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ALIENATION, DISCRIMINATION, AND SECURITIZATION: LEGAL PERSONHOOD AND CULTURAL PERSONHOOD OF MUSLIMS IN MYANMAR

By Nyi Nyi Kyaw

Since 2010 Myanmar has undergone a series of significant political and social reforms initiated by the U Thein Sein administration. Largely unexpected under the shadow of the notoriously repressive rule of the preceding government, the reforms quickly garnered praise from the international community. However, commentators and activists inside and outside of Myanmar also raised questions about the genuineness of the reforms. Of course, a challenging transition was to be expected, based on the experiences of other countries that have undertaken similar transitions from autocracy to democracy.

Myanmar has indeed faced a series of conflicts—especially conflicts that have pitted Buddhists against Muslims. Those conflicts, which are widely characterized within Myanmar as sectarian or intercommunal, were in fact clearly anti-Muslim. The country has seen a surge of anti-Muslim hate messages or demonization of Muslims. It is worth noting that incidents of anti-Muslim violence have not occurred since July 2014, when Mandalay was rocked by a

disturbance that resulted in the death of a Buddhist man and a Muslim man and damage to Muslim properties, including a cemetery. However, the impact of the violence is still felt by Muslims in Myanmar. During and after the violent episodes, many Myanmar Buddhists raised issues of *naing-ngan-tha* (citizenship) and *taing-yin-tha* (indigenous or national identity) and questioned whether Muslims truly belong in Myanmar culture.

The Rohingya are the only group whose citizenship in Myanmar is still unresolved and contested by the Myanmar government and people. Their ethnonym “Rohingya” itself has not been accepted either. However, a large number of other non-Rohingya Muslims who are citizens also face increasing questions of

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belonging. All of these questions, which are often raised in an emotive way, are about Muslim identity in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar. Such trends represent a serious threat to the equality of all citizens regardless of race, origin, religion, sex, etc., as enshrined by all three of the constitutions that Myanmar has adopted since independence.

In this article, I first describe the Myanmar Muslim mosaic, critiquing the conventional categorization of Muslims and highlighting the complexity behind such categorization. Second, I look at the texts that seemingly ensconce legal egalitarianism in the three constitutions of Myanmar, and then I discuss how the 1982 Citizenship Law has nonetheless effectively undermined legal equality of all citizens. Third, I survey and analyze the two cultural concepts of *kala* and *eh-the*, which have tended to exclude and alienate Muslims. Fourth, I trace the emergence of the perceived Muslim threat. Fifth and finally, I offer some concluding reflections.

Who are Muslims in Myanmar?

Social surveys have never been conducted in Myanmar to assess demographics and socio-economics of its Muslim community. Even Yegar's (1972) authoritative study of the story of Myanmar's Muslims was not based upon surveys or similar research. The government has delayed the release of the 2014 census data on religious demography, most likely because of the extreme sensitivity of the Muslim issue. Therefore, the religious demographic data provided in the previous census, conducted in 1983, remain the only available data on Muslims of Myanmar. The census found out that 3.9 percent of the total population in 1983 was Muslim, 3.8 percent being Sunni Muslims and the rest Shiites (Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs 1986). Relying on this data, successive Myanmar governments and the international community have estimated that Muslims constitute around 4 percent of the total population.

According to the 2014 census, the population of Myanmar stood at 51,486,253 (Ministry of Immigration and Population 2015). If we assume that the 4 percent figure remains unchanged, Myanmar now has at least two million Muslims.

Matthews (1995) notes that some Muslim leaders claim that the Myanmar Muslim population is largely underestimated and may even be as high as 13 percent. In a country such as Myanmar, where religious demography is a highly sensitive issue, it is not wrong to suspect that the government's figure is an underestimation. But even if we accept the government figure, a two-million-strong community is not insignificant. Rohingyas constitute around half of the total Muslim population in Myanmar. Apart from Rakhine State, there are large Muslim communities across Myanmar, especially in cities like Yangon, Mandalay, and Mawlamyine.

Myanmar's Muslims have been conventionally divided into various ethnic groups. However, this division is based upon the now outmoded colonial-era method of ethnic and racial classification, which was also derived from the census-making methods employed in British India. This categorization system is now largely irrelevant because Myanmar Muslims are now taken as a more or less homogeneous group by the Myanmar Buddhist majority and government.

