

# ‘Encountering the Real’: Jacques Lacan in Thailand Crackdowns\*\*

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## Abstract

The article attempts to revisit the crackdowns in Thailand from a Lacanian perspective. The collective traumas of the Yellow-Shirts and the Red-Shirts are suggested as the Real, a psychoanalytic term conceptualized in Lacanian psychoanalysis. By examining the history of Thai politics during the pinnacle of the crackdown years, notably 2008 and 2010, the article attempts to introduce Lacan’s theory to be integrative of the history of politics in Thailand. The expectation is to demonstrate how Lacan’s concepts such as the signifier, the Real, the fantasy, and the object of desire are instrumental for the rethinking of the crackdowns in Thailand in a plausible innovative and critical fashion.

**Keywords:** *collective trauma, the Real, signifier, fantasy, object of desire*

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# ‘เผยแพร่ความจริง’: ม้าม้า ลากอง ในการถลวยการชุมนุมประเทศไทย\*\*

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## บทคัดย่อ

บทความมีความพยายามวิเคราะห์การถลวยการชุมนุมในประเทศไทยผ่านทัศนะความคิดของจิตวิเคราะห์ของลากอง ประเด็นหลักที่ผู้เขียนเสนอคือการเผยแพร่กับสิ่งที่เรียกว่า ‘แหล่งจักร’ ของทั้งคนเดียวเหลือและคนเดียวเดง ซึ่งผู้เขียนเสนอว่าเป็น ‘ความจริง’ อันเป็นหนึ่งในทฤษฎีจิตวิเคราะห์ของลากอง โดยสำรวจประวัติศาสตร์การเมืองไทยในช่วงสูงสุดของวิกฤตการเมือง คือในช่วงปี ค.ศ. 2008 และ 2010 บทความพยายามนำเสนอทฤษฎีของลากองให้เป็นบูรณาการกับประวัติศาสตร์การเมืองไทย ความคาดหวังของบทความคือเพื่อแสดงให้เห็นว่าแนวคิดสำคัญของลากอง เช่น สัญญา ความจริง ความผันหวาน และสิ่งพึงประถนา มีประโยชน์สำคัญต่อการดำเนินการถลวยการชุมนุมในประเทศไทยในทิศทางใหม่ที่เป็นไปได้และด้วยความลึกซึ้ง

**คำสำคัญ:** แหล่งจักร, ความจริง, สัญญา, ความผันหวาน, สิ่งพึงประถนา

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## Introduction

The article illustrates a collective trauma based on facts that the two anti-government demonstrations in Thailand in 2008 and in 2010 had produced a shared traumatic memory. The two incidents are evident of the governments' impositions of violence aimed at disintegrating all the political oppositions. The article puts emphasis on the traumatic incidents that erupted to the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), notably the 'Yellow-Shirt' protestors, and equally to the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), notably the 'Red-Shirt' protestors. The Yellow-Shirts have refused to sympathise a traumatic incident that had relatively exploded to the Red-Shirts on May 2010 because members of the Red-Shirts consist of the pro-Thaksin individuals. The Yellow-Shirts' commemorations on the incident are structured by a polarisation of the shirt-colour. The Yellow-Shirts seem to only recognise the violent incident of October 2008 as a collective trauma whilst the Red-Shirts have a propensity to mourn the incident of May 2010 as a collective trauma.

Such commemorations based on parochialisms prevent both the Yellow-Shirts and the Red-Shirts to encounter the Real, that is, the Thai governments' orientations – in whatsoever they came to power by means of election, by means of appointment, and by means of coup d'état – in resorting to the use of violence as an utmost political solution. Furthermore, in order for

Thailand to attain national reconciliation, it is a request upon the two sides of protestors to drop off a veil of provincialism and to mourn the two events by not exuding one event over the other. It is also worth paying attention to the royal involvement of the Queen in her attendance at the Yellow-Shirts' funeral following the event of October 2008 including the King's denial to stop the conflict on May 2010, which is argued that despite the fact that the King were to intervene to halt the conflict, a suspension of conflict would only be ephemeral in consequence.

Democracy advocates invoke that Thailand's national reconciliation is only possible through a democratic means. The Thai Criminal Court is served as the Other to which a national reconciliation as the object of desire awaits to fulfil. Following the two dreadful incidents, the article views national reconciliation as the object of desire as theorised by Lacan as the object of lost, lack, and the desire of the (big) Other. In theory, there is no insurance that the desire of the Other and the subject's object of desire would converge. But whether the Court would succeed in fulfilling the object of desire as suggested by Lacan in the theory of the (big) Other or whether the Other is unable to fulfil the object of desire, is what remains to be seen in the near future.

