



BETWEEN COURAGE AND (IN)TOLERANCE

Research of the anti-Muslim discourse in Yangon,
Myanmar, within a time of political transition

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Picture on cover page: logo of 969 movement taken by author.

The test of courage comes when we are in the minority.
The test of tolerance comes when we are in the majority.
~ Ralph W. Stockman

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1. Introduction

On an international level the transitioning of Myanmar or Burma as the country was called until 1989, is widely known. The previous military government gave way to a democratically elected government in 2010. Within and even before this process of democratic transition, parliamentarian Aung San Suu Kyi has become an international and national symbol of peaceful resistance in the face of oppression. As the daughter of Myanmar's independence hero, General Aung San, she was the designated person to lead the revolt against the military junta and its dictator. She has been fighting for democracy and human rights since 1988 and she won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. Her reputation and opposition party being elected in parliament makes this democratization look like a legitimate one.

After years of military rule in Myanmar, the first elections were held in 2010. Victory was claimed by the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the military-backed party. Aung San Suu Kyi's party, National League for Democracy (NLD), was prohibited from participating in these elections, but eventually joined the by-elections in 2012. The by-elections were held to fill 45 vacant seats in parliament. The NLD won 40 out of these 45 (BBC, 2012). Somewhat later Aung San Suu Kyi took the oath in parliament and became the formal leader of the opposition.

Too often, when discussing contemporary Myanmar, does focus shift to developments like these, crowding out everything else. Unlike these recent positive developments in political space, other factors lack international attention although they are worsening. One of the destructive happenings in Myanmar is the marginalization of minorities. Some are ethnic minorities, such as Kachin, Karen and Rohingyas that have lived in Myanmar for years, but not in peace. I decided to focus on a minority that is marginalized not because of ethnic reasons, but because of religious reasons: the Muslims. Myanmar is a country where Buddhism is thriving. The estimation is, that 89% of the population is Buddhist. Hate speech aimed at Muslims is spread throughout the country. The theme of these hate speeches reflects on the view that Islam is threatening to overrun Myanmar, and that Buddhists should save their way of life. Discrimination is one of the results of the hate speeches. It seems like nothing is done about this hate speech, nor about discrimination. Even Aung San Suu Kyi, the face of defending human rights, is not outspoken about this issue. Slowly, research starts to focus on the oppressed Rohingya Muslims living in Rakhine State. Research on discrimination of Muslims in the rest of Myanmar did not commence yet. Therefore, it is significant to study whether discrimination is experienced in this ruling anti-Muslim discourse.

To study the experiences of discriminatory practices, practices that deny social participation, I focus on stigmatization. The concept of stigmatization integrates the whole process of the perceiving of differences, labeling, stereotyping and discrimination. Even if discrimination is not perceived, it is possible that other phases of social stigma do exist in Myanmar. The following research question arose: *How do certain Muslims experience social stigma in Yangon, Myanmar in 2014, a time of democratizing political space?* The data

presented in this paper gives voice to several Muslim people who live in Yangon regarding their experiences on social stigma and offers a comparison with the opinions of a few Buddhist people. These experiences are described within a context of political transformation.

In the following paragraphs I will provide a framework of historic-political context, theory and methodology.

1.1 HISTORICAL-POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Myanmar is located in South-East Asia between Bangladesh and Thailand (Map in Appendix I). It is formerly known as Burma, but the country's name changed in 1989 because the military regime changed all the place names chosen by the English colonial administration into a spelling that is closer to Burmese language. Myanmar is a country where multiple ethnicities and religions are represented. The numbers of population and percentages of occupation of religions are an estimation, because the last census was held in 1983. In March and April 2014 a new census was held, but the results are not made public yet. The estimation is that 89% of a total population of 53.5 million is Buddhist, Muslims and Christians both contain 4% of the population and only 1% is Hindu (World population review 2014). The country has seen multiple political systems. From multiple dynasties it changed into one kingdom, it was occupied by the British during colonial times, followed by independence including a democratic system, but a coup changed it into a military dictatorship, which ended in 2011 when the country adopted a democratic system again. I will elaborate upon these political changes in the following subsection.

Myanmar's history is dominated by political violence, tensions between and within ethnic and religious groups, social unrest and ethnic and religious discrimination and persecution. Great Britain annexed the country in 1886, when it wasn't and never had been a unified nation state because of its multiple nationalities. The British administration contributed to contemporary Myanmar in multiple ways. They established the contemporary borders and the demarcating and administrative structures (Taylor, 2007). The British administration was three-layered. At the top were British expatriates, at the intermediate level were specialized professionals consisting mostly of Indians and the lowest level contained a combination of indigenous, Chinese and Indian personnel (Mutebi, 2005). Already did Myanmar contain a mixture of ethnicities in that time. In the 1930s, the Indians became targets of a growing nationalist movement. A popular song from that time says that Indians were exploiting the economic resources in Burma and that they seized Burmese women and that Burma was in danger of racial extinction (International Crisis Report, 2013). Myanmar faced political instability from groups of communist rebellion and other ethnic conflicts in Myanmar.

During World War II occupation of Myanmar changed into the hands of the Japanese. The British administrators had fled to India, so the administration came into the hands of locals under the control of the Japanese. The end of the war brought restoration to the British

authority and also led to the restoration of British and Indian domination of the economic sector (Mutebi, 2005). To re-establish control over post-war Myanmar, the British installed a military government which gave way to the redefinition of certain leaders which was a first step into the future direction of the Myanmar government (Mutebi, 2005). Myanmar achieved independence from the British Empire on the 4th of January 1948 and became a republic. From that time on, the country adopted the parliamentary democracy system (Keling, 2010). This system, which was led by General Aung San, was able to convince minority groups to join the union of Burma. These integrative strategies didn't last long, for Aung San was assassinated and the Communist Party of Burma took over. The relative democratic system under the Communist Party survived until 1962. In this year General Ne Win and his military party took power and a new era of military rule began. The appearance of a military power in Myanmar's politics disrupted the implementation and consolidation of a democracy process (Keling, 2010).

With the new Socialist Program Party of Ne Win, attacks on ethnic minority leaders and pro-democracy activists became a daily reality. It marked a beginning of an endless cycle of war and ethnic insurgency, which has dominated the country ever since. Occasional outbreaks of anti-Indian violence continued. The adverse sentiments that the indigenous people had towards Indians expanded to the Muslim population that sometimes correspond to the Indian population, has the same physical features and is associated with the Indian population. In 1983 serious anti-Muslim riots broke out in Mon State. At the time of the 1988 pro-democracy uprisings, violent communal attacks targeted Muslims in Central Myanmar (International Crisis Report, 2013). The 1988 pro-democracy uprisings is an important milestone in the history of Myanmar, since the military socialist party's policy and politics was so bad that the system proved unstable and led to a major series of pro-democracy protests, marches, demonstrations and riots (Mutebi, 2005). It was started by students, but everybody joined; monks, housewives, children, Buddhists and Muslims. During this uprising Aung San Suu Kyi became the national icon for the pro-democracy movement and human rights. The uprising finally led to the current administration to accept a multi-party system. This was too good to be true, the uprisings ended on 18 September after a bloody military coup by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) (Mutebi, 2005). Not much later, on 27 September, the National League for Democracy (NLD) was founded by Aung San Suu Kyi.

The political landscape since then can be considered as a three-wing conflict between the SLORC/SPDC military government, the pro-democracy movement led by the NLD and the country's diverse ethnic minority groups (Schroeder, 2007). The SLORC had four goals to achieve: to maintain law and order, improve transportation, improve the humanitarian situation and hold multi-party elections. The latter happened in 1990, when the SLORC organized elections, although it did impose restrictions on public gatherings and political figures, like Aung San Suu Kyi, were placed under house arrest. Still, the elections were won with 392 out of a total of 492 seats by the NLD. This step towards democracy was annulled

by the SLORC, that announced two months later that the SLORC had legitimate power to rule for being recognized by the UN and because it would prevent a break-up of the Union.

To solve a part of the violent conflict, the military government made ceasefire offers to several ethnic armed groups, trying to end the conflict without having to agree to a real political solution. These agreements have been a first step in the process of peace building and democratization in Myanmar, since it brought relief to local ethnic communities and it has had positive impacts on human security, human rights and trade (Schroeder, 2007). But in 1997, a large mob with involved Buddhist monks attacked Muslim shops, homes and mosques in Mandalay. The violence spread to other towns across the country. Leaflets circulated, urging Buddhists to boycott Muslim stores and not to marry Muslims (International Crisis Report, 2013).

The military junta held a constitutional referendum in 2008. As part of the referendum process, the name of the country was changed from the 'Union of Myanmar' to the 'Republic of the Union of Myanmar' and general elections were held under the new constitution in 2010 (drafted by the military rulers), after 48 years of direct military rule (BBC, 2013). The NLD boycotted these elections, because most of its prominent members were banned from running the elections. Since then, the country has been governed as a presidential republic with a bicameral legislature, with a minority of legislators appointed by the military and others elected in general elections. The current head of state, inaugurated as President in 2011, is Thein Sein.

Little change was expected, yet one year later, reform was underway. The NLD had triumphed in bye-elections in April 2012, bringing Aung San Suu Kyi into parliament. Peace talks had begun with ethnic-minority insurgents. Peaceful gatherings and trade unions had been legalized (Jones, 2012). Although peace talks are started with several ethnic groups, according to the 2007 report of the UN's Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar on the eastern Thai-Burma border (areas populated by Karen, Karenni, Mon and Shan) and in the north western areas of the country (areas populated by Chin, Rakhine and Rohingya), government-led counter-insurgency operations continued and were characterized by high intensity violence and repression involving the use of excessive force and fire arms, and severe abuses of the human rights of unarmed civilians (Detailed map of Myanmar in Appendix II). The Rohingya Muslim minority in the north of Rakhine State faced deep discrimination and the government refused to recognize them as an official ethnic group (Smith, 2002). The Rohingyas are therefore denied equal citizenship rights. In addition freedom of movement is severely restricted, and they are unable to access medical and educational services, because they cannot travel outside their local areas (Refugee Review Tribunal, 2009). The reasons for Rohingya Muslims being discriminated and not being recognized as Burmese citizens with accompanying rights are multiple. The historical origin of Rohingya Muslims is detested. On the one hand it is claimed that Rohingyas have lived in Myanmar for centuries and that they are descendants of Muslim Arabs, Moors and Bengalis who came to Burma as traders and warriors. The general perception on the other

hand, is that Rohingyas are Bengali Muslims from Bangladesh (Kipgen, 2013). Violence against Rohingyas has always been a matter of the unsettled question on the origin and identity of Rohingya Muslims. Already in 1978 200.000 refugees crossed over the Bangladesh for being persecuted, tortured and harassed by the Burmese Army. The human rights situation of the Muslims has especially deteriorated since Burma's independence. Citizenship restrictions on the Rohingya population in the Bangladesh borders have deepened their exclusion from employment and other opportunities. Recently, violence towards Rohingyas spread again, starting with the rape and murder of a Rakhine woman by Rohingya men. This incident of 2012 was the first of a series of violent attacks on Rohingya Muslims and Muslims throughout the rest of Myanmar.

After this 2012 outbreak of inter-faith violence, anti-Muslim sentiments occurred in other parts of the country. Uprisings and protests fueled the tensions between Buddhists and Muslims. Hate speeches dominate social media. Rumors like examples of rape cases by Muslims or comparisons to animals like pigs and dogs are no exception on Myanmar's facebook pages. These hate speeches originate from a nationalistic movement called the 969-movement. The numbers 969 are peaceful in themselves, referring to attributes of Buddha, his teachings and the monkhood. In practice, this movement provides moral justification for a wave of anti-Muslim violence and discrimination (Marshall, 2013). The leader of the movement called Wira Thu. He is a powerful figure, is known internationally and he is the one that made the 969 movement significant. He was once imprisoned by the military junta for anti-Muslim violence. He returned from jail when all political prisoners were offered amnesty. In his sermons, or hate speeches, Wira Thu urges Buddhists to boycott Muslim shops and interfaith marriages. He calls mosques "enemy bases". He even called himself the Burmese Bin Laden once (Marshall, 2013). These messages are spread in multiple ways, by flyers, newspapers, social media, radio and sermons in monasteries and pagoda's. These factors are all relevant for the contemporary political situation in Myanmar and will contribute a context for the rest of this research.

1.2 RESEARCH SUBJECTS

The unit of analysis is the major entity that is analyzed in this study. In this case, the unit of analysis are individuals belonging to a certain group, being Muslims. Since I study the experiences of a few Muslims there's no possibility to generalize the data obtained from these individuals to all Muslims in Yangon. Buddhists are one of the units of analysis as well, since I study the opinions of Buddhists, although this is a supporting unit of analysis and not the main unit of analysis.

Muslims are a significant group within the entire population of Myanmar. Estimates differ greatly, but most authorities agree that at least four percent of the country's current population are practicing Muslims, which would come down to 2.2 million out of a total population of 55 million (Taylor, 1995). However, some claim percentages between 8 and 15 percent of the population. Myanmar's Muslims can be divided into four distinct communities (Selth, 2003). The longest established Muslim group in Burma has lived there

since the thirteenth century, when they arrived in Burma as traders, court servants, and mercenaries (Selth, 2003). These Muslims often married local Buddhist women and settled down in Burma. These Muslims speak Burmese, dress as Burmese and consider themselves Burmese, they only follow Islam as difference. They are called “Burman Muslims”, which was accepted by the colonial government in 1941 (Selth, 2003). The second group of Muslims is a small Chinese Muslim community in the north-east of Burma that has been there since 1873 when they fled China, after a bloody attack by the Chinese Emperor of that time. The third group arrived in Burma after the United Kingdom annexed Burma in three wars, all between 1824 and 1886 (Selth, 2003). By making Burma a part of British India, it was possible for large numbers of people, laborers, civil servants and merchants from India to migrate to Burma. Before Second World War, when there was a mass exodus to India, more than half of the population of Yangon was Indian (Tinker, 1967). When the military government nationalized the Burmese economy in 1963 and introduced new citizenship laws, several hundreds of thousands South Asians, including Muslims, returned to India and Pakistan. However, quite a community of Muslims remains in contemporary Myanmar (Selth, 2003). The last group is that of the Rohingya. These are Bengali Muslims that live in Rakhine State. Some Muslims perceive themselves as descendants of an independent Rakhine kingdom that existed during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This state was annexed into a unified Burma in the late eighteenth century (Zam Zam, 1998). Most of the Rohingya arrived with the British colonialists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A number of large-scale population movements from Bangladesh to Myanmar, or the other way around, has occurred since the Second World War (Selth, 2003). Since Muslims in Yangon is my particular unit of analysis, I will focus on the first, Burmese Muslims, and third group, colonial immigrants, of Muslims. The second group of Muslims lives in the north-east of Myanmar and the Rohingya in Rakhine State, while Yangon is located in the south.

Buddhism is the main religion in Myanmar. 89 percent of the population is Buddhist, which makes a total of 49 million Buddhists. It has been the most religious Buddhist country in terms of the proportion of monks in the population and proportion of income spent on religion (Cone and Gombrich, 1977). In the same territory of contemporary Myanmar Chinese texts and epigraphic records have been found that date back to the 6th and 7th century and indicate Buddhist religion. From the 11th to 13th centuries, the kings and queens of Pagan (Buddhist) dynasty built countless numbers of stupas and temples that still exist. Buddhism is embedded into the culture of Myanmar. There are many Burmese festivals throughout the year, most of them related to Buddhism, the most important one being Thingyan, or water festival. I focus on Buddhists in Yangon as my second unit of analysis.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this paragraph I will introduce the choices I made regarding theories. The theories that I use in this research, are explained upon in more detail in the chapters following this introduction. I will intertwine the main ideas of these theories into the following chapters to be able to clearly indicate the matches and mismatches between theory and practice in Myanmar.

The theories I use are embedded within discourse theory. Foucault is one of the most influential authors of discourse theory. He focused on the construction of power/knowledge relationships and the discursive practices in a society. What is constructed according to Foucault are subjects, and he meant that when human beings are made subjects, they are also subjected, that is, constructed as objects of power. Discourse is a large scale system of knowledge, a way of constituting the world through the ways we have to know and talk about it. Discourses bring realities into being. Foucault calls them regimes of truth (Miller, 2008). These regimes of truth are the main subject of this study. The experiences that Muslims shared, the backbone of this research, are not necessarily based on facts, they are not necessarily true, for truth is constructed. Their experiences are their truth, and therefore their truths are subjected to their context and circumstances.

Foucault perceived a discursive formation as a pattern of statements which constitute a system of knowledge in a given historical era. A discursive formation can be thought of as a cultural code, structure, or framework for knowledge constituted within a body of discourse or discursive practices. Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977) illustrates these interrelationships. The power of the penal system within Western society gives rise to a discourse of criminology. In turn, that power-laden and authoritative discourse allows the institutions of the penal system to define criminality and to perpetuate certain rules, roles, and practices. His view on discursive formations can be applied to the case of Myanmar in a way that the power of the government as institution and the power of an extremist organization, and maybe even their powers combined, could give rise to a discourse of discrimination. Foucault (1972) emphasized the importance of institutional sites of discourse and the positioning of subjects in relation to various domains or groups of objects, which would mean concretely that subjects (being Muslims) are positioned in relation to other groups (being Buddhists, or the government).

Why I chose Foucault, and not one of many other authors writing about discourse, is mostly because I agree with Foucault's epistemological notions. Next to that, other influential authors are not so practical in use to my field of research. Fairclough for example, has a textually oriented approach, which is not convenient when I, as researcher, don't know the local language. Laclau and Mouffe are greatly influenced by Post-Marxist thought, which is illustrated by a focus on division of society based on economic terms.

Social Stigma

The theory leading this research regards social stigma. The simple definition of social stigma is a set of negative and unfair beliefs that a group of people has about a subject. The founder of this concept within the social sciences is Ervin Goffman. He believed the trigger condition to stigmatization as being a disappointment between perceived attributes and stereotypes. Stigma is an attribute that discredits an individual. People are not aware that they have and use stereotypes and that they are fully aware people anticipate conformity to this stereotype. When the anticipation doesn't match with the expectation, there is a stigmatization people must deal with. It is assumed that people who are stigmatized have, or are believed to have,

an attribute that marks them as different and leads them to be devaluated in the eyes of others (Goffman, 1963). Stigmatizing marks can be visible or invisible, either controllable or not so and linked to appearance, behavior or group membership. In stigmatization, marks become associated with negative evaluations or discrimination and stereotypes. These stereotypes and evaluations are generally widely shared and well known among members of a culture and they become a basis for excluding or avoiding members of the stereotyped category.

Research since Goffman's essay has been very productive, leading to conceptual refinements. The stigma concept is applied to different circumstances, ranging from exotic dancing (Lewis, 1998) to cancer (Fife and Wright, 2000). It is used to explain some of the social consequences of being unemployed (Walsgrove, 1987) or to provide an understanding of situations, faced by debtors (Davis, 1998) and wheelchair users (Cahill and Eggleston, 1995). With these different circumstances and disciplines like anthropology, social geography, psychology and political scientists, a lot of variability exists regarding the definition of the concept of stigma. For example, Stafford and Scott (1986: 80) defined stigma as "a characteristic of persons that is contrary to a norm of a social unit". They defined a norm as "a shared belief that a person ought to behave in a certain way at a certain time" (Stafford and Scott, 1986: 81). Another, more influential, definition is the one of Jones et al (1984) who built upon Goffman's theory that stigma can be seen as a relationship between attributes and stereotypes. They regarded stigma as a mark that links a person to undesirable characteristics (Jones et al, 1984). These definitions seem to lack a component, when applying it to the situation of Myanmar, namely discrimination. They only view the concept of stigma as a situation wherein stereotypes affect a person, while the effects of stigma should also be taken into account.

Link and Phelan offered a useful conceptualization of social stigma. As well as Jones et al, these authors see Goffman's observation regarding stigma as the relationship between an attribute and a stereotype as precedent for their conceptualization. Link and Phelan (2001) theorize that stigma exists when the following interrelated components converge. In the first component, people distinguish and label human differences. In the second, dominant cultural beliefs link labeled persons to undesirable characteristics to negative stereotypes. In the third, labeled persons are placed in categories to realize a degree of separation of "us" from "them". In the fourth, labeled persons experience status loss and discrimination, where I will focus only on discrimination. Lastly, stigmatization is dependent on access to social, economic and political power. If the stigmatizing group doesn't have power, the previous components are not able to happen (Link and Phelan, 2001). I added social distance to the concept of social stigma, since it can be perceived as another outcome of stigmatization. This is not the first time that social distance is linked to social stigma. Albright, Walker and Levy (1982) also measured social distance from the stigmatized. They found indeed a connection between the degree of social stigma and the degree of social distance. Social distance is not so much a theory, as it is a measurable concept of the perceived acceptable

distance between certain groups. In the operationalization and paragraph 2.4 I will explain more about the applicability of this concept.

Social stigma is situated in discursive theory in a way that is linked to social constructionalism. Both the subjects that stigmatize as the subjects that are marked by stigmatization give meaning to the other subject, to which a social position is constructed. In practice this means that Muslims are the discriminated subjects and Buddhists are the stigmatizing subjects. Both groups construct their own meaning within the context of the stigmatization, regarding their social position. The meaning that Buddhists give to a certain curse word or discriminating act, may differ from the meaning that Muslims give to that exact same word or act.

Securitization

A second concept that assists this research is securitization. According to the Copenhagen School securitization takes place when an issue is framed as posing a threat to a designated referent object, which can be a state, group, sovereignty and ideology (Buzan, 1998). Securitization entails a two-stage process. An issue moves from non-politicized to politicized agenda, which means it is managed within the standard political system as being included in public debate (Buzan, 1998). From a politicized issue, the issue becomes securitized through an act of securitization. This means that a securitizing actor argues that a politicized issue is an existential threat to a referent object. The securitizing actor calls for extraordinary means to answer to the existential threat. Central to the process of securitization is the speech act. This is defined as a discursive representation of a certain issue as an existential threat to security. The Copenhagen school regards security as a socially constructed concept. The Copenhagen school predicts that an act of securitization can either be successful or failing depending on whether the audience accepts the discourse, in contrast to the realist approach to security studies that focuses on the material nature of the threat.

The Copenhagen school's perspective on securitization is being criticized for not addressing the dynamics of securitization and desecuritization in an empirical way (Emmers, 2007). Emmers (2007) believed that empirical studies will lead to a better understanding of the transition from the politicized to the securitized end of the spectrum. Another shortcoming of the Copenhagen School's view on security is the blurred distinction between the political and security realms. It is said that the boundaries between politics and security needs to be further defined and clarified. Issues that are expressed in security terms may continue to be located within the political space and addressed through standard political procedures (Emmers, 2007). This criticism is applicable to the inadequateness of this concept for the situation of Myanmar. When applying this theoretical frame to the case of Myanmar, it failed to address the dynamics of securitization in an empirical way. A move of an issue to the political agenda, or a move of an issue from the political to the security agenda is not something one can research easily. Access is needed to the political decision making space, which is not easy in a non-transparent political system as the current one of Myanmar's

transitioning democracy. A decision was made to borrow the concept of stigmatization from the Copenhagen school, but design the framework around it myself. I perceive securitization as the adaptation and legitimization of the anti-Muslim discourse by political actors. This will be done by researching the interaction of securitization with discriminatory practices. When the government adapts the anti-Muslim discourse by practicing discriminatory policies (formal or informal) or when the government preserves the anti-Muslim discourse by legitimizing discriminatory actions by other actors, securitization takes place. The process of securitization by the political actors is a clear interaction between the anti-Muslim discourse and discriminatory treatment. The speech act is still central to the concept of securitization in a way that the speech act (by political actors or others) contributes to the adaptation or legitimization of the discourse.

The discursive focus of the concept of securitization is applicable to the speech act. This discursive representation can be linked to Foucault's notion of 'Who is speaking?'. By this, Foucault means to draw attention to the status, sanction, and rights of speakers within a discursive formation (Foucault, 1972). The status of the person speaking, relates to the successfulness of the speech act. This is relevant in the case of Myanmar for speech acts are central to hate speech. In order for the hate speech to successfully spread and integrate into the minds of Myanmar's Buddhists, the person speaking must have a certain status. In chapter 3 I will elaborate on the status of the spokesperson of the movements spreading the speech.

This theoretical framework leads me to the main question "How do certain Muslims experience social stigma in Yangon, Myanmar in 2014, a time of democratizing political space? The following sub questions will contribute to the answer of the main question:

1. How do certain Muslims experience labeling and stereotyping by Buddhists?
2. Do certain Muslims feel this labeling and stereotyping is combined with obvious forms of overt discrimination directed at Muslims?
3. What is the opinion of certain Buddhists and Muslims on acceptable social distance between them?
4. How do discriminatory practices towards Muslims interact with the adaptation and legitimization of the anti-Muslim discourse by political actors?

Sub questions 1 to 3 will be answered in chapter 2, and sub question 4 will be answered in chapter 3 and together they will shape the conclusion of this thesis.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

The main and sub questions stated in the previous chapter are relevant for the design of this study. The purpose of this subsection is to present how I designed the research and in what ways I collected the data. In general is the goal of this research to give voice to individuals from a marginalized group. Muslims are not perceived as first class citizens,

which could lead to social distance and even more segregation between the different religious groups. This research is meant to show how an anti-Muslim discourse is constructed. The research presented here, aims to explore the experiences of individual Muslims and the opinions of individual Buddhists in Yangon, Myanmar. Without claiming to be representative of the whole population, the ideas presented in this research mainly dive in-depth into the experiences of individuals of a marginalized group.

