Islamic practices. This is an interesting discovery because it contradicts the government’s notion that non-Malays are free to practise their chosen religion. Another interesting discovery is that modernity in the context of Malaysia does not necessarily mean ‘new’ because Malaysia is inspired by development that took place in the past rather than present times. In this context, the Islamic excellence during the time of Prophet Muhammad is the preferred model of modernity, not the West. This study thus presents a concept of modernity beyond the West, whereby Islam and Muslims are incorporated in the general discourse of modernity. It is apparent that the West was not seen as an example of imitation.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Izzati Aziz is a PhD graduate of Cardiff University’s School of Journalism, Media and Culture. Her research explores post-colonial identity and development in relation to cultural modernity.

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

Michael J. Day
Independent Scholar, UK | michael.day.phd@gmail.com

Merisa Skulsuthavong
Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China | merisa.skul@xjtlu.edu.cn

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社ocially 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 thktheiyng (นิยม), 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 transmute, 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, #ผู้ถูกจับ (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;
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 #เลือกตั้งล่าสุด (DelayedElection) and #เลือกตั้งปีเด็ก (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 #ยุบให้ตายไม่เลือกมึง (DissolveAllYouWantWeStillWontVoteForYou) trended on Twitter (Gunia 2020; Thaitrukulpanich 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), #ทหารมีไว้ท าไม (OurF*ckingTax), #จะนำเจตการ (StupidLeaderIsADeathToUsAll), #ให้แม่หัวควย (LetItEndInOurGeneration), #ภาษีกู (FreeYouth), #รัฐบาลหัวความ (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 protesters 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).

Hmtaro emojis and emoticons trended with #อั้นอีสานhamtaro (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 dissolution 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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ABOUT THE AUTHORS
Michael J. Day is a Sociologist and Web Scientist who focuses on research related to digital human rights in South-East Asia. As a researcher, he is interested in developing the pro-human Web. A former teacher, Michael Day is committed to the education of marginalised learners.

Merisa Skulsuthavong is an Assistant Professor at Department of Media and Communication, Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, Suzhou, China. As a researcher, she is interested in intercultural communication, gender and new media technology.

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Adolygiad Llyfr: Adrodd ar Dlodi: Naratif y Cyfryngau Newyddion a Chyfathrebiadau’r Trydydd Sector yng Nghymru [Reporting on Poverty: News Media Narratives and Third Sector Communications in Wales]

Johanna Karlsson
Prifysgol Aberystwyth, DU | jok29@aber.ac.uk

LLYFR WEDI’I ADOLYGU

GEIRIAU ALLWEDDOL
newyddiadau, newyddiadau darlledu, cyfryngau, y wasg, tlodi, Cymru

DYFYNIAD

DERBYN I’W GYHOEDDI 15 Mai 2021

Pwy sy’n dlawd yng Nghymru heddiw a sut cynrhychiolir tlodi yn y cyfryngau? Sut ffilmio gyda pharch person llwglyd sy’n bwyta? Sut cadw’r pellhad a ofynnwyd a dweud y stori ar yr yn bryd? Ddylai’r cyfryngau ddangos o bob ochr rywun sy’n cysgu yn y stryd – gydag efallai chyffuriau a thrais – a risgio ailgynhyrchu darlun o bobl y stryd fel unigolyn diog a heb gyfle i wella eu sefyllfa? Pam ymddiried mewn newyddiadurwyr? (Ofn a balchder yw dau reswm i’w hosgoi.) Gan ymchwilio straenon newydd ar dlodi yn y cyfryngau print, ar-lein a darlledu Cymreig, yn ystod cyfnod rhwng 4 Ebrill a 15 Gorffennaf yn 2016, mae Kerry Moore, Uwch Ddarlithydd yn Ysgol Newyddidaueraeth, Cyfryngau a Diwylliant ym Mhrifysgol Caerdydd, yn cyflwyno gwaith pwysig a diddorol iawn ond heb gynnig atebion i’r cwestiynau sy’n codi. Mae’r gyfrol yn cynnwys tair prif ran, sef casgliad data, profiadau staff newyddiau a phrofiadau staff neu wirfoddolwyr y trydydd sector.

Mae 23% o bobol yng Nghymru yn byw mewn tlodi i’w gymharu at 21% yng nghyfan y DU. A welir pa storiau o dlodi ddigon teildwng i’w dweud yn y cyfryngau? Sut cyflwyno a, mewn
ffordd, llwyfannu tlodi i’r cynulleidfaedd? Mae un cyfarwyddwr sefydliad yn y trydydd sector yn siarad am ‘porn tlodi’ (Moore 2020, t. 112). Mae pobl dlawd yn y DU y dibynnu ar gymorth mympwyl. Felly, er bod rwyt ti’n efallai cysgu ar y stryd neu ar gyffuriau, mae angen bod yn ddigon cwrtai i’r gymuned o dy gwmpas di’i w cadw nhw’n ddigon hapus dal i roi arian at elusennau neu syth atat ti. Yn aml, mae’r staff y trydydd sector yn weithwyr prosiect ac mae’n bwysig cynllunio’r gweithgareddu yn ôl fe elwir ‘cylch newyddion y cyfrangau’ – sef, mae’n angenheidiol cyfathrebu’r straen pwysicaf y sefydliadau yn ystod o adegau tawel fel mis Awst. Yn amlwg, mae diffyf o siarad am dlodi yn y sgwrs gyhoeddus. Ar yr un bryd, mae’r astudiaeth yn dangos bod yr economi yy’r brif thema newyddion dros y cyfnod astudiwyd (Moore 2020, t. 30). Diweithdra y swyddi yw dau fater eraill sy’n agos iawn at dlodi a chyflwynir yn aml gyda’n gilydd. Dyna yn amlwg oherwydd taw diweithdra y swyddi’n, efallai, mwy niwtral a llai cywilyddus.

Er bod y golygyddion Cymreig yn amlwg yn cytuno bod tlodi yn rhywbeth sylweddol iawn yng Nghymru – mwy nag yn Lloegr (Moore 2020, t. 67) – dywedir gwylwyr yn tueddau at ymdangos teimlad o ddifyf o ddiddordeb ynddi. Mae storiaw newyddion banciau bwyd, er enghraifft, yn colli diddordeb y gwylwyr ar ôl cyflwynir newyddion ar yr un themâu am y pedwerydd tro (Moore 2020, t. 66). Angenheidiol i bawb sydd eisiau llwyddo i gael y neges ar draws i’w feddwI amdani. Gwaith ar y cyd a chyd-ddealltwriaeth rhwng y cyfrangau a’r trydydd sector ydy’r naratif ar dlodi, yn ôl y llyfr. (Moore 2020, t. 2) Diddorol iawn yw’r wybodaeth am ddifyf adnabyddiaeth tlodi’r bobol y Deyrnas Unedig, oherwydd nid ydy’r gwaith ar y cyd wedi bod yn holol iwyddiannus ar blaen. Fel arfer dydy’r Prydeiniwr ddim yn awgrymu bod y mwyaf o’r tlawd mewn oed gweithio ond yn hytrach wedi ymddeol a, mwy nag unrhwy boblogaeth arall yn yr Undeb Ewropeaidd, yn credu taw mewnffudo yw’r prif reswm tlodi heddiw (Moore 2020, t. 6).