The author grants that the psychoanalysis of Lacan is instrumental to the study of Thai politics, particularly when it comes to the understanding of the psychological aspects of the

political agents. In some extent, the theory of a Lacanian psychoanalysis used in this article deviates from a focus on the power relations between governments and protestors e.g. a declaration of martial law prior to the crackdowns. Initially, the theory departs from a focus on the governments' manipulations of the media e.g. the government labelling protestors as a troublemaker of nation. The theory also deflects from a focus on the demand for the political transformations e.g. from a constitutional monarchy to a republicanism as evident through some civilians' demands to terminate the 112 criminal code. Instead, the theory of a Lacanian psychoanalysis has sought to offer the aspects of thought, which has remained unthought, and to bring out those underneath aspects to the cumulative aggregates of the debates on Thai politics.

In using of a Lacanian psychoanalysis, this article is different from other perspectives because those views seem to neglect and omit the possibility of thinking on the collective trauma. It must also be noted as part of a research suggestion that the Lacanian psychoanalysis can be used flexibly, which means that when it comes to the study of Thai politics, it is not necessary at all cost to stipulate a Lacanian psychoanalysis to the collective trauma. To fulfil the debate; nonetheless, this article tries to offer a thought on crackdowns on protestors, carried out by either the elected or the unelected governments, as the collective trauma as the Lacanian Real. The article

is also different from those perspectives because those perspectives have never clarified how the royal family's intervention is a naked fantasy, which represses the primordial Real of the social antagonism. It will be argued in the subsequent sections that the intervention outside the Thai constitution is seen as the fantasy as hiding the Real, which would result in an ephemeral suspension of conflicts, and which would hardly lead to a permanent national reconciliation.

## **Lacan: the function of fantasy and the Real**

It is suggested that Lacan's theory of the Real is sufficient in acquiring an understanding of the collective trauma. Therefore, it is a priority to consider what Lacan means by the Real in conjunction with a fantasy function. Lacan claims in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (1994) that what psychoanalysts discover in the practice of psychoanalysis is an "encountering with the Real that always eludes us" (Lacan 1994, 53). Lacan maintains that the Real that eludes us is the insistence that keeps coming-back that locates beyond automaton and beyond signs governed by the pleasure principle (Lacan 1994, 53-54). The sign governed by the pleasure principle indicates a fantasy function, which formed up as a completed disguise to the Real. Therefore, what is needed to realise is that the Real lies behind the fantasy (Lacan 1994, 54). There is no finite account of the function of the

Real except that the Real is something that must be encountered and to be confronted in that it is indeed discovered as trauma that lurks behind fantasy. It is through this function of the encountering with the Real which Lacan calls it a tuch. Lacan explains that “the function of the tuch of the Real as encounter...first presented itself in the history of psycho-analysis in a form that was in itself already enough to arouse our attention, that of the trauma.” (Lacan 1994, 55).

It is the Real that crucially marks a traumatic symptom from within the pleasure principle; a principle nurtured by a fantasy-function. Lacan connects the fantasy function and the Real function with the function of repetition in which the starting point is to look at the fantasy-function. When the fantasy-function repeats itself, it repeats what it deems to disguise. This means that when the fantasy-function repeats itself; it also repeats the Real in a disguised form. This paradoxically means that when the fantasy-function repeats itself, the Real is also repeating itself as part of the indivisible essence as ‘the missed encountered that must be encountered’. The fantasy-function is as problematic to perception and consciousness as for the maintaining of the social relations in delusions. Fantasy seems only producing a happy encounter (*eutuchia*) whilst keeping the Real as an unhappy encounter (*dustuchia*) as equally as a trauma in a very far distance (Lacan 1994, 290). The Real is something that remains outside the signifier and is located at another place. With its

characteristic as ‘the missed encountered that must be encountered’, the Real highlights a symptom of fantasy and a lack of the symbolic order.

## October 7, 2008: the spectral image/ the encountering with the Real

Following a coup against the government of Thaksin in 2006, the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD) clothed in yellow-shirts was formed by a group of pro-royalists, the ultra-nationalist, the entrenched elite, the urban middle class, the oligarchs, the plutocrats, including people from the rural areas. The Yellow-Shirt’s aim was to eradicate Samuk’s and Somchai’s governments alleged by the Yellow-Shirts as administrations that maintained strongholds for Thaksin’s influence. Thaksin has been accused by the Yellow-Shirts of endeavouring to topple down a constitutional monarchy and to replace a government in Thailand with (his) republic. Therefore, Thaksin’s image has been reiterated in the Yellow-Shirts’ discourse as ‘otherness’ as ‘non-Thai’ because of his disloyalty to the monarchy (Chachavalpongwan 2011, 1019-1041). This can be suggested that Thaksin, whose aim is suspected widely to abolish monarchy, is represented in the Yellow-Shirts’ discourse as ‘the spectral image’ as a bad public figure. This can be pointed out that the Yellow-Shirt’s representation of Thaksin as a spectral image is a representation of Thaksin’s image as a ‘haunting spectre’.