1.4.1 Research Strategy

Social research

Social research is about the scientific study of human society and social relationships. Social scientists use several methods in order to analyze an immense variety of social phenomena. The strategy regarding method depends on the topic to be explored. Variable-centric methods can help to describe issues statistically, it's about amounts and numbers. Case-centric methods on the other hand describe issues in-depth, it's about explanations, reasons and beliefs (Curtis and Curtis, 2011). I chose to combine a variable-centric method with case-centric method. The case-centric method is central to the research with the aim to research some cases with many variables. The variable-centric method, surveys, researches a lot of cases with only a few variables. I feel that the data obtained from the surveys strengthens the data obtained from the in-depth interviews. Often, case-centric methods call for an inductive approach, which means reaching a conclusion based on observation. The data comes first, and the conclusion follows (Curtis and Curtis, 2011). This is also the case for the in-depth interviews that I did. For variable-centric methods it is usually the case to do research in a deductive way, by means of hypothesis testing. Before constructing the surveys I did not define clear hypotheses, but I did use a theory about the relationship between certain variables. This relationship is where the questions in the survey are based on.

Ontology and epistemology

This research will focus on the way people speak, their language, the meaning that they give to certain developments, and the differences between how people speak and act. Language leads me to the overarching notion of constructivism. Constructivism's common thread is a concern with the processes by which human abilities, experiences, commonsense and scientific knowledge are both produced in, and reproduce, human communities (Shotter and Gergen, 1994). Constructivist approaches tend to stress the way mind and action are contingent on specific cultural forms. Minds are seen as being built from the symbolic resources of cultures or a discursive move. All constructivist approaches tend to treat discourse as the central organizing principle of construction (Potter, 2012). When moving the issue to epistemology, the research questions of this study can be placed in the understanding epistemology. Epistemologically, discourse theory, the overarching theory of this research, takes an interpretative stance. The approach of this study is concerned with the ways in which people understand social stigma and act upon this within a context of

political instability. Ontologically this research is a bit more difficult to grasp. One tends to take the structuralist side, since people have little choice but to act according to the rules of the dominant social order. When taking a step back to Foucault, he argues that the oppressed, Muslims in this case, are never entirely powerless. People have individualistic power to practice resistance and the truth is the product of ongoing contestation between dominant discourses and marginalized ones. This way of thinking fits with the ontological stance of discourse theory. It explains how structure and agency are mutually constitutive. Social context together with human actors shape reality.

1.4.2 Research Design

Operationalization

Social Stigma is a broad concept that contains several stages. Several concepts are central to these stages. The first is human differences. I operationalize this concept as the perceived differences that the interviewed Muslims and Buddhists experience between these two groups. Another important concept are labels and images. I perceive labels as (negative) words used to describe a certain group, in this case Muslims. Images I perceive as a (negative) representation of a certain group, in this case Muslims, through an illustrative manner. Undesirable characteristic is another concept central to social stigma. In this research I perceive this concept as Islamic characteristics that are perceived as negative by Buddhists. The negative characteristics construct the stereotypes, which I perceive as an exaggerated image of Muslims that often doesn't fit with reality. Frequently, it is a prejudice or negative conception that's used as justification of certain discriminatory actions. Discrimination is a way to deny social participation or human rights to Muslims in this case, based on prejudices. The treatment of Muslims is based on the actual or perceived membership to this group.

Social distance is another consequence of social stigma and a concept that is assisting to this research. I operationalize social distance as the acceptable distance between Muslim and Buddhists in Yangon. Social distance can be reviewed on four different levels: between colleagues, neighbors, friends and family (by marriage). These four relationships together can make up a social distance scale. The social distance scale is able to give a certain score to the relationship. Within the social distance scale family is perceived as the closes relationship, next is friendship, then comes neighbors and the weakest relationship is in the office. This social distance scale will be used to review the opinion of people on the acceptability of certain relationships in Yangon.

In this research I operationalize securitization as follows. I perceive securitization as the adaptation and legitimization of the anti-Muslim discourse by political actors. This will be done by researching the interaction of securitization with discriminatory practices. Sensitizing concepts within this framework are adaptation, legitimization, anti-Muslim discourse, discriminatory policies, extremism speech act and political actors. Political actors are perceived as relevant actors in political space, like government officials and

parliamentarians. The speech act is operationalized as a speech or statement given or published with the meaning to frame religion-related issues in a certain way. This can be done by political actors, but also by others. Extremism is operationalized as the 969 movement, who has extremist ideologies. These extremist ideologies lead to measures that decreases inter-faith tolerance and incites hatred. Discriminatory policies are measures by political actors that lead to unequal treatment. Formal discriminatory policies are policies that are widely adapted, and informal discriminatory policies are policies that are experienced but not publicly known. The anti-Muslim discourse is operationalized as the ruling idea that Muslims are inferior to Buddhists. People are embedded in a society where this discourse may or may not play a role. Legitimization is operationalized as the approval of certain actions or speeches that may contribute to the anti-Muslim discourse. Adaptation is perceived as the acceptance of a discourse which may lead to actions that match the discourse. To define it more concretely: when the government adapts the anti-Muslim discourse by practicing discriminatory policies (formal or informal) or when the government preserves the anti-Muslim discourse by legitimizing discriminatory actions by other actors, securitization takes place. The process of securitization by the political actors is a clear interaction between the anti-Muslim discourse and discriminatory treatment. The speech act is still central to the concept of securitization in a way that the speech act (by political actors or others) contributes to the adaptation or legitimization of the discourse.

Data collection techniques

As seen in the previous paragraph, the data collection techniques that are used in this research are observations, content analysis of documents, in-depth interviews and surveys. For each of these techniques I will elaborate on the way I used the research instrument, the sampling method and the sample itself.

The non-participatory observations I used as a supporting technique, to be able to construct the other research instruments. I looked for obvious signs as stickers from the anti-Muslim movement that are used throughout Myanmar. I looked for obvious dressing and showing of a certain identity on the streets. I observed the behavior of taxi-drivers, and in spontaneous conversations I listened carefully to possible relevant subject matter. Out of these observations I could construct questions to ask later onwards in the research process. Therefore you will not be able to recover most of these observations in this paper.

The content analysis on documents I mostly used to be able to write the last chapter on discriminatory treatment by governmental actors and to write about hate speech in Myanmar. The sample contains of a video-fragment of a BBC interview with Wira Thu, the main character of the 969 movement, a nationalistic movement in Myanmar. It includes the transcripts of a couple of speeches by Myanmar's president Thein Sein as well. I also used some parts from the Constitution of Myanmar, published in 2008. The last part of the sample for the content analysis contains reports like a report of the Islamic Human Rights Commission and newspaper articles from Myanmar's newspapers published in English, The Irrawaddy and Myanmar Times.

The most important data collection technique in this research is the in-depth interview. I conducted this part of the research by snowball-sampling. The first two interviews I did were with a Buddhist and a Muslim, both contacts obtained via my internship, a local NGO aimed at inter-faith education. Those interviewees helped me to find the next interviewees and so on. In the end this led to nineteen in-depth interviews. Out of these nineteen interviewees, thirteen people were Muslim and six were Buddhist. Next to that, the sample consisted of fifteen men and four women. Although a lot of the interviewees had a background in the non-profit sector, only one interview was aimed at the NGO background of the interviewee. One of the interviews was with a government official. I designed every single list of questions applicable to the interviewee, but naturally I used the same categories of questions. The questions in the questionnaire for Muslims included their experience of discrimination, and on what levels, their idea of ideas behind the discrimination, their feeling about certain relationships with Buddhists, the kind of hate speech they encounter, how they feel about the government and their idea of discriminatory treatment by the government and how they feel about the developments of discrimination (whether they feel discrimination decreased or increased and when exactly). For Buddhists the questionnaires were designed from another perspective, but entailed the same kind of questions. The complete transcripts of the interviews can be reviewed in Appendix IV.

The last data collection technique I used is the survey, as well for supporting purposes to the in-depth interviews. The complete survey can be found in Appendix III. I had the survey translated to Burmese, to avoid restrictions to fill it in. Most questions were closed questions and the few open questions I had translated back to English after all questionnaires were filled in. The sampling method I used is in between random and purposeful selection. Out of the 126 complete surveys I collected, 15 were taken by a Muslim woman to her class and returned back to me. This part of the survey was purposeful selected. The other 111 surveys I collected in a park in downtown Yangon (56 respondents) and on a Market in Yankin township (55 respondents). This part of the survey was randomly collected.

The demographics of the respondents were as follows. In the questionnaire the question in what township the respondent lives was raised as an open question. With the translation I asked the translator to divide these townships in three categories: Buddhist township (where most of the inhabitants are Buddhist), Mixed Buddhist and Muslim township (where the inhabitants are equally Buddhist or Muslim) and Muslim township (where most of the inhabitants are Muslim). 102 (81%) respondents lived in a Buddhist township. 18 (14%) respondents inhabitants lived in a mixed township and 6 (5%) lived in a Muslim township. In the questionnaire the question on age was also raised as an open question. With the translation I asked the translator to divide these ages in two categories: below the age of 35 and the age of 35 and older. 72 (57%) of the respondents were younger than 35 years old. 54 (43%) of the respondents were 35 years old and older. 78 (62%) of the respondents were male and 48 (38%) were female. The answers on education were divided into three categories. The respondents that filled in not to have received any education fall under the category “no education”, which were 22 (18%) of the respondents. The respondents that only

went to high school fall under the category “low education”, which were 37 (29%) of the respondents and the respondents that filled in any bachelor, master or college degree fall under the category “high education”, which were 67 (53%) of the respondents. Regarding religion, 93 (74%) of all respondents were Buddhist, 26 (21%) were Muslim, 2 (1%) were Hindu and 5 (4%) of the respondents were Christian.

The questions that included the questionnaire can be divided into four themes. Demographics, which I just discussed, questions on the political situation, to find out how their stance is towards the current political situation, attitude based questions regarding religion, to find out the respondents’ stance on their attitude of people from different religions and questions on social attitude, to be able to measure the acceptable social distance between people from different religions in four different situations.

Some questions I did not use in this study, because they were not relevant or unclear. For one question I changed the answering categories in the process of analyzing, which will show in the tables. It’s about the question that focuses on the opinion of the respondent on people with four different religions. The possible answers were “very favorable”, “somewhat favorable”, “somewhat unfavorable”, “very unfavorable” and “I don’t know”. When analyzing, I deleted the option “I don’t know” for all the questions. For this particular question I divided the four categories of answers into two. “very favorable” and “somewhat favorable” became “positive attitude” and “somewhat unfavorable” and “very unfavorable” became “negative attitude”. For the rest of the questions, the categories of answers stayed the same after analysis.

1.5 CHAPTER PREVIEW

The theme of this thesis is the experience of discriminatory treatment. On the one hand this is studied by social stigma in society and on the other hand it is studied by the interaction with stigmatization in political space. This thesis is constructed in the following way. Chapter 2 contains the consequences of discriminatory treatment of and on social stigmatization in everyday life. The chapter is introduced by a clear framework of the theory social stigma which is joined with empirical data. Next is an extended subsection on labeling and stereotyping, after which a subsection covers discrimination, the final stage of social stigmatization. A paragraph on social distance follows and finishes with a short conclusion. Chapter 3 focuses on discriminatory treatment of and on securitization, by the study of adaptation and legitimization of the anti-Muslim discourse by political actors. The chapter starts with some general experiences of Muslims regarding discriminatory practices by the government, whereupon a paragraph is dedicated to hate speech. Hate speech is used as context to show the difference between the framing and reality of securitization of Muslims. The same is done in the next subsection, only with a context of security. The chapter ends with opinions on reasons for the securitization of Muslims and a short conclusion. The thesis concludes with the answering of the main question of this study and a discussion in which some implications and recommendations are debated.

2. Social Stigma in Society

The aim of this chapter is to link theory on social stigma of Link and Phelan (2001) to the practice in Myanmar. This chapter focuses on the experiences and perceptions of Buddhists and Muslims on discriminatory practices and their consequences. Doing so, this chapter will answer the first two sub-questions of this research. Besides that, this chapter will also answer the third question on social distance, as I perceive social distance as a consequence of social stigma. In the bigger picture of the research, this chapter contributes to the research question in a way that the experiences of Muslims regarding different components of social stigma will be discussed. As previously mentioned in the introduction, the theoretical framework of this thesis focuses mainly on social stigma and in particular on the conceptualization of social stigma of Link and Phelan (2001). They use Goffman's observation that stigma can be seen as relationship between an "attribute" and a stereotype as precedent for their conceptualization. According to Link and Phelan (2001), stigma exists when elements of labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination occur together in a power situation that allows them. This conceptualization of social stigma leads me to the following two research questions that I will answer in this chapter: "How do Muslims experience labeling and stereotyping by Buddhists in Yangon?" and "Do Muslims feel the labeling and stereotyping are combined with obvious forms of overt discrimination directed at Muslims?". The reasoning behind these questions is the assumption of this framework that all the elements or components are required to be able to address discriminating practices as being stigmatization. I view social distance as a consequence of social stigma. I will elaborate upon this concept in the fourth paragraph and the linked sub question is: "What is the opinion of certain Buddhists and Muslims on acceptable social distance between them?" The several components of social stigma are described in the following paragraph, linked to practice in Myanmar. In the paragraphs following the next one, I will go into detail to be able to answer the sub questions.

2.1 COMPONENTS OF STIGMA

In the first component, people distinguish and label human differences. There is a social selection of human differences when it comes to identifying differences that socially matter (Link and Phelan, 2001). Once differences are identified and labeled, they are typically taken for granted as being just the way reality is. In the process of stigmatization, it's important to realize which differences do matter and why they do. In the case of Myanmar, the human difference that matters socially is religion. Since religion is a big part in the lives of Myanmar' people, it's an important component of one's social status.

The differences that people encounter between the Buddhist majority and Muslim minority focus on looks and clothing, customs and socio-economic differences. "There is so many Muslim youth, they are just looking like us. But some of the Muslims have the moustache and they wear some cap and different clothes. So for that kind of people, we can easily see they are Muslim. With that kind of appearance, some people will think differently. But to the other people we are just the same. [...] Actually it is also their right. They can wear

everything they want. They can have the beard and moustache. But in the very sensitive period, and we can say that this is a very sensitive period, I would like to request that they wear it in the mosque, but outside they should show that we are all the same and not different. We should promote this kind of mindset. I want them to be similar to us. I would like to request that. I respect their right, but to decline the tension in society I would like to request that.”¹ The traditional clothing is a real issue. As mentioned in the introduction, there are different kinds of Muslim groups in Myanmar. The main relevant groups are the ‘Burmese Muslims’ and the group of Muslims that consist mostly of immigrants from India, arrived during and after British occupation. People indicate their problem with the second kind, for not integrating in Burmese society of which clothing style is a part. Next to clothing, many interviewees with an Islamic background also pointed out that their darker skin, compared to Burmese ethnic people, marks a difference between them and Buddhists.

Another example of difference in Islamic custom is mentioned by Thet Swe Win. “The Muslim community is isolated, we never talk. This is their custom. They don’t feel like they belong here, but they should create this feeling themselves. Because we feel like they are different from us, because of their wearing style. And the Muslim ladies wear a hijab and you can see only their eyes. They are people from other countries, they don’t belong here. But we accept the Burmese Muslim people.”² This Buddhist man perceives the difference as a combination of isolation and therefore misinterpretation and difference in clothing style. He feels that Muslims are only accepted when they wear Burmese clothing.

One Muslim interviewee felt that not only appearance count, but also the difference in background. “There is this socio-economic difference. Muslims are richer. If you go downtown you can see a lot of rich Muslim people.”³ This quote misses some nuance, in the way that he states that Muslims are richer. Naturally this is not the case for all Muslims, but my observations show that many Muslims start up a business and succeed because of close ties and therefore customers within the Muslim community.

In the second component, dominant cultural beliefs link labeled persons to undesirable characteristics to negative stereotypes. This component of stigma involves a label and a stereotype, with the label linking a person to a set of undesirable characteristics that form the stereotype. Labels that are used in Myanmar’s society to appoint Muslims vary from everyday use on the streets to usage on social media or on printed media. Examples are

¹ Author’s interview on 1 May 2014 with Nay Phone Latt, a Buddhist blogger and NGO worker from Yangon.

² Author’s interview on 18 April 2014 with Thet Swe Win, a Buddhist NGO worker from Yangon.

³ Author’s interview on 3 May 2014 with Aung Ko Ko, a Muslim NGO worker and teacher living in Yangon.

particular curse words and pictures from pigs or dogs. In the next subsection I will elaborate on usage and meaning of these labels. Undesirable characteristics that follow from these labels are traditional and religious beliefs, such as polygamy and the strict life style rules, the clothing, the darker skin color and the isolation of a part of the Muslim community. The stereotypes used focus on terrorism, the domination of Islam in some countries and conversion of Buddhists by means of marriage.

In the third, labeled persons are placed in distinct categories to connote a separation between “us” and “them”. The previous components of the stigmatization process become the justification for believing that negatively labeled persons are fundamentally different from those who don’t share the label. When labeled people are believed to be specifically different, stereotyping can be easily accomplished because there is little harm in ascribing all manner of bad characteristics to “them” (Link and Phelan, 2001). The stigmatized are thought to be the thing they are labeled, instead of a person having the thing they are labeled with.

This component is somewhat more difficult to recognize in practice. How do you know when someone categorizes someone with another religion into the “them” group and people with the same religion into the “us” group? I believe that the answer to this question can be found in the way people speak about the other group. Indeed, both Muslims and Buddhist use the terms “we” and “they”, implying “we” as in the group with their own religion, and “they” as in the group with the other religion. Besides this both groups constantly use “Muslims” and “Buddhists” to indicate the other group. They think the other group to be what they are labeled, thus being a Buddhist or Muslim, instead of persons having a certain belief, thus a person believing in Islamic or Buddhist religion. I do have to include the marginalizing note, that I used the categories “Muslims” and “Buddhists” as well in my interview question. Next to this the English language skills of my interviewees we’re of a low level, so they often chose the easiest expressions. Therefore, the meaning given to this way of operationalizing of this third component should be marginalized. But this component is also used in hate-speech, in which monks refer to Buddhists as “Burmese” while calling Burmese Muslims “Muslims” or “*Kalar*”. These monks believe that Muslims are unworthy to be called Burmese.

In the fourth component, labeled persons experience status loss or discrimination leading to unequal outcomes. This component is often left out in other conceptualizations of stigma, but Link and Phelan reason that when people are labeled, set apart and linked to undesirable characteristics, a rationale is constructed for devaluing, rejecting and excluding them. People are thus stigmatized when the fact that they are labeled, set apart and linked to undesirable characteristics leads them to experience discrimination. Consistently, stigmatized groups are disadvantaged when it comes to life chances like income, education and housing status (Link, 1987). Indeed, in the situation of Myanmar, most of the people I interviewed have experienced discriminatory practices aimed at their religion. Both informal ways of discrimination and formal, more structural ways of discrimination are

experienced. Informal ways of discrimination happen on the street, in everyday life and personal interactions. Formal ways of discrimination include institutions, like the government or businesses.

Lastly, stigmatization is dependent on access to social, economic and political power that allows the components to happen. It takes power to stigmatize (Link and Phelan, 2001). Powerless groups can label certain people, but these labels won't have any serious discriminatory consequences. Only a powerful group is able to identify human differences and have them generally accepted in society. This dependency on power is where discourse comes in the picture. Next to this it's about meaning of labels and images. Words are only contributing to stigmatization because actors give specific meaning to those words.

This means that in order for the Buddhist majority to stigmatize, they have to be the powerful group. For being the majority alone, means that they are more powerful than other religious groups, but is this enough to be able to stigmatize?

2.2 LABELING AND STEREOTYPING

In this paragraph I describe the link between the labeling and stereotyping in detail, meaning I elaborate on the experience in Myanmar regarding the second component of social stigma. I combine the experience of Muslims with the opinion or experience of Buddhists to get a complete overview and see where they collide.

Labels that are given to Muslims are given in several circumstances, in everyday interactions or in the media, both printed as social. An example of a label used in everyday life, that all of the interviewees gave, is the word *Kalar*. Buddhists and Muslims both gave this example, but they interpret the word differently. "It's not that insulting. Some people accept this. We say it also to our Muslim friends, they say it is not insulting to them."⁴ was said by a Buddhist, while "It's like we are not their people... not from their land. So many meanings but it depends on the context in which they use it."⁵ and "This means you swam across the river to here from India."⁶ were both said by Muslims. The Muslims that I interviewed feel that *Kalar* refers to the darker skin color, Indian features and background or more generally foreign background. The Buddhists that I interviewed either refer *Kalar* to the dark color or don't give any meaning to the word, like it's replaceable with the word "Muslim". Another example of a label that was given I only heard once. "*Maletu*, it means disgusting people."⁷

⁴ Author's interview on 10 May 2014 with Pine Soe Hein, a Buddhist student from Sittwe, Rakhine State, living in Yangon.

⁵ Author's interview on 23 May 2014 with Kyaw Lat, a Muslim NGO worker from Sittwe, Rakhine State, living in Yangon

⁶ Author's interview on 22 April 2014 with Shoab M. Mahda, a Muslim medical superintendent at Muslim Free Hospital, Yangon.

⁷ Author's interview on 21 May 2014 with U Kyaw Minn, a Muslim ex-political prisoner and leader of the Democracy and Human Rights Party, from Rakhine State, living in Yangon.

I was told that these words are used when Buddhists call on people with an Islamic background and in conversations referring to people with an Islamic background.⁸

An image that is recognized as a labeling image is the 969-logo (to be reviewed on front cover). They are used on taxis, shops and restaurants. I was told that they were used quite often but that they started to disappear now. I do recognize this, since I did see the stickers around Yangon, but not that many. People identify the meaning of these stickers as labeling the business as being Buddhist or just as advertisement for the movement. All Muslims did agree on one thing; they would not go in a business when a 969 sticker is placed on the door. It's a good example of how much power an image on a sticker is able to have. Not only on the street, but also on social media and in printed media are labels and images used to refer to Muslims. Social media is a tool that people use often, since censorship rules are loosened. I was told that over 100 anti-Muslim facebook pages exist.⁹ "On the facebook page, those Muslim haters change their facebook profile into a pig-photo. It means that they hate Muslims."¹⁰ Pigs are not the only animals used to show sentiments against Muslims. "Especially on facebook pages they use the picture of a pig, because Muslims don't eat pig. Sometimes they use the picture of a dog. For the Myanmar culture if we want to insult people we say that he's a dog. A dog is a very low creature in our culture, a monkey or cat is okay, but a dog is not."¹¹ One of the Muslim respondents told me that there are cartoons in particular newspapers that show images of people with beards and brown color, used to label Muslims.¹²

Dominant cultural beliefs link labeled persons to undesirable characteristics. Negative characteristics that are subscribed to Muslims can be divided into two categories; physical features and religious features. Physical features that are mentioned are mostly traditional clothing and the dark skin-color. Traditional clothing entails the long dresses, also worn by men, beards and moustaches, the hat for men and the hijab for women. Religious features entail the traditional beliefs, of which Buddhists think they are old-fashioned. The facts that Muslims can only marry Muslims and Muslim men can marry multiple wives, the food restrictions and the praying that is done five times a day make Islamic religion seem like a traditional and very different religion compared to Buddhism. In combination with the

⁸ Author's interview on 3 June 2014 with Zubaidah H. Ghaffari, a Muslim university teacher and chairwoman of the Muslim Women Council from Yangon.

⁹ Author's interview on 23 May 2014 with Kyaw Lat, a Muslim NGO worker from Sittwe, Rakhine State, living in Yangon.

¹⁰ Author's interview on 18 April 2014 with Thet Swe Win, a Buddhist NGO worker from Yangon.

¹¹ Author's interview on 1 May 2014 with Nay Phone Latt, a Buddhist blogger and NGO worker from Yangon.

¹² Author's interview on 6 May 2014 with Myo Win, Muslim director of an NGO focusing on interfaith education and dialogue from Yangon.

mosque, which is not accessible by any other than Muslims and the isolation in some neighborhoods, Buddhists perceive these characteristics as being undesirable.¹³

The stereotypes that are developed by the exaggeration of negative characteristics aim at three different factors. The first factor is terrorism and Islamophobia, the second is dominance of Muslims over Buddhist countries by conversion of Buddhists and polygamy and the third is economic inequality. When asking about the perception of people about reasons for the fear for Muslims this was the answer of Zaw Min Lat: “Because of Islamophobia. They are afraid that the Muslim people will seize the war. They will Islamize the Buddhist girls. We have a lot of stories about Muslim people here. Rumors actually. Like countries as Brunei, rich countries, they announce that once people get married with the Burmese/Buddhist people they get money. We got a lot of these kinds of rumors. The Burmese people don’t want our religion to be converted into another religion. That is a problem. Before the riots, the only problem was the marriage. We did business with them. The only problem was the marriage. We don’t want our women to be married to Muslims. Because they force them to change religion.”¹⁴ Also a Muslim respondent heard this rumor. “There was a rumor before, that when a Muslim person marries a non-Muslim person (and change their religion), he can get financial support from the mosque from other Muslim countries.”¹⁵ Zaw Min Lat is a Muslim NGO worker, experienced in inter-faith conflict resolution, which makes this remark a cogent one. Islamophobia was mentioned again by U Kyaw Min: “Everywhere there is Islamophobia, there are 3 reasons for this: Islam is the youngest religion compared to the other 3 big religions, Islam spread fast (for example in Indonesia, Middle East) and Islamic traditions are strict, people don’t understand. It’s very traditional, not modern. I think that Muslims should try to be a bit more liberal so people can understand the religion more easily. Normally people feel like Muslim people marry four wives, and that the holy Koran mobilizes Muslims to kill non-Muslim people. Islam is terrorism. These things are what they preach to the people.”¹⁶

This preaching is perceived as being unfair. One of the Muslim respondents told me about the content of these preaches: “Muslims are bad, not smart, and not easily sociable. They don’t practice the Buddhist moral precept, to not kill animals. Muslim guys kill animals. These kind of teachings are going on; even if they are not vegetarian. It’s not fair to project their teachings on us.”¹⁷ Another stereotype was uttered by Thet Swe Win. He said literally that most Muslim people are greedy and always looking for money. He thinks that it is

¹³ Author’s interview on 10 May 2014 with Pine Soe Hein, a Buddhist student from Sittwe, Rakhine State, living in Yangon.