Gan ddarllen llyfr uchelgeisiol Moore (2020), rwyf fethu ildio meddyliau am dlodi fel rhywbeth sydd yn bodoli yn yr un ffodd ledled y Deyrnas Unedig; beth sy’n wahanol yng Nghymru yw’r cyfrangau. The Sun ydy’r papur newydd mwyaf boblogaidd yng Nghymru (Moore 2020, t. 98). Sef, mae gan y cyfrwng print mwyaf yng Nghymru ddifyf bersbectif lleol yn ogystal à ddifyf persbectif lleol datrysiadau’r problemau. Yn debyg, mae eisiau enfawr disgwrs lleol ynglyn â thlodi yng Nghymru a risg o “stigma tabloid”, fel y gelwir gan Moore (2020, t. 81), sef newyddion yn aml anghywir a chyhuddol am dlodi ac sy’n ergyd ar dlawd.

Dyna pam mae hi’n bwysig iawn i greu platfformau academaidd ar gyfer yr un materion a chynnig trafodaethau dyfnach arnyn nhw. Nid oes ofn ar Moore (2020) am ofyn cwestiwn fel ydy’r iaih Gymraeg yn gysgod dros faterion eraill yng Nghymru? Hynod ddeallus i’w trafod yma ac yn dangos darlun mwyaf. Yn anffodus, er bod barn ddiddorol iawn, dydy hi ddim yn

Johanna Karlsson

JOMEC Journal 16 (2021) 131
Hynod dddidorol yw darllen persbectifau mwy o olygyddion cyfryngau Cymreig. Fe gyflwynir y cyfryngau Cymreig fel sector heb ddigon o adnoddau; yn Gymraeg yn ogystal ag yn Saesneg. Does dim gohebydd lleol yn y cymoedd; does neb yng nghanolbarth Cymru chwaith. Yn bellach i wneud cyfweliadau à phobl y dyddiau hynny mae ffôn clyfar ambell waith yn angenrheidiol, sef dydy hi ddim bob amser yn bosib ffeindio rhywun parod i siarad am ei bywdd tlawd ar y teledu gan ddyfais ddrud. Mae’n eironig ond yn amlwg taw prin adnoddau’r swyddfeydd golygyddol yn achosi problemau yn y ffordd sut cyflwynir tlodî yn y cyfryngau Cymreig – mae diffyg o arian yn ogystal ag amser ar gyfer creu gwraith newyddiadural dwfn a chyson. Dydy’r cyfryngau cymdeithasol ddim yn helpu – fel arfer os torrwyd stori mae eisiau am fwy o storïa newydd yn hytrach na dadansoddia dyrnach.

Dyma lyfr bron i hanfodol i bawb sy’n astudio’r cyfryngau yng Nghymru neu yn cysylltu â nhw mewn unrhyw fforedd arall. Gobeithio darllenir y llyfr hwn gan ffyfrwyr newyddiaduraeth gyfoes – mae llawer o straen pwysig ynddo – a gobeithio na chaff e’n sbarduno trafod mewn seminarau academaidd am sut portreadu pobl mewn sefyllfeydd difreintiedig. Er hynny, hoffwn wedi darllen mwy am beth mae’r newyddiadurwyr yn meddwl ar y pwnc. Beth yw eu barn am sut mae’r gwleidyddwyr yn gweithio â thlodi? Ydyn nhw’n cytuno â’r gyfundrefn yn gyffredin, neu pe byddent nhw eisiau ei chwalu a sut ydy hynny’n effeithio’r

cael ddigon o le i’w thrafod. Er enghraifft, mae’n olygydd newyddion print (Moore 2020, t. 68) sydd yn siarad am y mater ieithyddol yng Nghymru fel rhyweth sy’n cysgodir’r boblogaeth ddifreintiedig Gymreig. Eto, dyna bwyt pwysig iawn, yn amlwg, ond beth sy’n dweud bod tlodi yn ergyd dim ond at yr Eingl-gymreig? Hoffwn i yma ryw fath o gymhariaeth o gyd-deunau iathia leiafrifol arall am sut gallu jyglol materion yr iathia a chwestiynau cyfiauwynder cymdeithasol. Efallai tasai gymhariaeth â’r Alban yn ddefnyddiol yma dros y mater Gymraeg? Mae’r Alban ar’r Nîn glir ynghyd â dyfodol annibynnol yr Alban: yn hanfodol i’r archwilio a annibyniaeth yw symud at adeiladu gwladwriaeth lles go iawn. Nid yw’r Aelwg yr Alban ar y lefelau o ddwyieithrwydd â’r Gymraeg, ond nid ydy hynny wedi datrysir problemau tlodi’r Albanwyr. Ond mae fforodd arall i’w gweld: fe welir poblogaeth Cyrmraeg i gyd fel dosbarth canol, yn ôl un gohebydd yn yr adroddiad. Yn anffodus, dydy’r awdures ddim yn trafod y sylw yn bellach gan ofyn beth yw’r risgiau cymdeithasol i unigolyn o gymdeithas leiafrifol (fel yr un Gymraeg). Yn ôl rheolwr gwybodaeth a mewnwliaid, “cryfder a gwendid” yn yr un pryd yw’r agosatrywydd yng Nghymru (Moore 2020, t. 98). Yn amlwg, mae rhai o bartëion ym Mae Caerdydd sydd eisiau adeiladu gwladwriaeth lles yng Nghymru, bell i fforodd o San Steffan. Serch hynny, nodir gan yr awdur y diffyg pwerau’r Llywodraeth Cymru. Mae angen am raglen gyfan i weithio yn eang yn erbyn yr effeithiau’r tlodi ac yn cynnwys ffactorau fel gwasanaethau iechyd a thai fforddiadwy (ffaith dddidorol: y cyfryngau print yn trafod digartrefedd mwy nag y cyfryngau darlledu).

Hynod dddidorol yw darllen persbectifau mwy o olygyddion cyfryngau Cymreig. Fe gyflwynir y cyfryngau Cymreig fel sector heb ddigon o adnoddau; yn Gymraeg yn ogystal ag yn Sasesneg. Does dim gohebydd lleol yn y cymoedd; does neb yng nghanolbarth Cymru chwaith. Yn bellach i wneud cyfweliadau à phobl y dyddiau hynny mae ffôn clyfar ambell waith yn angenrheidiol, sef dydy hi ddim bob amser yn bosib ffeindio rhywun parod i siarad am ei bywdd tlawd ar y teledu gan ddyfais ddrud. Mae’n eironig ond yn amlwg taw prin adnoddau’r swyddfeydd golygyddol yn achosi problemau yn y ffordd sut cyflwynir tlodi ynw y cyfryngau Cymreig – mae diffyg o arian yn ogystal ag amser ar gyfer creu gwraith newyddiadural dwfn a chyson. Dydy’r cyfryngau cymdeithasol ddim yn helpu – fel arfer os torrwyd stori mae eisiau am fwy o storïa newydd yn hytrach na dadansoddia dyrnach.

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gwaith a phroses newyddiaduraeth? Allan nhw gadw’n niwtral?