Jacques Derrida in his book *The Specters of Marx* (1994) has sought to clarify the meaning of 'spectre' from his critical philosophical outlook, generally known as deconstruction. In thinking about spectre as one of the philosophical topologies as well as political terminologies, Derrida immediately links the term 'spectre' to the 'haunting effect'. At a fundamental level, Derrida cautions that one should not efface the semantics or lexicons of 'spectre', which is linguistically equivalent to 'the fantasmagorical', 'the hallucinatory', 'the fantastic', and 'the imaginary' in terms of its topology (Derrida 1994, 1). The spectre has produced a *haunting effect*, enabling itself to create fear and anxiety to the living subjects (Derrida 1994, 1). Derrida connects Marx's articulation of spectre with a sense-perception. Derrida claims that Marx is not interested in maintaining a distinction of sensuous and non-sensuous. Rather, Derrida follows Marx, the thinker, who highlights that spectre is *sensuously non-sensuous, and sensuously supersensible*. (Derrida 1994, 4) Therefore, the spectre is psychologically understood as the non-sensuous sensuous as the perception that one has towards the uncanny.

Despite its quasi-absence, the spectre is perceivable in one way or another because the spectre has continued its existence external to the body; it is irreducible to any bodily attachments. This precisely means that a spectre could maintain its continuity without a body attachment (Derrida 1994, 5). The spectre's existence is not nihilistic

despite the absence of its bodily existence. The spectre is indicated by Derrida as the 'out of joint' as 'the delirious', 'the capricious', and 'the unpredictable insisted coming back' (Derrida 1994, 5-6). Derrida's spectre is a singularity that bounds to no time, space, territory, distance, proximity, absence, presence, including its ability in creating mental effects.

It is plausible in some extent to employ Derrida's spectre to understand the images of Thaksin and his subordinates as 'the sensuously non-sensuous, and the sensuously supersensible' as creating *the haunting effect* to the Yellow-Shirts including the ultra-royalists. The Yellow-Shirts' standpoint is clear in defending the monarchy from being overthrown because Thaksin's emerging power is viewed as a threat to monarchy. Thaksin's image is replicated in the Yellow-Shirts' discourse as a spectral image even though he is forced to live in exile, currently in Dubai. Thaksin's spectral image from afar has created fear and anxiety to the Yellow-Shirts. Thaksin has still been recognised by the Yellow-Shirts as a business expansionist as an anti-royalist whose objective is to create republicanism in Thailand.

This corresponds to Derrida's definition of spectre because Thaksin may no longer have a bodily presence in Thailand but his political influence has unbounded across territories. Thaksin's political influence is empirical when Thaksin's sister, the ex-Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra won a national election in July 2011.

Although Yingluck was ousted because of a military coup in May 2014, it had been generally realised that Thaksin maintained his political dominance through Yingluck's and the previous administrations. This suggests that before Yingluck had been deposed by the royalist coup, the spectre of Thaksin continued its uncanny existence, although with the absence of his body.

Thaksin's spectre is construed as the 'out of joint' as the delirious, the capricious, and the unpredictable that has a robust intention to return.

However, it is necessary to counterbalance this Derridean perspective with the Lacanian Real that if the Yellow-Shirts were to continue reiterating Thaksin's as the spectral image, such discourse would mistakenly fail to encounter the Real: a collective trauma that had been experienced by the Yellow-Shirts and the Red-Shirts as a result of the governments' impositions of violence against the anti-government demonstrations.

To move a theoretical paradigm from Derrida to Lacan, it can be suggested that the initial phrase in which the Yellow-Shirts are politically engaged is plausibly a politics of self-victimisation. Their attempts are nothing less than to imply that the group including the nation as a whole is 'the absolute victim' whereas Thaksin to whom the Yellow-Shirts have disdained as 'a haunting spectre' is an enormous threat to nation.

In a Lacanian psychoanalysis, the spectre of Thaksin is reiterated as the Yellow-Shirts' *object petit a* (the object cause of desire). Here, the relationship between the Yellow-Shirts as the victimised subjects as the object cause of desire, leads to the formation of 'the superego injunction'.

The superego injunctions of the Yellow-Shirts are to indicate that Thaksin is a haggard behemoth whilst the Yellow-Shirts themselves are presupposing themselves as the absolute victims.

The political expressions in submitting themselves to be the absolute victims are the imperative of the Yellow-Shirts' superego injunctions, indicating on the self-victimisations of identity in which the Yellow-Shirts enjoy and wilful to accept it.