¹⁴ Author’s interview on 18 April 2014 with Thet Swe Win, a Buddhist NGO worker from Yangon.

¹⁵ Author’s interview on 23 April 2014 with Zaw Min Lat, a Muslim construction business owner and organizer of the Muslim Youth Forum recently held in Yangon.

¹⁶ Author’s interview on 21 May 2014 with U Kyaw Minn, a Muslim ex-political prisoner and leader of the Democracy and Human Rights Party, from Rakhine State, living in Yangon.

¹⁷ Author’s interview on 23 May 2014 with Kyaw Lat, a Muslim NGO worker from Sittwe, Rakhine State, living in Yangon.

inciting problems. I was surprised that he expressed this perception, because of his background in inter-faith education and his liberal view on religions in general. This unobvious viewpoint shows that he is embedded in a society where these remarks are being considered as normal. It does contribute to the discourse that Muslims have or are perceived to have a disproportional access to wealth and property. These grievances originate from colonial times, when Indian moneylenders built a fortune on the struggles of Burmese lenders (Prager and Tun, 2013). Another contributing factor is that a disproportionate number of Muslims are businessmen, money changers and shopkeepers today (Prasse-Freeman, 2013). The economic grievance is constructed by perceptions that Muslims only make use of Muslim-owned shops, as distinguished by the 786 label. 786 symbolizes in practice shops where they sell halal food, but to Buddhists it claims the desire for economic domination (Schissler, 2013). The 969 movement can be seen as a response to this grievance, since economic limitations are part of their hate speech as well.

2.3 DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES TOWARDS MUSLIMS

The question whether these labels and stereotypes are also combined with negative behavior aimed at Muslims is very relevant for this theoretical framework, since Link and Phelan are the ones adding discrimination to their conceptualization. These discriminatory experiences of Muslims are aimed at everyday practices and are compared to experiences of Buddhists, where relevant.

Muslims already experience discrimination from a young age: “At the public schools there is a lot of discrimination, even from teachers. Teachers force the Muslim students to pay respect to Buddhism. In front of other students the teachers say that Islam is really bad. Some students are really proud, but they are being discriminated by the teachers.”¹⁸ Zubaidah H. Ghaffari told me how Muslims receive stricter punishments than Buddhist kids do. Some Muslims have downgrading experiences: “Just 2 days before Thingyan festival myself and an uncle got picked up by an ambulance. A drunkard was walking in the center of the road. When the driver honked, he didn’t move. The driver went around him, but he scolded up his *longyi*. Because the Muslim Free Hospital was written on our car. Actually previously it was not that bad. This government has always instigated these things in the mind.”¹⁹ Some have violent experiences: “A few days ago in a village near Yangon, there were four houses destroyed by Buddhist guys, because a Buddhist girl was in a relationship with a Muslim man.”²⁰ And some experienced indirect discrimination: “I teach so many Buddhist and Christian people. They appreciate me. But some of the students don’t appreciate me because of my religion. And I am always in touch with government officials, they don’t know

¹⁸ Author’s interview on 23 April 2014 with Zaw Min Lat, a Muslim construction business owner and organizer of the Muslim Youth Forum recently held in Yangon.

¹⁹ Author’s interview on 22 April 2014 with Shoaib M. Mahda, a Muslim medical superintendent at Muslim Free Hospital, Yangon.

²⁰ Author’s interview on 23 April 2014 with Zaw Min Lat, a Muslim construction business owner and organizer of the Muslim Youth Forum recently held in Yangon.

I am a Muslim so they communicate very well with me and appreciate my job. But when they get to know I am a Muslim, their behavior changes. So sometimes I feel really bad.”²¹ “It’s not intentional but because of hate speech people are afraid, I feel a change and see eyes change when I say I am Muslim.”²² Subsequently, this discrimination is not always direct and tangible for outsiders. Sometimes it’s just a feeling that Muslims have that makes them uncomfortable.

Some comments showed that some Muslims are afraid. “In the villages the situation is worse than it is here. But when we dress like this, with the beard, we are afraid.”²³ Some even avoid certain situations out of fear: “During the water festival, we stayed in the mosque to practice religious things to avoid the water festival. It’s always at our conscious. We cannot say something about bad experiences in front of Buddhist people. Some understand, some don’t. This is also some kind of discrimination. We are not free to talk.”²⁴ This fear is apparently causing non-participation in society sometimes, which can contribute to the mutual misunderstanding and distance between members of religions.

The feeling that these Muslims have does not necessarily coincide with the experience of Buddhists. One of them told me that there’s no problem in Yangon and that people just live together. And somebody else told me that there are two groups of Muslims. The Muslims who accept the Burmese traditions, who wear Longyi’s and clothing like Burmese people, they are called Burmese Muslims, and the other group who doesn’t accept Burmese traditions, wearing long clothing, a beard and a moustache. The first group is accepted according to Thet Swe Win, but the traditional Muslim group should adapt. This perception coincides with the subject description in the introduction of this thesis and with the experienced differences between Muslims and Buddhists. The degree of adjustment of Muslims in Burmese society is an important factor for Buddhists, regarding their view on Muslims.

Discrimination on the street is not the only informal discriminatory treatment in Yangon, the private sector is also involved. Job opportunities are not always equal, is what some Muslims experience. “In some areas in the private sector, offices don’t accept Muslims. Like the banking community, or Buddhist companies with nationalist and crony people. This is direct discrimination.”²⁵ A young Muslim woman experienced this in person: “In 2009, I

²¹ Author’s interview on 3 May 2014 with Aung Ko Ko, a Muslim NGO worker and teacher living in Yangon.

²² Author’s interview on 9 June 2014 with Hnin Aye Ko, a Muslim founder of an NGO in interfaith workshops, living in Yangon.

²³ Author’s interview on 1 June 2014 with Chit Swe, a Muslim teacher in Islamic studies and Imam from Yangon

²⁴ Author’s interview on 3 June 2014 with Zubaidah H. Ghaffari, a Muslim university teacher and chairwoman of the Muslim Women Council from Yangon.

²⁵ Author’s interview on 23 April 2014 with Zaw Min Lat, a Muslim construction business owner and organizer of the Muslim Youth Forum recently held in Yangon.

always thought to work as bank staff. When I handed in my CV they accepted me, but when they saw me for the first time, even though I wasn't wearing my hijab, I had to show my ID card. They saw Islam on the card. They didn't tell me anything but I wasn't selected"²⁶ This was mentioned by an intelligent, representable woman, but these features were not enough to get her a job at this bank. It's not only difficult to get certain kind of jobs, but several people told me about difficulties with promotion. Some Muslims have high functions, like vice-president and deputy rector. Both people were in the position to be promoted to president and rector, but both couldn't get the job because of religious discrimination. They weren't seen fit to have such a high position.²⁷ This means it is difficult for middle aged people to get a better job and for young people to get a job. I was told: "Why do you think there are more uneducated Muslims than Buddhists? Among the parents, there is traditional thinking. Muslims can't get a job, so why going to higher education? They are going into business."²⁸ When some Muslims don't integrate in Burmese society by having the same jobs or going to the same university, it could have consequences for the perceived transparency of Islam and its followers and the mutual misunderstanding between Buddhists and Muslims.

The fact that Buddhists discriminate Muslims and that Muslims experience this discrimination may (be) influence(d by) how Buddhists and Muslims' attitude is towards each other. This attitude is stated in table 1.

Table 1. Buddhists' and Muslims' positive or negative attitude towards other religions (in percentages).

	Buddhists' attitude (n=93)		Muslims' attitude (n=26)	
	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive
Towards Buddhists	0	100	24	76
Towards Muslims	65	35	0	100
Towards Hindus	13	87	4	96
Towards Christians	8	92	0	100

In table 1 we can see whether Buddhists and Muslims perceive people from other religions positively or negatively. Whereas 65 percent of the Buddhists out of the sample has a negative attitude towards Muslims, only 24 percent of Muslims has a negative attitude towards Buddhists. When comparing the attitude of Buddhists with the perception of Christians or Hindus it becomes clear that there's no doubt that Muslims are the

²⁶ Author's interview on 4 June 2014 with Jue Jue Tan, a Muslim NGO worker in interfaith dialogue from Bago, living in Yangon.

²⁷ Author's interview on 2 June 2014 with Jacob Maung Maung, a Muslim landlord from India, living in Yangon.

²⁸ Author's interview on 3 June 2014 with Zubaidah H. Ghaffari, a Muslim university teacher and chairwoman of the Muslim Women Council from Yangon.

marginalized group. From this table it is impossible to draw conclusions about cause and effect of the numbers, but from deducting information out of the previous paragraphs one of the effects could be that the misunderstanding of Buddhists towards Muslims is greater than the misunderstanding of Muslims towards Buddhists. This would make sense, since Muslims is the group out of which a part is not adjusting to Burmese customs, which creates misunderstanding or even intolerance.

2.4 SOCIAL DISTANCE

One of the outcomes of social stigmatization is exclusion of the stigmatized group from certain parts of society. I wasn't sure if social stigma even existed in Myanmar before starting my research, and if it would exist, in what form. That's why I decided to research social distance as a result of stigmatization. Social distance is a concept that isn't used as a theoretical framework in social research. It is mainly used as a practical concept or model to measure the preferred or acceptable distance between a representative individual and others. In this research I translate this as the acceptable distance between Buddhists and Muslims in Yangon, Myanmar. Since this translation includes the distance between Buddhists and Muslims, I will cover the perspectives of both Buddhists and Muslims. The sub question that I will answer in this chapter is: "What is the opinion of certain Buddhists and Muslims on acceptable social distance between them?".

The researches of T.W. Smith and G.R. Dempsey (1983) and R. Faranda and D.B. Nolle (2003) study social distance in a quantitative way. The former duo used the indicators 'would marry into group', 'would have as close friends', 'would have as next-door neighbors', 'would work in same office', 'would have as speaking acquaintance', 'would have as visitors to my nation' and 'would debar from my nation' to measure social distance. The latter used 'would accept into kinship relation', 'accept as close friends', 'accept as neighbors' and 'accept none of these relations' as indicators for social distance. I combined the indicators of these two researches and this concluded in the following indicators: 'accept as colleagues', 'accept in the neighborhood', 'accept as a friend' and 'accept into family by marriage' as indicators, the former being the most distant relationship and the latter the most close relationship.

I divided the subsections into these four different indicators and in each paragraph I will combine the results from the qualitative data and quantitative data I obtained.

In table 2 is described what percentage of Buddhists and Muslims accept four different kind of relations with people with other religious backgrounds.

Table 2. Buddhists and Muslims that accept certain relationships (in percentages).

	Buddhists (n=93)			Muslims (n=26)		
	Acceptance of Muslims	Acceptance of Christians	Acceptance of Hindus	Acceptance of Buddhists	Acceptance of Christians	Acceptance of Hindus
Within Family	1	11	8	4	8	4
Being Neighbor	27	42	40	50	50	54
Being Friend	41	67	57	58	73	73
Being colleagues	40	61	60	81	70	73
None of these relations	25	2	4	4	4	0

Table 2 shows the percentage of Buddhists and Muslims who accept certain relationships with people with another religious background. In the questionnaire, people had the option to fill in that all relationships are acceptable, some relationships, or that no relationship is acceptable. I will refer to this table in the following paragraphs, in which all the separate relationships are discussed.

2.4.1 Workplace

Yangon is Myanmar's main center for industry and trade, which provides sufficient opportunities for people to get a job and cooperate with people from different religious backgrounds. Thet Swe Win told that there's no problem regarding religious within businesses. People make profit, so they cooperate. The numbers of table 2 tell something different. They show that 40% of Buddhists accept Muslims as a co-worker, compared to 61% of Buddhists accepting Christians and 60% acceptance of Hindus. Obvious is that Muslims are least accepted as colleague. Interesting is that Muslims' acceptance of all groups, but definitely Buddhists, is much higher (81%). This means that 60% of Buddhists would prefer to avoid Muslims as co-workers but in the in-depth interviews, none of the Buddhist told directly that they didn't want to work with Muslims, nor the other way around. Zaw Min Lat, a Muslim construction business owner, did tell me that some house owners don't want him as a contractor, because of his religious background. When focusing on colleagues in the same workplace, the Buddhists that are working in the NGO-business naturally work together with Muslims, since most of their NGOs relate to inter-faith conflict resolution. Soe Min Lat, a Buddhist from a village in Myanmar, did mention he doesn't have Muslim colleagues in his office but this was mentioned without any judgment. The difference between the numbers in the table and data from the interview could be caused by the difference in background of respondents. Most interviewees were highly educated, working part time and with NGOs whereas the survey participants were more diverse regarding background and may have been less tolerant.

2.4.2 Friendship

Another indicator for social distance is friendship. As table 2 shows inter-faith friends are perceived as just as acceptable as inter-faith colleagues. 41% of the Buddhists think it's acceptable to have a Muslim friend, which is significantly lower than the acceptability to be friends with Christians or Hindus. None of the Buddhist interviewees indicated that they did not have Muslim friends, only one indicated that he has very few.²⁹ One remark of Pine Soe Hein does stand out: "Many friends I have are Muslim, but they are good."³⁰ This indicates that he does think that there is some part of the Muslim population that is not good and not friendship worthy. Pine Soe Hein originates from Rakhine State and identified himself as a Rakhine Buddhist. The fight between Rohingya Muslims and Rakhine Buddhists could have influenced this remark, since he strongly feels that a part of this Muslim group has an activist background and is a threat in Rakhine state.

Muslims are somewhat hesitant in accepting Buddhists as friends, compared to accepting Christians and Hindus, shows table 2.2. 58% accepts Buddhists as friends, and 73% accept Christians and Hindus. Chit Swe, a Muslim teacher in Islamic education, explains: "Islam allows us to make friends anywhere."³¹ "Anywhere" apparently has different meanings to different people, although all the Muslims I interviewed indicated that they had friends with all kinds of religious backgrounds, without exception of Buddhists.

2.4.3 Neighborhood

The city of Yangon is divided in townships. Most of these townships are dominated by Buddhists, and in some Muslims are the majority of inhabitants. Observations told me that some buildings are fully occupied with people from one religion. This makes the question whether people want to be neighbors with people from another religious background rather relevant. Table 2 shows that only 27% of Buddhists wants Muslims as a neighbor, compared to 42% Christians as neighbor and 40% Hindu as neighbor. It shows that Buddhist are not fond of people from another religious background as neighbors in any case, but Muslims are the most unwanted neighbors. 50% of Muslims doesn't mind Buddhists as a neighbor, and this number is comparable for the other two religious backgrounds. The 73% of Buddhists not wanting to live close to a Muslim is explained by some of the remarks made during the interviews. Both Thet Swe Win, Buddhist, and Kyaw Lat, Muslim, described that in neighborhoods where Buddhists are the majority, Buddhists don't want to sell the apartments to Muslims. Thet Swe Win's personal anecdote illustrates this: "My mom owns a few rooms that she rents out. She doesn't want to rent the rooms to Muslims. Because we are afraid once a Muslim family moves in the street, the other Muslims also come in and in

²⁹ Author's interview on 31 May 2014 with Soe Min Lat, a Buddhist from a village outside Yangon, living in Yangon.

³⁰ Author's interview on 10 May 2014 with Pine Soe Hein, a Buddhist student from Sittwe, Rakhine State, living in Yangon.

³¹ Author's interview on 1 June 2014 with Chit Swe, a Muslim teacher in Islamic studies and Imam from Yangon.

five years the whole street will be full of Muslims.”³² Thet Swe Win works for an NGO and has Muslim friends, but still feels that Muslims will occupy a whole street. He might not even be aware that this comment is discriminatory, for being situated in an anti-Muslim discourse. Another anecdote I experienced came from a PhD student who was looking for a roommate. She said to me that she had one option for a roommate, but that it didn’t feel right because the possible roommate was Indian. I asked her why that was a problem, and she told me very subtle that it was because of too big differences. This girl was highly educated, but still couldn’t bear the thought of living together with a Muslim girl.

Although Muslims are more liberal in their opinion on who to accept as neighbor, their remarks are not very integrative but not necessarily because they don’t want to accept Buddhists. It seems like they are afraid to not be accepted by Buddhists: “I would feel like a minority in a Buddhist neighborhood.”³³ This remark came from Ko Ko Lay, a fairly conservative Muslim, but he was not the only one. Aung Ko Ko claimed that the reason for the Muslim dominance in some townships is discrimination. He said that Muslims in general don’t want to live in a Buddhist dominated area because they are scared. He sees this development as the reason for the isolation of a part of the Muslim community. He himself doesn’t behave this way, since he moves within a mixed community with friends and co-workers of different religions. U Shwe Maung, Muslim government official, thinks that Buddhist are very welcome in Muslim neighborhoods: “They say Muslims cannot buy apartments in some buildings. In the Muslim areas we try to let them know we live in harmony.”³⁴ Since the last census happened earlier in 2014, of which the results are not published yet, and the one before that in 1983, it is not possible to reflect on the facts about religious occupation in neighborhoods. However, observations and the interviews do show that there is a certain unwillingness by Buddhists to live close to Muslims and for Muslims to live close to Buddhists, which increases social distance between the two groups.

Table 3 shows the percentage of people who do not want to live close to certain buildings. It is relevant to this paragraph for it shows the acceptability of religious buildings, among others, in people’s direct surroundings.

Table 3. Buddhists and Muslims who do NOT want to live next to a certain public place (in percentages)

	Buddhist (n=93)	Muslim (n=26)
Pagoda	23	12
Mosque	47	8
Church	2	4

³² Author’s interview on 18 April 2014 with Thet Swe Win, a Buddhist NGO worker from Yangon.

³³ Author’s interview on 19 May 2014 with Ko Ko Lay, a Muslim teacher at the Islamic Theological School in Yangon.

³⁴ Author’s interview on 7 June 2014 with U Shwe Maung, a Muslim government official from the USDP, from Rakhine State, living in Yangon.

Table 3 shows that Muslims are more tolerant with a Buddhist religious building than the other way around. 47% of Buddhists does not want to live close to a mosque, while 12% of Muslims does not want to live close to a pagoda, though the percentage of Buddhists that do not want to live close to a pagoda is even higher. The larger majority of Buddhists and Muslims do not have any problem living close to a church. The number of Buddhists who do not want to live close to a mosque is thus the most interesting, definitely when combining this number with the number of people who has a negative attitude towards Muslims, which is done in the following table.

In table 4 is the attitude towards Muslims of Buddhists who do not want to live close to a mosque described.

Table 4. Buddhists' negative or positive attitude towards Muslims, out of the group that does not want to live close to a mosque (in percentages).

	Buddhists (n=37)
Negative attitude	76
Positive attitude	24

Out of the people who do not want to live close to a mosque, 76% of Buddhists had a negative attitude towards Muslims. This does not conclude that 76% of Buddhists does not want to live close to a mosque because of religious discrimination. It does however indicate that they perceive mosques negatively, because of their negative attitude towards Muslims and Islam.

2.4.4 Kinship

To be able to accept somebody from another religion into your family as spouse or (grand-) daughter or (grand-) son is the rarest, since this is the closest relationship compared to the other three. This is also shown in table 2. Only 1% of all Buddhists participating in the survey wants to welcome Muslims in the family by marriage, which is extremely low. However, compared to the acceptability of Hindus or Christians in the family it is not much lower. This means that kinship is seen as a relationship only suitable between Buddhists. Still, Muslims are the kind of people that Buddhists really don't accept in the family. I asked to two of the Buddhist interviewees whether they would marry a Muslim girl. Soe Min Lat did not think so, except when she would convert to Buddhism. Ashin Sandarwara on the other hand, bases his perception on a prejudice: "Most men don't marry Islamic ladies, it's very rare. Because most Muslim ladies are not very beautiful. With Buddhist women it happens sometimes [marrying a Muslim man]. That's why they designed the marriage law." With the marriage law, Mr. Sandarwara means the inter-faith marriage law proposal that is called for by the 969 movement. This law proposal, if enacted, would require Buddhist women to get permission from parents and government officials before marrying a man from another faith (Weng, 2014). The 969 movement collected 1.3 million signatures of supporters, which concluded in an official draft and is now taken into consideration by relevant government

bodies. The overwhelming support for this draft definitely indicates that inter-faith marriages are a worry for Buddhists.

For Muslims the acceptability is not much higher. Where 4% of the Muslims accept Buddhists into family by marriage, 8% accepts Christians and 4% accepts Hindus. One reason a couple of interviewed Muslims give, is religious Islamic teaching. The Koran guides Muslims to marry Muslims only. "Islam guides us to not marry Buddhist people, men or women. Islam allows us to marry Jews and Christians, because they believe in one God. If a Buddhist converts to Islam totally, completely, then Islam allows us to marry them. Islam doesn't allow us to marry Buddhists, because their acts and performances are very different. We can't live together like this."³⁵ I quote Chit Swe, an Imam. These differences between the religions are mentioned more often. Muslims believe these differences would cause many problems. Somewhat more liberal Muslims nuance this view. They think it wouldn't be accepted by family, but they see marriage and love as a personal issue, not a religious one: "as a human, it happens [falling in love with somebody with another religious background]"³⁶ All the Muslims that I interviewed believe that the Buddhist community would not accept inter-religious marriages. Among others because of the sermons of the monks and the related inter-faith marriage law.

2.4.5 Isolation

The unwillingness of people to work with, befriend, live close to or marry people with a different religious background could result in isolation of the minority. Table 2 shows that 25% of the Buddhists and 4% of Muslims indicated that they did not think any of the four relationships were acceptable. Both the interviewed Muslims and Buddhists give clear reasons for this isolation. Aung Ko Ko reviews it as a two-folded problem. He thinks social integration between Buddhists and Muslims is very weak. The majority pushes to exclude, but Muslims also self-exclude according to him. NGO founder Hnin Aye Ko has a clear idea on this isolation: "Buddhist communities have that kind of idea of ownership, because of little education. They feel like they are owners, and we are guests. To me, nobody owns and everybody is a guest. The reason for isolation is extremeness and too little knowledge about the meaning of Koran. There's a lot of misinterpretation of the language. Religious leaders are vulnerable. Everybody blames them because of the clothing. They become isolated as well. They should build their capacity. But Muslim religious leaders are blamed, become vulnerable, get isolated, aggressive and teach this to their community."³⁷ Just as Aung Ko Ko, she sees this isolation two-folded. The sense of ownership is as push-factor from the

³⁵ Author's interview on 1 June 2014 with Chit Swe, a Muslim teacher in Islamic studies and Imam from Yangon.

³⁶ Author's interview on 3 June 2014 with Zubaidah H. Ghaffari, a Muslim university teacher and chairwoman of the Muslim Women Council from Yangon.

³⁷ Author's interview on 9 June 2014 with Hnin Aye Ko, a Muslim founder of an NGO in interfaith workshops, living in Yangon.

side of Buddhists, just as the misunderstanding of Islam and its traditions. But on the other hand it leads to Islamic sermons teaching to be isolated, so the discriminatory behavior gets avoided. The last reason that is given, as well by Aung Ko Ko, is that jobs for Muslims are hard to get by, definitely in the government sector. This leads to a small number of Muslims applying to college, because parents advise their children to go into business instead of school. School would be a waste of time, since the lack of job opportunities. This is causing isolation.

The Buddhists that I interviewed mostly blame Muslims for the non-integration. They blame the lack of access: “In the mosques, no one dares to enter. They are always closed. Only Muslims can come in. That creates some misunderstanding.”³⁸ or dressing “Some people fear Muslims. It’s like they are the leaders. They never smile... they look really strange. The children are more afraid.”³⁹ Khaing Thitsar thinks it’s caused by separateness in life style: “We don’t live together. We live separate. That’s why there is no transparency and there is discrimination.”⁴⁰

2.5 CONCLUSION

Within this chapter, the main focus lied on the truths of Muslims and a few Buddhists to be able to review whether social stigma takes place. Of the four subsequent steps that are necessary for social stigma to occur, all four are more or less present in everyday life in Yangon. The first step in stigmatization is the recognition of certain differences between the stigmatizing actor, Buddhists, and the stigmatized actor, Muslims. These differences focus on three categories in Yangon; looks and clothing, traditional customs and socio-economic differences. These categories of differences lead to certain labels and images to mark Muslims. The main linguistic marker people use is the word *Kalar*. The connotation of this word is very different for Buddhists and Muslims. The former uses this word even in situations calling out to friends, while the latter group feels it means that they are foreigners, swam across a river from India. Other imaginary markers people use are the 969-logo and pictures of dogs and pigs, these last two are mostly used on social media. Dogs are used for being perceived as one of the lowest creatures in Myanmar and pigs are connected to the Islamic teaching to not eat pork. These labels are linked to undesirable characteristics, which are perceived as physical features such as the traditional clothing and darker skin color, and religious features; traditional Islamic teachings such as polygamy, food restrictions and the prayers five times a day that are exclaimed from the mosques. The stereotypes that follow from these characteristics include Islamophobia, dominance of Muslims by the conversion of Buddhists and economic inequality. These categories of

³⁸ Author’s interview on 10 May 2014 with Pine Soe Hein, a Buddhist student from Sittwe, Rakhine State, living in Yangon.

³⁹ Author’s interview on 10 May 2014 with Pine Soe Hein, a Buddhist student from Sittwe, Rakhine State, living in Yangon.

⁴⁰ Author’s interview on 10 June 2014 with Khaing Thitsar, a Buddhist student from the dry zone, living in Yangon.

labeling and stereotyping are experienced by Muslims. The third indicator focuses on the separation between us and them. This is a step that was harder to contextualize and thus harder to prove. What I can say about it, is that there's a literal separation in the way Muslims and Buddhists spoke about each other. Both groups used clear words like "we" and "they" to indicate that they particularly belong to a different group.