Beth a hoffwn i’w gweld yw trafod go iawn ynglŷn ar gyfundrefn o elusennau ym Mhrydain. Pam methu rhoi pwys ar y llywodraeth i wneud beth sydd mai’n yna i’w wneud – sef, cynnig y posibiliadau gorau i bawb yn hytrach na thaflu’r dasg i ffordd at gymdeithasau sydd fel arfer yn neud gwaith anhygoel ond sydd dan lai o dryloywder na gweinidogaethau, awdurddodau ac asiantaethau llywodraethol. All y cyfryngau cael effaith ar y gwleidyddwyr i newid pethau ac, os ie, ym mha ffordd? Yn bellach, hoffwn i wedi gweld trafodaeth neu o leiaf manylion ynglŷn â gwahaniaethau daearydol. Ydy bod yn dlawd yr un peth yng Ngwynedd, ym Mhowys ac yng Nghaerdydd? Ydy’r gwahaniaethau rhwng y rhanbarthau’n dangos yn y cyfryngau? Prifaterion cysylltiedig â thlodi yn y cyfryngau yw diweithdra ac ansicrwydd gwaith (Moore 2020, t. 119). Wrth gwrs, wedi blwyddyn o bandemig mae’r sefyllfa wedi newid. Mae yna fwy o bobl mewn tlodi achos y coronafeirws, ond dim mwy o amser i greu newyddiaduraeth amdanyt.

**AM YR AWDUR**
Mae Johanna Karlsson yn ffyrnwaig yn yr adran Astudiaethau Theatr, Ffilm a Theledu ym Mhrifysgol Aberystwyth. Ei diddordebau ymchwil yn cynnwys y gynrychiolaeth a’r ymgormodolaeth a’r ymgorfforiad y genedl, y Gemau Olympaidd ac ieithoedd lleiafrifol; sef ffactorau pwysig yn ei thraethawd hir Negotiating Space: An Investigation into the Subject within Postcolonial Polity.

**CYFEIRIADAU**
Journalism is central to democracy, citizenship and everyday life, and its study is important because it helps us to understand this key social, political and cultural institution. The role of news in shaping the way we see and understand the world, ourselves and others is of paramount importance. Contemporary journalism continues to be under siege from the breakdown of the business model that was based on advertising, declining revenues and the closure of newspapers taking place in the midst of the global pandemic COVID-19. Politically, journalism’s role in society is under pressure from various interests which has resulted in an untenable situation for journalists. New challenges and pressures have also arisen from technology which have impacted the norms and conventions of this important institution. These changes call for a continued study of this field, and *The Handbook of Journalism Studies* edited by Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch – first published in 2009 and its second edition of 2020 – play such a role.
The first edition was published in a context in which journalism both as a practice and an institution was undergoing rapid transformation economically, technologically and socially. The advent of new interactive communication technologies, globalisation and the economic crisis are some of the changes. The second edition, on the other hand, is a timely contribution, published during a period when journalism is undergoing new transformations in this radically different context. For instance, the ongoing digital revolution, the rise of social media and disinformation, new production and information strategies and the worsening economic crises are having a profound impact on every aspect of journalistic practice, professional identity and institutional structure. The second edition is more comprehensive in its approach and takes into account the slippery nature and destabilisation in journalism of over a decade since the first edition. Thus, it is not a mere update of the first edition as it includes 25 new chapters and nine updates of versions from the first edition. Some of the additional issues covered in the second edition include the digital revolution, social media, computational journalism, the rise of global populism and media control by authoritarian governments.

Both editions review bodies of literature on diverse aspects including journalism studies as an academic field, practices of news production, analyses of news content, the complex relations of journalism and society, and the global context of journalism research. Both editions demonstrate gaps in literature and set the agenda for future research in journalism studies in an international context. The strength of both editions lies in how they show that journalism is an increasingly global phenomenon whose study is becoming an international and collaborative endeavour. Both editions focus on covering not just the West and more specifically Anglo-American perspectives that have traditionally dominated the field, but also look beyond this context to Africa, Latin America, Continental Europe and Asia.

Both editions are presented in a similar fashion with chapters organised in parts. The first edition has five while the second has six parts, including a new one on journalism and culture which discusses important topics including how users matter to journalism and vice versa, as discussed by Irene Costera Meijer (2020). Folker Hanusch’s chapter on journalism and everyday life (2020) surveys the emergent body of work dealing with various aspects of journalism and everyday life. An important inclusion in the second edition is Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Motti Neiger’s chapter on journalism and memory (2020) which considers commemorative journalism, the use of memory in covering events and how journalists use it to establish their identity, boundaries and authority. The chapter is useful in helping us to understand the complex relationship between journalism and memory, a topic which has been insufficiently interrogated in previous research. Elizabeth Poole’s chapter on covering diversity (2020) is a fresh and relevant inclusion as identity politics are
central to populist groups for garnering support for their political projects, as is being witnessed in the world today. The chapter analyses the representation of ethnic minority groups in contemporary Western media using the United Kingdom and the representation of Muslims as a case study.

Both editions critically discuss why and how journalism studies should be done. Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009/2020) trace the evolution of journalism studies from what they call the prehistory of journalism studies, followed by the empirical turn, the sociological turn and the international-comparative turn characterised by globalisation, new communication technologies and the rise of global networks. In addition, Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2020) explore how there has been a development of new approaches that enrich the field methodologically and conceptually. Chapters are authored by prominent global scholars coming from a range of disciplines hailing from different countries, and this is important for a field which is rich, dynamic, always changing and globally diverse. The call to rethink and broaden the scope of research beyond mainstream journalism, elite nations, leading news organisations and prominent journalists is an important contribution made in the first edition which challenges academics to investigate smaller less glamorous journalistic workplaces, content and audiences. As Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009) note in the first edition, the scholarly neglect of these areas is problematic since journalists’ working conditions vary hugely depending on economic, political, technological and social contexts. The second edition builds on this through a reflection of established areas of research and demonstrating the ways in which these areas have advanced and changed over time.

In the first edition, Barbie Zelizer’s chapter on journalism and the academy (2009), in the first part, argues that its study has not kept up with changes. The chapter calls for a reflection to interrogate what has been privileged and overlooked in order to accommodate the variances that exist on the ground. Beate Josephi’s chapter on journalism education (2009) discusses how it has evolved in the United States, what ought to be taught and the ideological assumptions underlying journalism teaching. The chapter also identifies some of the key texts used in the teaching of the field. One of the key contributions made in the second part of the first edition, is the discussion on the significance of understanding the work of journalists by looking at the context of news production. In the section, the theory of ‘gatekeeping’, which has resurfaced due to technological change, is explored together with the ideal of objectivity which continues to be key in journalism cultures. Thorsten Quandt and Jane Singer’s chapter (2009) makes a key contribution by calling for a rethink of methodological and conceptual tools in the light of ongoing changes that have been accelerated by the advent of journalistic convergence and cross-platform production.
In the second edition, the discussion on news production is deepened with Oscar Westlund and Mats Ekström (2020) making two distinct contributions through a discussion of the organisational context and routines for coordination in news organisations, and routines in relation to the concrete situated practices. Their discussion touches on the radical change in the tools and systems used in news production in contemporary times. They argue that the pace of doing news has changed as new routines emerged in increasingly digital and data-driven newsrooms. They also acknowledge the important role of professional journalism in a context in which disinformation is becoming widespread and how more and more news organisations have reformulated their routines to encourage cross-departmental coordination.

