



Article

The Politics of Protest and Gender: Women Riding the Wings of Resistance

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Abstract: The #MeToo movement, from its creation by activist Tarana Burke back in 2006 to its explosion on social media during the 2017 Harvey Weinstein sexual assault allegations, has continuously propagated images of gendered resistance from around the globe. In South Korea, Poland, Mexico, Bangladesh, and more, large numbers of women protest a variety of gendered topics: from unjust rulings in cases of domestic violence, to the lack of reproductive rights, to femicide, to inaction by law enforcement on cases of stalking, harassment, or sexual assault, and more. These images clearly demonstrate that public resistance is dominated by women, even in societies that are seen to traditionally subjugate women—though this is not new, and women have always been involved in resistance even when there was no way to document their participation. However, in countries where conservative institutions, public opinion, and government policy that contribute to gender inequality are paired with punitive action for opposition, women face a higher risk of being punished, ostracized, or brutalized for their resistance. In Thailand, a military state with perhaps the strictest *lèse majesté* laws in the world, activists are frequently fined, imprisoned, kept under surveillance, disappeared, or forced to flee. Despite this, Thailand experiences frequent surges of public resistance, dominated by youth and overwhelmingly by women. Since February 2020, a large portion of the Thai population, consisting primarily of students, has taken to public demonstrations demanding a fair democracy and constitutional reform, joined together in exasperation over an uncertain future, a crippling economy, an untouchable elite, and a rigged election. In this now years-long movement, fueled by global support and sophisticated protest tactics learned from watching Hong Kong, we observe the inclusion of gendered protest topics and demands by Thai women and girls. This paper demonstrates how Thai women utilize the movement to demand progress in gendered areas by examining examples taken throughout the 2020 pro-democracy protest movement, with the overall objective of contributing to understanding the relationship between public resistance and feminism.



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1. Introduction

ผู้หญิงคนไทยสามารถเลี้ยงลูกและเป็นแม่ที่ดีในขณะที่เด็ยอกันกำป็นคนเข้มเบอสามากทีจะต่อสู้อครุได้

Thai women rock the cradle with one hand and swing the sword with the other.

(Chadchaidee 1994, p. 123)

Numerous legends about famous Thai women in history—Queen Chamadevi of Lamphun, the sister guardians of Phuket, Ya Mo in the Northeast—depict Thai women playing relatively equal roles in society and in conflict as Thai men. Although these legendary figures are still venerated, and their stories still told, it seems that as time passed women became more suppressed as rigid gender roles were enforced. Ironically, while the majority of historical heroines found their fame through courageous actions during times of war or conflict, in Thailand today, women are very rarely seen outside of the administrative arm of the military. According to regulations on female soldiers by the Ministry of Defense, women serving in the Thai army are not permitted to perform duties related to combat and may only enter as civil servants or support staff, despite being trained to do so during the

initial incorporation of women into the armed services as additional troops during World War II. At some point during Siam's history, between frequent power changes through militarized coups (to the extent that the country is considered to have a coup culture and the ongoing hypermasculinization of the military, women's welfare and needs were sidelined as "women's issues" as gender roles became more and more distinct.

This paper will analyze a selection of case studies and individuals from the current pro-democracy protest movement that fall under the umbrella of three topics: rape culture, LGBTQ+ rights, and reproductive rights, folded into the movement by Thai women, for the benefit of Thai women. In addition to examining those case studies, it will refer often to the Thai monarchy throughout. It is important for the reader to know that although Thailand's political authority is frequently held by the military (as it is at the time of this paper being written), it is at heart a constitutional monarchy, with the monarchy having been ingrained into daily Thai life as the primary institution and gatekeeper of both the Thai patriarchy and military rule.

Finally, it is imperative that I acknowledge that although I title the paper using "women" and depict the term "gendered resistance" as relative to the gender binary (male and female), I must emphasize that gendered resistance is relative to the issues, demands, and needs of non-binary and LGBTQ+-identifying women. LGBTQ+ activists have long been at the forefront of Thai resistance movements for decades due to conservative social values and policies that undermine their existence, and LGBTQ+ demands are also being made during this current movement. In a country that is mistakenly believed by foreigners to be friendly to LGBTQ+ people and lifestyles due to the global popularity of Thai drag shows and ladyboys, it is important to note that LGBTQ+ people in Thailand continue to face discrimination and exploitation in many aspects of Thai society despite their seemingly positive presence in media and entertainment.