However, such 'the superego injunction' has been read another way around as the discourse of perversion. In this case, the desire in being victims is not unrelated to the object cause of desire. The subjects are the masochist pervert who do not only enjoy presupposing themselves as the (feminine) victims, but also they are the perverts who pretend to speak on behalf of the absolute knowledge, claiming themselves as the master of knowledge. They are the perverts who are claiming themselves in the position of knowledge and claiming to speak on behalf of others, acting themselves as the 'stand-in' for the others' desires. It is dangerous if such knowledge that claims to be a stand-in for others' knowledge

is elevating itself to be a master-signifier. Though coming from the different fashions, the situation in Thailand stands as a verification of the thought-provoking suggestion made by Marc Leger that the culturalisation of politics is introducing to us the modes, codes, markers, and styles of victim politics into macro-politics (Leger 2013). This Lacanian theory may contribute to the possibility of thinking on the Yellow-Shirts' leaders whether their self-victimisations in front of the magnitude of Thaksin are simply a masochism to which they are just a group of political reactionists whose claims on the absolute knowledge merely served as a 'stand-in' for the mass. The mistake arisen out of this incident is that if politics is by nature flaring up across the ideas of differentiations, deconstructions, and diversity on the plane of immanence – a concept introduced by Gilles Deleuze as a reference to the field of smooth space of life and death that flows without absolute divisions and without the definitive account (Deleuze 2001, 26) – so what the Yellow-Shirts's leaders are guiding the mass is to denaturalise and desensitise the nature of politics and far from paying respect to the political quality of the plane of immanence.

On October 13, 2008, Queen, Sirikit, attended a funeral of Angkhana Radappanyawutt, who was known in the Thai public as 'Nong Bo', and who was appraised by the Yellow-Shirts as 'a flower of the PAD'. Queen Sirikit celebrated this young lady protester as a modality of a virtuous Thai citizen because Angkhana's political action at

her last will was to defend the monarchy. According to the Thai Constitution, members of the royal family must be refrained from any political involvements and must perform political neutrality. The Queen's attendance of Angkhana's funeral had probably created uncomfortable feeling to the Thai scholars including the Red-Shirts because her appearance at funeral was seen as an extra-constitutional intervention. This royal attendance at funeral was uncomfortable to the Red-Shirts and to the academic because it was interpreted that the Queen refused to perform her neutrality in politics as stipulated in the Thai Constitution. The Queen's participation is interpreted as a refusal to perform neutrality, according to the Thai Constitution.

However, it is suggested on the contrary that instead of focusing on the Queen's attendance at Angkhana's funeral as her refusal to perform neutrality according to a principle of constitutional monarchy, the encountering with the Real is in need to focus on the intense use of violence as part of the political solutions practiced in reality by the Thai governments. It is undeniable that the Thai governments in whatsoever they came to power by means of elections, by means of appointments, and by means of military coups, had ultimately resorted to the use of intense violence against protestors in order to manage conflicts and to return country to a normal condition. This means that rather than indulging on representing Thaksin as a spectral image, it is more valuable to underscore the intense practice

of violence wielded by the Thai governments as the traumatic-Real as the undeniable aspect that have to be encountered. This precisely means that the Yellow-Shirts should cease pursuing constructing Thaksin's image as a spectral image as a politician who has ambition to abolish monarchy because such viewpoint seems to sidestep the encountering with the Real and hinders a possibility to underscore a collective trauma spilled over to the Yellow-Shirts and the Red-Shirts during the bloodbath events.

## May 20, 2010: the signifier of loss and the Real

The Red-Shirts, or the United Front of Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), formed as a reaction to the September 2006 military coup against the government of Thaksin Shinawatra, a billionaire tycoon who gained support from the poor as a result of his very attractive populism-democracy. During the coup in 2006, the Thai military coupled with the Yellow-Shirts had been very instrumental in discouraging all Thaksin's supporters including the two parties of Thaksin, the People Power and the Pheu Thai Party to mull over their backups of Thaksin. The Thai military maintained an unconditioned power in a backdrop and had engineered supports to the right-wing party, the Democratic Party, led by the British born who graduated from Oxford and Eton, Abhisit Vejjajiva, who was prepared to be a prime minister following the coup against Thaksin. Acknowledged that the Red-Shirts planned to topple down his

administration, Abhisit declared an emergency decree in early March 2011 in order to ensure a normal condition.