Myanmar's Muslims are traditionally grouped into Indian or South Asian Muslims of various sorts such as Tamil-speaking Cholia Muslims, Urdu-speaking Soorthis and Memons, Bengali-speaking Bengalis; Bamar Muslims who have converted to Islam and are found in middle Myanmar; mixed-blooded Muslims or Zerbadees who are usually the children of Indian/South Asian Muslim fathers and Bamar Buddhist women and are mainly found in middle Myanmar; the Panthay or Yunnanese Chinese Muslims usually found in Mandalay and Shan State; the Pashu or Malay Muslims concentrated in Southern Myanmar; the Rohingya in Northern Rakhine State; and the Kaman who also live in Rakhine State (Khin Maung Yin 2005; Lambrecht 2006; Yegar 1972, 1982). On the face of it, this categorization seems to possess anthropological merits, but so-called anthropological knowledge based on ethnography mainly conducted by British colonialists has been questioned and critiqued by post-colonial scholars. Moreover, the method, which is drawn from the censuses taken in colonial Burma, is based not upon noticeable racial characteristics

among those groups but upon language, again at the behest of British census makers/takers.

Various authors have criticized the continued use of this outmoded method by the Myanmar government (Steinberg 2006; Taylor 2015; Turner 2014). Moreover, most of those Muslims of Myanmar now speak Burmese as their mother tongue so the colonial-era method does not seem a reasonable one in classifying them.

Because there is a sheer dearth of contemporary anthropological research on the Myanmar Muslim community—and its identity is contested mainly in legal terms and in cultural notions as well—it makes more sense today to distinguish Myanmar Muslims into three groups: government-recognized *taing-yin-tha* Muslims (now the 50,000–100,000 strong Kaman alone); non-*taing-yin-tha* groups who are accepted as citizens (Indian/South Asian Muslims, Panthay, Pashu, Zerbadees, Myedu, etc., whose respective numbers are not known); and problematic groups whose legal belonging to Myanmar is not wholly accepted by the government (the Rohingya, who are estimated to number one million). Indeed, there are many gray areas between those racial boundaries; colonial censuses categorized peoples solely based upon language as stated above. Many Muslims in Myanmar now may be said to have mixed ancestry and they may not find it easy to trace their origins further than their grandparents. And those ethnic terms that were used or accepted such as Panthay, Pashu, and Myedu are no longer in the government's list of 135 groups (Hla Min 2013; Myan Pyi Tha 1990), whose continued relevance and veracity has been questioned by many scholars (Steinberg 2006; Taylor 2015). Actually, the strongest support that may be given to this critique of the “135 groups” list is that the 2014 census reportedly found out that there are 917 ethnic or racial groups, although the new list is to be further scrutinized, certified, and announced (Paing Soe 2015). Likewise, those Indian/South Asian terms such as Chulia Muslims, Soorthis, and Memons are no longer found in official publications. To repeat, those groupings were primarily the creation of British census makers. In other words, Muslims of Myanmar are a diverse community first “imagined” (Anderson 1991) by the British and

then edited, re-imagined, and accepted as such by the military governments of Myanmar.

The Ministry of Immigration and Population (MIP) classifies most Muslims as one of the three mixed-blooded groups such as half-, one-third-, one-fourth-, etc., -Indians, -Pakistanis, or -Bengali/Bangladeshis, implying that most, if not all, of them have South Asian ancestry or origin. Interesting racial combinations and/or permutations have been created by MIP in issuing citizenship scrutiny cards (CSC or national ID) to Muslims. For example, a CSC held by a Muslim in Mandalay has *Indian-Pakistani-Bamar* although India and Pakistan denoted the same geographical entity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Myanmar received migrants from then British India. Likewise, another Muslim who was born in the Ayeyarwady Delta has *Indian-Bengali-Bamar* on his CSC. One extreme example is found in a CSC held by a Muslim lady in Mandalay. Her Muslim father was assumed by the MIP official to have Indian-Bamar mixed ancestry. Her mother was born to an Indian father and a Kayin mother. Therefore, that Muslim lady ended with a CSC with *Indian+Bamar-Indian+Bamar-Kayin*. According to her CSC, she is assumed to descend from a mixture of Indian, Bamar, and Kayin but she has five races/ethnicities on the card. If this official practice continues, one wonders how the CSCs of her children will look like when that Muslim lady marries a man with a totally different racial make-up. For example, if she ends up marrying a man of a racial mix such as *Kachin-Chin-Mon*, her children will have *Indian+Bamar-Indian+Bamar-Kayin-Kachin-Chin-Mon*!