2. Background

Prime Minister (PM) Prayuth Chan-ocha and his supporters took power from then-prime minister Yingluck Shinawatra in 2014 through a military coup following a period of political instability that had similarly seen a rise in anti-government protests calling for democratic reform. A royalist with strong ties to the military, PM Prayuth's administration brought with it a significant increase in cracking down on dissent or political opposition via lèse majesté laws (also known as Article 112), stricter conformation of students in schools, and increased censorship on internet and media platforms to limit the spread of government criticism through geo-blocking. He has been widely criticized for his plays to obtain absolute power, his anti-democratic sentiments, and for threatening the civil liberties of both Thai and foreign citizens and journalists.

Although PM Prayuth remained in his position following general elections in 2019, the results of those elections demonstrated a rising threat to his seat by the Future Forward party, a new progressive party that had won strong public support from younger voters especially. Following this discovery, Thailand's constitutional court, acting in the interest of PM Prayuth's junta, declared Future Forward's leader guilty of violating election laws, thus dissolving the party in early 2020. This move was viewed as political suppression by Future Forward supporters, and public protests calling for the prime minister to step down and for a new, fair election to be conducted cropped up in universities throughout the country. Since then, the protests rapidly spread into a nationwide movement to encompass a wider breadth of demands, including for reform of the constitution.

Thailand is no stranger to public resistance movements calling for political reform. In 1976 at Thammasat University, a peaceful pro-democracy protest was held that experienced a violent crackdown by both law enforcement and civilian opposition. Protestors were lynched, assaulted, sexually abused, burned alive, shot, and beaten to death. Thousands of protestors were arrested, whereas the violent perpetrators—both the law enforcement officers and enraged civilian opposition—have not been brought to justice to this day. Today, Thammasat University remains a hub for free thought and a gathering spot for modern

protestors. Echoing Hong Kong, activists consider the movement to be “leaderless”, though several prominent voices continue to stand out. Although some of these are longtime pro-democracy activists, such as Pawin Chatchawanphongphan, who lives in exile in Japan due to endangerment from his outspoken criticism of the monarchy, there are many who are quite new and belong to groups commonly suppressed by Thailand’s strict ruling majority: high school and college students, LGBTQ+ individuals, and women.

In this current movement, the largest public challenge to the Thai establishment to date, we observe significant participation of women and girls, paired with their assertion of gendered issues, including awareness-raising for sexism and rape culture, demands to decriminalize abortion and sex work, calls for affordable and accessible menstrual care, and others. Women activists hold floating workshops for protestors to color pictures of vaginas to challenge Thailand’s taboos about sex, and hand out free face masks, sanitary napkins, and condoms. They teach about consent and direct protestors who have been victims of sexual assault or harassment to aid organizations and lead environmental protests. Teenage girls are the backbone of the Bad Students movement, another group that is utilizing the protests to demand reform of Thailand’s educational system comprised of strict gendered dress codes, enforced uniformity, and rote learning. One of the leaders of the Bad Students movement, a high schooler named Benjamaporn “Ploy” Nivas, noted the participation of women as being due to a longstanding dissatisfaction with gender inequality in the country (Chaisamritpol and Martin 2020).