The Red-Shirts marched to the centre of Bangkok in a defiance of an emergency decree on March 2011. The colossal rally was to force a snap resignation of Abhisit and to demand a fresh election. On May 19, 2010 the government put a pressure on the Red Shirt protestors to cancel its mob that lasted 6 weeks but the situation was aggravated. At least hundreds of the Red-Shirts protestors had sought to hide inside Wat Patumwanarama; a Buddhist temple located at the Ploenchit Road near the protestors' gathering. The situation was heightened on May 20, when troops were ordered to 'clear the areas' according to the government's declaration of the security operation known as "Operation Reclaiming Area and the Assembly Crackdown". In Abhisit's viewpoint, the government's security reason in using of force against protestors had meant to restore the country to normal condition. *The Independent* newspaper reported that the fight on May 20 continued until the night, the city of Bangkok was engulfed in flames, 15 people were killed and nearly 100 were wounded; 6 bodies were founded in War Patumwanaram temple. *The Green Left*, a non-governmental organisation, reported that soldiers used real ammunitions, shells, and snipers to gun down the unarmed civilians in the 'free fire zone' declared earlier by the government. This violence incident was generally known as the Bangkok Crackdown and was baptised as the

“Cruel May” by the Red-Shirt. Since its beginning of the anti-government campaign in March, the flare numbers in total for the Red-Shirt protestors were that more than 90 persons killed and around 1,800 persons injured.

In retrospect, if the Red-Shirts claim that May 20, 2010 violent incident is their collective trauma, it will be the claim that signifies incomplete viewpoint in respect to the fact of the duple violence because it entirely dismisses the Yellow-Shirt’s trauma occurred in October 7, 2008. By the same token, if the Yellow-Shirts claim that October 7, 2008 is their collective trauma, it will be the claim that signifies prejudice and bias that disrespectful to the fact of a duple violence because it entirely dismissed the Red-Shirt’s trauma occurred in May 20, 2010. If the viewpoints from both sides remain caught in a partiality and in a staunchly parochialism, such viewpoints will drive Thailand to aporia. The country will remain to be seen as a sectarian division as structurally divided by the shirt colours.

In one of his seminars, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan points out to a problem of signifier. Lacan suggests on the view that the function of the signifier is that “signifier is the signifier that holds one signifier to *another signifier*” (Lacan 2007, 13). Accordingly, there is no signifier as the signifier *as such* because the signifier is displaced as ‘another’. The signifier ‘as another’ is the always-already displaced, the self-deconstructed, and the self-represented in distortion. Lacan tries to engage with problems

of signifiers because he opposes the signifying meaning in which signifiers are made to represent. Lacan problematizes the correlative function of the signifier and the signified because of its inconstancy, distortion, delusion, and misrepresentation, particularly in terms of the production of meaning. It is with this courageous viewpoint in which Lacan points out that every signifier is a symptom because the signifier fails to encounter the remaining essence in which Lacan baptises it as ‘the Real’. The signifier is symptomatic because it gives false imaginary and holds falsely meaning and because the signifier itself is hiding a traumatic essence of the Real. In effect, if the signifier represents the existing situation in an incongruous meaning, it will bring false imaginary to social relation as a whole because it is dismissed to encounter the Real. Lacan usually refers the Real to trauma that stands as a pathogenic image as an imperfection of the signifying meaning constituted in the symbolic order.

It can be argued that the Lacanian Real, the imaginary, and the signifier are consistent to the Yellow-Shirts’ and the Red-Shirts’ traumas. If the Yellow-Shirt based on their parochialisms were to simply point out to October 7, 2008 as a signifier of the collective trauma, it would be consistent to what Lacan suggests as “the signifier that always holds one signifier to another” (Lacan 2007, 13). The Yellow-Shirts would bring false consciousness and also false imaginary to the country’s collective trauma in consequence. If the

Yellow-Shirts were to continue to signify October 7, 2008, this would not only mean that they fail to overcome colour divisions, but they also would fail to capture and to encounter the Real; the essence of collective trauma originated by the states' uses of violence that had erupted on both sides.

By the same token, if the Red-Shirts were to signify May 20, 2010 as the signifier of loss, trauma, and the collectively painful memory, the result would be fatally nihilistic as the same as the Yellow-Shirts because the signifier is the signifier that represents *another*. If the Red-Shirts were to signify May 20, 2010 as the collective trauma, it would not be a representation of the collective traumas that both sides had indeed encountered. The signifier based on such provincialism brings a distorted version of a collective trauma to the country. And hence will definitely lead to a false imaginary and a false consciousness to the country's collective trauma. Therefore, adopting Lacan to make sense of the Thai conflicts is helpful in providing the critical perspective in a sense that his theory would help to deconstruct as well as to reimagine the possibility to 'encounter the Real'. The theory denies both Yellow-Shirts's and Red-Shirts's signifying systems, which are allocated to represent a collective trauma in distortion.