A senior Muslim politician in Mandalay has “Bamar” as the race/ethnicity on her CSC issued in 2012 because she could prove her Bamar blood and it was accepted as such by the preceding MIP official. Actually, having *Bamar* as the race/ethnicity on CSCs issued to Muslims was a common practice in the late 1980s and 1990s in Upper Myanmar because many of the Muslims there are believed and accepted to have exclusively or predominantly Bamar blood. However, the same Mandalay-based politician was told by the present MIP official that no Muslims had been given CSCs with *Bamar* alone

as the race/ethnicity since 2007 and all Muslims in Upper Myanmar now have Indian or Pakistani or Bengali/Bengladeshi as a prefix to their racial/ethnic identity or a combined/permutated form as in the examples stated above. The same pattern of Indianization, Pakistanization or Bengalization in CSCs has been reported by many Muslims in various places of Myanmar. Indeed, the adamant demands made by the Myanmar government in recent years that the Rohingya must be called Bengalis and registered as such can also be seen as an extreme example of the pattern.

Besides these present official racial categorizations of Muslims, it is also highly problematic that the MIP distinguishes *taing-yin-tha* (descendants of 135 groups) from *thwe-hnaw* (mixed blood). The term *thwe-hnaw* has racist connotations; in Burmese *hnaw* conveys not just mixed but also impure or adulterated. Despite the claims by MIP officials that being *taing-yin-tha* or *thwe-hnaw* is not related to one's religious affiliation, in practice it seems to be the case. The popular perception of a strong correlation between religion (read Buddhism) and citizenship—that is, to be Burmese/Myanmar is to be Buddhist—which seems to be in agreement with MIP's position has also been found out by survey research projects taken in recent years (Asian Barometer Survey 2015; Lall et al. 2014).

Sai Latt (2013) notes a few interesting cases of Muslim descendants of *taing-yin-tha* parents whose citizenship applications were delayed or pending and required special visits to the MIP offices—unlike their Buddhist counterparts. The citizenship application of a Muslim girl born to a Danu (*taing-yin-tha*) father and a Shan (*taing-yin-tha*) mother was delayed. When she visited the respective MIP office to enquire about the matter, she was told by the official that she is *thwe-hnaw* because she is Muslim. In another case a female Muslim university student born to a Danu father and an Inntha (*taing-yin-tha*) mother has a CSC that lists her ethnicity as *Indian-Bamar-Danu-Inntha*. Although she is not ethnically or racially Indian at all, she was Indianized by the state due to her religion. Her Inntha mother also had to become a “Bengali” when she applied for her CSC in 1989 (the year when the State Law and Order Restoration Council started issuing the

cards) again solely because she is Muslim. When another Muslim woman born and raised in Mandalay visited the MIP office to update her CSC, an official told her that she looked *thwe-hnaw* and is not *Bamar* at all. She was also told that her updated CSC would not have *Bamar* alone and would include a racial/ethnic prefix. To avoid these sorts of hassles with the MIP, Muslims often claim to be Buddhists in order to get their CSCs. Due to the discriminatory policy of the MIP, Muslims, with the exception of the Kaman, are effectively alienated. Even one-third of the *taing-yin-tha* Kaman population did not have their CSCs yet as of September 2014 (Su Min Ko 2014). According to official thinking in Myanmar, Kaman Muslims alone are *taing-yin-thas* whereas the rest are *thwe-hnaw*.

Further evidence of the discrimination against those citizens who are *thwe-hnaw* in their citizenship applications is that MIP has left them out in its nationwide project, known as *Moe Pwint*, to issue CSCs launched from July 1, 2011. Although *taing-yin-thas* have enjoyed one-stop citizenship application services provided by MIP, *thwe-hnaw* citizens are still required to visit the township MIP office and wait for an unspecified period of time to get their CSCs, according to an official statement issued by MIP (*Myanma Ahlin Daily* January 3, 2015, p.7).