Even Thailand’s largest and longest-standing institution, the monarchy, is not free from criticism. In addition to calling for constitutional and systemic reform, women are calling for reform of Thailand’s patriarchy and thus the monarchy, its greatest representative (Wongsamuth 2020). Once untouchable (and still vastly so) by the aforementioned *lèse-majesté* laws, consistently weaponized to crack down on opposition to the ruling party, a tenable loss of public reverence towards the throne is becoming apparent. Unlike his late father, the highly respected King Bhumibol Adulyadej, King Maha Vajiralongkorn does not seem to care about either his country or the world’s opinion of him. The king has been constantly embroiled in scandals since he took the throne, encountering criticism focused on the ill treatment of his mistresses, his frivolous expenditure of the royal family’s wealth for personal use rather than in aid or in the interest of the nation, and his eccentric, flippant actions (such as appointing his beloved pet poodle, Foo, a marshal in the Royal Thai Air Force). He often comes off as an unconcerned ruler, representing Thailand from afar in a prolonged stay in Germany. The flagrant disinterest displayed by the current king in both his lacking response and lack of concern for Thailand’s COVID-19 crisis, paired with global embarrassment discerned by his eccentric deeds, is being publicly and openly challenged by many Thai citizens during this movement, when not long ago doing so would have resulted in harsh punitive consequences. On social media, protestors disseminate memes, foreign news articles, and colloquial language across multiple platforms to invalidate the king and vocalize his flaws, calling for the removal of the monarchy and a redistribution of its absolute power from this single flawed idol directly into the hands of the Thai people. The anonymity and speed afforded by social media assisted with the rapid spread of these posts, compelling the Thai government to impose restrictions, such as geo-blocking, on certain social and communication platforms to exert some form of control.

From the beginning of the 2020 pro-democracy movement to now, female protest leaders and demonstrators have called attention to how Thailand’s most powerful *M* institutions—the monarchy, the military, and monkhood—are dominated by men and have little or no place for women (Loos 2020). A movement within a movement, women activists and protestors are taking advantage of this historical moment to shed light and seek progress on issues that disproportionately impact women and girls—riding the wings of this revolutionary resistance movement to call for significant changes on how Thailand treats rape culture, LGBTQ+ rights, and reproductive rights.

3. On Rape Culture

Thailand's staunch rape culture determines the trajectory for sexual assault cases in the country, which often amount to no more than a slap on the wrist for perpetrators and feelings of deep-seeded shame and helplessness for victims. Rape and sexual assault are frequently romanticized in lakorns, popular Thai soap operas, where the concept of consent is rendered retroactive. A 2017 UN study found that victims of sexual assault are silenced by an agonizingly slow process and an insensitive justice system, where stereotypes about sexual assault, including that victims invite it through the way they are dressed, prevail (Rojanaphruk 2017). Furthermore, as domestic violence is considered a private affair, it is unlikely that victims will be removed from the situation or receive the proper help and resources that they need; rather, they may be coerced by social stigma to return home and endure additional abuse quietly in order to preserve the reputation of their family or partner. Although publicized sexual assault and domestic violence cases rally an immediate public outcry, attention dies out quickly as no tangible outcomes are made and the sting of comments that blame the victim far outlasts the comfort felt from any initial words of support received. In a society where sex education is almost nonexistent and it is taboo to openly discuss matters related to sex, it is no wonder that a large portion of gendered resistance focuses so strongly on calling for the increased awareness, recognition, and diligence of sexual assault victims and cases from authorities.

The #MeToo movement reached Thailand in 2018, when actress Cindy Sirinya Bishop started the hashtags #donttellinghowtodress and #tellingtorespect on Instagram to bring awareness to victim blaming and the need for the onus of sexual assault to shift from the victim to the perpetrator. What started as a social media rant against the increased sexual assaults towards women that occur during Songkran, the popular Thai water festival, quickly turned into a larger social campaign to teach the public about victim blaming, rape culture, and consent—as well as bring attention to inaction by law enforcement officials for not believing victims when they come forward. Although the outpouring of support on social media received by this campaign is a positive sign, an unwillingness by sexual assault victims to either talk about or report their experiences continues.