Tim P. Vos (2020) revisits the notion of what it means when journalists are called ‘gatekeepers’ and addresses related concepts of ‘gatewatching’ and ‘gatebouncing’, arguing that gatekeeping is not ‘dying’ or ‘dead’ but needs refinement. In the same section, Matt Carlson and Seth C. Lewis’s chapter on boundary work (2020) discusses how digital media have made medium differences irrelevant and opened up media space. The chapter offers a top-level analysis of boundary work and journalism, and a synthesis of literature across four areas: the study of boundaries broadly, its application to the study of journalism, a growing body of boundary work research in journalism studies and the particular element of temporality in studies of boundaries of journalism. The chapter on objectivity, professionalism and truth seeking by C. W. Anderson and Michael Schudson (2020) updates a similar chapter in the first edition. A chapter by Mervi Pantti on journalism and witnessing (2020) is new in the second edition and critically analyses how the concept of witnessing has expanded beyond its traditional definition and evolved to perform various ideological and analytical functions with constant clarification and new categorisations. The discussion on citizen witnessing’s significance comes as the proliferation of mobile devices and social networking sites has turned everyone into a potential witness and testimony producer bypassing gatekeepers (Frosh and Pinchevski 2014).

The third section of the first edition moves on from news institutions to the content they produce, looking at the plethora of theoretical and empirical perspectives which have sought
to explain the texts of journalism through the whole range of theories. Renita Coleman, Maxwell McCombs, Donald Shaw and David Weaver (2009) point to the difficulty of distinguishing between agenda-setting research and the perspective of framing. They suggest that, in political communication research, framing has been rather narrowly conceived and that scholars could benefit from broadening the study of framing effects, connecting them to larger questions of democratic theory. The chapter on news values, written by Deirdre O’Neill and Tony Harcup (2009), points out that producing lists of news values obscures the fact that conceptions of news values are ever contested and change dynamically across time and place. This calls for a constant evaluation and understanding of what counts as ‘news’ in different contexts. This chapter is updated in the second edition. Meanwhile, Teun van Dijk (2009) demonstrates how scholars conceptualise the ways in which the news is infused with the dominant ideology and contributes to its maintenance and reproduction. Questions of power within the commercial press also come to the forefront in the final chapter of this section, which was written by S. Elizabeth Bird and Robert Dardenne (2009), and the authors argue that a key question for scholars of news narrative ought to be whose story is being told. This is key in contemporary society as various political and economic factors continue to shape dominant narratives.

In the third section of the second edition, Christian Baden’s chapter on framing (2020) reviews scholarship on framing the news in light of what it can contribute to understanding the specific role and contribution of journalists. Darren Kelsey’s chapter on news, discourse and ideology (2020) provides a historical overview of approaches to critical theory that have analysed the ideological significance of media. The chapter updates a similar one in the first edition. Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas R. Schmidt (2020) interrogate news and storytelling through an examination of the traditions of scholarship around news, storytelling and narrative. The section is rounded off with Herman Wasserman’s chapter on tabloidisation of the news (2020) which helps us to understand the different approaches, key thinkers and texts in the study of tabloid journalism, often perceived as having a detrimental influence on democracy (Sparks 2000).

The fourth section of The Handbook of Journalism Studies (2009) takes a broader view by looking at work on the relationship between journalism and society. Brian McNair’s chapter on journalism and democracy (2009) points to a current pessimism about journalism’s role in facilitating citizenship. The scholar also argues that there are grounds for optimistic assessments because “there is more political journalism available to the average citizen in the average mature democracy than at any previous time in history” (McNair 2009, p. 247). William Dinan and David Miller (2009, p. 250) pick up on scholarly debates about the health of the public sphere, calling “for a new synthesis of theories of communication, power and
the public sphere”, using Habermas’ ideas as foundation. The chapter on ethics by Stephen Ward (2009) encourages an approach that takes into account both the local and global contexts while a focus on audiences brings to the fore the notion and importance of consumer agency. The fourth section in the second edition (Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch 2020) updates Stephen Ward’s chapter on ethics, discusses journalism and democracy, the economic contexts of journalism and provides a chapter on journalism, public relations and spin. Here, Jim Macnamara (2020) acknowledges the escalation of the influence of political PR on journalism, a discussion begun in the first edition. Arjen van Dalen’s chapter on journalism, trust and credibility (2020) discusses how the undermining of journalistic autonomy contributes to further erosion of public confidence in the news media around the world.

In the first edition’s fifth and final section, calls for situating journalism studies in its global context are made. The chapter by Thomas Hanitzsch (2009) demonstrates that similarities and differences in professional routines, editorial procedures and socialisation processes exist in diverse parts of the world. The rise in comparative studies is argued to be an attempt to probe deeper into these similarities and differences in journalistic cultures. Meanwhile, in the final chapter of the book, Herman Wasserman and Arnold de Beer (2009) note the continued dominance of the West in international journalism due to Western bias and lack of universally applicable concepts. They argue that African journalism studies approaches should be taken seriously as part and parcel of a globalising world and not considered as an “area study” isolated from broader debates. The chapter further points out that a study of African journalism will be important for illustrating the contested nature of the epistemologies, professional ideologies and value systems that mark journalism worldwide. It is noted that this study will also play an important role in unearthing its colonial heritage and post-colonial appropriation between globalised Western influence and local resistance.

In the sixth part of the second edition, Liane Rothenberger, Irina Tribusean, Andrea C. Hoffmann and Martin Loffelhoz (2020) trace the development of journalism studies by analysing major methodological and conceptual schools, seminal books and journals in the field, and academic institutions offering journalism and communication studies. Thomas Hanitzsch’s comparative journalism research chapter (2020) discusses the rapid development of comparative research in the last two decades. It debates key studies and findings, and reflects on the methodological challenges. Cherian George’s discussion of research on journalism in authoritarian contexts (2020) is an important addition at a time when research in non-Western contexts is growing and understandings of the relationship between media and power in transitional democracies and influence on journalism is of great significance.
Overall, both handbooks make an important contribution to the literature on journalism providing cases and evidence from various contexts. It is justifiable that the handbooks do not attempt to exhaust all scholarly areas of journalism in their richness and depth. The first edition is useful in offering a starting point for further discussion and debate among scholars and students in communication and journalism studies. The second edition, on the other hand, is more comprehensive and serves to reimagine and revitalise the field of journalism studies at a moment of radical transformation. Future editions should consider including a discussion on journalism, global pandemics and health journalism, as we have witnessed how the global pandemic COVID-19 has negatively impacted journalistic operations economically, politically and technologically. In addition, the growth of non-profit investigative journalism and cross-media collaboration among journalists locally, nationally and across the globe is being witnessed and a force that cannot be ignored. Media sustainability in a digital era and personalisation of media content will continue to be important to interrogate.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Carolyne M. Lunga is a Journalism PhD candidate at City, University of London (UK) with 9 years of experience as a Journalism lecturer. She is currently serving as a Graduate Teaching Assistant for the MA International Journalism programme and teaches International News, Global Journalism and Media Ethics courses. She holds two Master’s degrees in Journalism and Media Studies and Education both acquired from Rhodes University in South Africa, an Academic Practice Certificate from City, University of London and an Associate Fellowship for Higher Education (AFHEA). For her PhD, she is researching how collaborative investigative journalism is being done in southern Africa. Her research interests are in the areas of investigative journalism, digital journalism, media ethics, normative theories of the media, disinformation and misinformation.