Constitutional Equality Yet Legal Inequality

Despite these contentious notions of *naing-ngan-tha*, *taing-yin-tha*, and *thwe-hnaw*, there are various provisions for equality of all citizens irrespective of race or religion or class—that is, irrespective of being *taing-yin-tha* or *thwe-hnaw*—in the 1947, 1974, and 2008 constitutions. Although the 2008 constitution is now in force, this section will draw from all three to highlight how egalitarianism of all citizens has been constitutionally enshrined throughout the history of independent Myanmar since 1948. The following sections of Myanmar's respective constitutions clearly provide for formal equality of all citizens:

All citizens irrespective of birth, religion, sex, or race are equal before the law; that is,

to say there shall not be any arbitrary discrimination between one citizen or class of citizens and another. (Section 20 of Constitution of the Union of Burma, 1947)

All citizens are equal before the law irrespective of race, status, official position, wealth, culture, birth, religion or sex. (Section 147 of Constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma, 1974)

The Union shall guarantee any person to enjoy equal rights before the law and shall equally provide legal protection. (Section 347 of Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2008)

More importantly, the present constitution has a provision in its Section 348 for non-discrimination of citizens based upon religious affiliation:

The Union shall not discriminate any citizen of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, based on race, birth, religion, official position, status, culture, sex and wealth.

However, even though formal constitutional egalitarianism has a long history in Myanmar, actual equality was severely undermined by statute in 1982. Despite the provision for legal equality of all citizens in Section 147 of the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma, which was then in operation, in the late 1970s the socialist Ne Win government started a nationwide project to draft a new citizenship law by claiming that the previous citizenship laws—the Union Citizenship Act (1948) and Union Citizenship (Election) Act (1948)—were no longer suitable for the country.

Before looking at the 1982 Citizenship Law and its discriminatory provisions, let us first look at prior citizenship concepts and categories. One of the most important decisions nationalist leaders had to make at the dawn of independence was how to conceptualize citizenship in Burma,

which had received significant alien populations such as Chinese and Indians throughout the colonial rule.

Hence, Section 11 of the Constitution of the Union of Burma categorized four classes of people for Burmese citizenship: persons born of parents of any indigenous races (Sub-Section i); persons born in Burma who had at least one grandparent of any indigenous races (Sub-Section ii); persons born of parents who were citizens at independence (Sub-Section iii); and persons born in British territories (including Burma) who had lived in Burma for at least 8 of the 10 years before independence in 1948 or before January 1, 1942, and intended to live in Burma permanently (Sub-Section iv). The Union Citizenship (Election) Act was enacted in 1948 for the fourth category in order for them to elect Burmese citizenship.

The main Union Citizenship Act was also promulgated in 1948 to provide further details. Besides the four classes, the act also provided that a person born in Burma, whose parents were born in Burma too and whose grandparents had made Burma their permanent home, would be a Burmese citizen (Section 4.2). It is very noteworthy here that according to this provision alone, all the people in Myanmar, nowadays, of any ancestry would have become citizens.

Since indigenous races or *taing-yin-tha* is an important concept, which was stated but not defined in the Constitution of the Union of Burma, Section 3.1 of the act defines indigenous races as those who have resided in Burma anterior to 1823 or before British colonization. There are two significant aspects to this definition. One is that as long as a group of people may trace their residence in Burma before 1823, they may claim to be *taing-yin-tha*. The other is that being *taing-yin-tha* is group-based and hence it is not individually determined. If an individual person does not fall into an ethnic group recognized as *taing-yin-tha* by the government, regardless of the fact that that particular person may with evidence trace and provide residence in Burma anterior to 1823, the person will not be accepted as *taing-yin-tha*. However, section 13 of the Union Citizenship Act asserts, “there shall not be any arbitrary discrimination between one citizen or class of citizens and another.” It is very important

because all classes of citizens would be treated as equal without discrimination whichever category or class of people they fall into.

This notion of equality between all classes of citizens was completely dispelled by the new Myanmar Citizenship Law that was promulgated in 1982. Although the previous citizenship legislation did not state how being *taing-yin-tha* of a group would be determined and recognized, the new law gives discretionary powers to the state to determine whether a group is indigenous or not (Section 4).