Victims of sexual assault, both women and men, are unlikely to report their stories to authorities. A 2019 YouGov survey of approximately 1000 people found that one in five (21%) Thais have experienced sexual assault in their lifetime. Out of those, 57% told someone else about the incident, but only 10% of that group reported the incident to the police (the former telling either a friend or a family member). When asked for the reason behind their lack of reporting, 27% responded that they felt that no one would do anything about the problem. In 2018, a 29-year-old woman reported being raped when visiting a gynecologist's office in Nakhon Sawan province. The doctor allegedly then transferred THB 300,000 to the victim to bribe her into dropping the case. After her case was picked up by a women's advocacy group, up to 50 more women came forward with stories of sexual assault experienced by the same doctor, along with reports that the same man consistently utilized discomfiting, intimate language with his patients. Despite this, the victims faced opposition, and their credibility was written off on the basis that they did not come forward quickly enough, that they did not do enough to defend themselves, that they must have consented, and that they were simply attempting to ruin the image of a respected individual in the community. In the end, no arrest was made by the police, who determined that there was "no physical evidence" to incriminate the doctor. The initial victim was examined by police 10 days after her report.

Sex crimes against tourists, particularly Westerners, are more widely reported and pursued by authorities due to international pressure to act. Even then, the victims are criticized, and Thai authorities have been criticized for covering up the issue and mishandling cases in their downplaying of foreign women who allege that they have been assaulted while on vacation in the country. Following the murders of two British tourists in Koh Tao in 2015, where the female victim was sexually assaulted before her death, PM Prayuth questioned the outfits of the victims and of female tourists overall, stating that, "They think

our country is beautiful and safe and they can do whatever they want, I'm asking, if they wear bikinis in Thailand, will they be safe? Only if they are not beautiful" (Paddock and Suhartono 2018). Though he later apologized to the families of the victims, it is still a victory for rape culture when the individual with the highest position in government believes that the onus of sexual assault lies with the victim and is continuously adamant that providing men and women with equal rights would deteriorate Thai society (Saiyasombut 2016).

In addition to the general sentiment that law enforcement should be placing more weight on the claims of sexual assault victims, students are using the movement as an opportunity to shed light on an equally insidious component of rape culture in Thailand: the widespread sexual assault and abuse in schools, often perpetrated by those in positions of power and dismissed or downplayed by general administration. A posterboard titled "What kind of abuse have you suffered in school?" was erected by student activists during one protest, asking for people to place stickers in labelled boxes that applied to them. Labelled items included types of abuse, places of abuse, and types of perpetrators, with the stickers serving as a solemn visual of the extent of abuse experienced by so many. One image in particular, this time of a young woman in a high school uniform whose mouth was taped up as she held a sign alleging sexual abuse from teachers, gained traction on social media in November (Mahira and Matthew 2020). University student Nalinrat Tuthubthim, the woman in question, utilized the protest to call specific attention to her abuse, and the abuse that frequently occurs in places where young people expect to feel safe, performed by those whom they expect to trust. Her photo sparked backlash as some critics called for legal action against Nalinrat for harming the country's image, demonstrating the frequent ignorance by protest opposition of the true issues at hand in favor of preserving Thailand's reputation—a parallel to the care and caution placed on the reputation of perpetrators by an offender-oriented justice system, rather than on the safety and pursuit of justice for victims.

Even within the pro-democracy activist community, rape culture transcends the bonds of shared values. Activist Chumaporn "Dao" Taengkliang said the following in an interview for Khaosod English: "I can tell you, there are far more cases. Some of them, if I told you their names—you'd be shocked. Especially when it comes to big-name activists, women wouldn't dare name them. Women have little power in this issue" (Charuvastra 2017). Women have reported experiencing sexual assault by the hands of fellow activists, then feeling either afraid or pressured to come forward with their stories lest they be ostracized by other members of the group or disbelieved due to the power and reputation that their perpetrator holds. Although some victims have bravely come forward and publicized their experiences in an effort to initiate change starting within the activist community, just the very fact that gender-based violence occurs within the movement is a solemn reminder that rape culture has a powerful hold over Thai society. Women activists will likely need to continue their efforts to bring awareness to and challenge that ingrained culture long after the current protests end, whether they are successful or not.