Since the crackdown on May 2010, the Red-Shirts reassembled annually on April at Rachaprasong area for commemorating the dead protestors. Former protestors all wearing in red

shirts gather to express their sorrows and grievances to the dead comrades. Monks are invited for the holy ceremony for those dead comrades to rest in peace, in the Buddhist belief. Since 2011-2014, the commemorative ceremony could be conducted without obstacles, but the ceremony had been revoked in April 2015 because the junta – currently the official government of Thailand whose power came by means of coup d'état against Thaksin's sister, Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra on May 2014 – had not allowed the Red-Shirts to perform the commemorative ceremony. The article suggests otherwise that despite the fact that the Red-Shirts' struggle to maintain a principle of representative democracy against the junta government is appreciated, this does not mean that the Red-Shirts' stream of thought would be able to traverse a structural colour division. It is worried sometimes that the Red-Shirts' exercises of the freedom of expressions seem to sustain the colour division, and, hence does not lead at all cost to the emancipation from such political parochialism. Such commemoration based on parochialism is a false imaginary that hampers the possibility to encounter the Real, referring to the collective traumas erupted on both sides and the political culture of the Thai governments in resorting to the use of forces in order to manage situations.

The politics based on provincialism suggests that the Red-Shirts are likely to fall into the same mistaken footstep as the Yellow-Shirts. The Yellow-Shirts' self-victimisations are

conditioned by presupposing Thaksin and his lackeys as an aggressor whilst for the Red-Shirts are the aristocrats whose power dwell outside constitution and whose authority stands at the backdrop of Thai politics. The Yellow-Shirts' and the Red-Shirts' identity formations as of being victims make politics of the two different positions the two sides of the same coin. The Yellow-Shirts' superego injunction and the object case of desire in viewing of themselves as the absolute victims have been conditioned by presupposing Thaksin as an absolute devil whilst the Red-Shirts' self-victimisation is depending on the presence of the aristocrats. Although there are differences in terms of political beliefs, of ideologies, and of perspectives among the Red-Shirts, it is argued that it is the identity politics of self-victimisation that the Red-Shirts seem to have shared in common. It is through the withdrawal of the politics of self-victimisation in order to encounter the Real to which the Yellow and the Red-Shirts can mutually understand the collective trauma of the country.

## **Promoting national reconciliation: the object of desire and the desire of the Other**

Following the crackdown on October 7, 2008, the Queen had presided over the Yellow Shirts' funeral but following the crackdown on May 20, 2010, Her Majesty the Queen gave no response to the death of Red-Shirts protestors.

It was also dubious why the King, who demonstrated his phenomenal statesmanship in preventing an escalating conflict between General Suchinda Kraprayoon and Chamlong Srimuang during May 1992 bloodbath, gave no likewise response to the event of May 2010 crackdown on the Red-Shirts. This issue is clandestinely discussed by some 'progressive' scholars in joint with the new generation of Thai scholars to the reason the King wished not to help Thaksin and his subordinates since the coup in 2006. Those scholars have often believed to what had been publicised in the WikiLeaks' cable that the King was behind the coup against Thaksin in 2006; but the mainstream media in Thailand until now has never relied on contents emanated from the WikiLeaks.

During the Red-Shirt protests on May 2010, one of the prominent Red-Shirts' leaders appealed to the King's sanction to end the conflict, after the troops started firing real bullets to protestors. There was no response from the palace. The King has been revered by the Thai majority as 'the Father of all Thais' figure whereas some factions of the Red-Shirts in joint with the 'progressive' scholars have been trying to absolve a monarchy. The Red-Shirts' leaders imploring for the King's mercy is a crucial episode that can be interpreted in a psychoanalytic account that the "Name-of-the-Father" is still symbolically in place. His fatherhood status is just occasionally challenged by a group of Red-Shirt hardliners; an anti-Oedipus son. Therefore, it is valuable to place

this issue in a Lacanian theory that the King's silence is rather seen essentially as the Real as recognised among the Lacanian as the essence of the thing that remains outside the symbolic order.

The King's refusal to grant the withdrawal of troops from the Ratchaprasong area is argued in the very Lacanian fashion that his silence on the Red-Shirts' demand is the Real. But even if the King were to intervene to stop the conflict in May 2010, his involvement would definitely be a dilemma. The King's superb intervention would be an ephemeral suspension of a political conflict between Abhisit's government and the Red-Shirt protestors. And not to hope that the PAD who is known as the royalist Yellow-Shirts would ultimately agree to the King's decision. This rather suggests that the King's intervention, which is welcomed by the Red-Shirts's leaders, might bring an immense displeasure to the PAD. The King's intervention that would bring no satisfaction to the PAD would also not be able to ameliorate the wound of the colour division affected across the country.

This means that although the King were to be successful in preventing a mounting conflict between Abhisit government and the Red-Shirts protestors, such royal intervention would seem to be a political fantasy. It would look as *if* political conflicts in Thailand were cleaned up, and every party engaged in conflicts were able to reconcile, thanks to a celestial involvement. However, given the fact that the Yellow-Shirts would probably not agree with the King's mercy on the Red-Shirts,

Thailand is still encountering the Real that there is no genuine reconciliation between the Red-Shirts and the Yellow-Shirts. If there were to be the King's intervention, such superb intervention would be seen as a fantasy of the temporarily national reconciliation as the ephemeral suspension of political conflict, because underneath a delusional surface lays the Real of the extreme structurally colour-conflict, which remains there, coherently. This is certainly the King's first dilemma in terms of his political decision and particularly if his intervention were to be actualised.