When it comes to the final stage of social stigma, we reach the question whether obvious forms of overt discrimination is directed to Muslims in Yangon. This is definitely the case. Muslims already encounter it when they enter primary school, where their treatment is occasionally different from Buddhists. Some people are afraid to leave their safe surroundings to go out their Muslim neighborhood, because they think Buddhists will behave in a discriminatory way. Next to some discriminatory practices they encountered, for most Muslims it includes a feeling of being different. In interaction with Buddhists they are treated the same, but when the Buddhists find out that they are in fact Muslims something changes in their eyes. Muslims also encounter discriminatory practices within jobs. Religion is one of the factors within personal information that needs to be mentioned when people apply for a job. Multiple Muslims had the experience that they were welcome for a job interview, until their religious background showed. The question whether there's power to stigmatize can be partly answered in this conclusion, partly in the one of chapter 3. Buddhists are the majority in Yangon and Myanmar, which makes them a powerful group. But it is also important to review how and by whom they are supported when necessary in their discriminatory practices. This will be discussed in the following chapter.

The perceptions regarding social distance are very clear. Buddhists tend to be reserved in their acceptance of Muslims, whereas Muslims are a bit easier in accepting Buddhists in their personal space. The most remarkable distances were measured within the relationships of neighbors and family. Neighborhoods are often perceived as a safe place for Muslims when Muslims are the majority and Buddhists are afraid for a Muslim occupation when a room is let to a Muslim family. Marriages between the two groups are, almost without exception, not done. Muslims think so because of religious teachings, Muslims are supposed to marry Muslims and Buddhism is too different from Islam. Buddhists think so because the conversion from Buddhism to Islam is a nationalistic strategy to strengthen stereotypes about Muslims.

Some interesting remarks came up during the analysis of the data in this chapter. The first is that there is a clear division between sorts of Muslims. The Burmese Muslims, who dress traditionally Burmese clothing, are accepted more than the Muslims who migrated to Myanmar during and after Second World War. Not all of these Muslims dress and act traditionally Islamic, but a certain amount of them do. This results in a barrier between Muslims and Buddhists, because of misunderstanding. Buddhists don't understand the long clothing, beards, and hijabs. The second is that Muslims are aware that this barrier exists, but don't want to change this behavior. They are also aware of their isolation and to think this is a two-folded problem. They feel being pushed from the Buddhist side, but their

religious teachings do not encourage people to break free from this isolation. The last remark is about the embeddedness of the anti-Muslim discourse. Even the most liberal Buddhists, working in the NGO business, having Muslim friends, expressed stereotyping and discriminatory remarks. It means that the anti-Muslim discourse is established in a way that people don't even notice their prejudices.

3. Securitization in Political Space

Discriminatory practices in society, discussed in the previous chapter, cannot be understood without the interaction with Thein Sein's government and the Buddhist monk-led 969 movement. This chapter therefore focuses on discriminatory practices in political space. This will be done with help of a framework of securitization. Securitization is the adaptation and legitimization of the anti-Muslim discourse. This process interacts with discriminatory practices in two ways. Securitization happens when the government adapts the anti-Muslim discourse, which leads to discriminatory policies and it happens when the government legitimizes the anti-Muslim discourse. The government legitimizes the anti-Muslim discourse through the acceptance of the 969 movement and its speeches. Securitization in other words is a process of support mechanisms from the government towards extremism, in order to deal with an existential threat. This chapter revolves around the interaction between discriminatory practices and securitization. The question that I will answer is "How do discriminatory practices towards Muslims interact with the adaptation and legitimization of the anti-Muslim discourse by political actors?" and this is done by use of the topics general discriminatory practices, hate speech and security.

3.1 DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES FROM THE GOVERNMENT

Discrimination on a formal level is done by the government of Myanmar. The government is transitioning towards a democracy since a couple of years, but equal treatment to all citizens seems a bit far-fetched at the moment, although the Constitution, drawn in 2008, says otherwise. It states that "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." Next to this, "The Union shall, upon specified qualifications being fulfilled, in appointing or assigning duties to civil service personnel, not discriminate for or against any citizen of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, based on race, birth, religion, and sex." (The Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2008). It does state that Buddhism recognizes a special position as it is the faith practiced by the great majority of the country, but it also recognizes Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Animism as the religions that co-exist. It is a bit contradictory that the government states to not discriminate any citizen based on religion, but does give a special position to one of the religions. Let's see whether the government holds itself to its own constitution.

A vast majority of Muslims that I interviewed came up with governmental discrimination regarding the National Registration Card (NRC). This kind of discrimination is two-folded. On the one hand the government discriminates because it is harder and more expensive for Muslims to obtain such a card than for Buddhists and on the other hand, the government's treatment towards Muslims is discriminatory when handling the NRC. "As for me, I paid around 300\$ to get a card. The Buddhist people don't need to pay so much money, around 10\$. That's a problem most of the Muslim are facing in this country. If I don't have a card I can't go to engineering school. If I can't go to engineering school I can't get a degree certificate. That's why my parents paid a lot of money to the local immigration officer for

the card.”⁴¹ So in order to participate normally in society, it’s necessary to get a NRC card, which is very hard to get because of this unofficial discriminatory governmental practice. “In terms of restrictions from the government I do face discrimination. I have an identity card, but when we travel we need to show our card to the police and they discriminate me. They never ask questions to Buddhists. But they asked a lot of questions to me; what kind of job, where do I need to go, that I had to inform people where I wanted to go. We hold the same card, but they behave differently. Religion is mentioned on the card, as well as race.” This is the clearest kind of discrimination from the government. Next to discrimination it is corruption as well, but since it is only aimed at the Muslim population it is a definite discriminatory practice.

The other ways of discrimination by the government is aimed at restrictions. On national level, Muslims are not able to participate in sports.⁴² In the army there are participatory restrictions as well. “My own brother was colonel in the army. Because he was a Muslim he couldn’t be lieutenant colonel. Later, they stopped allowing Muslims in the army altogether.”⁴³ Besides this impossibility to get a promotion as a Muslim, government officials don’t allow Muslims as employees anymore.⁴⁴ Muslims held many senior government positions after Myanmar gained independence from Britain. But the situation changed in 1962, when the military junta seized power. They hindered the hiring and promotion of Muslim officials. The military drew on popular prejudices that Muslims dominated the economy and used these profits to build mosques and buy Buddhist wives to convert them (Marshall, 2013). Although the military government is no longer in place, this discriminatory practice did not go anywhere. This is a good example of an interaction between the discriminatory practices or prejudices and adapted anti-Muslim discourse and an indicator that securitization is happening.

U Shwe Maung experienced travel restrictions at the airport. He needed a travel authorization, so he asked why. He had a NRC and he is a Myanmar citizen. They said that they didn’t had an answer, only instructions. For all Muslims they needed authorization according to U Shwe. This discriminatory practice is linked to the citizenship law. This law was enacted in 1982 and hasn’t changed since. This law distinguishes between three categories of citizenship: full citizenship, associate citizenship and naturalized citizenship. Full citizenship is acknowledged when people belong to one of the national races or whose ancestors settled in Burma before 1823. An associate citizenship is acknowledged when people can show that one grandparent was a citizen of another country and naturalized

⁴¹ Author’s interview on 3 May 2014 with Aung Ko Ko, a Muslim NGO worker and teacher living in Yangon

⁴² Author’s interview on 23 May 2014 with Kyaw Lat, a Muslim NGO worker from Sittwe, Rakhine State, living in Yangon.

⁴³ Author’s interview on 3 June 2014 with Zubaidah H. Ghaffari, a Muslim university teacher and chairwoman of the Muslim Women Council from Yangon.

⁴⁴ Author’s interview on 19 May 2014 with Ko Ko Lay, a Muslim teacher at the Islamic Theological School in Yangon.

citizenship is acknowledged when people provide evidence that their parents entered and resided in Burma prior to independence in 1948 (Human Rights Watch, 2014). This law is most discriminatory towards the Rohingya minority. Despite being able to trace Rohingya history to the eighth century, the ethnic minority is not recognized as one of the national races. That is why most of the Rohingya have a formal legal status as residential foreigner, are restricted on their freedom of movement, denied access to higher education and cannot hold public office (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

Another discriminatory practice from the government that is linked to the constitutional statement that Buddhism is the religion with a special position in Myanmar; the emergence of a ministry of religious affairs. It exists since before Myanmar gained its independence. Two out of four of its objectives do not reflect upon an equal treatment between different religions. One states that the ministry exists for the purification, perpetuation, promotion and propagation of the Theravada Buddhist Sasana and the other objective is the emergence and prevalence of Myanmar traditional customs and culture (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2013). Hnin Aye Ko mentioned in our interview that the building or reconstruction of mosques is prohibited and that restrictions are put in place for religious teachings and schools. No information can be found on the restrictions on the development of Islamic buildings, but the Ministry of Religious affairs did keep a record of the number of religious buildings. There are 58399 monasteries, compared to 3265 churches and 2266 mosques. It makes sense that the number of monasteries is much higher, because the majority of the population of Myanmar is Buddhist, but a higher amount of churches is remarkable, since the size of the Muslim population is estimated to be the same as the Christian population. It could reflect a hesitance to permit the building of new mosques.

Results from the survey show that people are not very positive about the government, although this comes from both Muslims and Buddhists. This is showed in table 5.

Table 5. Buddhists' and Muslims' opinion on the current political situation of Myanmar (in percentages)

	Buddhists (n=88)	Muslims (n=24)
Very bad	3	8
Bad	15	42
Neutral	67	42
Good	10	8
Very good	5	0
Mean	2,98	2,50

Table 5 shows how the majority of Buddhists is neutral about the current political situation in Myanmar, while the majority of Muslims is divided between the opinions of a bad or neutral political situation. This is also revealed by the mean, which is higher for Buddhists than Muslims.

Table 6 shows the opinion of Buddhists and Muslims regarding the general direction in which Myanmar is moving.

Table 6. The opinion of Buddhists and Muslims on the general direction of Myanmar (in percentages)

	Buddhists (n=58)	Muslims (n=19)
Right direction	60	10
Wrong direction	40	90

Also in table 6 it is clear that the opinion of Muslims on the general direction of Myanmar is significantly more negative than that of Buddhists. Where 40% of Buddhists think Myanmar is going into the wrong direction, 90% of Muslims do. No conclusions can be drawn from these numbers regarding the causes of the difference, but one of the influences could be the unequal treatment from the government and the subsequent lack of trust that Muslims have in the government.

3.2 HATE SPEECH

A growing tendency exists to spread hate speech in Myanmar. It originates from extreme Buddhist monks, especially Buddhist monks who support the 969 movement. In this paragraph I aim to give an introduction about extremism in Myanmar, which concretely entails the 969 movement, their leader and the content of the hate speech, followed by a subsection explaining how the government legitimizes the creation of anti-Muslim discourse.

3.2.1 The 969 movement

The 969 movement is the most well-known Buddhist nationalist movement in Myanmar. The movement became prominent in November 2012, when their religious principles started being used in anti-Muslim campaigns. These campaigns were followed by the displaying of the 969-logo by shops, restaurants and taxis all over Myanmar. The ideological roots originate from a book written in the late 1990s by Y Kyaw Lwin, functionary in the ministry of religious affairs. Its precepts are rooted in a traditional belief in numerology. The number 969 represents the nine attributes of Buddha, the six attributes of his teachings and the nine attributes of the Sangha, monastic order (Bookbinder, 2013).

This numerology is misleading when trying to understand the intentions of the 969 movement. The man who is mostly identified with the movement is its leader, and Buddhist monk Wira Thu. He was jailed in 2003 for inciting religious conflict, but was released in 2012 as part of the release of political prisoners. Culturally, Buddhist monks are very influential in Burmese society. It is therefore that Wira Thu and other leaders of the 969 movement have quite some supporters. Although 969 has a numerological meaning, the contents of Wira Thu's sermons have nothing to do with numerology, all the more with anti-Muslim, nationalistic hate speech. His sermons claim that Muslims control Myanmar's

economy and call for a boycott of Muslim-owned businesses. He also preaches about Muslims that get Buddhist-Burmese women and coerce or force them to convert to Islam. This relates to Wira Thu's fear that Muslims will become over populous and will take over Myanmar and transform it into an Islamic nation (Bookbinder, 2013).

An interview by Jonah Fisher from the BBC with Wira Thu gives some good examples of the content of the sermons of the 969 movement. Wira Thu thinks Muslims are only well behaved when they are weak. When they become strong they are like a wolf, in large packs they hunt down other animals. He refers to Buddhists as other animals. At a sermon attended by mostly Buddhist women, Wira Thu warns them: men are determined to marry and convert them. Despite Muslims contributing to only 5% of the population, Wira Thu says that Muslim men that marry multiple wives is part of an aggressive plan of Islam to become Myanmar's main religion. Despite of the intolerant message, a significant part of Myanmar's Buddhist population seems to be supporting him too. Wira Thu: "At first the word extremist felt very bitter, but later it became sweet. I have a real and deep love for this country, I am not just saying it. I am not pretending like a politician for the sake of power. I have a deep love for this country. If they call me an extremist then I am pleased to bear that name".

During the interviews, the attitudes of Muslims were generally negative towards the 969 movement. Associations were made with terrorism, because they teach and spread violence and with danger for the country, for it negatively influences development. Myo Win adds: "They publish a monthly magazine full of hate speech. It's terrible."⁴⁵ When asking whether Muslims would go into shops where a 969 sticker is put on the doorframe, all of them said no. They would not feel welcome. People feel like it's only getting worse because of this movement: "Before the election we had one enemy; the military (government). But since the elections we have so many enemies; government, military, racist parliamentarians, and general people because of hate speech campaigns."⁴⁶ The Muslims I interviewed do not believe that all monks initiate the hate speeches, nor that all people believe them. They think that mostly uneducated and unqualified people believe it.

Buddhists are more nuanced about the movement. Soe Min Lat told: "It [969 movement] is acceptable as a Buddhist. Muslims have 786, Buddhist should have 969. This is not discrimination."⁴⁷ With 786 he refers to the numerology of Muslims, used to refer to shops with halal food. Buddhists also make a clear distinction between the good origins regarding the numerology and the bad way in which people are using the numerology. Pine Soe Hein

⁴⁵ Author's interview on 6 May 2014 with Myo Win, Muslim director of an NGO focusing on interfaith education and dialogue from Yangon.

⁴⁶ Author's interview on 22 April 2014 with Shoaib M. Mahda, a Muslim medical superintendent at Muslim Free Hospital, Yangon.

⁴⁷ Author's interview on 31 May 2014 with Soe Min Lat, a Buddhist from a village outside Yangon, living in Yangon.

thinks that this movement doesn't cause a problem, because "very great monks" lead the 969 movement.

3.2.2 Speech vs Action

Government official's speeches and statements regarding the 969 movement and anti-Muslim discourse are important. They tell something about the official stance and legitimization of this discourse. Also important is how the government is acting on this discourse and whether speech and action coincide.

The government is not denying its support for the 969 movement and its leader in their speeches or in comments to reporters. Minister of religious affairs told Reuters: "Wirathu's sermons are about promoting love and understanding between religions, it is impossible he is inciting violence.", although he denied that the movement has official state backing. (Marshall, 2013). Sann Sint, a former lieutenant general in Myanmar's army, sees nothing wrong with the boycott of Muslim businesses being led by the 969 monks. "We are now practicing market economics," he said. "Nobody can stop that. It is up to the consumers." (Marshall, 2013). Even president Thein Sein reacted with a supportive statement when Wira Thu was portrayed as the "Buddhist Bin Laden" by New York Times magazine. He said that 969 is just a symbol of peace and that Wira Thu is a son of Lord Buddha (Marshall, 2013). Even 969 monks have the feeling that they are supported, because their speeches to protect their race and religion are allowed.

Thein Sein did submit a report to parliament in August 2013 stating: "Political parties, some monks and some individuals are increasing the ethnic hatred. They even approach and lobby both the domestic and overseas [Arakan] community," (Zarni, 2013). It looked like he did want to oppose the 969 movement. But statements like these only mean something when they are acted upon. Since the government did not detain or deterred a single Buddhist preacher of hate speech for acts of spreading anti-Muslim hatred in society, the statement of Thein Sein was only meant to frame a government stance, while reality is different. It's a big difference in support compared to 2001, when Wira Thu was arrested and sentenced to 25 years in prison because he distributed anti-Muslim pamphlets that incited communal riots in his hometown. At least 10 Muslims were killed by Buddhists. That was the first time that spreading of hate speech caused blood-shed by the 969 movement. In the constitution of Myanmar that was drafted in 2008 is clearly stated that "the abuse of religion for political purposes is forbidden. Moreover, any act which is intended or is likely to promote feelings of hatred, enmity or discord between racial or religious communities or sects is contrary to this Constitution." Although it is clear that the actions of Wira Thu and his movement are prohibited, the government is not accusing him as it did in 2001. Support by lack of opposition to this movement is also a form of support. The remarkable thing is, that there is an example of a government practice that imprisoned a man for acts intended to outrage religious feelings, but this was a Muslim man in Bago. Bago, a region near Yangon, was hit by anti-Muslim violence in 2012. A local court of Bago, imprisoned this man for two years, because he removed a 969 sticker from a shop. The section of a law that

sentenced him, outlaws deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings (Marshall, 2013). This law can't apparently be used to accuse preachers of hate speech, but can be used to accuse people who protect themselves against this hate speech. This is a clear example of an act of securitization.

A concrete example of a practical discriminatory practice originated from the 969 movement is the inter-marriage law proposal. The inter-marriage law proposal is a good example of an interaction between a discriminatory practice from the 969 movement and the government, for the sake of securitization. The inter-marriage law proposal was promoted by Wira Thu, who collected 1.3 million signatures supporting this proposal. Consequently, Thein Sein, Myanmar's president, has asked parliament to consider this law and it is currently drawn by the appropriate ministry. The proposal includes a law to give protection and rights for ethnic Buddhists when marrying with other religions, a ban on polygamy and legislation to balance the increasing population (AFP News, 2014). Although this proposal has been proclaimed a violation of women's and human rights, there are no signs that the government is halting the design of this law. It is also clear that this proposal is especially drawn to restrict the freedom of Muslims. Polygamy is permitted within Islam, traditional Muslims get many children because they don't use contraceptives and the rumor goes that Muslims intentionally marry Buddhists to convert them. All three elements of this proposal hit the Muslim community the worst.

Without exception all of the people I interviewed shared their opinion on the government's support towards the 969 movement. Some thought the support lies in not taking action and keeping silent. Some accuse some hardliner group and military-men within the government that are supporting the movement. Ashin Sandarwara, ex-monk, is also sure that the movement has support from the government. He gave the example of Mandalay, where the NLD wanted to give a speech about the constitution. They didn't receive a permit. When the 969 movement wanted to give a speech, they received the permission. Anytime, anywhere. He thinks this is clearly not a coincidence. U Shwe Maung, government official, also believes that the 969 movement is supported, but only by the president and his cabinet. Not by parliament speakers. According to him, it was the president's office that strongly objected the publication about Wira Thu in New York Times Magazine. And it is the president's office that never pressed Wira Thu to stop speaking hate speech.

3.3 SECURITY

Also violence is an aspect of the anti-Muslim discourse. Within this violent space, the government has a task to protect citizens without bias. In this subsection is reviewed whether this is the case. Secular violence has spread over Myanmar since 2012. The first incident happened in June 2012 in Rakhine State. Many more violent riots followed in Rakhine State, but also in other parts of Myanmar. Within this paragraph I start with a situational overview of these riots, whereupon the speech versus action by political actors will be discussed.

3.3.1 Violent riots

The first and most deadline incident started in June 2012 when riots and clashes between Rohingya Muslims and Rakhine Buddhists left 200 dead and displaced thousands. It is assumed and framed like the rape and murder of a young Buddhist women by three Muslim men initiated the chain of events in Rakhine State (BBC, 2014). The violence between Buddhists and Muslims did not restrict itself to Rakhine State. In March 2013, an argument between a Buddhist and a Muslim in a gold shop in Meiktila led to a riot between Buddhists and Muslims, leaving more than 40 people dead and some neighborhoods destroyed (BBC, 2014). In August of the same year, Buddhists burnt Muslim-owned houses and shops in Kanbalu after refusal of the police to hand over a Muslim man accused of raping a Buddhist woman (BBC, 2014). In January 2014 a controversial attack happened in Rakhine State. The attack on Du Chee Yar Tan resulted in the deaths of at least 40 Rohingya men, women and children. An un-published UN report states that they were killed by local security forces and civilians of the rival Rakhine group. The Buddhist extremists were angry about a kidnapping of a Rakhine policeman by some Rohingya men. Myanmar's government has been denying the killings, but a UN investigation and findings back up the killings (Perlez, 2014). Very recently, in June and July this year, a few violent attacks were pulled in Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest city. It is framed like the violence sparked following a rumor that spread on social media that a Buddhist woman had been raped by one or more Muslim men (BBC, 2014).

3.3.2 Speech vs Action

In the monthly presidential speech of the 1st of May in 2014, Thein Sein talked about the violence occurring in Rakhine state: "These events are universally unacceptable, and should never have happened. We will not accept this kind of behavior, and action against the offenders is being taken pursuant to the law." In the presidential speech of last November he spoke about his trip to Rakhine State. "I also visited Rakhine State during October. I personally witnessed the riots in Thandwe during that trip. Such episodes show that there are still many challenges hampering our efforts to build an open society. The members of the society as a whole will need to work hand in hand with each other in order to resolve these challenges. I have instructed the local authorities to continue to endeavor in their efforts to enhance the bedrock of conflict resolution, namely prevalence of law and order and regional stability. I have also urged the social, religious and community leaders to work with each other in finding solutions through dialogue." U Shwe Maung, parliamentary representative thinks that these solutions through interfaith dialogue are only used to show the (international) public that the government is handling the situation. In reality he says that the dialogues do not have any impact, because they invite only "good Buddhists and good Muslims", instead of more conservative religious leaders.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Author's interview on 7 June 2014 with U Shwe Maung, a Muslim government official from the USDP, from Rakhine State, living in Yangon.

Besides interfaith dialogue, the messages that the government spreads to the public of Myanmar mostly contain the upholding of the rule of law. Phil Robertson, deputy director of Human Rights Watch's Asia Division is skeptical about these kind of messages from the government. "The government's claims that it is seeking to uphold 'rule of law' for all concerned is contradicted by the president's apparent willingness to bend over backwards to protect those inciting violence when they wear saffron robes". Compared to the speeches regarding government's response during and after violent attacks, international organizations and local newspapers are not so sure about the impartiality and preparedness of the government to respond to the attacks. Human Rights Watch's world report of 2013 stated that state security forces failed to intervene to stop the sectarian violence at key moments. And during the attacks in Meiktila, the army waited three days before stepping in, while this town is home to a significant military installation (Bookbinder, 2013). It looks like security services are indolent to respond to incidents. Also in the recent attacks of July 2014 there is doubt whether security forces act indiscriminate. Around 300 Buddhists rode motorcycles around Myanmar's second largest city of Mandalay, shouting death threats to Muslims (Mooney, 2014). The police did put up barriers to block roads into a predominantly Muslim neighborhood and prevented the Buddhists on motorcycles from entering. But they did not disarm or arrest the Buddhists who had been riding around the city, screaming threats and singing the national anthem (Mooney, 2014). The police did arrest five Muslim men, after their homes were searched and ceremonial knives were found (Mooney, 2014). This event unmistakably means that the security forces in Meiktila were biased and treated people differently based on their religion.

Most of the interviewees agree with this biased behavior of security forces, they think that the government's security forces do not act in their full potential when handling the violent attacks in Myanmar. They think that when the government wants to control the situation, it is able to. Chit Swe agrees with this. He said that the government stated that it couldn't control the violence and the 969 movement. But now Myanmar holds the chairmanship of ASEAN, which it does in 2014, they are controlling the situation. He feels that it is in the power of the Myanmar government to control or not. Interviewees also gave examples of Meiktila, where security personnel kept watching during the riots. Hnin Aye Ko, founder of NGO focused on interfaith dialogue, spoke with a police officer who attended one of her workshops. He told her that they have emergency plans for situations like secular riots. But to use these emergency plans, they need permission by the central government. Finally, U Shwe Maung, the government official, thinks that the government is taking the side of Buddhists. He told me about the situation in Meiktila, about which the religious minister gave a briefing in parliament. He blamed the Muslims who would have killed monks, but according to the Muslims, the monks instigated the problems at the mosque. He feels that the religious minister is biased towards Buddhists.

Another example of contributing to the anti-Muslim discourse by speaking differently than acting is the attack on Du Chee Yar Tan in Rakhine State that happened last January and resulted in the deaths of at least 40 Rohingya men, women and children. An un-published UN report states that they were killed by local security forces and civilians of the rival Rakhine group. The Buddhist extremists were angry about a kidnapping of a Rakhine policeman by some Rohingya men. As a response to this attack, the Burmese government released a final report. The report states that the government strongly denies that any of the violence took place. Much of the English-language 20 page summary of the report also focused on expressing the government's displeasure with the UN and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Holland, which have made statements indicating that violence did occur in the Rohingya village. Kyaw Yin Hlaing, secretary of the commission and an adviser to President Thein Sein, and Tha Hla Shwe of the Myanmar Red Cross Society and chairperson of the commission, told reporters during a press conference in Rangoon that they had found no evidence of killings of Muslim civilians. "There were allegations of deaths, but we don't see evidence of deaths," said Tha Hla Shwe. "Where are the bodies, where were the dead bodies buried, what happened to the bodies? Nobody could tell us." Kyaw Yin Hlaing said a conflict may have broken out between local residents and security forces following the disappearance of police sergeant Aung Kyaw Thein, who is now presumed to be dead, and added that the commission saw damaged homes during its visit. However, he said they did not find evidence that security forces had caused all the damage (Aung, 2014).