4. On LGBTQ+ Rights

Parallel to the experience of women, LGBTQ+ people are harmed by traditionally conservative social values and stringent gender roles in which they do not quite fit. Women and LGBTQ+ activists in Thailand often work alongside each other, emphasizing the need for intersectionality and to include the needs of adjacent marginalized groups: sex workers, migrant workers, hill-tribe women, religious minorities, and people with disabilities or HIV. Gender-based violence in the nation doubly impacts LGBTQ+ women, who are threatened by the cross-section of misogyny and LGBTQ+ phobia. A prominent trans community and the presence of popular LGBTQ+ celebrities in the entertainment and fashion industries disguise the magnitude of violence and trauma inflicted on LGBTQ+ citizens every day in the forms of bullying, harassment, disownment, sexual assault, and exploitation. Within a society that preaches conformity to rigid gender norms and expectations, to present

yourself outside of those norms—in this case, to openly identify as LGBTQ+—is an open challenge to the system.

Thailand is often lauded as a relatively safe destination for same-sex couples, with the National Tourism Authority making the commitment in 2019 to promote more LGBTQ+ tourism to the country. Despite this truth, open displays of sexuality are frowned upon by an enduring social conservatism, and trans individuals are not yet able to have legal recognition of their gender. The Thai LGBTQ+ community is largely tight knit, concentrated in areas that are frequented by foreigners such as Phuket, and seen most often in the entertainment, fashion, or sex work industries, as employment discrimination is an ongoing problem. The first pride parade held in the capital, Bangkok, was in 2003, an event that was organized by various businesses to capitalize on the gay movement at the time, and the next event (this time organized by LGBTQ+ organizations) was not held until 2017. While pride events have typically focused on legalizing marriage and promoting visibility and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community, the 2020 Bangkok Pride Parade notably folded in the political demands of the nationwide pro-democracy protest movement, calling for the resignation of PM Prayuth and reform of the constitution alongside equal rights, reproductive rights, and the decriminalization of and protections for sex work.

One prominent voice within the movement is that of college student Siraphob Attohi, whose protest persona is drag queen MC Masala Bold, who calls explicitly for gender equality when participating in a demonstration. Siraphob is the founder of the Free Gender TH Group, an activist group dedicated to promoting LGBTQ+ demands within the ongoing pro-democracy movement. One of the group's biggest demands is for the legalization of same-sex marriage. Although a bill was approved in July that would recognize same-sex unions, the ultra-conservative voices in government and other opposition have prevented that legislation from moving forward (Salvá 2020). For many LGBTQ+ activists, the passing and implementation of that bill is the highest priority on the list of community-specific political demands. An overarching belief that the achievement of democracy will also open the doors for equal rights and progressive legislation for LGBTQ+ individuals will continue to persist, as the current government's adherence to patriarchal values makes the unobstructed passing of progressive gendered legislation unlikely. That the ability to elect truly progressive representatives who would acknowledge their existence and their needs in new democratic elections would be a significant win for the future of the community is not lost.

LGBTQ+ activists and advocacy groups have remained a strong demographic within the current pro-democracy protests, in part because their messaging focuses on the demand for equal human rights for their community, and in part due to the dominantly youth-led movement having more open-minded and inclusive views about sexuality and gender. They are distinguishable from their fellow protestors through their dress, which is often far more colorful and expressive. They participate in song, dance, and theater performances held during marches. Drag queens in full attire walk the streets in tandem with other protestors while waving the LGBTQ+ flag. By putting themselves on full display, activists are marrying the foundational demands of the pro-democracy movement with their own, advancing a collective understanding of their identities as valid and promoting social progress for both women and the LGBTQ+ community in Thailand through their visible celebration of pride.

5. On Reproductive Rights

In 1972, a nationwide survey was conducted to gauge Thai women's views on induced abortion:

“Questions concerning their attitudes towards induced abortion in six different circumstances were asked of 1254 rural Thai married women, aged 15–44, in a 1972 nationwide fertility survey. A positive response was given to one or more of the questions by nearly three-fifths of the women; the largest proportion of positive responses (42%) was given by women if the pregnancy resulted from rape, and 40.1% responded affirmatively if the

pregnancy might endanger the health of the woman. The lowest proportions, but still nearly one-fifth of the women, were in favour of abortion if the couple do not want another child or if they cannot support another child" (Burnight and Leoprapai 1977).