Unlike the Constitution of the Union of Burma and the Union Citizenship Act which only stated eligible classes of people for citizenship, the new law created four classes of citizens with different rights and different ways of acquiring citizenship:

- *mwe-ya-pa naing-ngan-tha* (literally meaning “born citizen”) or citizenship by birth accorded to descendants of *taing-yin-tha*;
- *eb-naing-ngan-tha* (literally meaning “guest citizen”) or associated citizenship given to those non-*taing-yin-tha* people who applied for citizenship under the Union Citizenship Act;
- *naing-ngan-tha pyu-kwin-ya-thu* (literally meaning “one who is allowed to be naturalized”) or naturalized citizenship given to those non-*taing-yin-tha* people who had been in the country anterior to 1948 but could prove that they had failed to apply for citizenship under the Union Citizenship Act; and
- *naing-ngan-tha* or citizenship given to those who had already been citizens in 1982; those born of parents both of whom are citizens; those born of parents one of whom is a citizen and the other an associate citizen or a naturalized citizen; those born of parents one of whom is a citizen or an associate citizen or a naturalized citizen and the other born of both parents who are associate citizens; those born of parents one of whom is a citizen or an associate citizen or a naturalized citizen and the other born of both parents who are naturalized

citizens; and those born of parents one of whom is a citizen or an associate citizen or a naturalized citizen and the other born of parents one of whom is an associate citizen and the other a naturalized citizen.

The first class of citizenship may never be revoked except in the cases of an acquisition of a foreign citizenship or leaving Myanmar on a permanent basis (Section 16 and 17). But there is great concern about the discretionary powers given to the state to revoke citizenship of the other three classes (Section 8b). People belonging to all the three classes of non-*taing-yin-tha* citizens are in permanent legal limbo because their citizenship may still in theory be revoked by the state, in stark contrast to the claimed ultimate aim of the drafters of the 1982 law to eventually give full citizenship to all peoples of non-*taing-yin-tha* ancestry after waiting for three generations. The other extreme restriction of the law is the stipulation that once citizenship of the three classes has ceased or been revoked, they may never re-apply for their respective citizenship (Section 22). The section also applies to *taing-yin-tha* citizens but it is only concerned with those among them who permanently leave Myanmar or become a citizen of another country.

Competing Cultural Concepts Which Alienate Muslims

Besides MIP’s use of *thwe-hmaw* and four legal classes in determining citizenship of Muslims, two more concepts have had widespread influence in Myanmar in recent years: the idea of Muslims as “*kalas*” and “guests.”

Kala is a term that has been in common use since the times of Burmese kings of the Bagan dynasty (Luce 1959). In those days, it was used to refer to others who are supposed to have entered the kingdom from the West and did not carry any negative connotations. Muslims and other non-indigenous peoples in the kingdom were officially called *kalas* on many occasions. It was in colonial times that *kala* became derogatory or was perceived to be so by Indians and Muslims (Egretau 2011; Ikeya 2011). Colonial Indophobia held by Burmese, which later transformed to Islamophobia (Egretau 2011),

was a major cause behind the transformation of *kala* into a pejorative term.

The Burmese in the colonial era also referred to British and other Europeans as *kala-pyu* (white *kalas*), though this usage is no longer common. Likewise, *kala* was used then to refer to all South Asians, whether they are Hindus or Muslims. Common scholarly consensus is that *kala* used in colonial Burma was derogatory in terms of race, class, and culture (Ikeya 2011). *Kala* often meant dark-skinned and it connoted prejudice based upon skin color (Harvey 1946). This racial or geographic meaning of *kala* referring either to Europeans or South Asians in colonial Burma seems to have carried a more religious connotation. *Kala* is now commonly understood to be reserved for Muslims although it is still often used in referring to non-Muslim Indians. Even the Panthay who are racially Chinese are often called *kalas* because they are Muslim. Actually people of Myanmar even use *kala* to refer to Muslims from other parts of the world. For example, Malay Muslims in Singapore and Lebanese Muslims in Australia are called *kalas*. Therefore, it is not incorrect to say that *kala* mainly refers to Muslims now and it carries a derogatory meaning. My field interviews with Buddhists in Myanmar also support the fact that *kala* is derogatory and they try not to use it in public especially in the presence of Muslims.