It is worth considering another dilemma. When the King refused to intervene to end the conflict of May, 2010, the King faced criticisms from the Red-Shirt hardliners. The King's refusal of rescuing the Red-Shirts was probably interpreted by the Red-Shirts as a discriminatory practices as a clear precision of his political standpoint that he really chose to ally with the Yellow-Shirts. His decision of exercising no intervention was to signal the troops to carry on missions on the Red-Shirt protestors, which resulted in 90 individuals dead and more than 1,000 injured on May 20, 2010. It points out to a second dilemma that either the royal intervention or non-intervention is a hindrance to Thailand's national reconciliation. It is a political dilemma because the King in whatsoever of his decision is rather seen as precipitating a deep political conflict between the Yellow and the Red Shirts. Therefore, it rather belongs to the responsibility of the Thai to struggle to fulfil national reconciliation based on the democratic

procedure to which a reversal cannot be the case. Following the bloodsheds, it is worth paying attention to the Thai Criminal Court, which is anticipated to play a crucial role in the process of national reconciliation in respect to principles of democratic accountability and transparency. Despite the ordeal, the court's ultimate decision must help balancing out every party's feelings at stake in the conflicts. However, there was a report that might disturb the Red-Shirts' feeling that following the incident of May 20, 2010 more than 20 persons of Red-Shirts protestors were sentenced to prison related to arsons and violation of the emergency decree whereas the military officers, the security forces, or the government had not been properly charged for their responsibilities of the 90 persons killed on that day. On October 2013, Messrs Abhisit and his deputy Suthep Thaugsuban had been charged with murders, which resulted in the death of 90 people. Abhisit and Suthep were charged with the deaths of a 43-year-old man and a 14-year-old girl during a crackdown on May 2010 that they approved the use of live ammunitions and snipers to quell protestors. Abhisit and Suthep insisted denying every allegation charged against them. Abhisit was released in December 2013 with 34,280 GBP granted as a bail whilst Suthep was absent from court because at that time he was leading the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), another colossal mob protestor which was operating a street demonstration known as "Operation Bangkok Shutdown" against

Yingluck's government. The trial against the two was rescheduled by the Court in March 2014. On August 28, 2014, the Thai Criminal Court dismissed murder charges against Abhisit and Suthep with obligation that under the decree of the state of emergency, the two leaders were authorised to act with official immunity granted to protect them from prosecutions that hereby endorsed in the decree provision. It is observed in the Court's verdicts with which impunities were granted to Abhisit and Suthep, the Court's obligation may increase tension and may aggravate an always-already national disparity because the court's decision renders perceptions of injustice to the Red-Shirts to which likely to belittle a chance for national reconciliation. However, it is worth noting that the murder cases indicted against those two powerful politicians have been lingering even at present under the current junta's rule, this suggests that there remains no precise accounts from the judges for the exact penalties on the two politicians.

It is observed that the Pheu Thai Party and the Red-Shirts are in graver sombre following Prime Minister Yingluck officially deposed from power in a coup against her government in May 2014. The junta is obviously formed by a group of militaries known to pay courtesy to the palace. It became widely observed that the junta's flat aim was to remove Thaksin, to enervate his Pheu Thai Party, and to encroach those whom alleged by the junta as endeavouring to garner supports for Thaksin. The omens for the Red-Shirts immediately

crippled when the Criminal Court filed murder cases against ex-Prime Minister Somchai for his crackdown against PAD protestors on October 7, 2008. There is a worthy of note that by the time that this article almost finished (April 17, 2015), the local newspapers in Thailand reported two week ago that Somchai and the other three men are due to schedule for the first trials on May 11, 2015. This is perhaps a bad premonition for the Red-Shirts, particularly given the context that the junta is known as always showing aggressive stance towards Thaksin; and particularly Somchai is autobiographically known as Thaksin's brother-in law. The result may be foreseeable but it is beyond the scope of this article to suggest a prediction. Nonetheless, it stands as a hint that an attempt to fulfil national reconciliation in Thailand remains in a due yet sceptical process.

The case of national reconciliation process in Thailand is probable to illustrate Lacan's theory of the object of desire that prompts together with the issue of the (big) Other. It is elucidated in Lacan's theory that the object of desire has encountered the lack and lost but which the subject has craved desperately to fulfil. Lacan also adds that the object of desire has another meaning, that is, the object of desire is the desire of the Other (Lacan 1992, 311-325). When combined the two hypotheses are, it is flexible to account that Lacan has a subtle suggestion that the essence of the object of desire characterised as lack and loss, for the subject, is because the subject's object of desire depends on the Other.