Though a study of similar nature has not been conducted since, these results would indicate that a significant portion of rural women would support abortion if not for practicality's sake, a number that is likely to increase if we were to update the survey to include the opinions of educated modern women living in cities. Despite this, Thai culture possesses a strong abhorrence to abortion. In Theravada Buddhism, the primary religion practiced in the country, abortion is a heavy sin, as fetuses are viewed as a living thing. Following a strong belief in karma, Buddhist ceremonies are conducted en masse to cleanse the sin of abortion from believing women and ward off the malevolent spirits of the unborn children that would otherwise latch onto their mothers to cause misfortune and depression. Additionally, abortion is demonized in film and popular folklore, further influencing public disapproval for the procedure in most cases. However, despite cultural opposition against abortion and those who have sought it out, abortion is still practiced. Illegal abortion clinics prop up in many areas that lure in younger, rural, or ill-informed customers with the promise to rid the pregnancy in secret for only a few thousand THB, risking the health and safety of those who seek help.

In this current pro-democracy movement, abortion rights activists are expanding their public presence and visibility and seeking increased support by holding floating workshops and demonstrations, with the objectives of lobbying for the decriminalization of abortion and challenging the stigma against it. They hold mini workshops to teach protestors about contraceptive options, mutual consent, and safe sex, and hand out free condoms and materials listing resources for those considering abortion. They pass around petitions asking people to sign to show support for changing abortion laws. Reproductive rights are being messaged as an undeniable human right, echoing the call for adherence to human rights present in the larger movement.

Perhaps one of the most significant catalysts for anti-abortion sentiments in Thailand is Thai law. Section 301 of the Thai Criminal Code criminalizes abortion, stating that "Abortion is illegal and anyone who gets or performs an abortion is at risk of being jailed up to 3 years or paying a THB 6000 fine", whether the abortion is self-induced or sought medically. Doctors who perform the procedure may also lose their right to practice as a consequence. Only two exceptions are currently present for Section 301, which are (1) if continuing the pregnancy risks the health of the mother and (2) if the pregnancy is the result of rape or coercion. On 23 December 2020, Cabinet members voted in favor of a new bill that would allow women to seek abortion if their pregnancy were no more than 12 weeks old. Per this new bill, which was fully passed after obtaining approval in the House of Representatives in February 2021, two sections of the Criminal Code are now amended: Section 301, in which women can seek abortions without consequence if their pregnancies are no older than 12 weeks, and those who seek abortion after 12 weeks will face reduced penalties, and Section 305, in which an additional allowable exception for abortion, the high risk of serious fetal impairment, was added. These amendments would also decriminalize doctors who perform abortions if the allowable conditions are met.

Activists have since criticized this bill, as women have previously sought abortion after 12 weeks of pregnancy, meaning that the Criminal Code would still penalize these cases. Regional women's rights and advocacy organizations such as Women Helping Women and the Manushya Foundation have spoken out that although the passage of this bill is a cautious victory for reproductive rights activists, it is still not enough to help the overall safety and wellbeing of Thai women without the total repeal of Section 301. Activists are now calling for the additional approval of a second proposed bill, which would allow legal abortion in cases of up to 24 weeks.

Protestors might find some inspiration from a similar movement that occurred roughly 17,000 kilometers away. In December 2020, after a decades-long battle by abortion rights activists beginning in the 1970s, Argentina became the fourth Latin American country to

legalize abortion. Activists credited the passing of the landmark bill to the generations of organization on the behalf of activists who were able to break down existing prejudices about abortion to garner wider support from the public. Rather than focusing solely on bodily autonomy, a legitimate argument for abortion but one that is often met with opposition from those who place a high value on the potential life of a fetus, activists instead began to reframe their discourse on the human life toll caused by underground abortions. In changing the message, they were successful in obtaining larger and more diverse sources of support. This success was visible in the demographic shift of the protestors—what began as a domain of resistance dominated by young women developed into a larger movement encompassing people from various age groups, classes, and genders. Through strategic organization, mobilization, and messaging, Argentinian abortions rights activists were able to achieve progress in spite of the strong religious conservatism and entrenched anti-abortion sentiments that made the idea of passing legal abortion impossible only two years prior. We can observe that Thai reproductive activists are implementing similar strategies to change the tide of people's opinion, and therefore encourage changes in policy.