An interesting perspective on framing besides the framing on government response, is how the newspapers frame how the violent attacks are inflamed. Out of the five riots I described in paragraph 3.3.1, three were framed as being incited by a rape of a Buddhist woman by one or multiple Muslim men. This framing confirms with the fear of Buddhists that Muslims want to take over the country. By taking Buddhist women, Muslims fuel the fear that the Muslim population is expanding and restricting Buddhists regarding their population growth.

3.3 OPINIONS ON REASONS FOR SECURITIZATION

It cannot be verified, but all the interviewees with a background in the NGO business had a similar idea about the reasons why the government securitizes Muslims and the religious division. Myo Win thinks the current government has the same policy as the British during colonial times; to divide and rule. The government divides certain groups in society, so attention is focused on this division instead of on the ruling party. Thet Swe Win agrees: "Activist like us cannot focus on it, we have to focus on that kind of problems instead of government projects. The government diverts the people's interest by the religious conflicts. The pipe line [oil pipe line from Myanmar to China], we reject it. Because the pipe line crosses the whole country from west to east to China. We only get about 20 or 30% of the profit. 80% goes to China. We accused to the government that they want to divert our interests against this project. So that's why they create the religion conflict. There are so

many cases of violence, where many police were present but never took action. They let the people destroy and fire.”⁴⁹

The other reason where they agree on, is the upcoming parliamentary election. Even the NLD party, among others originated from the idea to secure human rights, does not stand up for Muslims. If she does, she will lose support according to U Shwe Maung. All Buddhist people will blame her and subsequently she won't be able to become president, is his opinion. That the NLD party is hesitant to show support towards the Muslim community and protect their human rights is also noticed in international media such as the Independent (2012): “Politically, Aung San Suu Kyi has absolutely nothing to gain from opening her mouth on this,” Maung Zarni, a Burma expert and visiting fellow at the London School of Economics, told the Associated Press. “She is no longer a political dissident trying to stick to her principles. She's a politician and her eyes are fixed on the prize, which is the 2015 majority Buddhist vote.”

3.5 CONCLUSION

There is a clear interaction between discriminatory practices and securitization. Securitization contains of legitimization of discriminatory practices by extremists and the adaptation of the discourse by discriminatory treatment of the political actors themselves. Political actors are legitimizing discriminatory practices by the 969 movement in different ways. In their speeches they support the 969 movement and its leader clearly and unmistakably. In one case, the president of Myanmar criticized monks and individuals of increasing ethnic hatred in an official document for parliament. However, actions of the government do not show the same critique. None of those monks or individuals are detained. Also the marriage law proposal, which is initiated by the 969 movement, is non-officially approved by authorities. Both the Muslims and Buddhists support the idea that the government is legitimizing the 969 movement. They even think they support the movement with financial means.

The adaptation of the anti-Muslim discourse by the government is two-folded. On the one hand it is adapted because of the application of discriminatory practices by the government towards Muslims. These practices are experienced by Muslims and mostly focus on the lack of job opportunities within the government, the corruptive practices regarding the selling of national registration cards and the behavior of government officials when checking people at control posts during travel. The government is also posing restrictions on the participation of Muslims in national sports and the army. The Rohingya's even face travel restrictions. Next to these practices, the government acclaimed Buddhism to have a special position within Myanmar, because of the majority of Buddhist citizens. It could be that because of these factors, Muslims perceive the government and the direction that Myanmar is taken more negatively than Buddhists do. On the other hand the discourse is adapted because governmental actors behave biased in situations of violence. Government officials

⁴⁹ Author's interview on 18 April 2014 with Thet Swe Win, a Buddhist NGO worker from Yangon

condemn the violence between Buddhists and Muslims in their speeches and promote the rule of law. Their actions refute this however. Security forces are slow to respond and when they respond they are biased in who to arrest.

Out of this chapter it became clear that governmental actors do support extremism in direct and indirect ways and that they adapted the anti-Muslim discourse themselves, by discriminatory policies and biased security forces. Therefore we can conclude that securitization takes place. Securitization influences the 969 movement because they can practice what they preach without resistance and it is suspected that the 969 movement positively influences the securitization because it diverts attention from some suspicious governmental policies and it leads to support for the coalition party in the elections of 2015.

4. Conclusion

Within this research, the main focus lied on the truths of Muslims and Buddhists to be able to review whether social stigma takes place. Contextual questions revolved around securitization of the Muslim population within a time of democratic transition. The following research question will be answered in this conclusion: *How do certain Muslims experience social stigma in Yangon, Myanmar in 2014, an age of democratizing political space?* The research question is a two folded question, with interrelated components. The first component focuses on discriminatory practices within social stigma and the second component focuses on securitization of Muslims by a democratizing government. The main theme that walks through both chapters is discriminatory practices. The focus of the data are the truths of Muslims and Buddhists regarding their experiences and perceptions of the anti-Muslim discourse.

Muslims experience that the four steps necessary for social stigma are all present in society in Yangon. Differences between Muslims and Buddhists focus on looks and clothing, traditional customs of Islam and the perception of socio-economic differences. These categories of differences lead to certain labels and images to mark Muslims. The main linguistic marker people use is the word *Kalar*. The meaning of this word is very different for Buddhists and Muslims. The former uses this word even in situations calling out to friends, while the latter group feels it means that they are foreigners, swam across a river from India. Images that people use are the ၅၆၅-logo and pictures of dogs and pigs, these last two are mostly used on social media. Dogs are used for being perceived as one of the lowest creatures in Myanmar and pigs are connected to the Islamic teaching to not eat pork. These labels are linked to undesirable characteristics, which are perceived as physical features such as the traditional clothing and darker skin color, and religious features; traditional Islamic teachings such as polygamy, food restrictions and the prayers five times a day that are exclaimed from the mosques. The stereotypes that follow from these characteristics include Islamophobia, dominance of Muslims by the conversion of Buddhists and economic inequality. These categories of labeling and stereotyping are experienced by Muslims. The third indicator focuses on the separation between us and them. This is a step that was harder to contextualize and thus harder to prove. What I can say about it, is that there's a literal separation in the way Muslims and Buddhists spoke about each other. Both groups used clear words like "we" and "they" to indicate that they particularly belong to a different group. A component of social stigma and consequence of social stigma at the same time is discrimination. Muslims encounter it in school, where their treatment is occasionally different from Buddhists, some people are afraid to leave their neighborhood, because they expect Buddhists to behave a certain way. Next to some discriminatory practices they encountered, for most Muslims it includes a feeling of being different. In interaction with Buddhists they are treated the same, but when the Buddhists find out that they are in fact Muslims something changes in their eyes. Muslims also encounter discriminatory practices within jobs. Religion is one of the factors within personal information that needs to be mentioned when people apply for a job. Multiple Muslims had the experience that they were

invited for a job interview, but were rejected once their religious background showed. Another consequence of social stigma is social distance. Buddhists tend to be reserved in their acceptance of Muslims, whereas Muslims are a bit easier in accepting Buddhists in their personal space. The most remarkable distances were measured within the relationships of neighbors and family. Neighborhoods are often perceived as a safe place for Muslims when Muslims are the majority and Buddhists are afraid for a Muslim occupation when a room is let to a Muslim family. Marriages between the two groups are, almost without exception, not done. Muslims think so because of religious teachings, Muslims are supposed to marry Muslims and Buddhism is too different from Islam. Buddhists think so because the conversion from Buddhism to Islam is a nationalistic strategy to strengthen stereotypes of Muslims.

In a time of democratic transition it can be expected that discrimination is not one of the dominant discourses in a country. It can definitely be expected, that when it is, the government is actively trying to change this discourse. In Myanmar it is the other way around. The government is actively involved in the anti-Muslim discourse by legitimizing discriminatory actions by the extremist 969 movement and contributing to the discourse by imposing discriminatory policies and treatment on the basis of religion. It became clear that governmental actors do support extremism in direct and indirect ways and that they adapted the anti-Muslim discourse themselves, by discriminatory policies and biased security forces. Therefore we can conclude that securitization takes place. Securitization influences the 969 movement because they can practice what they preach without resistance and it is suspected that the 969 movement positively influences the securitization because it diverts attention from some suspicious governmental policies and it leads to support for the coalition party in the elections of 2015.

All the components mentioned in chapter 2 and 3 come together now. Central to all components is discriminatory treatment within the anti-Muslim discourse. Within this discourse are all four relevant actors situated. These actors are the Muslims, Buddhists, government and 969-movement. This anti-Muslim discourse is constructed by the interrelation between the government and other actors. The government legitimizes the 969 movement to practice hate speech and also Buddhist can behave freely, without fear of being prosecuted when discriminating or use violence. Because of this discrimination that can be practiced freely, the government does not have to adjust their discriminatory policies because no powerful group is against it. Muslims experience the discrimination, which causes fear and isolation. All these factors together establish a strong anti-Muslim discourse. All these actors are situated within this discourse. Even people with a background that empowers them to have an anti-discriminatory approach, like NGO employees, sometimes express discriminatory remarks. To put it shortly, social stigma is experienced to the fullest by the Muslims I interviewed and the 'democratizing' government is contributing by the securitization of Muslims.

5. Discussion

Buddhists are the large majority of the population in Myanmar. They perceive Muslims as a threat to their identity, whether or not because of hate speech by a nationalistic movement. Because they are in the majority they are the powerful group, and because of this power they are in the position to discriminate. Muslims on the other hand are a minority. The results of this research shows that they are more tolerant towards Buddhists than the other way around, while they are the group being discriminated against. But maybe they are tolerant for being the minority. Without power, what is there to be done? The current global situation regarding Islam and Muslims is complex. On the one hand there is a global fear for terrorism, which incites islamophobia. On the other hand, Muslims are persecuted. Not only in Myanmar, but also in other countries such as Israel and India. Even in Europe there is a segregation problem between immigrated Muslims and the local population. Altogether, integration of and protection from Islam is a globally relevant issue. Where Muslims are the minority, they can be viewed as victim, where they are the majority, they could pose a threat. Going back to the case of Myanmar where Muslims are a minority, it is not realistic to perceive them as a threat to the Burmese nation. The country's government, including NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi, should worry less about their votes in 2015 and worry more about the integration of a stigmatized religious minority. This can only contribute to the development of a country full of potential.

Doing social research with a limited sample of respondents, with a limited amount of time and in a foreign culture, causes some limitations to the research. One of the limitations is being an outsider as researcher. As interviewer I stood out in Myanmar, I was an outsider. I looked different and I had a different accent. I was lucky that being Caucasian in Myanmar is seen as favorable, that made it easier to be trusted and for people to want to talk with me. Still, being close to participants who are culturally different brings about some possible complications. Most participants of the research knew what I was researching in advance, because they wanted to know before doing the interview. Next to this some of the participants knew me in advance of the research. It may be that they wanted to please me or not to impact our relationship and therefore not answered the questions truthfully. It could also be that they felt obligated to participate, for not wanting to let me down. This raises ethical issues, because all respondents must participate on voluntary basis (Curtis and Curtis, 2011). Something else that is related to the outsider perspective is my particular view on cultural issues. Since my point of reference is very different from the participants, it could be that data is biased because I find meaning in something that means nothing to the participant. This is linked to the criticism on an interpretive method, like the one in this research is. An interpretive approach allows the interpreter's own normative frames of reference and world of meaning, which makes this approach subjective and subject to biases (Koch, 1995). I tried to avoid this as much as possible by asking about meaning and asking for reasons with multi-interpretable comments during the interviews.

The main limitation to this research is access to a diverse group of people. The respondents I had access to spoke English. I did three interviews with a translator to be able to interview (somewhat) conservative Muslims, who did not speak English that well. This means that the majority of my respondents were highly educated. Most of my interviewees mentioned that hate speech, which is a dominant feature of the amount of discrimination, is mostly believed by uneducated people. This example shows that my data could have been very different, when I would have interviewed people who are not or lower educated. Another limiting factor related to access is that a lot of my interviewees were in, or were related to the NGO sector. On one hand, this could be an advantage because they have a wide-spread view of some issues but on the other hand, they are much more liberal in their thinking and their opinions could be very different from the average Myanmar' citizen. But since it is not my goal to generalize my findings to the whole population of Yangon, I will take these limitations into account with the conclusions. Not only access to people, also access to documents is a factor of limitation to this research. Most documents and speeches of the government, which I used for content analysis, are written or published in Myanmar language. I could have chosen to have a local translator make a selection from these foreign documents and translate them, but I chose otherwise. I chose to only use documents and transcripts that were published in, or already translated to, English. This way it is easier to make a relevant selection of documents. Naturally this has effect on the kind of data that I retrieved. Because of the access of foreigners to these English documents, it could even be the case that these documents are framed in another way compared to national documents. To deal with this limitation I asked most of the respondents in the interviews what their opinion was on the difference between the government's actions and its speeches. Naturally, that didn't lead to the same results as when I would have been able to review more governmental documents, but in this case is data on the opinion on the government just as important as the documents itself.

Self-reported data, like part of the data in this research, is not always reliable by the fact that it rarely can be independently verified. Self-reported data contains several potential sources of bias that should be noted as limitations. The first is selective memory (Brutus et al, 2013). People I interviewed could have remembered or forgotten experiences or events that occurred in the past, however it's not possible to take into account possible effects of this sort of bias. Another source of bias is attribution, the act of attributing positive events and outcomes to one's own agency, but attributing negative events and outcomes to external forces (Brutus et al, 2013). Particularly the second part of this sort of bias could be of influence in my data retrieved from interviews. I intent to limit this as much as possible, by comparing the data obtained from interviews with newspaper articles and other trustworthy sources. The last applicable source of bias is exaggeration. Meant with exaggeration is the act of representing outcomes or events as more significant than is actually suggested from other data (Brutus et al, 2013). As well as with attribution, it is possible to take this kind of bias into account. I indeed experienced some cases where I had the feeling, based on previous interviews and other sources of data, that interviewees

exaggerated some events to prove a point. In case of aware exaggeration, I will either exclude data or include it with a marginal note.

To avoid some of the limitations that I encountered during this research, follow-up research needs to be on a larger scale with a better representation of Myanmar society. When more interviews are conducted with people from conflict areas, who experience discrimination and violence up close, a better description can be given of the situation. This research focused on the description of the problem. Just as important is the solution to the problem. Another direction a follow-up research could take is how to solve the discrimination following from stigmatization. Link and Phelan (2001) suggest two principles to change stigma. The first principle is that the approach needs to be multifaceted to address the many mechanisms that can lead to disadvantaged outcomes, and it needs to be multilevel to address issues of both individual and structural discrimination. Secondly, an approach must address the fundamental cause of stigma. It needs either to change the deeply held attitudes and beliefs of powerful groups, or it needs to change the circumstances so as to limit the power of such groups to make their cognitions the dominant ones. A research that touches upon these fundamental causes and mechanisms in order to review possible change would be interesting.

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Appendix I: Map Myanmar



Source: Asia Briefing (2014)

<http://www.asiabriefing.com/news/2013/02/chinese-troops-getting-battle-ready-in-yunnan/>

Appendix II: Detailed Map Myanmar



Appendix III: Survey Outline



Utrecht University

The results of this survey will be processed anonymous and will only be used for my master degree in the Netherlands. Thank you very much for participating.

Kind regards, Marit van Liere

Township		Job	
Age		Ethnicity	
Sex	Male / Female	Religion	
Education			

How do you view the current political situation of Myanmar? (Choose one)

- Very good Good Neutral Bad Very bad Don't know

On the whole, is Myanmar generally moving in the right or the wrong direction? (Choose one)

- Right Wrong Don't know

Cross the circle in front of the buildings that you would DISLIKE living close to (more than one possible):

- Church Fire Station Pagoda Primary school Mosque Nightclub

How much do you have in common with Buddhists (Choose one)?

- Very much in common | Much in common | Little in common | Nothing at all in common | I don't know

How much do you have in common with Christians? (Choose one)

- Very much in common | Much in common | Little in common | Nothing at all in common | I don't know

How much do you have in common with Hindus? (Choose one)

- Very much in common | Much in common | Little in common | Nothing at all in common | I don't know

How much do you have in common with Muslims? (Choose one)

- Very much in common | Much in common | Little in common | Nothing at all in common | I don't know

What's your opinion on Buddhists? (Choose one)

- Very favorable | Somewhat favorable | Somewhat unfavorable | Very unfavorable | Don't know / indifferent

What's your opinion on Christians? (Choose one)

- Very favorable | Somewhat favorable | Somewhat unfavorable | Very unfavorable | Don't know / indifferent

What's your opinion on Hindus? (Choose one)

- Very favorable | Somewhat favorable | Somewhat unfavorable | Very unfavorable | Don't know / indifferent

What's your opinion on Muslims? (Choose one)

- Very favorable | Somewhat favorable | Somewhat unfavorable | Very unfavorable | Don't know / indifferent

Please cross the circles if you would be willing to accept the following situations or relationships with Buddhists:

- Accept as a co-worker | Accept as a neighbor
 Accept as a close friend | Accept into family by marriage

Please cross the circles if you would be willing to accept the following situations or relationships with Christians:

- Accept as a co-worker | Accept as a neighbor
 Accept as a close friend | Accept into family by marriage

Please cross the circles if you would be willing to accept the following situations or relationships with Hindus:

- Accept as a co-worker | Accept as a neighbor
 Accept as a close friend | Accept into family by marriage

Please cross the circles if you would be willing to accept the following situations or relationships with Muslims:

- Accept as a co-worker | Accept as a neighbor
 Accept as a close friend | Accept into family by marriage

Thank you for your time!

Appendix IV: Transcripts Interviews

Interview 1

Name interviewee: Thet Swe Win

Telephone number: 09420029616

Name interviewer: Marit van Liere

Date interview: 18-04-2014

Location interview: interviewer's home

Acronyms:

M: interviewer Marit

T: interviewee Thet

V: interfeerer Vanessa

M: Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, like where you're from and your age?

T: My organization is called a Myanmar Youth, the one founded in 2010 after the elections. That organization focuses on empowerment of youth and development issues. In 2012 I visited ASEAN youth Forum in Cambodia, I started having a network with a Myanmar youth network. My network was bigger. I did a lot of activities apart from my organizations. I organized the international day of peace in 2012. That one was the biggest on here [in Myanmar], more than 2000 people joined. Then we did the Myanmar Youth Forum in 2014. In 2013 the crisis happened; the Muslim. This crisis was since 2012 in Rakhine. This was getting bigger in 2013. A Muslim friend of mine and I decided to do a public campaign to raise awareness about peaceful co-existence [of different religions]. Then we did a campaign called 'pray for Myanmar'. That campaign was successful, because we could prevent the [long hesitation] the fighting in the community. Studies, then came back here. Then I founded the center for youth and social harmony together with some friends, that's what I am doing right now.

M: Did you study before you did all this?

T: I studied population studies. It's like statistics. That's all I have basically.

M: Now you're 27?

T: yes

M: What's your religion?

T: I am practicing Buddhism, but not in the traditional way. I accept all religions. I accept all the good things of all the religions.

M: So what do you think the difference is between how you practice it and how other people practice it in the country [Myanmar]?

T: The traditional Buddhism, they don't learn much about the religion. They just accept it from their parents. They never criticize their religion. But I am not like that. I criticize my religion.

M: what do you think about the way you practice your religion and others practice Buddhism? What's your opinion on it?

T: actually the Buddhism here is spiritual workshop things. We call it 'Ned'; spirit. Because Buddhism originated from India, so it's like before the Buddhism there was Hinduism and also one the Buddhism came to Myanmar it mixed together with the religions from China. We have everything here. We worship everything. Actually the ordinary Burmese people, so my understanding is that Buddhism is to practice and to control the mind. To get in real peace. The way the Buddha tells it, is to find inner peace in ourselves, then only we can spread the peace around. But people here do not really practice is like this.

M: what's your opinion on other religions here in Myanmar?

T: it's good.. I accept every religion. For me it's no problem. But, you know, the ritual, I see something different when I come in other religions places like church or mosque. I feel that every place is.. I feel different, strange.

M: like that's not your place?

T: yeah

M: Do you feel that other people – I know you are every open towards other religions – perceive Muslims differently?

T: yeah. You know, I was a Muslim hater before. When I was in highschool, the hate speeches on national level were occurring. The legends about Muslim people spread around in that time. You might know the man named Wirathu? He was arrested around that time in 1998. There was a riot happening in the near Meiktila. The legends were spreading to schools about all the bad things about Muslims. I hated Muslims, I hated them. In our class there were only two Muslims. One guy was quite older than me, the older was the same age but rather small. At the break time, me and two of my friends would always beat him.

M: what changed then/ what made you change?

T: I read a lot of books. We have a famous book about the religions. I read it so I can understand the concept of other religions. Then I changed myself. In 2008 after the saffron revolution. I joined this revolution as well. Many muslim people.. thousands of monks walked on the street barefoot. The Muslim people gave them shoes. Also other people did. Then I realized that they are also human beings and feel the same as us. So I changed my mind. In 2008 in December I went to Singapore and met a lot of other religion people. I understand religion things.

M: what do you think the cause is that originally people treat and see Muslims differently than people of their own religion?

T: ehshhmm.. it's quite different now. Before two years ago, before the riots started, many Buddhist people they don't like them, but they can accept them. So they never disrespected them.

M: why didn't they like them?

T: Because of the Islamophobia. They are afraid that the Muslim people could seize the war. They would Islamize the Buddhist girls. We have a lot of stories about Muslim people here. Rumors actually. Like countries like Brunei, rich countries, they announce that once they get married, the Burmese/Buddhist people.. like how much.. we got a lot of these kinds of rumors. The Burmese people they don't want our religion to be converted into other religion. That is a problem. Before the riots, the only problem is the marriage. We can accept the economically, the business things we can accept. We buy at the shop.. no problem. Also we do business with them. But, only the problem is the marriage. We don't want our religion to be married to Muslim. Because they force them to force them to change religion.

M: what changed after the riots in 2012?

T: the 969 came up. Then the problem is that they .. you know what the 969 people did? They waited at the entrance of the 786.. Muslim shop. They beat the Buddhist people who go and buy at the Muslim shop. .. shouted to go back and buy from Buddhist people.

M: Do you feel that you are treated differently than a Muslim your age would be treated in Yangon?

T: there is the same problem.. the Muslim people here have been treated as second class citizenship. Even for the open societies like us, some people still discriminate Muslim people. So I would say that they are not treated the same as us.

M: How do you notice this in everyday life? So what are the exact differences?

T: Not that obvious. But we know that because we are the people living here for a long time. So we know that.

M: but you cannot really name an example?

T: yeah. Like for example, when you take taxi, you are happy to see that the taxi driver is a Burmese guy. You are not so happy with a taxi driver with a beard.. and you know the Muslim guy. The people don't want to take Muslim taxi. That's why last year many of the taxi's they put the 969 stickers on their taxi to let people know that they are the Buddhist people's taxi.

M: these taxi drivers, do they also not want Muslims to take their taxi?

T: sometimes.

M: Do they also have these 969 images on different places in the city or only on taxis?

T: different places, everywhere. Only because of the rainy season all [not able to hear].

M: did you ever were in a situation where Muslims were discriminated and in that case, what words were used to discriminate them?

T: I never experienced discrimination.

M: Or maybe not yourself, but close to you?

V: tell her the story

T: For the facebook page, those Muslim haters they change the facebook profile into a pig-photo.

M: and what does that mean?

T: It means that they hate Muslims. There was a case from the .. I reported this to the government and the US Embassy. A party called Unity and Diversity, that is a political party. The chairman of that party is a Muslim hater.. any Muslim. His facebook profile picture is a photo of a pig. A few months ago he announced that the intruders from Bangladesh, like the Muslim intruders. He announced that whoever could kill the intruders from Bangladesh, his party would reward 300\$. Per person. He is spreading the hate speech. And also so many people they contribute money to him. That is quite dangerous. So I reported this. This is the way the people are discriminated.

M: How do you think Muslims are excluded from normal participation in society?

T: Not only the Muslims. But Muslims are most special right now.

M: also other religions?

T: No, race is the problem. Burmese people think of themselves like they are the great Burmese people. Because they dominate the whole country. Clearly we have a lot of ethnic tribes. The Burmese people they think they are the great Burmese, and so the other races and other ethnics are lower than us. So the mindset .. we have been teaching since we are in kindergarten about the Burmese system. The government will systematically destroy the educational system. Three or four decades ago. The system was already destroyed. The mindset is like that. Not only we focus on Muslims. Only right now the cases came up and we are more focused on that. We discriminate to the other people, the Burmese people normally.. other ethnic people.

M: and what kind of ethnic people do you mean?

T: The Chin, Kayin, Chan, Chin. A lot of ethnic. Over 135 ethnicities. The Burmese only think we are the biggest and greatest.

M: While these people all have lived in Burma, for such a long time already..

T: Yeah. That was our history thing. During the Burmese kingdom time.. the Burmese king always wanted to fight the other ethnic minority people. They crooked the things?? Mandalay, even though minority Muslim people hated to the Burmese people.. Mon ethnic, Rakhine ethnic.. actually Rakhine is the place that riot happened right now. The Rakhine ethnic .. all the Rakhine people are the Buddhist but they hate the Burmese people. They hate them a lot. Actually the Rakhine people hate us. Because they think

that we.. the Burmese people.. grabbed their freedom 250 years ago. The Buddha image in Mandalay was brought from Rakhine in that time. Only right now, because of the Muslim problem, they stick together with us. We have to fight them again. We have to fight each other after the problem.

M: do you think the problem, the riots, will come to an end?

T: I think so [higher voice].

M: who is responsible for that you think?

T: the government. Because we have to.. treat them equally. That means that all the ethnic people are asking for federalism, so they can have their own power to rule, their own state. But now they don't have that kind of power. If we give them the pure federalism, the problem will be solved I think.