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Book Review: Community-Centered Journalism

Andy Nelmes
Cardiff University, UK | nelmesaj@cardiff.ac.uk

REVIEWED BOOK

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Most of what is written about the current crisis in journalism focuses on failed business models, massive job losses, plummeting advertising revenue - in short, a national and international industry struggling to survive, let alone thrive, and the subsequent damage to democracy as it collapses. News blackholes, news deserts and zombie news coverage are real dangers in an era when fake news is on the increase and trust in journalists is deteriorating. The big question being asked by academics, industry commentators and decision-makers is: how can power be held to account if the media ceases to function and that which survives loses credibility?

There have always been sections of society which have struggled to be heard, been routinely ignored by the media or have a history of negative news coverage. Distrust of journalists is high in these marginalised communities, often quite justifiably given the pressures reporters are under to sensationalise news events. However, journalism can play a vital role in engaging with social problems and providing solutions. This is where Andrea Wenzel’s book Community-Centered Journalism: Engaging People, Exploring Solutions and Building Trust (2020) makes an important contribution while also setting up the challenge of rethinking accepted norms and values of journalism, such as objectivity and professional boundaries.
Wenzel says this book is not about saving the journalism industry:

It’s a book about reimagining how journalism could better serve communities and what that looks like may bear little resemblance to traditional ideas of journalism. I’m interested in looking at the process of community-centred journalism and how it could repair journalism and, along the way, I hope that can be used to address some of the harms that journalism has caused over the years including problems around trust. But my starting point is not how to improve the industry but how to try to improve the communication health of communities. (Wenzel et al. 2020)

Journalists are used to reporting on society’s inequalities, but journalism is rarely used to tackle social problems (Buckland 2018). All too often, the basic information needs of the poorest are not being met as journalists treat news in a hierarchical way, reflecting society’s power dynamics. Community journalism is a way to challenge this and draws attention to the relationship dynamics between journalists and the communities they serve (Reader 2012). It is a place-based ‘connectivity’ or ‘embeddedness’ (Lewis et al. 2014), which resonates with Wenzel’s research (2020). Her book draws on case studies which are interlinked by a nearness to people and face-to-face meetings – be it through community forums, workshops, information tables or talking to people in the street. Reader (2012) says this ‘nearness’ increases the community’s accessibility to journalists as well as the journalists’ sense of accountability for their actions. This is at odds with the working practices of most mainstream journalists – desk-bound, online and geographically distanced – whose main sources tend to be those members of the community with the loudest voices and highest profiles (i.e. the most powerful). Lewis et al. (2014) highlight that one of the main difficulties faced with setting up and maintaining genuinely reciprocal community journalism is that it takes time to establish relationships of trust and goodwill which a 24/7 news cycle mitigates against.

Wenzel (2020, p. 4) takes two practices as starting points – solutions journalism and engaged journalism – which test the boundaries and challenge journalistic norms, such as objectivity, that “reinforce hierarchies of race, class and geography”. With solutions journalism, a journalist’s role is not only to report on problems but to rigorously report on responses to social problems. By comparison, engaged journalism is a range of practices that aim to build relationships between journalists and the public and involve the public in the journalistic process. Uniting these approaches, Wenzel (2020) utilises a communication infrastructure theory (CIT) - a theoretical framework which, she says, “grew out of a desire to understand the role communication plays in building and maintaining community cohesion and also the processes of social change at the local level" (Ball-Rokeach et al. 2001; Kim and Ball-Rokeach
2006). While journalism scholarship often focuses on journalists assuming a central role in the communication health of communities, “CIT positions them as only one actor in a larger network where other actors also have agency” (Ball-Rokeach et al. 2001; Kim and Ball-Rokeach 2006).

When applied at the local level, solutions journalism and engaged journalism practices intervene in what communication infrastructure theory, or CIT, calls ‘storytelling networks’ – that is, the network of residents, community groups, and local media that are all involved in circulating community stories. (Wenzel 2020, p. 4)

Wenzel’s case studies (2020) cover a diverse range of communication projects across the United States, from South Los Angeles and rural Kentucky to the South Side of Chicago and Philadelphia. They involve rural and urban communities, poor and affluent, white-majority and Black-majority, ones which voted for Trump and others where the Democrats won.

In the introduction, Wenzel (2020) recounts her own experiences of working as a global affairs producer in public radio in Chicago and her growing disenchantment with having a listenership sitting within an ‘ideological bubble’ (i.e. disproportionately white with higher-than-average levels of education and income in a majority Black and Brown city). Wenzel subsequently worked on projects to explore ways to engage more directly and positively with the wider community which has since influenced her academic research:

‘I not only have researched solutions journalism and engaged journalism initiatives but also have gotten my hands messy attempting to help to organize them. As such I make no claims to be an objective outsider. I am doing this research because I want to understand how I too can help facilitate this work more effectively’ (Wenzel 2020, p.6)

The introduction goes on to place journalism interventions in context and gives a valuable overview of trust in journalism, the early development of peace journalism and public journalism, solutions journalism and engaged journalism, community engagement and boundary work with a very detailed discussion of CIT.

Chapter 1 looks at a media intervention organised by the University of Southern California’s Metamorphosis Research Group. It focuses on the storytelling link between local media and community organisations in South Los Angeles, which is a majority Black and Latinx area that has historically been stigmatised. Chapter 2 studies more closely the storytelling link between residents and local media by paying attention to Chicago’s Curious City, which is a
public media initiative seeking listeners’ participation in creating output. Chapter 3 examines the entire storytelling network in a politically polarised region by introducing a model for designing research-based local journalism interventions in a majority Republican area in Western Kentucky. In chapter 4, Wenzel (2020) draws attention to Philadelphia where projects in a historically African American neighbourhood suffer from challenges of disempowerment, while there is a majority white suburb with a significant proportion of Trump voters. This chapter argues that community-centred journalism projects may not be scalable, but they may be portable. More community-centred projects are examined in chapter 5 which challenges the boundaries of journalism by adopting new roles and competencies, often incorporating community-organising practices. This chapter features very good insights from key practitioners into the need for journalists to adopt new roles when engaging with communities. It also looks at ways of evaluating impact and the possibilities of philanthropic funding. Wenzel’s book (2020) concludes on a positive, though guarded, note that it is possible for journalists to regain the trust of communities, although it will require time, effort, patience and a willingness to rethink traditional journalistic roles.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Andy Nelmes is a PhD student at Cardiff University’s School of Journalism, Media and Culture researching the news ecosystem of a city in the UK looking at the power dynamics of local news as it travels between declining traditional media and emerging hyperlocals.