Throughout the pro-democracy protests, reproductive activists took a strong public stance to demand the approval of the bills and the repeal of Section 301. It was perhaps easier to sway public opinion about such a controversial subject by correlating the right to abortion as a human right, intertwining their fight with the overall message that there exist inherent human rights that Thai laws and government should respect, a message that the protest movement consistently pushes. Furthermore, there is growing support for abortion rights throughout the government and the country, considering high rates of teen pregnancy, couples' and family poverty that prevents proper care for additional children, and the rate of injury or death associated with illegal abortions. A rising confidence by abortion rights activists to publicly and openly champion reproductive rights, disseminate informational resources and materials, and increase efforts to garner support within the bubble of pro-democracy protesters may well succeed at adding the necessary pressure to get the second bill to pass, promote safe sex and wider access to contraceptives for Thai citizens, and perpetuate pro-abortion ideologies within the country.

6. Conclusions

What we are seeing in Thailand, from February 2020 until the present, is the engendered climax of decades of covert resistance by both pro-democracy activists and those in pursuit of inherent natural rights that supersede Thai law: freedom of speech, of movement, and of the body. The Thai patriarchy, represented by the three *M* institutions, inundates its people with harmful beliefs on women's role in society and the stigma associated with sexual assault. Even when laws are made in pursuit of gender equality, the insidious grip that the patriarchy has on Thai society demands deference to those longstanding gendered beliefs, rendering such laws powerless.

Throughout the movement, protestors, some minors, have been abducted by officials, arrested, and charged with violating Article 112 for their participation in the demonstrations. Prominent protest leaders have faced multiple Article 112 charges since their involvement began, with bail running upwards of hundreds of thousands of THB. In December 2020, actress Inthira Charoenpura became the first celebrity to receive a summons based on the vague *lèse majesté* charges for her financial support of pro-democracy student groups. It is thus far unclear whether she will also face any economic consequences from sponsors or partnerships that want to avoid a similar fate by association. Although the authorities have steadily increased their crackdown of protestors, often citing the COVID-19 pandemic as their reason to disperse public gatherings, the overall movement continues seemingly undeterred. The nonviolent movement borrows heavily from the sophisticated protest tactics learned from Hong Kong, including the latter's famous "be water" strategy, which keeps the nationwide movement largely leaderless and keeps the mobility of protestors fluid in a largely successful attempt to avoid and outsmart law enforcement.

Is there a resolution in sight for the protests, and if so, where do Thai women's rights activists go from here to ensure their gendered demands be met? Though data are limited, we know that movements that involve a higher number of women and gender minorities are more likely to maintain nonviolence for the duration of the movement, a finding that is increased when women are involved on the frontlines, as they are in Thailand (Chenoweth 2019). Furthermore, movements with women on the frontlines are more likely to find success than those without, due to a variety of factors—including the increased likelihood of engendering support from law enforcement and security forces working for the state. We also know that when resistance movements include gender-based ideologies, whether women's equality, reproductive rights, or family care, they are not only more likely to succeed compared to movements that fail to include those ideologies, but they are also more likely to find *prolonged* success in the long term.

The current protests have proven that Thai activists have the capability to effectively organize within a larger movement to promote support for gendered issues, experiencing small wins along the way, such as the passing of the reformed legal abortion bill. Women and LGBTQ+ activists have so far been successful at framing the messaging of their championed issues to align with the overarching objectives of the pro-democracy movement, a necessary strategy to influence the wider public to support their cause. Does this mean that true democracy is achievable in Thailand and, by extension, holistic and genuine gender equality? Although local women's rights and advocacy groups work every day to affect change, the actions of civilians are not a sustainable option for progress when the problems are systemic. It will take the persistent resistance of Thais to place continued pressure on the government to meet their demands. This now years-old movement has so far not slowed down in momentum, despite crackdowns from authorities and the ongoing pandemic. We will continue to watch from afar, standing in solidarity with the protestors as much we can. Whatever the events that unfold, Thai women are latching onto the current and with them rides a reckoning.

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