Whatever the nuances of *kala*, almost all Muslims in Myanmar find the term derogatory, which is strongly supported by my field interviews with some 30 Muslim leaders and activists in May, June, and July 2013. All of the interviewees in unison claim that they dislike being called *kala* mainly because it denotes alienation, and being designated as aliens implies mistrust of Muslims' loyalty to Myanmar. During the colonial era, Burmese Buddhists used the term to express their resentment toward outside forces that supplanted their social position. Feeling dominated by the power of the British at the top and by the number of Indian migrants in the middle and lower levels, the majority Burmese Buddhist community in colonial Burma

found themselves at the bottom of the ladder (Chakravarti 1971; U Kyaw Nyein 1958; Taylor 1974). Moreover, because Burma was ruled as a province of India until 1937, Indian migration to Burmese territory was considered a domestic movement of people even though Burmese and Indians regarded each other as different peoples. Animated by a desire to leave the British-owned Indian Empire, Burmese nationalist language of the early 20th century was loaded with anti-*kala* sentiments and expressions (Chakravarti 1971; Ikeya 2011; Mazumder 2013; Siegelman 1962). Later, anti-*kala* language was used in reference to the *Mujahid* Rohingya rebels who terrorized northern Rakhine in the 1950s. They were labeled *kala-so* (evil *kala*) in government publications. Today, *kala* in that context remains a highly pejorative term in part because of this association with evil.

Kala is still used in many public settings despite its negative connotations. In June 2012 state-run newspapers (the *Myanma Ablin Daily*, the *Mirror*, and the *Myawady Daily*—all in Burmese), used the term in a report on the killing of 10 Muslims in Taungup by a vigilante Rakhine Buddhist mob. The papers all used the phrase “Muslim *kala*”, whereas the *New Light of Myanmar* (in English) only used “Muslim.” A number of politicians and activists criticized the government for using such inflammatory language (Aung Thet Wine 2012). Consequently, the papers issued a correction without an apology, replacing *Muslim kala* with the bland description *pyi-twin-ne Muslims* (literally meaning Muslims who live in the country). The mistake, which should not have been made in the first place, reflects the anti-Muslim sentiment within official circles of Myanmar.

In addition to *kala* rhetoric, a more subtle prejudice against, or at least condescension toward, Muslims has emerged in recent years: the notion of Muslims as “ungrateful guests,” in contrast to Buddhists as generous hosts. During and after the series of violent sectarian conflicts in Rakhine State and elsewhere in 2012–2014, the language of Buddhist hosts (*ein-shin*) and Muslim

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guests (*eb-the*) became widespread. Burmese social media, mainly Facebook, during those three conflictual years frequently saw Rohingyas figuratively described as ungrateful guests who try to bite the hand that feeds them. That hand is understood to be Rakhine Buddhists who are regarded as the original owners of the land, that is, Rakhine State, whereas Rohingyas are illegal or, at best, “guests.” The description did not stop with the Rohingya; it has started to be widely used to refer to all Muslims in Myanmar.

Although seemingly mild, “guests” rhetoric can perform two main functions. First it reminds both Buddhists and Muslims that they are in a relational social milieu in which the former is the benefactor and the latter the debtor. The second is that Muslims in those cities and towns which saw violence in 2012 and 2013 are thought of as having acted ungratefully toward Buddhists. This puts Buddhists on alert for the “Muslim problem.” In short, although the “guests” terminology is not overtly derogatory like the “kala” rhetoric, it is contributing to the current social climate in which increasingly all Muslims, not just the Rohingya, are having their cultural personhood defined as “alien.”

The Securitization of Muslims

I have argued that Muslims in Myanmar have been alienated and their cultural personhood downgraded despite constitutionally provided legal equality of all citizens. However, there is yet another discourse that has affected Muslim identity: securitization. Muslims are increasingly perceived not just as foreign but as a security threat.

The 969 campaign, which is believed to be at the helm of the anti-Muslim Buddhist nationalist movement, and Ashin Wirathu, its de facto leader, have gained celebrity status in the media. The campaign, with its colorful and ubiquitous 969 emblem, was officially launched in Mawlamyine in October 2012 by an association of five young Buddhist monks, known as *Thathana Pālaka Gaṇavācaka Sangha Apwè* (Defenders of Sāsana and Religious Teachers Network). The 969 does not have an organizational structure and it is better to be characterized as an ideological movement. It promotes a nationwide “buy Buddhist” campaign.