When the subject's object of desire is in need to rely on the desire of the Other, it seems that the subject's object of desire faces an enormous constraint. This means that there is no guarantee that the Other can respond equally well to the subject's object of desire. Therefore, when the subject cannot find assurance of the object of desire with regards to the desire of the Other, the subject's object of desire placed in the desire of the Other is therefore displaced and in consequence facing a lack, a loss, and a castration to which Lacan writes to those castrated subjects as 'the barred subjects'. Lacan points out that there is no subjects' object of desire that can be guaranteed under the arrangement of the Other. Lacan also points out the betrayal role enacted by the big Other as "the big Other does not exist".

The national reconciliation is the object of desire that may be or may not be the lack and the loss. The Criminal Court is the (big) Other that is able or not able to maintain national reconciliation. How could the Thai Court ensure to the public that the Court's official decision will really bring justice? In other words, how could the Thai Court make sure that its official decision would be agreed upon by every party at stake in the conflict? Can the Thai Court as the (big) Other respond equally well to the public's expectation? Can the Court fulfil this object of desire to the public without lack and loss? Is it possible that the (big) Other that is able to grant a fulfilment of national reconciliation as the object of desire is

veritable for the Thai public? Is it possible to neglect Lacan that the (big) Other still exists rather than does not exist? The Court's verdict is predictable in either optimistic or pessimistic results in which the Thai public has still been waiting for that crucial answer that will definitely be one of the endogenous factors that determines the future of national reconciliation of the subsequent events of the future episode of Thai politics.

## Conclusion

The article maintains that there are four possible points to take into considerations. Firstly, the article employs Lacan's **the Real** to argue that the Real that is needed to encounter is a collective trauma that had been disrupted on the Yellow-Shirts and the Red-Shirts protestors. It is a worthy of note that the Thai governments whatsoever they came to power by means of elections, by means of appointments, and by means of coup d'état have shared a common practice in exercising violence to manage conflicts. In order to grasp a collective trauma, it is with my humble opinion to request Yellow-Shirts and Red-Shirts protestors to withdraw from the ideological confinements and begin to consensual on the reality of collective deaths, damages, and losses. In other words, it is in need for them not to shun away the Real, but courageous to encounter the Real.

Secondly, the article employs Lacan's concern over a problem of **signifier** as the signifier of the lack and the loss to argue that a commemoration over the dead people must not be based on insularity, localism, and parochialism. Commemoration based on the shirt-colour division is a parochial commemoration. Ideally, a proper commemoration should be a commemoration with the two days combined; October 7, 2008 and May 20, 2010. And only in this way that the signifier of a collective trauma is hopefully completed, and to resist a bit to Lacan's theory of signifier as the signifier of the lack and loss.

Thirdly, the article employs Lacan's theory of **fantasy** as a disguise of the Real to argue that the royal political involvement would restore a temporarily peace to the Thai society. If there were to be a royal political intervention to assist the Red-Shirts protestors according to the Red-Shirts' leader demand, it would simply be a temporarily suspension of conflict and would look as if everything gets back to a normal condition. A fantasy of royal intervention would temporarily conceal the Real antagonism between the two shirt-colours and would temporarily hide the Real conflict between the Red-Shirts and the Yellow-Shirts. It would not bring a critical recognition on the use of violence against people by whatsoever types of government that came to power.

Fourthly, the article employs Lacan's theory of **the object of desire** as the subject's object of desire that relates to the desire of the

Other to argue that a national reconciliation is the Thai's object of desire, yet still in need of the Court's verdict as the (big) Other to fulfil that object of desire. The Court is enacted its role in Lacanian theory as the big (Other). But whether the Thai Court would be able to fulfil the Thai's object of desire, a national reconciliation, is yet unpredictable. The Court may or may not able to handle a national reconciliation so as to fulfil the Thai's object of desire. If the Court would capable of doing so, it could be said that the (big) Other does exist to guarantee the subject's object of desire; and this somehow informs the theoretical limitation detected in Lacan's teaching.

It can be suggested as part of the future research on the same topic that the Lacanian psychoanalysis is helpful in being critical on the

Yellow-Shirts and the Red-Shirts in a sense that the political movements of the two sides have not addressed problems of capitalism, which can also be taken as the Lacanian Real as a social disruption. It can also be suggested for the researchers that the psychoanalysis of Lacan is applicable to understand Thai politics via opening an intellectual dialogue between Lacan's psychoanalytic concepts with other notions prevailed in the contemporary philosophy such as Judith Butler's 'the grievable' and 'the ungrieveable' form-of-life, with Jacques Derrida's 'mourning that is impossible to mourn', including with Giorgio Agamben's 'bare life'. There are a numerous aspects arisen out of the crackdowns in Thailand awaited to be discussed and critically debated, certainly in an innovative and a constructive engagement.

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