M: do you think the government is taking it's responsibility?

T: No.. All these problems here, are the government responsibilities. Since the 2012 riots, the rape case. One Rakhine Buddhist girl was raped by three Muslim guys. But normally the government media they never announce this. They only announce that there was a rape in Rakhine by three guys. But that night I was watching the news and it was announced like this: A Buddhist girl was raped by three Muslim guys. That means that the government is fueling to the fire. They should not do that. The way they announced the news was quite mobilizing the people to fight. So 100% government responsibility. Because during the riots in 2013 the gas pipe line from Rakhine State to China was already connected. Then most of the people they can offer .. for that. Because of the riots. Riots happened everywhere. Many cases.. the government would benefit from that.

M: Benefit?

T: the activist like us cannot focus on it, we have to focus on that that kind of problems instead of government projects. The government divert the people's interest by the religion conflicts. The pipe line, we reject it. Because the pipe line crosses the whole country from west to east to China. We only get about 20 or 30% of the profit. 80% goes to China. We accused to the government that they want to divert our interests against the project. So that's why they create the religion conflict. Because so many cases, many police but they never take action. They let them destroy and fire. There is a lot of government responsibility.

M: Do you think there's a difference in what the government is telling in its speeches on television and in the newspapers and what they are really doing about the violent issues or do you think that it's pretty much the same?

T: The government should take action for sure. They never take it seriously. They never take action seriously. So they can arrest monks who are doing the hate speeches, but they never do it. For the riot they let it happen and they never arrest people. So the government let it happen. Another interest of the government is the 2015 election. They want to divert the people's interest. Because NLD they never take action about the religion conflict, but that is too controversial. So NLD never take action, so its popularity is down now. Because the government people actually, especially the USDP is saying that the NLD is a Muslim party and that the Muslim people give money to NLD. That kind of rumor they spread. Its popularity is down.

M: Do you feel that the government is taking sides? Do they support the 969 movement and anti-Muslim movement or not so much?

T: Sure, the government supports them.

M: In what way?

T: In keeping silent. They never take action, that's the way they support them.

M: They don't take action, but they also don't really take action against Muslims, or do they?

T: Actually no. But in Rakhine state they do. Because the prime minister is Rakhine. And the whole administrative body is Rakhine people. So they oppress them.

M: Do you mean the political party in Rakhine State or the national?

T: Both. We have the state division government here, right. We have the Union government and the state division government. So the Rakhine State government has a problem. Also the political party called RNDP (Rakhine National Development Party), they spread hate speeches. Also mobilizing people to destroy the Muslim people. The government is biased on the anti-Muslim people.

M: Who or what do you think is the cause of the violence and discrimination between Buddhists and Muslims?

T: The cause of the violence.. I am not sure. I will say both. Both sides. Because only now we are talking to Buddhist people, that . is bad. In Rakhine state especially, many Rakhine girls were raped by Muslim guys. That was true. So many cases. But people didn't know about this. Only now that the Rakhine people they can't hold it and they fight them so that the people .. sometimes the Muslim people also are doing the bad things. We can see it. It's like a clap. You can't clap with one hand, you need two hands. Both hands.. both sides.

M: what do you think of the proposition for this inter-marriage law?

T: I can't accept it. Because the girls should have the right to choose her partner, who to marry. We should not stop them by law. This is violating human rights.

M: Do you think that it will go through?

T: So far I think yes. We still have to change it.

M: But if the government approves is, there's nothing that people can do, right?

T: yeah.

M: What do you think about the current political situation, system? The country is transitioning towards democracy but how do you think it's doing?

T: yes, we're changing. That's quite obvious. But there's still a part that needs changing. We still have the 25% from the military [in the government], they are appointed, not selected. This 25% can still nominate one vice-president. So that's not fair for us. That thing should be changed. And I don't know about the clause 59D about Aung San Su Kyi actually, that she cannot become president. I have no point to talk about this, because this is about our national security. I would agree with the people who don't want to change. I don't want to change it. There should be another way we can make her president. We should find another alternative. But the 59D is quite controversial.

M: And what about the economic situation here?

T: Only the apartments, the prices are quite high. The telephone line, five years ago the telephone prices were so much higher. Most prices have gone down, because of the changed system. The businesses are not quite fair yet. More free than before.

M: What's not fair?

T: Because the rich people, got rich from the military government. They share a relationship with them. They always get projects from the government. Not quite fair. Then many foreign company investors are coming in here, but the problem here is human resources. We have a problem in five years, because of high demands and not enough skilled workers who speak English and know the international things. Most educated people go to Singapore and Thailand or Australia, so they get higher paid than here, that's why they don't want to come back here. The people who live here are not well-trained and high-qualified. That's a problem that we cannot solve right now. The business is overall growing, but on the other hand we need to do a lot of preparation

because of the ASEAN economic cooperation. With all the ASEAN countries we can trade. The countries who have money, all the rich countries like Thailand and Malaysia, they can bring their products here. A country like Singapore who has a lot of human resource will come in here to work. Our local people have no chance to get a higher position. We'll be cleaners and doormen, like blue-collar jobs. We need to prepare. We need to prevent the bad things as well.

M: Do you feel like the current economic situation has an impact on the discrimination towards Muslims?

T: There are two telecom companies that just arrived here. Ooredoo is owned by Muslim people. They recruit 3000 .. recently, but most of the employees are not Muslim people. They don't want to show people they are biased to the Muslim. But Telenor is owned by Christian, but most of the employees are Muslim, because the Telenor is grounded in Bangladesh, so technicians and people are sent from there. Here in Yangon very difficult for a riot or crisis to happen. We have already an interrelation with the businesses. We just don't want to destroy our business.

M: Do you have any more thoughts about the 969 movement?

T: I don't support them. Actually the 969 movement is good originally. The first 9 is about Buddha, the 6 about Tama and the 9 about Taga. Not a big deal for us. But people use it in a bad way, they should not use it anymore. It is originally good.

M: Do you think the discrimination is aimed only at Rohingya or at Muslims at a total community?

T: Actually, they are attacking the Muslims. They are attacking the religion. I have one point; a story of my friend. He is Muslim. He founded an organization called Fateh Resource Center. Because the Muslim community is isolated. They never communicate with the other people, even though we live side by side, in the same apartment, but we never talk. This is a Muslim custom. That they are isolated. My friend is Muslim, but he doesn't like the situation and wants to change the society. What he did is; he went to the Muslim orphanage center and he teaches [could not hear] .. At these kinds of centers they only teach Muslim things, like Islam religion. The leaders don't teach anything about former education, most Muslim leader here don't even speak Burmese language, even though they were born here. They can't read it, they can't write it. That's a real problem. So my friend went there and teaches the children about formal education and how to read and write. Ten years ago he asked where you're from, from Pakistan. Even though he is born here. Then he asked again; can you sing the national anthem. He didn't know. My friend then taught him to sing the national anthem together. What I see is that that's a big problem. The Muslim people here don't think that they belong here, to this country. That is the problem. If they don't feel like they belong here, they will not .. to this country.

M: Do you think this sense of belonging is something that they themselves should create or also the Burmese people?

T: They should create themselves. For example Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement, he was discriminated a lot by white people, but they never think themselves as not belonging to the country. They stood up as citizens of the country and asked the right of citizenship. The Muslim people here should do the same. First they should consider themselves as citizen of this country and then they should stand up together and ask for their rights. Now even in the Muslim community they supplented a lot in different groups. We have four major Muslim groups here. They don't like each other.

M: Why not?

T: Muslim are quite funny here. We have a saying: If you see two Muslim guys doing business together, you should prepare to walk because they will create a problem soon. Because most Muslim people are quite greedy, always looking for money. That's a

problem. Some Muslim groups want to get famous and some want to get money, I don't know why. That's inciting problems. Four major groups..

M: Can you name them?

T: I don't know: Ohlma, Myanmar Ohlma group, I don't know, difficult names. But basically I can divide them into two groups. The Muslim who accept the Burmese tradition, who wears Longyi and jacket like us, we call it Burmese Muslim. They are quite familiar with us. Most of the Burmese people can accept them, because of their customs. But the other one with long beard and mustache and they wear long clothing. We don't accept it.

M: Why don't you accept it?

T: Because we feel like they are different from us, because their wearing style. And the Muslim ladies wear hijab and you can see only their eyes. They are people from other countries, they don't belong here. But we accept the Burmese Muslim people.

M: So they live pretty isolated. What kind of things do you see that isolates them?

T: They only deal with their own Muslim people, they never deal with other people. This means that the girls with the hijab, they are not allowed to go to school. By the Muslim people. The boys are allowed to go to school. They visit normal schools. We need to change this. Two problems; Buddhist people sides raise the awareness about the integration to the Muslim people.

M: Do you have more examples or stories that indicate discrimination?

T: Actually no... But we hear many news about this kind of discrimination. Even in our family they don't like Muslims. My mom owns a few rooms that she rents out. She doesn't want to rent the rooms to Muslims. Because we are afraid once a Muslim family moves in the street, the other Muslim also comes in and in five years the whole street will be full of Muslims.

M: When two Buddhist people talk about Muslim, what kind of words do they use to discriminate Muslims?

T: We call it 'Kala'. Kala is what we call Muslim people.

M: How would you translate it?

T: The black color. We discriminate by the color. Kala means like everybody should be Indian. Who we call Indian people, he doesn't need to be Muslim. Should be black and Muslim or Hindu also. But we call them Hindu Kala. Muslims we call Muslim Kala.

End of Interview

One note said after interview:

Thet believes that Bengali Muslims are intruders in Rakhine State. It's no problem for Myanmar to open refugee camps, but other rich countries should offer their help and food and money. Own country doesn't have enough money, it has other priorities.

Interview Nr. 2

Name interviewee: Shoaib M. Mahda

Telephone number:

Name interviewer: Marit van Liere

Date interview: 22-04-2014

Location interview: Muslim Free Hospital Office

Acronyms:

M: interviewer Marit

S: interviewee Shoaib

I: interfeerer

M: Can you introduce yourself?

S: I am Dr. Shoaib M. Mahda. I studied at the institute of Medicine. I was born here, brought up here and I am a Myanmar citizen. My mother died two years ago. My father died. All my other family members are all in the United States.

M: why did they move?

S: Because of the situation here. They can't do anything here. They can't do any business here. So they had to move out.

M: Because of your religious background?

S: No, there was no religious suppression.

M: And what about you're religious background?

S: I am a Muslim. My religion is Islam. My ethnic race is a Surti. Surti's are from Budjrath states. Our forefathers come from India. But we were born here.

M: And what about your job?

S: I am an administrator. I was elected as vice president of this hospital and then I was appointed as honary medical superintendent. We don't take money from this hospital. Everybody who works here are business men.

I: We came here during time of Burmese kings. So many Rohingyas have been here during time of Burmese kingdoms. And now they say they came here to [war/work; could not hear]

M: Can you tell me a little bit about the history of the hospital?

S: This hospital was established in 1937. Young Muslims who build this hospital. This building was dominated by our president's grandfather, at the time one of the richest men of Burma. It grew during time to fit with the needs.

M: Why was it set up? What's the difference with the other hospitals?

S: Other hospitals you have to pay for nowadays. At that time, prenatalized (nationalized was done in 1962). Before then were some private hospitals, that people could not afford. People could come here and come in for treatment totally free. For the poor and needy. 5% do pay for services.

M: How do you earn the rest of the money that you need?

S: Our main income, main donations come from 'Zakar'. Muslims have to pay about 2,5% of their income to poor people every year.

M: is that enough to maintain the hospital?

S: No, not enough. We receive a big fund from foreign countries such as Japanese, Australian, Italian embassy and from the Red Cliff foundation. There are so many donors who are not Muslim. We don't treat only Muslims, you know. Actually non-Muslims are more than Muslim patients. We are a Buddhist country. We cannot discriminate. We receive all patients, that's all. Even before this election, all the NLD party members were treated here. Because they had nowhere to go. Even Aung San Su Kyi came here when she had a tumor in her uterus for our doctors. Because she did not believe anyone. All

the politicians before the elections of 2010 were treated here. After they were permitted to be elected in the parliament, they donated money to other hospitals. Not to this one. I am not afraid to say, I don't like them at all.

M: Why not?

S: I am not a politician, I am straightforward. So I can't bear that kind of things.

M: About your aim; it's to help the poor, the needy and the sick without discrimination of race, creed or color, right? Do you think that other hospitals do discriminate? And How?

S: Yes. For example; this hospital is not that big and we don't have so many good doctors as the common hospitals do. Sometimes we have trouble and we need emergency help. This hospital does not have an emergency unit. When we need to refer somebody to another hospital they discriminate and call us "Indians"/"You Indians". They do take the patient. We have to refer them.

M: Do you have other examples of discrimination towards Muslims in hospital areas?

S: I have not come across these things, but I've heard that people are called Indians or 'Kala'. This means you swim across the river to hear from India. So sometimes they discriminate like this. In every Burman office there is great discrimination. You can't get national registration card if you are a Muslim.

M: That's an identification card?

S: Yes, but I got it. A certificate from the high court. I am a naturalized citizen here. In 1952 my parents became naturalized citizens here, by applying to the court. Now they closed it. Actually I am a pure Indian, but I got this card here.

M: What happens when you don't have a registration card?

S: You can't go around or go to other countries. But nowadays they give it, but there's a big corruption.

M: You have to pay money?

S: Yes, you have to pay about 300.000 – 500.000 kyat. Chinese cross the border from mainland China and they buy estates and they got a naturalized citizen card. Pink colour; first class citizen?

M: How's that possible?

S: With money, all corrupted.

M: How is the situation with the ID cards for Buddhists?

S: They have to pay too. But not as much.

M: Does your hospital have some government interference?

S: No, it's just registered with the ministry of Health, otherwise we can't rent this hospital.

M: And do you experience some negative comments on the hospital from the media or some movements?

S: No, I never came across this thing.

M: Why is it called the 'Muslim' Free Hospital?

S: It is built by just Muslims. That's why it's called this way. All the Muslims, most of our community members of Surtis and other Muslims as well, they contributed to this hospital. And all our committee members are Muslims. But most doctors are Buddhist. They can't interfere in administration.

M: do you think Muslims feel differently in this country in everyday life?

S: .. Silence.. I already told you there's discrimination everywhere. The issue with the national registration card. You have to attend college, but that's only possible with a registration card. Some difficulties and differences with Buddhists.

M: this kind of discrimination is kind of official, is it also on the streets?

S: No, it's official.

M: What do you think the cause is for the discrimination?

S: In pre-independence area, most Indians –not us- they brought a lot of Indians because they colonized India first. Because Indians believe the British are the masters and they obey them. That's why they discriminate us. At that time all their needs were taken by Indians. When the British government was here, they gave priority to Indians. Actually Burma was a part of India. Burma was a state of India. But actually, before nationalization there was not such discriminations or apartheid policy in Burma. When Ne Win came, he start preaching all these things. His government was the worst. There were killings of Muslims. They burned down houses of Muslims. They burnt down mosques. It never happens here. Burma was not that insecure at that time, it was very secure. There was no-one to touch you. Nowadays you can't tell.

M: Do you think that's the fault of the government or some other reason?

S: It is the fault of politics. Because this present government will lose if the elections take place in 2015, from Aung San Su Kyi and the NLD. They are meddling all the things to get favour.

M: To get favour from the Buddhists?

S: Yes. If the Buddhists and Muslims go against them, they do not hesitate to kill them. They did it before.

Actually it is not about Buddhists and Muslims. It is all politics. They have trained about 2000-5000 military men to do all these things. Some hooligans after them, some are ignorant follow them. Actually Burma was a very good country. Burmese people were very humble. But this military government is very cruel and rootless.

M: Do you think it started in '62?

S: No then it was just starting. There were some mistakes done by Indians as well, in the Unduz era. They think Burmese was inferior, they didn't give so much attention to Burmese.

M: So it became worse the last two decades?

S: Yes.

M: The 969 movement is telling that Muslims are a threat to the Burmese identity. What do you think about that?

S: There is no threat from Muslims to Buddhists. If you want to learn Islam, please read Koran with meanings and the life of our messenger. No threat to any religion in the world. If you want to become a Muslim, you're welcome. If not, that's your wish. No force, no harm. Nothing harm from us. [repeated 3x]

M: Why do you think they think that then?

S: It's politics! It's by the military rulers. They didn't want to give power away to NLD people. They can take away at any time. They write that thing in constitution.

M: Do you think they will change the constitution?

S: No chance.

M: What about the difference in the Muslim community? And do you think there's a difference in how people treat the different groups groups?

S: In line of Koran teachings, Muslims are all the same. No difference. But we have different kind of races (examples: Bengali, Surti, Hindu).

[Interruption]

M: Do you feel there is a difference in what the government is telling people and what they are doing?

S: Mostly they lie. The day before yesterday there was an accident where 24 people were killed, and they wrote only 12 in the paper. They never show the exact figure. They took the census here last week. The UN and other donors give them papers and special pencils that can't be erased. But they used cheap Chinese pencils instead, which could be erased, and they did. It's all bullshit. Actually, they are saying that Muslims are only

4% in Burma. But we are with 13-14% at 1972 census. And the Muslim population never drops down, it always goes up because we cannot use sterilization.

M: Why do you think they want to change the census?

S: They didn't want to give minority rights.

M: How many percent should it be to give the rights for the government?

S: I don't know, I have not read the constitution. I think everybody in the world, if it's more than 10% they should get minority rights.

M: Do you think there are specific labels/images people use to mention that you are a Muslim?

S: Kala, and they point the beard out. Just 2 days before Thingyan festival myself and an uncle got picked up by an ambulance. A drunkard was walking in the center of the road. When the driver hunked, he didn't move. The driver went around him, but he scolded up his Longyi. Because the Muslim Free Hospital was written on our car. Actually previously it was not that bad. This government has always instigated these things in the mind.

After closing down the recording:

S: All religions are the same. We are not to judge about other religions, because we don't know.

Freedom of speech and democracy is good, but it should be restricted. People can't say everything they want if they don't know or want to do harm.

Example..> If one Muslim men does something bad, it reflects bad on all Muslims.

One day all religions will end.

Interview Nr. 3

Name interviewee: Zaw Min Latt

Telephone number: X

Name interviewer: Marit van Liere

Date interview: 23/04/2014

Location interview: Little restaurant – empty

Translator: Thet Swe Win

Acronyms:

M: interviewer Marit

Z: interviewee Zaw (translated by Thet)

V: Observer Vanessa Schwegler

T: Translator Thet Swe Win

T: We did a lot of things together. He is also one of the organizers of the Muslim Youth Forum. He also has a business in construction.

M: Can you tell a little bit about yourself?

Z: I have 5 siblings and I am the youngest one. And I am a Muslim. I am trying to be. I live according to the holy Koran, I follow Mohammed.

M: Why was the Muslim Youth Forum organized?

Z: To see how they can live peacefully together with other religions in Myanmar. And to raise difficulties of Muslim Youth people, like education and freedom of expression.

M: What were the outcomes of the Forum?

Z: We found out the common challenges of Muslims from the rural country. We found out what is the best way to live peacefully together with other people. We issued a statement after the forum.

M: What are the common challenges?

Z: Mostly, we don't want to get the conflict with other religions. We also face education and health problems. We want to get a better education system. We also want to have .. process like other young people and religions.

M: Do you think young Muslim people have a different opinion on these matters than their parents (other generations) do?

Z: Not that much, the young Muslim people have more knowledge about the inter-faith things than the old people. But the old people have a lot of experience. They are sharing with each other, so it's not that different.

M: The participants of the Forum; what kind of, where did they come from. Only Muslims?

Z: From all over the country, all Muslim.

V: Are non-Muslims also able to participate?

Z: They are allowed to be an observer.

M: What is your experience being a Muslim in Myanmar?

Z: Before the crisis, before 2 years ago, I was happy. Now I feel that people discriminate me. Our leaders our dutiful, but now it's the time to fight for this. Muslims feel they are discriminated by the majority Buddhist people. This situation right now is only for temporary. I believe that it will recover and that we will talk to each other again.

M: What do you think needs to be changed to stop this situation?

Z: The rule of law and the political will of the government. If they really take action according to the law, we can stop all this.

M: About the discrimination; in what way do you feel you're discriminated?

Z: After 2010, when hate speeches happened, discrimination is more obvious than before.

M: What are the things being said in hate speeches about Muslims?

Z: Normally people feel like Muslim people marry four wives, and that the holy Koran mobilizes Muslims to kill non-Muslim people. Islam is terrorism. These things they preach to the people. In my family we only marry one wife and this is supported by the Koran.

There was a rumor before that when a Muslim person marries a non-Muslim person (and change their religion), he can get financial support from the mosque from other Muslim countries. But this is not true.

That way hate speech preachers, preach about bad things about Muslims and the government allows them to speak freely.

M: What kind of images or labels do people use in the hate speech or on social media?

Z: In Yangon it is not that obvious, but in the rural area extreme people are training the young rural people systematically not to buy at Muslim shop and not to have a relationship with Muslim. A few days ago in a village near Yangon, there were four houses destroyed by Buddhist guys, because a Buddhist girl was in a relationship with a Muslim people.

M: and what about bad words people use?

Z: There are some trainings to hate Muslim and there is printed media that says bad things about Muslims and this is supported by the government. Like bad things from the Koran, raping cases, terrorism. Not all the Buddhists preach about hate speech, I am talking about specific individuals, like Wirathu. The government is behind him.

M: But he was in prison for inciting violence right? Why was he wrong that time, and this time not?

Z: People who didn't want to go to democracy, headliner people, these people fully support him. People who want to draw back democracy, by communal violence and religious conflict. They use religion as a political tool.

M: What is your experience with discrimination in daily life?

Z: For him there's no discrimination in Yangon. But in the rural area many Muslim people experience discrimination. I do experience this with my construction business; some house owner don't want to work with a Muslim person.

M: What do you think the reason is for that?

Z: The government just let the hate speech spread around, and they never take action for the discrimination. I blame the government. If the government takes action, the discrimination will disappear in one or two years.

M: So do most people living here, believe the hate speeches?

Z: 70% of the young population do not believe it, but 30% does believe it.

M: Do you think discrimination differs between different Muslim groups?

Z: Same discrimination.

M: And also between Rohingya and 'normal' Muslims?

Z: Same. All Muslims are the same.

M: So the discrimination is aimed at the religion, and not ethnicity?

T: Yeah.

Z: I think it is because of religion and not because of race.

T: People see Bengali and Rohingya as the same thing, because Rohingya is not accepted as identity.

M: How do you perceive other religions in Myanmar?

Z: All religions teach about good things. Good or bad things do not depend on the religion, but on the individual mind.

M: How do the Muslim people feel about their discrimination?

Z: We have been peacefully living together with other religions for so many years. But only now the country is changing to democracy, they have been discriminated. So I feel very sorry about that.

M: What do you think that the government should do about it?

Z: The rule of law is the key point. The government should not discriminate by race or religion. For the violent cases, the government should not be biased towards one religion. If they do it strictly, discrimination will disappear?

M: Do you think the government will change?

Z: I don't think that if the government stays the same, I don't think the government will do it in this term.

M: Do you think anything will change if the constitution stays the same (in relation with elections 2015)

Z: If we have a genuine democracy in 2015, it is going to change.

M: You mention rule of law a lot, but what exactly do you mean with that?

Z: The government should not be biased to the race or religion to achieve democracy. They must act according to the law.

M: Do you think there is a difference between what the government says to do and really do?

Z: Yes, after the conflict the government promises that it won't happen again, but it keeps on going to other cities. The government never arrest the people.

M: Who do you think is responsible for the discrimination?

Z: In the first place the government, and in the second place the people who work for the government. The people who give wrong information to discriminating people, have more responsibility than the discriminating people?

M: What do you think about the census?

Z: It's a lie. At first they said to allow whatever races people wanted, but last minute they changed it for Rohingya people. The immigration also has this problem. The census registration, never allowed Muslim people to put their ethnic name in there. They wrote down whatever they wanted. There's a lack of transparency.

M: What do you think about the inter-faith marriage law proposal?

Z: I want to have the law, because the law can clarify that Muslims are not marrying other religions. But in some area, like Rakhine, inter-marriage is happening. But most Muslims are not marrying wives of other religion. But the law should be for everybody, but now it's only for Buddhist, to protect Buddhist from Muslims.

M: That's not official right?

T: They don't describe it like that, but in practice it is.

M: What do you think of the 969 movement and their notion that Muslims are an identity threat to Burmese identity? How do you feel that people see it that way?

Z: Abuse to the Muslim, without proper proof/example/cases... [Interruption] Most of the Buddhist people do not accept the 969 movement, so I don't think the 969 movement will present the whole Buddhist community. People just show up in 969 t-shirts, they write it on the wall, while they have no evidence. It's framed by one group.

M: Why do you think some people do see Muslims as a threat to their country's identity?

Z: Because some of the Buddhist respective seniors preach the hate speech, the naïve Buddhists believe it.

V: Are you married and are your children discriminated?

Z: My kids go to international school, no discrimination there. At the public schools there is a lot of discrimination, even from teachers. Teachers force the Muslim students to pay respect to Buddhism. Then in front of other students the teachers say that Islam is really bad. Some students are really proud, but they are being discriminated by the teachers.

The government.. Some Muslims went to university, but they don't have an ID card; so they can't receive the certificate. For a new one you have to pay 300-400\$.

Z: I would also like to ask you to go talk to your government, so that democratic values can be taught here.

Z: it's dangerous; the government, no law for Muslims...

Interview Nr. 4

Name interviewee: Nay Phone Latt (pseudonym because profession as blogger)

Telephone number: 095047281

Name interviewer: Marit van Liere

Date interview: 01-05-2014

Location interview: Office of interviewee

Acronyms:

M: interviewer Marit

N: interviewee Nay

M: What kind of blogger are you?