The movement has been largely incorporated into *Ma-Ba-Tha* (Organization for Protection of Race and Religion). *Ma-Ba-Tha* was established in Yangon in June 2013 and its Upper Myanmar chapter in Mandalay in January 2014. The majority of the central committee members of both *Ma-Ba-Tha* (headquarters) and *Ma-Ba-Tha* (Upper Myanmar) are senior and learned Buddhist monks, although a few lay Buddhists also sit on the committees so as to evade the ban on forming monastic bodies apart from nine state-recognized sects (Nyi Nyi Kyaw, forthcoming).

The combined 969 and *Ma-Ba-Tha* campaign is often portrayed as an anti-Muslim hate movement in the international media. While a direct connection between hatred and violence is not always possible to prove, their hate messages are believed to have played at least an indirect role in all recent anti-Muslim violent episodes (Nyi Nyi Kyaw 2015; forthcoming). Indeed, the rhetoric of the militant campaigners—both monks and lay Buddhists—has created a narrative construction of the Muslim threat (Nyi Nyi Kyaw 2015; forthcoming) and of a nationwide Buddhist siege mentality (Kyaw San Wai 2014) or an exclusive Buddhist identity (Walton and Hayward 2014).

To understand these trends it is helpful to draw upon the theory of securitization developed by the Copenhagen School (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998). “Fear speech” (Buyse 2014), which stems from “deep securitization” (Abulof 2014) of Muslims as an existential threat to Buddhists and Buddhism in Myanmar, has led to the call by 969 and *Ma-Ba-Tha* for use of extreme measures against everything Muslim. Muslims, the Rohingya in particular, are believed to be polygamous, to marry Buddhist women and convert them to Islam, and to have bigger family sizes than do Buddhists. In the market, Muslims are also alleged to only transact with Muslims or buy from Muslim-owned shops, which makes Muslims become better-off and more able to lure Buddhist women of lower socio-economic backgrounds. It is also alleged that those Buddhist women who marry Muslim men will be converted to Islam and raise their children as Muslims. All of these narratives promoted by Buddhist nationalist monks portray an imminent

apocalyptic future in which the size of the Myanmar Muslim community surpasses the Buddhist counterpart, and the latter loses its political and social power. Schissler, Walton, and Thi's (2015) field research with non-elite Buddhists in six cities in Myanmar also found that this *Ma-Ba-Tha* 969 ideology is widely shared by lay Buddhists who even contended that any measures taken to deal with the Muslim threat is virtuous defense.

In order for Buddhists to check this Muslim conspiratorial plot to Islamize Myanmar, the 969 and *Ma-Ba-Tha* campaign have proposed two main solutions: to buy Buddhist, and to push for four special race and religion bills concerned with polygamy, Myanmar Buddhist women's interfaith marriage, population growth, and religious conversion, all of which have become law as of late August 2015. The nationalists have bombarded the country with their message through sermons by Buddhist monks, talks by laypeople, photo shows, weekly and bi-weekly journals, pamphlets, statements, pictures, songs, conferences, stories, books, movies, and social media. This deep securitization, which strikes at the heart of Buddhist existence, has again led to further deterioration of Myanmar Muslims' cultural status. Muslims are increasingly seen not only as ungrateful alien guests but also as a menace to the survival of Buddhism and Buddhists.

Conclusion

I have argued that Muslims of Myanmar often face social, political, and cultural demonization—even though not all of them are Rohingya, and even though all are guaranteed equality by the constitution. The Rohingya of course fare worst among Muslims because their citizenship has not yet been recognized. But non-Rohingya Muslims, even the ethnic Kaman, have also faced the increasing tide of social and political alienation and discrimination (Nyi Nyi Kyaw 2015). To better understand the reasons for this anti-Muslim sentiment we have examined a number of important Burmese concepts, including *taing-yin-tha*, *mwe-ya-pa naing-ngan-tha*, *naing-ngan-tha*, *eh-naing-ngan-tha*, *naing-ngan-tha pyu-kwin-ya-thu*, *kala*, *ein-shin*, and *eh-the*.

More worryingly, we have seen that Muslims are perceived not just as foreign but as a security threat. The securitization of Islam has affected the Muslims of Myanmar much more severely than the above-mentioned concepts, because the threat designation naturally calls for extreme measures against them. Such responses have clearly been seen in the last three years in the actions and rhetoric of 969/*Ma-Ba-Tha* and their supporters. It will only be possible for Muslims to regain their constitutionally guaranteed equality when both the discriminatory discourses and securitizing agendas are tackled head-on. ❖

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