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Book Review: Citizen Media and Practice: Currents, Connections, Challenges

Zizheng Yu
Cardiff University, UK | yuz8@cardiff.ac.uk

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In Citizen Media and Practice: Currents, Connections, Challenges, editors Hilde C. Stephansen and Emiliano Treré (2020) bring together contributors to explore ways to further our thinking about media practices with a specific focus on citizen and activist media. The book is intended to stimulate dialogue among scholars in different fields and promote discussion and debate over media practice approaches between Anglophone and Latin American scholars.

In his foreword, media scholar Nick Couldry (2020) welcomes this exciting collection for reconnecting recent research on media practice approaches in North America and Europe with its Latin American roots, while focusing on citizen media and developing a wide range of implications of the ‘media as practice’ paradigm.

The ‘practice’ turn (Couldry 2004, 2012) in media studies has inspired social movements and media scholars to develop more research on citizen and activist media in recent years. Stephansen and Treré (2020) open this collection by introducing ‘media practice’
comprehensively. They provide an overview of current research on media practices, review the antecedents of the media practice approach in different theoretical directions and identify the possible converging points between them (the connections in the book’s subtitle). Furthermore, the editors look at how the concept of ‘media practice’ has been used in recent literature and identify the pros and cons of doing so, from the perspective of practice-focused research on citizen and activist media (currents). They also propose future research directions related to citizen media and practice, and the challenges faced by this expanding interdisciplinary field (challenges).

Stimulating dialogue between Anglophone and Latin American scholars who are interested in media practice is one of the most important contributions of this collection. To introduce the Latin American tradition to Anglophone scholars, the editors present the rich history of media practice within Latin American communication theory, which “pre-dates the current ‘turn’ to practice in Europe and North American media scholarship by at least a couple of decades” (Stephansen and Treré 2020, p. 2).

This volume is divided into five parts, which comprehensively introduce the concerns and applications of the media practice approach across a diverse range of contexts and experiences related to activist and citizen media. There is an introductory chapter for each section which emphasizes the relationship between the research and the media practice approach.

Part 1 consists of four chapters, giving a comprehensive introduction to the roots of the media practice approach in Latin American communication theory. Clemencia Rodríguez (2020, p. 37) writes in the introduction: “Latin America [scholars] did not have to wait until the 2004 publication of Couldry’s article [...] to begin thinking about a shift to practice, the shift happened 40 years earlier [in Latin America]”.

Rodríguez (2020) emphasizes the importance of the media practice approach in Latin America and the similarities and differences between the approach and the ‘practice turn’ in the North. At the same time, Rodríguez (2020) clearly defines that the lack of communication between scholars in the South and North is the reason why the history of media practice in Latin America was not recognized by the Global North scholars. In Chapter 2, Omar Rincón and Amparo Marroquín (2020) further demonstrate how Latin American scholars turn to practice in communication studies. The work of six key Latin American scholars who are recognized as pioneers of media practice – Paulo Freire, Jesús Martín-Barbero, Carlos Monsiváis, Néstor García Canclini, Rossana Reguillo and Bolívar Echeverría – is presented. In Chapter 3, Alejandro Barranquero (2020) traces the Latin American concept of ‘praxis’ back
to the 20th century. By dissecting this concept from the perspective of historical development, Barranquero highlights the interdisciplinary nature of the origin of the practice concept: “[It emerged] from different fields such as alternative media, educommunication, reception studies, and communication for development, […] practice-based media approaches also owe much to anthropology” (Barranquero 2020, p. 67). The author also points out the extensive influence of the ‘praxis’ concept on the subfield of communication and cultural studies, such as educommunication, community and citizen media, and the notion of mediations. Ángel Barbas (2020) contributes to the research field of activist media practices from the educommunication paradigm in the last chapter of part one. By studying contemporary social movements and their use of media as educational practices, Barbas (2020, p. 84) argues that educommunication provides us with a conceptual link to “expand our capacity to understand the complex repertoire of media practices developed within social movements” and “allows us to build another bridge between ‘media practices’ and ‘media learning processes’”.

In the introduction to Part 2, Donatella della Porta (2020) shows that the media practice approach allows us to move beyond traditional approaches to both mass media and digital media, and capture the richness and complexity of communicative practices in and around social movements. This second part has two chapters besides the introduction, which clearly present the complex interplay between activist agency and the technological affordances of media technologies from the perspective of the media practice approach. In Chapter 5, Bart Cammaerts (2020) develops a detailed genealogy of the various ways in which activists have used traditional media, telecommunications and digital media to achieve their social movement goals – from print and postal services to telecommunication, radio broadcasting and the internet. Cammaerts (2020) argues that each media and communication technology has provided activists with various mediation practices that meet their needs, and we should not forget the capabilities of the old technology because of the emergence of new ones, as “the Empire always strikes back” (p. 110). In Chapter 6, by bringing media practice and media archaeology together, Anne Kaun’s combined approach (2020) allows us to “excavate how media technologies function in the context of political participation and mobilization” (p. 124).

Part 3 of the book is composed of three chapters, focusing on the richness, benefits and challenges of practice approaches to video activism. In the introduction, Dorothy Kidd (2020) recounts her own experience of video activism in Bogotá and presents its early roots. Inspired by Downing (2013), Kidd (2020, p. 131) also suggests we should “combine analyses of social movement practice and political economy” when we study social movement video based on social media platforms. In Chapter 7, Tina Askanius (2020) critically summarizes
existing scholarship on historical and contemporary forms of video activism and identifies three distinct foci within it – “video as technology, text and testimony” (p. 137). Askanius (2020) also shows how a practice-based approach can allow us to see video activism as technology, text and testimony at once. In Chapter 8, Alice Mattoni and Elena Pavan (2020) demonstrate the usefulness of the media practice approach for studying alternative media and digital traces through a strong case study of the use of YouTube in the Italian Se non ora, quando? movement.

Part 4 consists of three chapters, exploring the implication of expanding the media practice approach to ‘acting on media’ (Kubitschko 2018). In the introduction to this part, Andreas Hepp (2020) argues that the phrase ‘acting on media’ expands our understanding of media practice – “it is not only about practices of communication and the use of media, but also about practices of shaping the media infrastructure and technologies” (p. 171). Meanwhile, in Chapter 9, Sigrid Kannengießer (2020) uses the concept of ‘consumption-critical media practices’ to explain practices involving ‘acting on media’ to achieve sustainability and media practices that use media to critique unsustainable consumption. In Chapter 10, Hilde C. Stephansen (2020) argues that ‘knowledge practices’ should be conceptualized as an integral part of media practices, which is essential for expanding our understanding of agency in the context of citizen media.

The last part of the edited collection, Part 5, consists of four chapters illustrating the value of the media practice approach in understanding the datafication process and its consequences. In the introduction, Helen Kennedy (2020) explains why the media practice framework can offer a productive approach for scholars in the field of data studies to explore people’s experiences of datafication and different new data practices. In Chapter 11, Stefania Milan (2020) uses the ‘acting on media’ framework to explore contemporary forms of data activism, such as open data activism, data-based advocacy, encryption and obfuscation, insisting that the implication of (citizen) media practice needs to be broadened by shifting our focus to software and the ontologies of information. In Chapter 12, Aristea Fotopoulou (2020) contributes to this part by exploring how practice theory is relevant to citizens’ data practices from a feminist perspective. In Chapter 13, Lina Dencik (2020) points out the value of the practice framework for researching how citizens are controlled by data systems through a case study of the use of social media intelligence in predictive policing in the UK.