N: Actually I want to be a writer, but it is not so easy in this country to be a writer because there are so many restrictions. There's no freedom of expression and also there is censorship in the military regime. Most of the magazines and journals prefer the famous writer, there is no place for the young writer, so it's very difficult to be a writer. When I went to Singapore my friend introduced me with blogging. In the blogging you can get the domain name free and everything is free and we can write in Burmese language. I created my blog and there is no editor, no censorship so I can write whatever I want. Because of the military regime, there are so many Myanmar communities around the world, and they are very eager to read Burmese language on the internet. There are a lot of Myanmar bloggers and they have a lot of audience.

M: What do you write about on your blog?

N: All kinds of things, short stories, poetry. Most of my writing is post-modern short stories. If I am criticizing the government, I never say it directly. I do it in story-format or sometimes I use the metaphor.

M: Why don't you do it directly?

N: It depends on the political situation of Myanmar. You can get into trouble if you criticize the government directly. Especially in the military regime. I also prefer the post-modern theory. If I want to say everything directly, I will be a teacher. I am not a teacher, I want the readers to think themselves.

M: What's the difference between and after the military regime, regarding censorship?

N: Now there is no censorship. At first in the military regime, if you want to publish something, you have to get permission from the military. Now you can publish without permission. But in the military regime everything is illegal, gmail, gtalk was illegal. All the news websites were banned. Viewing these was illegal. Not it's all over, we can see everything and use everything.

M: But there are still consequences right, if you write something they don't like?

N: Yes, the problem is the law. There are so many laws made by the military government that are still valid, in power. We need to change these laws.

M: Can you tell about an example?

N: Electronic transition law; they sentenced me with this law; a sentence of 15 years. According to this law everybody can get into trouble if the government doesn't like what you post online or write. In the last period of parliament they already reduced the penalty from 7-15 years to 5-7 years. And there are so many other things they need to amend. I was punished in 2008, after the Saffran revolution (of 2007). I participated in that revolution, and I am also an NLD member and helped politicians. Because of these reasons they sentenced me for 20 years. I was released in 2012, with all the other political prisoners.

M: What was the reason for the releasing all the political prisoners?

N: The government said that they are going to the democratic society. If they want to change from military to democratic government, the first thing is to release all the political prisoners. If they wouldn't have done it, the international community would not have believed the intentions of the government. So it's like a first step towards democracy.

M: Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your family?

N: My grandfather is also a formal NLD member, just like my parents and me. In 1988 there was an uprising, at that time I was 8 years old, but I remember everything. Also in 1996/1997, there was a student uprising, I participated in this uprising. In 2007 I also participated. I cannot keep quiet when the government is doing wrong things to the people, I am against unfairness, which is in my blood. I am a Buddhist and I grew up with so many Buddhist books. Not only just reading the books, but I also practiced Buddhism, also in prison. The Buddhist teaching is to be concentric with what you're doing: mindfulness.

M: Is your family from Yangon?

N: Yes, all from Yangon.

M: What do you think of the current situation in Myanmar?

N: Compared with the military regime, we can see so many changes. But some of the changes are not spread around the country. Like we got the freedom of expression, but in some rural areas they want to ,, In the big city we can see the change, but in some rural areas the administrative center did not realize about the change and have the old mindset. Differentiate two groups in government; soft-liners who are willing to make a change, and hardliners who do not want to change the government, because of their own interest or any other reason. The balance between soft and hardliners is not so clear, sometimes the hardliner has power, sometimes the softliner. So the future of our country is not clear, whether it will be better or worse.

M: How do you perceive other religions in Myanmar?

N: There are four main religions, but as I learned, it's more than four. Some people worship the trees or the universe. There are so many beliefs. For the country, it's my opinion that every religion should be under the sovereignty of the country. There is a sovereignty of the country, and all the religions should fall under that. But in some countries, they put one religion on top, above policy. I don't accept that kind of thing.

M: Do you feel this is happening here?

N: There are some groups, but not for all Myanmar people.

M: What groups?

N: We can guess that there is one group who is doing this thing intentionally. They promote Buddhism and attack other religions, especially Islam. We also can say that they have a big background and big support. I think it's also connected to some government official. Some of the people they are doing incitement and attacking other religions, by using the same name. But the government is not doing anything about that kind of activity. We can guess there is a big group trying to be a nationalist country.

M: Why do you think they attack Muslims?

N: This is an old matter of the government. Also during British colonialism, the British government also created that kind of conflict. Because they want to hold their power. If the people are very united and want to change the government, they want to divide the people by using these measures. The military government is also using this method. Ne Win government did it as well. The problem is that you cannot know, when I am not telling anything. But now everybody knows about the events in the country, so it's different from previous times.

M: Why do you think these extremist groups have so many supporters?

N: In this country facebook is very popular. There are so many pages that intentionally attack Islam and create the violence around the country. Social media posts are also printed and spread around rural areas, so everybody has access. They also download the video's of youtube and show them in rural areas. They say that all Muslims are like that (video material from Islamic extremist countries).

M: Do people believe it?

N: Yes, but it depends on the education level of the people. It does not work so well in downtown areas, where people are educated. People live together there, with all religions, and we don't want to fight each other. But in the rural area, most people are non-educated so it's very easy to incite violence.

M: What's your personal stance on Islam as religion?

N: Especially because of some extremist countries, they use the Koran and highlight some sentences. Most of the people in our country they have some worry that the Islam will overwhelm the whole country. So the government also knows this, that's why they use these reports. For the Islamic religious, the Islamic girl cannot marry other religions, they are prohibited I think.

M: Isn't that stated in the inter-marriage law? That's not official right?

N: I do not mean this law, I mean in the Koran. If Burmese girl marries Islamic boy, most Burmese girl change their religion into Islam. They also use this kind of example to ignite the violence. My point of view is to respect the right to believe. People should have the right to keep their own religion after marriage, we should protect her rights. But now the law is not like that. Some men want to change this in the law. I don't support this law. Everybody can marry all religions, which is their right. We have to respect their rights. We have to focus on the right to believe any religion.

M: In Yangon, do you feel you are treated differently than a Muslim man your age would be treated?

N: No, but it depends on.. there are so many Muslim youth, they just wearing like us. But some of the Muslim they have the moustache and they wear some cap and different clothes. So for that kind of people, we can easily he is a Muslim. In that kind of appearance, some of the people will think differently. But for the other people we are just the same.

M: What kind of things do people think about Muslims who look different?

N: Actually it is also their right. They can wear everything they want. They can have the beard and moustache. But in the very sensitive period (we can say that this is a very sensitive period), I would like to request that they wear it in the mosque, but they should show that we are all the same and not different. We should promote this kind of mindset. I want them to be similar with us. I would like to request that. I respect their right, but to refuse the tension in society I would like to request that.

M: How do you think that Muslims in the country are discriminated (words, images)?

N: Especially in the facebook pages they use the picture of the pig, because Muslims don't eat pig. Sometimes they use the picture of a dog. For the Myanmar culture if we want to insult people we say that he's a dog. Dog is in our culture a very low creature, a monkey or cat is okay, but a dog is not.

M: Do you know some examples of words they use to describe Muslims?

N: We also use the word 'Kala'; it's not that insulting. Some people accept this. We say it also to our Muslim friends, they say it is not insulting to them.

M: Is this word also used to insult people?

N: Yes, then they use it as Kway Kala; then it's in combination with dog. Only Kala is not an insult.

M: Do you also see this on the streets or only on social media.

N: No, in the city they just put the 969-stickers. And they persuade people not to buy anything from Muslim shops.

M: And does it also happen the other way around?

N: We don't really think about this. If we want to buy something we just go to a shop. For Muslims it's just the same. But now they promote that. But that kind of campaign is not affecting me.

M: Do you think there are ways in which Muslim people are excluded from everyday life?

N: Not in the society. But in Rakhine State, that kind of problem exists. Whenever a child is born, we have to publish the birth certificate. If you have this certificate you can apply for school. But in Rakhine State, some people can't get the birth certificate.

M: How do you feel about the violence between Muslims and Buddhists?

N: I think it depends on the education system. Most of the people do not understand about democracy and globalization. In globalization we promote that kind of mindset, that all are human beings. Most of the people in our country they had to stay for a long time in a military regime, very closed society. They don't know about the world, globalization and democratic practice. That's the main problem, if we want to have a long term solution we should change the education system, now we never teach about democracy. If we can put the proper mindset to the young generation, we can solve all the problem. So the education system is responsible.

M: You are doing anti-hate speech campaigns, what hate speech?

N: From everybody, everybody should not say the dangerous and hate speech. Everybody should mind their speech, and not to spread hate among the society.

M: What do you think the responsibility is of the government?

N: They have a responsibility and some of the problems are bigger because of the lack of responsibility. I have a list of people the government should arrest, but they don't do anything. Also in some conflict, the police and the administration center are very slow to take action. That is why some of the conflicts are bigger. We as individuals also have the responsibility. For me, I never say the dangerous speech. Whenever I say something, I always think. We also should learn about not only our society, but also the world. What is the thinking and mindset of the people around the world. The government is the most powerful group to stop that kind of conflict. That is why we also try to change the government and amend the constitution.

M: Do you feel that there's a difference in things the government say and do?

N: There are so many problems inside the government. As I mentioned earlier they have the two group and they also have the tie between.. if the president wants to arrest somebody, but he don't dare to do, because there is somebody behind these people and there is a tie between the president and these people.. ???????????? Sometimes they say I will stop these things, and sometimes they say I don't support that kind of thing. It's very complicated. Our politics is very complicated. In that kind of conflict and incitement, they focus on religious issue. But they have the political intention. Sometimes in Rakhine State, you need the military, so you should support the party with the military. They support the USDP. These conflicts are related to politics.

M: What is the political intention?

N: To get the votes from the people. Everybody supported the NLD, but in some states the NLD cannot get the votes.

M: Why?

N: We can say that it's a matter of divide and rule. They divide the people and the NLD. They also divide the Muslim and the Burmese.. Buddhist. And the Rakhine Burmese, Kachin Burmese. The problem is we don't understand.

M: What do you think about the census?

N: the problem is that the people don't believe the government, that is why they cannot get the real statistics. Because for a long time the government oppressed the people and the people are just like objects and they cannot say anything back to the government. They don't have power. Most people don't believe the government, and they also don't believe the activity of the government.

M: This 969-movement, do you feel that it's supported by the government?

N: We cannot say this directly. We can say that some of the hardliner group inside the government is supporting the movement. And also the military group. In the military they also have the hatred to the Islamic society.

M: Why?

N: They were brainwashed in the military. Also to hate Aung San Suu Kyi. Because of the brainwash. They also put the information that general Aung San is the cause of the civil war. Another one is that Islamic people came to take the country. So to hate the Islamic people and to oppress them. That's their mindset. Most people who spread the hate speech don't just attack the Islamic, they also attack Aung San Su Kyi.

M: Do you feel that discrimination towards Muslims changed after the political transition and why?

N: Also in the military regime, there was so many discrimination and oppression towards the Islamic society. But the problem is that during the military regime there was no media freedom, so nobody knew about it. We cannot say that it is just happening after the military regime. We have to understand the situation clearly. In the constitution the military can take back the power, when there is so many conflicts in the country and is not stable. At that time the military could take back power. So some of the people from the military they want to show that military is very important for the country. They also take 25% of the seat in parliament, they can show these conflicts. Because of these conflicts you need us to peace the military. You cannot get out the military, they are very important for the future they say. That's why I can say there are military behind the conflict.

M: Do you think there is a difference in how people see Muslims and Rohingya?

N: Not the same, there is a problem in Rakhine State. There are some people... Bengali... from Bangladesh, they come to the Rakhine. There are also some Rohingya who stayed there for a long time. In the history some of the government in history accepted Rohingya, but some did not. It is not so clear if Rohingya is an ethnic group. I don't want to debate this thing. What I would like to highlight is, whatever they want to be, they can be. They are just a human being and we should respect their existence and rights.

M: Pictures on social media:

"if you don't want to be our new generation to be a Muslim, you also have the responsibility"

969 stickers mean: this is a Buddhist shop

"In Sweden, a 1000 girls were raped by Muslim men"

Picture with: "Some Islamic people are hitting monks"

National Patriotic Party

Myanmar Nationalistic Network

Study: civil engineer; education is not so good, and I was young when making the choice for a study.

Interview Nr. 5

Name interviewee: Aung Ko Ko

Telephone number: 09420033708

Name interviewer: Marit van Liere

Date interview: 03-05-2014

Location interview: The Gardens restaurant

Acronyms:

M: interviewer Marit

A: interviewee Aung

M: Can you introduce yourself?

A: I am working as a trainer in terms of political field, like political economy and constitution. I work as a researcher, on the Rakhine commission. At the time I studied on identity crisis of Muslims in Myanmar. And then I am also a Muslim, I need to work some program as a facilitator role to mediate the two communities. My native is one of the township called Nepauta. I am living in Yangon. My family is simple, just me and my mother.

M: What is your religious background?

A: Traditional Islam, but I see something in every religion, including Islam. I think there's a lot of people like me in this country. I have no sufficient understanding on religion, including my religion. In everyday life I just practice by going to the mosque, but sometimes I am absent. Although I do not really practice it in everyday life, I know how to control myself without fully understanding religion. I know what I should do.

Sometimes in term of divorce or marriage, we need to understand religion because of customary laws. I know this is bad behavior (to drink beer, or smoke), but these are personal issues, not religious. But I practice the principal, which is good or not.

M: How do you see Islam?

A: Also other religions, they are not different. They should understand the culture and religion. Most of the religions the culture is more influential, in terms of speaking and dressing style. Islam in this country is so isolated. Because of them and because of majority. Most of the guys I know don't understand Islam fully themselves and Buddhism as well. But in terms of social integration is very weak. Because of Islam and because of majority. The majority pushes to exclude. But Muslim people also self-exclude. They are doing discrimination to the majority. "I am a Muslim, I don't want to be a friend with you as Buddhist", self-isolation. In terms of culture, since 1962 all Muslims are more Indianized. Because of religious scholar who was studying in India. Because of them, the community is getting influence from Indian culture.

M: How do you see other religions in Myanmar, especially Buddhism?

A: Since 1948 our country is based on Burmese Buddhist nationalism, in terms of nation building. For example, the domoba organization who was very influential, the motive of this organization is Buddhist nationalism (during colonialism). 1948-1962: Ne Win gained power and also focused on Buddhist nationalism, Buddhism got really strong and therefore Buddhists are very proud of themselves: "This is a Buddhist country, other religions are guests, we are the owner because this is our country". In terms of my opinion on their opinion on other religions.

M: But what about your own opinion?

A: Christians are not a problem in this country. Because people see them as ethnic people. Hindu is not. Islam is not. But Hindu is just a few people, so Muslim is the problem in their understanding. When we talk of social integration, we need to give more attention to the Muslim and Buddhist. My personal view, in terms of Muslim side; we should do some activities in terms of social integration. But at that time the government

and the majority stayed silence, because they don't want to do some integration project. Because of their idea that it's unnecessary to integrate with Muslims because they think Muslims are second hand citizens, they are first class citizens, owner.

M: Do they also not see Muslims as indigenous when they have lived here for a long time?

A: Muslims have lived here for a long time, but in the colonial period, Britain brought a lot of Muslim people from India. For example, when I look a little bit Indian it's accepted by Buddhist. But in that time we shouldn't have discussed the indigenous issues. Buddhists don't understand the concept of Muslims as indigenous people. And Muslims don't perceive themselves as Indian.

M: Do you see yourself as a Burmese, do you feel you belong here, like this is your country?

A: Sometimes I feel really bad, because I am doing political things and teaching so many Buddhist and Christian people. They appreciate me. But some of students don't appreciate me because of my religion. And I am always in touch with government officials, they don't know I am a Muslim so they communicate very well with me and appreciate my job. But when they know I am a Muslim their behavior changes. So sometimes I feel really bad. Zwe and me have the same job, but according to the government officials we don't have the same job. Because he is a Buddhist and I am a Muslim.

M: What's your experience being a Muslim in Yangon?

A: I go the mosque, sometimes I go to a pagoda with my friends, or for my work with students. I don't want to eat pork. That's the only difference with the majority. Because of that I really integrate in the Buddhist community, I don't have close friends in the Muslim community. 99% of my friends is Buddhist or Christian.

M: Have you ever faced discrimination?

A: Not in terms of community, but in terms of restrictions from the government I do face discrimination. I have an identity card, but when we travel we need to show our card to the police. This time they discriminate me. They never ask questions to Buddhists. But they asked a lot of questions to me; what kind of job, where I need to go, that I had to inform people where I wanted to go. We hold the same card, but they behave different. Religion is mentioned on the card, as well as race.

M: Do you have the idea that this discrimination is towards race or religion?

A: Both, but I think the way is more dependent on religion. For example, the Rohingya; the problem is really easy to solve, but because they are Muslim the problem is getting old. It's based on religion.

M: Does discrimination differ between different kinds of Muslims?

A: Buddhists want to discriminate the Muslims who appear different than Buddhists regarding culture (with the long dress and beard) , but they don't dare to. Because they look like religious leaders, like monks. But some Muslims wearing traditional Islamic clothes stay in their Muslim community. The communities are more and more unique and isolated, because of their dress and culture.

M: What do you think about this isolation?

A: Around 90% of some townships are Muslim, because of discrimination. Muslims in general don't want to live in Buddhist dominated area, they are scared. Because of that, they are getting geographically isolated. But not me. And in terms of demographically; for example, if I am very good in studying, so after education I can't get a job in the government sector. So why should you go to university as a Muslim? If you finish education, how can you do? After that you have to do some business, don't go to

university, don't waste your time. You need to do some business parents think like that. That's causing isolation.

M: Did you go to university?

A: Yes, in engineering. My parents wanted me to be an engineer. I need any kind of bachelors, after that I want to study political science for master.

M: Do you want to marry a Muslim girl?

A: I want to marry... If I am interested I can marry any kind of girl, regardless of religion.

M: But do you think it would be acceptable?

A: No, my parents and community would not think so. Because of that I need to find a Muslim girl, but for my personal view it doesn't matter. And I don't like the culture of most of the Muslim girls, their dress. I have no plans about marriage.

M: Do you think the Buddhist community would accept it if you marry a Buddhist girl?

A: No. Because of our religious teachings. If you are a Muslim, you have to marry a Muslim girl. You have no right to marry a girl from different religions, this is Islamic teaching. Some religious scholars argue that Islamic and Christian can marry each other, because they have the same god. But that doesn't count for Buddhists.

M: Do you think the Muslim communities are happening because of Islamic traditions or exclusion from Buddhist community?

A: Both. Muslims are isolated because of pull and push factors. There are also push factors from Buddhist side.

M: What do you think you can do about their social exclusion?

A: Muslim culture and Buddhist culture should not be different.

M: Who should adapt?

A: All of Buddhist think like that, in Muslim side the educated people think like that. Some Muslims don't want to accept it. Intellectually they do, but behaviorally do not want to change. If only they would change their dress, problems would decrease. So first thing is cultural assimilation. In this township in Rakhine, the conflict is not as big as other places in Rakhine. Because the Buddhist and Muslims are not different there. Very good in social integration. Principally it is okay to dress like you want, but realistically it is a problem.. You need to align the Burmese culture.

M: Who or what is the cause of religious discrimination/violence?

A: We need to understand history. The conflict between Indian and Burmese people started before independence. After dependence another conflict happened because of religion in 1936. Buddhist became national religion. After 1962, Ne Win handled the country. We can see some conflict in 1988, because of religion, until 2012. This problem is a historical problem. The second thing is that we need to address the nationalism. Because of this nationalism, formally ethnic people are automatically discriminated. 1st thing is colonialism/history, 2nd thing is nationalism, 3rd religious, 4th socio economic difference (Muslims are richer). If you go downtown you can see a lot of rich Muslim people. Also in Rakhine. Around 40 years ago, most Muslim people are business owner.

M: How do you think the Muslim people got richer than other people?

A: In Yangon, Muslim people have more entrepreneurial skills than Buddhist people. They are the minority, so they are more unique. They have a concrete network to do the business. Historically, Muslim people are really rich (before 1948). They are more cohesive, regarding business.

M: Who do you think is responsible for the change that is needed?

A: First one is government, and civil society. The Buddhist civil society is more important than the Muslim civil society. We need to try to cooperate with the Buddhist community. Without them it has no effect. Government need to control hate speech and ultra-nationalist movement. And the civil society and whole population needs to be aware.

Third one is Muslim leaders and civil society, but I think they are willing to do a lot. But they can't do a lot without corporation of the Buddhist society.

M: What do you think the role is of the government in the conflict?

A: We need to enforce a rule of law system. When I rape a Buddhist woman, this is my personal problem, not concerned with my community. When a Buddhist man attacks Muslims, they stay silent. But the other way around, everybody knows. The important thing is rule of law. The second thing is they need to promote equality regarding right and religion, in terms of policy making and the constitution. Maybe I am a Muslim, but I am a citizen as well. I have the right to dream to be president. They need to change the citizenship-based nationalism.

M: Do you feel that the government is inciting violence now?

A: I don't think so. But they need to address the root cause of the problem, discrimination or nationalism. They need to formulate some kind of policy for this issue. They only address symptom or the problem.

M: Do you think there's a difference in how much discrimination is going on, before and after the transition?

A: Before transition discrimination is big within the government, but in term of community it is not so bad. But after 2010 election, the public enjoys their fundamental right of freedom of speech. But our government do not understand, do not consider how to control the hate speech. So socially discrimination already took place in 2010, but economically there was no discrimination (access to shops). This economic discrimination is a new problem.

M: So what changed during transition?

A: Hate speech. The 969 campaigner are really strong in the community and have a lot of money. I don't know where this money is coming from. But the politicians and government stay silence towards this movement. But the civil society is getting weak. Because of the 969 movement, in terms of public speech and social media, economic discrimination is getting big.

M: Do you think 969 movement is reaching everybody?

A: They are everywhere, but I don't think everybody. Some of the Buddhist men are sympathetic to the Muslim community. But this group is very small. The group who hates the Muslims is much bigger. 969 campaign and stickers are everywhere.

M: What do you feel when you see a 969 sticker?

A: I don't care. But for example, I go to some place and I need to take a rest to stop my car. There are 4 restaurants. One is Muslim, the other three are Buddhist. Before the 2010 election we can't know which one is Muslim and Buddhist. But now they promote 969, then I am really scared to enter this restaurant. If I enter and they know I am a Muslim, I don't know how they behave to me.

M: One of the things that the 969 movement says, is that they see Muslims as an existential threat to the identity. How do you feel about this?

A: We need to defense our religion. I don't think it is rational or logical. The Muslim side has no plan or capacity to do like that. They are fighting each other within the Muslim community. I don't think it's a real situation.

M: Where do you think the idea comes from?

A: the idea is already appeared since before 1988, but it was not popular. But after transition, because of facebook and 969 movement activists it spread. The public don't has the capacity to identify what is real information. So because of that this rumor is spread around the country.

M: How do you think they're spreading it, with what kind of messages?

A: The first message concerns the marriage problem. They say that the Muslim guys want to marry Buddhist girls and convert them. The second thing is that they want to dominate [could not understand]. The third message is economic, if you will buy one of the products from Muslim owner, you are the enemy of Buddhists. Another thing is that people should not support the political parties, which include Muslims as employees. Like the NLD, where a Muslim lawyer works.

M: What do you think about the census?

A: Because of census, Muslim people want to re-address their identity. Even I'm a Muslim, I don't know my ethnicity exactly. I am a Burma, and a Muslim. But because I am Muslim they mention on my identity card India+Burma/Pakistan+Burma. My father's parents are Indian + Burman, and my mother's parents are from Pakistan and Burma. They post to our identity crisis. Because of the census, people are aware that they need to create an identity, a new identity. I don't think it's good. We need to change ultra-nationalism. Muslim are multi-ethnic. In realistic approach, if they don't recognize as ethnicity by the government, they don't have a right. In the census they are promoting one of the ethnic name calls Pathi, which is historically one of the name of the Muslim community. But the government doesn't accept this. Just like the Rohingya. Some worry that the Muslim population will be bigger than before, than the Buddhist people expect. The conflict can be bigger because of the census.

M: What do you think about the proposal for the inter-marriage law?

A: I don't know so much about the concept of this law, but we need to know who promotes this law. I don't want to criticize this law, but the promoter of this law is the ultra-nationalist movement. That's the problem. The activists who are promoting the law are not good in my opinion. And they have political aim than social problem I think.

M: Why did the government just agree on making the proposal?

A: Because of the political campaign. They want votes. Near 2015 election the conflict is really taking place, because the monks... most of the political parties don't want to stop this nationalist movement and they want to leverage to use this movement in their political campaign. This is current situation. No politicians don't dare to reside this ultra-nationalist activists, including the Lady [Aung San Suu Kyi], she doesn't want to address this issue, because she is also a politician. I don't like that she doesn't speak out. I don't like her because of that. Why do you want to be politician? She told to the public that she wants to promote the human rights and do some educational reform and economic reform. She wants to be a president. But if you have a political way for this country, you need to talk in terms of conflict. And also she always criticizes the rule of law. My question is... she is the chairman of rural committee. She has a lot of power in the rule of law system. She is not an ordinary person, she is a crucial person. She needs to initiate to implement policy. But she doesn't do like that, she only criticizes.

M: In terms of the government, do you think they say something different than how they act?

A: Sometimes when government officials talk about discrimination, they speak against it. But they are also talking like "We are the Buddhist". There speak is flexible in terms of Buddhist nationalism. They also promote Buddhist nationalism and citizen nationalism. We don't know the real political way.

M: You told me about the corruption regarding ID cards; can you tell me again?