This collection opens a dialogue between Latin American and Anglophone scholars who are interested in the media practice approach. The collection of Stephansen and Treré (2020) inspires us to explore more of the voices of scholars from other parts of the world, such as Asia, in terms of the media practice concept. Overall, this collection provides an informative
and timely account of the concerns and applications of the media practice framework across various backgrounds today, which will also be helpful to readers with an interest in the practice-oriented research on citizen and activist media.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Zizheng Yu is a PhD candidate at Cardiff University’s School of Journalism, Media and Culture. Zizheng’s recent work is concerned with the short-video-based (SVB) social media platform, consumer activism/political consumerism, media practices, video activism and digital activism.

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Like the previous collection first published in 1998, this edition includes both topical and high-profile stories such as the #MeToo movement and Black Lives Matter but also the covert but no less damaging and harmful actions and behaviours that compound gender inequalities. With an impressive breadth of subjects, the book sets out to build on familiar research themes including the influence of media ownership and control, sexism and women’s employment to issues of politics and identities, gendered racialisation, cyber feminism and feminist discourses in a post-truth era.

The book highlights gender issues that relate also to ethnicity and race, age and physical appearance and sexual orientation. An important addition is the attention to the increased and often detrimental coverage of the LGBQTIA community across mass media. In so doing, it raises important questions about the role of social media as a progressive or harmful alternative platform to advance discourse on gender and representation.

By exploring this diverse range of issues from international perspectives, the book’s central concern is about who makes the news, who sets the agenda and, importantly, who or what is excluded. The book posits that a lack of diversity leads to news that is written and presented based on the priorities of a particular patriarchal and heteronormative perspective.
which in turn alienates parts of society and perpetuates patriarchy. While some chapters do acknowledge moves towards inclusivity, the dominant tone of the book is that systemic and embedded practices across journalism and the mass media are inhibiting women’s progress in the sector with negative consequences for wider society.

The book is divided into four sections: Part 1: The Gendered Politics of News Production; Part 2: News Discourses, Sexualisation and Sexual Violence; Part 3: Engendering News Audiences and Activism; Part 4: Politics and Identities in the News. Each section includes chapters that address broad research interests within the given theme and from a range of perspectives. The combination of interesting research methods and approaches that are written in an engaging and accessible style are both stimulating and thought provoking. There is connectedness of subjects across the different sections of the book providing the reader with an interdisciplinary, international lens through which to view consistent themes in contrasting settings.

Part 1 explores the gendered politics of news production and highlights some of the hidden exercises of power across the sector. The chapter on women and technology in the newsroom highlights the covert perpetuation of negative gender stereotypes. By way of illustration, Usher (2019) gives the example of a person equating their lack of technical prowess of being like a Mum. This seemingly innocuous description aligns technical incompetence as a female trait and, as such, reproduces notions of technology as a male domain. In addition to specific sector examples, this section addresses the limited attention to equality and inclusivity policy in the sector. This lack of attention to inclusive policy and culture not only limits the progression of women to decision-making roles but also means that female talent across the sector is squandered. The section strongly asserts that this is not only an issue for news production but one that has negative impacts on society, business and culture as a whole.

Part 2 explores discourses in the news on sexualisation and sexual violence and critiques the role of the media in reproducing ideas about gender rather than challenging gender normativity. There are interesting questions about how celebrity and sensationalism gain media coverage for transgender stories that feature already established figures in the media such as Chelsea Manning and Caitlin Jenner. The section asserts that, although such stories are a platform for transgender discourses, coverage still links gender and sexual orientation as though they are synonymous, creates narrow ‘wrong body’ narratives and does not discuss gender diversity (Capuzza 2019). Visibility is also discussed within the context of the reporting of sexual violence. There is a worrying history (and, in some cases, it remains ongoing) of news coverage of rape, sexual violence, molestation and abuse either not being
covered or done so through a male perspective, often with cultural connections such as so-called corrective rape (Falkof 2019).

With its focus on engendering news audiences and activism, Part 3 addresses narrative construction and the role of the media in shaping common ideas about groups within society. Topics discussed in this section are diverse and include the representation of race rights and the cohabitation of refugees (Weber 2019), the invisibility of Arab women in political journalism (Mellor 2019) and the obstacles that Chinese women journalists face for career advancement (Wang 2019). Although this section has a broader global perspective, there are consistencies across countries in terms of the lack of women’s contributions to the newsroom because of patriarchal discourse, limited advancement above entry-level jobs and the gendered aspects of promotion.

Part 4: Politics and Identities in the News discusses the role of social media as a platform for enabling misogyny, racial abuse and anti-feminist discourse in the public sphere. It asks an important question about the duality of the internet as both enabler of democratisation and hatred in a post-truth era. Social media gives rise to the ‘amateur’ displacing the ‘expert’ in public discourse, and concepts such as ‘fake news’ allow the dismissal of contrary and opposing views. The reporting of Hurricane Maria is used to explore how gender, news and power created racialised and gendered stereotypes of Puerto-Rican identity (Molina-Guzmán 2019). This section discusses the reporting of the US news coverage of women politicians focusing on Hillary Clinton’s 2016 presidential campaign (Falk 2019) and includes interesting parallels to previous chapters that highlight a disproportionate number of female, particularly older female, political correspondents (Franks and Howell 2019).

As a collection, this book includes 21st century emergent concerns and high-profile movements such as #MeToo. As such, this edition is not only being timely and topical but also the sense of a step change. This collection not only highlights shortcomings within the sector, but in some instances also suggests useful and helpful steer that could help improve gender representation and difficult new gender discourse. This book is an important, illuminating and sobering read for anyone with an interest in gender equality, marginalisation, hidden exercises of power and embedded systems of privilege.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Kate Penney is a Doctoral Researcher in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Sheffield. Her research interests include policy formation, regional inequalities, power dynamics and marginalisation. Kate has managed numerous projects in Further and Higher Education and is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.
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Book Review: Producing British Television Drama. Local Production in a Global Era

Julien Grub
Independent Scholar, Germany | JulienGrub.research@gmail.com

REVIEWED BOOK

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Ruth McElroy and Caïtronina Noonan (2019) give a holistic overview of the production of drama for public service broadcasters (PSB) in their book Producing British Television Drama. The authors present an introduction to the importance of drama for audiences, arguing that we are not in the ‘golden age’ of television anymore. The book examines four main topics. First, the changes in production of television drama on an executive level of the PSB stations. Second, it assesses the importance of local production and regional representation in a globalized TV market. Furthermore, it looks at the conditions of labour in television production. Finally, it explores the impact of drama productions on tourism of a specific region.

The seven chapters of this book focus on different interconnecting aspects of British television production. The first two chapters function as an introduction and lay the foundation for a controversial thesis: the absence of a second ‘golden age’ of television. Chapter three and five investigate the ecology of production, concretely the changes in production and the new head in charge – i.e. the commission. The fifth chapter evaluates the labour in television production and gives room for an empirical study of workers, a shift away
from the common examinations of actors, producers, directors and cinematographers. The importance of the region as a representation and place of productions is discussed in chapter four. Tourism as an aspect of local production is observed in chapter six. The final chapter offers future-oriented interpretations of the current television and video-streaming service market.

McElroy and Noonan’s overarching argument throughout the chapters is that drama is highly popular with the British audience because it reflects their living environment or represents their location, an assumption rooted in audience ratings. However, as the authors point out, the process of producing drama for television has shifted as “commissioning editors form a well-established elite in television production, operating as an intermediary between the broadcast organization and program supplier” (McElroy and Noonan 2019, p. 52). Commissioners supersede the foremost role of the producers. Here, McElroy and Noonan (2019) confirm the results of Gillian Doyle (2016, pp. 637-639), Jonathan Bignell and Stephen Lacey (2014, pp. 9-11). As a side note, the authors add that this does not mean a bigger diversity during the process of production. Furthermore, they point out the development in terms of distribution between the in-house production companies and independent production companies, as well as foreign ones. The new idea that McElroy and Noonan (2019) lay out is their evaluation of a specific production approach in the UK. It is the combination of commissioners rather than showrunners who pitch a new drama series, now financed by more and more independent production companies. This change in production forms a new type of risk. The risk for a production exists now more for independent production companies and not PSBs.

The labour force in television production has so far been neglected in media studies, according to chapter five. As the focus is shifted from stage production to manual labour, new objects of research are presented, along with the results of the analysis of television production. In this section, the authors differ from Steve Blanford, Beth Johnson, and Matthew Pateman (cited in McElroy and Noonan 2019, p. 98) who analysed labour in the form of showrunners and scriptwriting. McElroy and Noonan’s approach (2019) is more in line with the works of Mark Banks, Helen Blair, Susan Christopherson, Sarah Baker, and David Hesmondhalgh (cited in McElroy and Noonan 2019, pp.101-104) because they talked about the working conditions of the often-unseen workforce in the craft labour.

The results presented in this chapter are based on interviews with people in the workforce of TV production companies. The authors emphasize the importance of female voices because they make up more than 50% of the workforce in television production. They argue that, due to work conditions, people in TV production tend to have a low median age and a
wealthier middle-class background because of a high rate of unpaid extra work. The quality of labour is not included in policy, as it is seen as merely an economic good, rather than a cultural one.

In an in-depth example, the authors describe the Roath Lock Studios in Cardiff as the main production place for *Doctor Who* (2005–present). The success of the series was the reason for building up this labour market and developing the region. A long-running series is a safe requiring labour market, which is described by McElroy and Noonan (2019) as high-volume production, in contrast to high-value production. An established and base production helps the well-being of workers and benefits their careers.

Another aspect of regional production is presented in chapter six. The analysis is based on Bourdieu’s concept of ‘cultural intermediaries’, different forms of intermediaries, and the strategic value “that screen agencies and tourism boards derive from their work” (McElroy and Noonan 2019, p. 124). The analysis focuses on the screen agency Northern Ireland Screen and the tourist board in Northern Ireland. For the authors, cultural intermediaries lower the financial risks of television productions into a ‘growth coalition’ as developed by Susan Christopherson. The UK has a diverse competing structure of screen agencies that function as co-producers and co-financers. In their conclusion, the agencies get to be government-supported investors. McElroy and Noonan (2019) say it is remarkable that Northern Ireland was chosen for such a large-scale TV production as *Game of Thrones (GoT)* (2011–2019). A significant thesis is that GoT went to Northern Ireland not solely because of the First Minister’s involvement, but rather because of Northern Ireland Screen and their promise of substantial public investments. The authors say it is difficult to assess the return of money in the local Northern Irish economy, and here they agree with Susan Christopherson (cited in McElroy and Noonan 2019, p. 132) who suggests it is a marginal return, especially in the case of non-recurring productions. As the only available numbers for GoT are provided by Northern Ireland Screen, this allowed the authors to rightfully hesitate with provision of a decisive answer in this matter.

The development of tourism because of a TV drama production is the other aspect in this chapter. Different reasons why there could be tourism leverage out of GoT are presented. First, the success of GoT in the USA and its incredible importance for Irish tourism stems from the fact that “a substantial diaspora travel to Ireland in the hope of reconnecting with their genealogy” (McElroy and Noonan 2019, p. 135). The second reason is the production value of GoT and the usage of the environment for filming, which benefits smaller locations. HBO and Northern Ireland Tourism had an agreement on using trademarks from the show. Another remarkable argument made by McElroy and Noonan (2019) is the adaption of
Rodanthi Tzanelli’s idea for shifting the tourism memory from factional violence in Northern Ireland to the fictional conflicts on GoT’s continent, Westeros. They give examples of touristic marketing of GoT in their chapter conclusion, including augmented reality tours on filming locations or fan involvement strategies on social media. Yet, the latter can cause problems, like the showrunners’ comments on Belfast as an ‘un-cosmopolitan city’.

Finally, the fourth chapter about regional identity and representation is thematically the most important chapter. The main ideas of this chapter can also be found across the whole book. The authors “note a research gap in terms of regional and national structure of contemporary UK television drama production” (McElroy and Noonan 2019, p. 74). They give an overview of PSB stations and their connection to the regions, with a special focus on Wales. One of the premises is that there is a differentiation of regionality between ITV and the BBC. ITV was founded with regionality in mind, especially in regional advertisement aspects, while the BBC was a staple of centralization. Moreover, after the Brexit referendum and its different regional voting patterns, the PSB landscape also changed, creating a greater valuation of single nations. For this, the authors present the example of Channel 4 and its campaign ‘4 all the UK’, which was a competition for production locations and headquarters outside London. This echoed an earlier attempt by the BBC for more production outside of London. Wales benefits the most because of long-running show productions there, according to McElroy and Noonan (2019), but still not every region and nation is represented equally. The production on location has a significant role in representation, especially if the show is set in that region and not only used for production. An interconnected aspect to representing a region is the language. The authors give examples of Welsh programming and series like Y Gwyll/Hinterland (2013-2016), arguing that mono- or bilingual series help to represent and strengthen minority languages in the UK.

The book provides a great overview of the conditions of television production in the UK. Especially chapters four and six give room for new ideas concerning the analysis of production processes. My biggest concern with the book is that there are some instances where exceptionalism of the UK television market is created by the authors; however this is not attributed to or confirmed by other sources (McElroy and Noonan 2019, pp. 47, 61). Nevertheless, this book is significant due to its holistic approach and single analysis of the UK television ecology.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Julien Grub has a B.A. in modern history and German literature and an M.A. in comparative history from the University of Freiburg, Germany. The author previously worked with Valentina Escherich on the food situation and cookbooks during World War I, Krieg in der Küche, for Badische Heimat and on the connection of the film Suspiria (1977) to Freiburg for a cooperative book, Okkultes Freiburg, edited by Günther Klugermann, Anna Lux and Uwe Schellinger. Julien Grub is part of the bisexual research group founded by Julia Shaw.

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