A: As for me, I paid around 300\$ to get a card. The Buddhist people don't need to pay so much money, around 10\$. That's a problem most of the Muslim are facing in this country. If I don't have a card I can't go to engineering school. If I can't go to engineering school I can't get a degree certificate. That's why my parents paid a lot of money to the local immigration officer for the card. It is just corruption; it doesn't go to the government,

it's personal. This also happens to Chinese. They think you're not an indigenous person. Even if I got a card, most immigration officer discriminate to me. They act like the card is not real. I think they think I got a card because of corruption, because of money.

Interview Nr. 6

Name interviewee: Myo Win

E-mail: starmywin@gmail.com

Name interviewer: Marit van Liere

Date interview: 06-05-2014

Location interview: Smile Office

Acronyms:

M: interviewer Marit

W: interviewee Myo Win

M: Can you introduce yourself?

W: I am executive director of SEDF. I was born in Yangon. I was brought up in a Buddhist community as a Muslim. My life is strange, because now I am one of the leaders for civil society as well as religious leader. We work with education based organization for change for democracy. I graduated Yangon University in Psychology and I studied conflict resolution in York University. I also did a short study in peace research methodology. And I also got the Islamic degree, the Islamic theological science so I am an Imam as well. I do that every Friday, preaching in the mosque. My only family is my wife. My parents passed away a long time ago, both from Myanmar.

M: What do you think about the current political situation in Myanmar?

W: It's very complex. Government resistance as well as ethnic diversity and ethnic version of citizenship ideology, I mean ethnic nationalism.

M: What kind of ethnicity?

W: I am biologically mixed. My father's side, my grandfather is from Bengal. My mother's side, her grandfather came from South-India. So Buddhist, Burmese, Muslim mixed. But I was brought up in a Buddhist community as a Muslim. I feel like a Burmese Muslim, previous name is Pathi. That's recognized as ethnic. But the problem is... in Burma people are more focused on what their ethnicity is. According to the democratic idea, having citizenship is enough. In Burma almost all the politicians never use the citizenship issue, they focus on ethnicity. This is a legacy of colonialism. Especially the British government, they have done the policy called divide and rule. This is to encourage ethnic diversity, still people have this idea. The government now has the same policy as colonialism; to divide and rule. At the same time the idea of citizenship law is very complex. We call it apartheid law, because they have different classes of citizens. Citizen is a citizen. They have full, associate and naturalized citizenship. Naturalized mean they are the third generation. Associate means not full, after naturalized you can be associate citizen. Foreign residence citizen is not a Burmese citizen. This is 2008 constitution citizenship law. I am not sure why today politicians wanted to keep this law, it was made up by General Ne Win. Why do they want to keep? Maybe in memory of Ne Win. This doesn't support human rights.

M: To which of these categories do you fit?

W: I am a full citizen. But the government officially have already included discrimination practices, according to people features, religion... inside the rules, procedure, rules, law, and practices included structural discrimination policy. That's the key challenge, this is not only in the government but they have established this mindset in the people's thinking?

M: How do you think this got to the people so fast?

W: Without educating the people, like our national icon, very fair usage they can speak up. But they don't practice fair language, nobody speaks for minority in parliament. How can we overcome? Including civil society we don't have a common ground for the marginalized people. This is done under the name of censorship because the issue is

sensitive. There's a silent majority. Even if they don't agree to the idea, people are silent. Even the lady is silent. Who will overcome? Except international community, they point out this issue. But inside Burma, this is not happening.

M: How do you experience being a Muslim here in Yangon, Myanmar?

W: In Yangon we normally have not a big problem physically. But spiritually we have big trouble, because of everyday we saw in everyday public media hate speech, we saw anywhere hate campaign and sermons. People are worried. Less than 3 or 4 years ago. Before election we had one enemy; the military (government). But after the elections we have so many enemies; government, military, racist parliamentary, people because of motivation and hate speech campaigns. People are not really happy for Muslims because of motivation.

M: Do you feel that the people in Yangon believe what is told in the hate speeches?

W: Actually, even though they don't believe they are not against the hate speech. The majority of people. Hitler publicized every day wrong information and wrong message. Within a certain period people thought it was true.

M: Have you ever faced discrimination?

W: Yes, color discrimination as well as...

M: How

W: Because of features of people with brown color or who look like Muslim. People are not dealing with good communication. And last year the economic boycott campaign, 969 sticker said we are against Muslim. Muslim have bigger fear. There is no protection from the government. There's no mechanisms against this unethical movement. That is the direct every day, you can see on different kind of media against Muslims. Or jokes for brown colored people. And the use of Kala. Kala is a bad name. Some people say it's not bad to use this, but it's very notorious. Just like 969, it's a nice idea but in practice they use it for discrimination.

M: Do you know more examples of labels or images or words people use to discriminate Muslims?

W: The image like the people with the beard, brown color, you can see every day the cartoonist. Another type of discrimination is practical; in some offices also in government, they never get promotion. This idea got to the private sector as well. Some areas don't accept Muslims, like Banking community, or Buddhist Company with nationalist people, crony people. This is the direct discrimination. Indirect discrimination is people stop to stand up for some group. People look face to face to other, why does that Kala person stand up and talk? Muslims should not have this role. I had a direct experience, I was key facilitator for a forum. I handled one topic, after that somebody came up and he said to me that a genuine citizen should handle this topic. So he thought I was not a genuine citizen. People in Burma have the idea of owner and others as guests. Others mean not brothers or sisters. They are not a part of us. This means others.

M: What is the reason for the discrimination to Muslims, why Muslims?

W: Because of the political motivation. In the beginning. Now, even in politician, they believe Muslim are very dangerous people.

M: Why?

W: No why. They say like, 2000 years ago Afghanistan was Buddhist country. Today you see Muslim country. We don't want to lose like Afghanistan. Same example for Indonesia. But this is not a true fact. Afghanistan and Indonesia were never Buddhist countries. People are not noticed that in Buddhist religion is no limit for marriage. You can marry a 1000 wives. According to the Burmese traditional way. Very proud people, if the man who is strong, he can marry 1000 women. That's Burmese saying. This is pro-

polygamy. So many Burmese kings had a lot of wives. But nobody talks about this. Islam allows this as well, but not compulsory. But a limit of 4, really limited. Islam reduced polygamy. My perception is you can marry 2 or 3 or up to 4, we are not allowed for more than 4 wives. This is limitation. The Burmese missionary is like; Muslims marry 4 wives and reproduce with a lot of children. But in Burma, less than 1% of people marry more than one wife. 40 years ago they did not have protection plan and education in terms of number of children. My mother had 40 children. Today most of the families don't give birth to more than 3 children. This ideology started in 1981, before the 969. This was ideology from the military. In 1983 they started officially this ideology, 1997 attack to Muslims started publicly and spread around the country. Because of the fear of people that was established during military time. After the military people became motivated. Hegemony discourse.

M: How do you think the violence/discrimination spread only after the transition?

W: People can express themselves now. After they left people are motivated and express. In the beginning they wanted to maintain their power, but now; even the president believes that Muslim is the enemy. He strongly believes to hate Muslims and being against. Somebody like Aung San Suu Kyi don't feel this hate, but she doesn't say anything. If she would say something, people would start to question this, but she never does. People are very racist, because of education.

M: Is there exclusion for Muslims in everyday life?

W: Yes. In different areas, different offices. Public areas, people are not safe. People are not happy when they see the Muslim. Muslims have big trauma because of current discrimination. They fear to go to public areas and to be involved.

M: Would this lead to isolation?

W: Yes, definitely. That's why we are trying to get the nationwide Muslim conference. Bottom up ideology. We now try to engage by the community. Muslims are involved from all over the country. The outcomes should be; the voice of Muslims. They should express what they are feeling. Then we can demand the government. Maybe some central body will come up to fight for Muslims. But we don't know yet. We expect 2000 people to attend, all Muslims.

M: What do you think can be done against the exclusion?

W: A communal voice. Grassroots, bottom up approach.

M: How do you practice your religion?

W: Very simple. Islam always focus on justice. The problem is the public practice. Because it's not easy to get a permit to organize Muslim movement. Any movement.

M: Do you need movements to practice religion?

W: Practice religion means different things. Formally I can worship in our homes. But we are threat if we pray in the mosque. So many rumors; people are storing weapons in the mosques. They think Muslims have a mission to take Buddhist women and that this is funded. Religious freedom means not only for worship.

M: And how do you see your religion?

W: I am a Muslim because I was born as a Muslim. This is very common in Burma. But now I am adult, and thought about it. Currently I want to keep the Muslim. Because they are much marginalized. I wanted to stand next to the people who are marginalized.

M: Because of the religious or political motivation?

W: Because I want to help the marginalized group and I did not find a religion better than Islam. According to the practice of Buddhism, I won't be happy. They are terrible because of current situation. I am not sure about their essence. They are not good people. People always need to morality. The people who call themselves Buddhist are not moral to me.

M: Do you think the discrimination takes place because of their religion or because they are the biggest group?

W: Because of the biggest group and politicized.

M: But still you feel Buddhist are terrible people.

W: That's my experience, because of the situation.

M: How do you perceive the other religions?

W: Buddhists are very mindful religion. Very difficult to practice. Not very practical. Very spiritual. That's why you cannot marry according to Buddhism. I can't do it. The same time, Buddha notice human beings are nothing, just physical. Very nice, very mindful, but not practical. The Christianity is very similar to Islam.

M: Did you ever feel like taking revenge for discrimination?

W: No, fighting back has different meanings. We are against that idea, we educate people. We are losing respect because we are marginalized. I decided to gain respect from people again, by being a teacher.

M: I heard that in some Muslim communities, the Muslims don't really feel like Muslims because of their traditions and treatment of the Burmese people, what is your opinion?

W: The problem is for the country's education. People miss a sense of belonging of the country, rather than ethnicity. They have a sense of belonging of their ethnic. For Muslims the same. They feel like Muslims, rather than Burmese. Because the structure and the system and racism is pushing out Muslims. So I have a strong commitment for the country, I have a strong sense for the country. That's why I live here, while I can live anywhere. I have a responsibility. But most Muslim people are not like that, they fear because they are treated like they are others. So they think they are others. We also need to try to encourage ourselves among the Muslim community to get a sense of belonging. Somebody said "we have to be patience", I asked them "what's your country?" And they didn't knew the answer. We need to educate them. We are born here, our forefathers are born here. Why is this country not ours? This is a big challenge.

M: Do you feel you are treated differently than a Buddhist men your age would?

W: I always show my commitment and responsibility. I always proof my sense of belonging. Some Buddhist people ask; how many people like you? And I say that there are a lot of people like me.

M: But do you think people who are less like you, and who are dressing like Muslims, the discrimination is worse?

W: Normally the discrimination is towards Muslims, no matter the dressing. But targeted to the people who are clearly Muslim or Indian. They feel that they don't have commitment to the country. I don't support to wear like that, but they have their right. I never say negatively, even though I don't like that. But this is globalization, they have their right.

M: How do you feel about the Buddhist/Muslim violence?

W: I don't agree. This is the one sided attack to Muslim. Violation against Muslims. I don't agree to the term Buddhist/Muslim violence. So called Buddhist violence against Muslims. The motivation is political interest, there had no action been taken to the attacker.

M: Who or what is the cause?

W: it's politics, not the persons.

M: So the violence is incited by politics, how?

W: The ruling party and ultra-nationalist party they are the one side. They are afraid to lose their religion.

M: Who do you think who is responsible for change?

W: Who are committed... Who the moral leadership, the voice for the voiceless, who talk about minority rights. Civil society activists.

M: Do you feel there's a difference in the things the government they say or really do?

W: We can show a lot of laws that officially discriminate. Some are procedure and some are internal discrimination. State service religious officer reported to the chief minister for the situation of Muslims. Very secret report, I got it 1.5 year ago. They reported that one of the police station, one of the Muslim arrived and opened a tea shop. After that he hire some Muslim staff to cook. After that there arr 4 or 5 families there, but some are coming for the jobs. He reported attention for this situation. Finally these policy guy moved to another place. In the military Muslim cannot get a promotion. Two days ago I got some good information. Somebody wanted to retire from the military, not easy. Now there's a mechanism; if they want to drop out they declare themselves Muslim. Then it's easy to go away.

As a Muslim you cannot be a rector. My friend is a deputy rector, has the same work but still is deputy.

M: What can you say about the 969 movement?

W: This is a racist Muslim. It's dangerous for this country. I don't mean 969 directly but the idea of 969. That ideology push the country... not developing.

M: What do you think about the thought that Muslims are a threat to the Burmese identity?

W: We need to be against Islam and Muslim, or else the country will be lost. That is their ideology. Every day they do the pamphlet, leaflet and motivation and their organization they call the Buddhist race and religion protection organization. They publish a monthly magazine full of hate speech. It's terrible.

M: Do you think they are supported by the government?

W: I can say that a part of the government is supporting them. I can say very safely. I cannot show. Now they are stronger and stronger.

M: What do you think about the interfaith marriage law?

W: Ideally for the country I am against, human rights perspective. For the safety and security of Muslims I support this law. Because they have proof; somebody marry a non-Muslim person. They burn the whole village, kill people for this purpose. If this law has established, even though a Muslim falls in love with different religion lady, they cannot marry according to the law and there will be no violence.

M: But they can still marry if they get permission right?

W: They won't get the permission. In general perspective I am against, for the sake of the people and country and human rights. But for the safety of Muslim people it's good.

M: What about the census?

W: Up till now there has been so many controversial. How much Myanmar government keep promising and agreeing, still lose their commitment and promises.

Interview Nr. 7

Name interviewee: Pine Soe Hein
E-mail: pinesoehein03@gmail.com

Name interviewer: Marit van Liere

Date interview: 10-05-2014

Location interview: Coffee shop

Acronyms:

M: interviewer Marit

T: interviewee Pine

M: Can you introduce yourself?

P: I am from Sittwe, Rakhine State. I've been here for about 5 years [in Yangon] and I have been working here. Doing some volunteering and civil society work.

M: Why did you move from Rakhine State to Yangon?

P: For education and job opportunity. I finished my university in Sittwe, and then I worked there for three years and then I moved here.

M: What about your family situation?

P: My mother is a teacher, and my government is a government servant – he retired for his health now. I have a big family with 6 siblings.

M: What's your religious background?

P: I am a Buddhist. All of my family is Buddhist.

M: You are from Rakhine... what is the situation there at the moment?

P: The tensions between community... actually when the conflict happened I was not there. The community is separate now.

M: Do you know anything about the change of the situation in Rakhine State after and before the military government?

P: Not only in Rakhine state, but the whole country. During the military government they pressed the public, maybe been afraid for the political situation; political prisoners, many oppression. Later during the transition some freedom of expression and a little bit more freedom in every aspect.

M: Working for civil society, what is it that you want to change?

P: A pure democratic country, but as you know theres the transition period. I think that slightly changes in the country, so as I am involved in civil society work. Before the government changed, you had to be very careful. Background checks.

M: You've been to the Arakan National Conference, right? What did you want to achieve there?

P: The conference went well. Many people and different groups came together and discussed political regional issues. It was only three days and it's as short time to discuss big things.

M: Were Rohingya groups also represented?

P: Only National Arakan Conference, so only Arakan people. No other group.

M: IN the paper: a proposal that there will need to be a bigger army to protect communities from Muslims. What do you know about that?

P: I haven't read it, but we discussed it. It's like border guards, to protect at the border. To be safe at the border.

M: What is your personal opinion on the Rohingya issue in Rakhine State?

P: Actually, this issue is not religious, it is a border immigration problem. Actually the main problem is the term Rohingya. You say the term Rohingya, Arakanese people say Bengali people, because they cross the Bangladesh border to Rakhine State. In total there are 90% Bengali people living in the two townships near the border. They use the

term Rohingya and say they are the ethnic people, ethnic in Rakhine State. The Rakhine people are afraid... because in 1947 during the colonial period some RSO (Rohingya soldier Org.), armed forces of Bengali people, they said to spread Muslim in the country. They said that they want to take Buddhist down. The Arakanese people are afraid... the main problem is the term Rohingya.

M: You said that Arakan people are afraid, do you feel the same way?

P: Yes, I also think the main problem is immigration. This problem can be easily solved by the government of Bangladesh and Myanmar. When they use the term Rohingya, history comes in which is very hard to solve by the government.

M: How do you practice your own religion?

P: I am not very focused on religion. I have some knowing of religion.

M: How do you perceive other religions?

P: I don't know in detail about their religions, but I see their culture. Not to say all the people, all the religions, but... in Rakhine State the Christianity is low. Mostly there are Muslim people. As I mentioned the religion is not that much... actually Buddhist and Muslim are really different. For example with killing animals, reality is different. Not only the religious problem, but also being afraid of political issue. Actually in Rakhine, there are eight tribes. Kamin is also Rakhine and Muslim.

M: Now you've talked about the different people from religions in Rakhine State, but what about Yangon?

P: The same. Not like in Rakhine State, very crowded and different people and different religion also. But the living style is very different. Rangoon is a big city and people are moving around.

M: This different living style, how does that affect religious people?

P: Normally it has not much affect. It's not a problem.

M: How do you perceive Muslims in Yangon?

P: I see that there are too kind. Many persons in Rakhine State and in Rangoon... many friends I have are Muslim, but they are good. We go to school together. But the problem is not religious. Using the term Rohingya, it's not my friends. They are political activists. Later they may be well organized. Also in Yangon, many Muslims have been living, they fought for freedom, but also in Yangon there are activists. I see different, these groups.

M: Do you feel that you are treated differently than a Muslim person your age would in Yangon?

P: Most of my friends in Yangon are Burmese... Buddhist. Just a few Muslim friends. In the community of my friends, it's not different. But I don't know... for me there's not a difference.

M: Did you ever experience social exclusion of Muslims?

P: I have no direct experience. But some people say that especially Muslims are discriminated. But I have no direct experience. So here, in my opinion they say that they don't have the right to be elected, but it's a political issue. In the community I have no experience.

M: And how do you feel about the Buddhist-Muslim violence?

P: I feel really sorry for this conflict, because I have many Muslim friends. But the problem is being afraid for both communities. Even though the starting point is a political, or being afraid, it tends to be a religious conflict. Because in Rakhine State the [Buddhist and Muslim] communities are really different, the conflict happened between those two groups so it tends to be a religious conflict.

M: Don't you think all people should have the right to call and feel themselves whatever they want to?

P: In my opinion the name is not the problem. Whatever they name themselves. But the problem is the background. For example; they named themselves Rohingya, that's not the problem. But they say that the Rohingya are the ethnic Rakhine State... even they call themselves Arakan. They are grabbing the history, besides the name. The idea is that they create the history of Rohingya, not only the name Rohingya. It's not the name, it's what the name means.

M: Who or what is the cause of the violence?

P: Actually the violence is not the first time in history. It happened two or three times. Being killed and the community fighting. Both of the communities have been afraid of each other because of earlier fighting. Another one is that the big Muslim communities (90%) in the two townships frighten the Arakan people. It's not the starting point, but it has an affect for the conflict. For Arakanese people they don't control these illegal immigrant problem. Afraid and afraid. The starting point is the rape thing, but it's not the only one.

M: One of the reasons is that people are afraid, but what's the underlying reason for being afraid?

P: They have history of fighting each other. And the reality Bengali people crossing the river anytime. I was there 3 months (in the border area) to help on a fisher boat, there's no immigration at the border. It's a reality. For them it's very easy to go to Bangladesh or going into Myanmar.

M: What do you think the Bengali will do when they are with a lot of people?

P: The idea is to spread two groups; Citizens (legal Bengali) and non-citizens (illegal Bengali).

M: Who are the illegal people?

P: According to the citizen law of 1982.

M: What do you think about the inter-faith marriage law proposal?

P: I haven't read it, but in my opinion I heard that some women organizations not accept the law. It's not to deny marrying Muslims and Buddhists, but protecting.

M: What do you think about the census?

P: Generally the government did the census, ethnic people don't agree. Because the government states that there are 138 ethnic tribes in Myanmar. But this is wrong. The government is lying.

M: What do you think the responsibility is of the government in the interfaith conflict?

P: During military government, the military government oppressed all the people. But now they are a little bit free. It doesn't mean there is a 100% freedom. The government is responsible for that situation. There is still oppression. The government is changing slightly, we hope it will be better more and more.

M: Do you have any thoughts about the 969 movement?

P: When I first met the 969, just the idea, not the movement. It's like 786, buying things from Buddhist shops or Muslims shops. This is not the movement, just idea. But later many people use the 969 logo, 969 became popular. Actually the monks lead the 969, very great monk, so it's not a problem. But on the ground they use the logo.

M: What do you think about the hate speech of the 969?

P: I watched some cd, it's not all good. It depends on personal saying. They are using their logo, they say what they want to say.

M: Can you say some examples that you didn't agree with?

P: I don't really remember, but in my opinion I can say that Buddhist is good. I can't say Muslim is bad. Just say Buddhist is good is no problem.

M: Do you think the 969 is supported by the government?

P: I don't know, no evidence. It's hard to say.

M: Do you feel that there are communities in Yangon where a lot of Muslim people live?

P: Some townships have a lot of Muslims.

M: Do you think Buddhist people still want to live there?

P: I don't know exactly, but I don't think they want to live there, because when the conflict happens they are dangerous.

M: Do you think some negative stereotypes exist in Yangon?

P: Yes. It's like saying Muslim people are bad. It's not the right way.

M: But do you think there are public words or images that are publicly spoken about when people talk about Muslims?

P: It's like marrying by lying Buddhist women. Like Muslim man by lying they try to get marriage Buddhist women.

M: Why would they be lying?

P: I don't know but I think they don't want to get marriage with them, because the religion is really different.

M: Why do you think Muslims stick together in the same communities?

P: Not only Muslims, also Rakhine and Kachin. They can speak their own language. Near the mosques and Muslim people.

M: Do you think the isolation is created because of the townships, they get separated?

P: Maybe, but not intentionally.

M: Anything to add?

P: Generally in Rakhine, before some conflict happened, Muslims and Buddhist tend to live together in townships, very crowded. They don't understand each other. Also in Rakhine. For example in a monastery, there are a lot of Buddhist people but all people can go there. In the mosques no one can dare to answer the mosque; they are always closed. Only Muslims can come in. That creates some misunderstanding. Even in childhood they don't understand Muslims because they can't enter. And also, in the history they come from Bangladesh and they are worker in Rakhine State, after the season they go back to Bangladesh. They are farmers. Their living standard is a little bit lower than Rakhine, because they are workers. But later can happen some feeling of Muslim. It's like their position is not the same, not like friends, but like worker. But later they have some feeling like they don't have the same standard, they discriminate. But in the city it's different, with all the shops. It has changed.

M: Have you been to the refugee camps?

P: I've been to Buddhist refugee camp. Homeless people live there, their houses are burned in the conflict. The number is much smaller than in Muslims camps [after I asked].

M: If people really look like a Muslim (by their dress), do you think discrimination is worse?

P: Maybe. Personally it's like they are the leaders. They never smile... they look really strange. The children are more afraid.

M: Not with monks?

P: No. The point is that people can enter the monasteries anytime.

M: What do you think about the thought that Muslims are a threat to Burmese society according to the 969 movement?

P: As I mentioned, I agree that there are two kinds. If they say like activists or extremists creating the word Rohingya, they are a threat to the community. But the larger part of the community living in the villages they are not a problem.

M: Do you think there's a difference in what they say in their speeches and what they really do about issues in the country?

P: They always do like that. Not only about the conflict, they do a political trick. They say something differently than what they do. It's the transition period, they have always done this. We have to change the government, in order to be democratic. They are not responsible towards the public.

M: Do Buddhist have some feeling about Muslims being successful?

P: There are some people who don't like Muslim people because of this. I don't know exactly, but maybe.

Interview Nr. 8

Name interviewee: Ko Ko Lay

Name interviewer: Marit van Liere

Date interview: 19 May 2014

Location interview: Office NGO Center for Youth and Social Harmony

Acronyms:

M: interviewer Marit

K: interviewee Ko

A: translator Aung Ko Ko

M: Can you introduce yourself?

K: Now I am teaching English at the Islamic Theological School in Yangon. I have 7 siblings and I am the youngest. My family is from Yangon. My great grandfather is from Bangladesh. My religion is Islam.

M: How do you practice your religion?

K: There are a lot of fundamental work. In childhood I studied the matters from Islamic School. About four or five years. And then I got a lot of knowledge and I studied the Islam.

M: What do you think about the current political situation in Myanmar?

K: There are many religions and races. We are all different. The government and public have a big gap. Just as many different communities. All people need peace. We have no peace now?

M: How do you experience the gap?

A: Maybe you need to clarify [after long silence].

M: How do you experience being a Muslim in Yangon?

K: In historical a lot of Muslim and non-Muslim had differences. A lot of Muslim people have education and business. They have many weakness in education and business. Education is very weak. I am not happy in Myanmar. Because of the government don't give to the public the fully rights, I think.

M: What's the difference for Muslim and Buddhist people regarding rights?

K: Actually I think Buddhist people are very simple and very honest. Muslim people are living in here. According to politicians Muslim people are not different from non-Muslim people. But Muslim people and Burmese people have no problem. They love each other. But I think so that there's instigation. Actually all of Myanmar people and Muslim people love each other. Because of instigation the conflict is bigger.

M: Did you ever experience discrimination?

K: Yes.

M: And how?

K: I think the government discriminates Muslim and other minority ethnics. For example the government officials have no Muslim people. Because of my appearance, with beard, sometimes I go to public space and some guys are talking like bad comments. But I am living in Muslim community, I don't go out there so often.

M: What kind of bad comments?

K: Disrespectful.

M: What are the reasons for people to not be respectful toward Muslims?

K: Actually a weakness of Muslim people, because we are living differently. We do not participate with the other community. We used to live in my culture, in my religion. This is my weakness. I will have to show my behavior, character, kindness. I will show them.

M: Why did you choose to live in that community? Why do you separate yourself?

K: Muslim people they think so that they do not participate with the government. Muslim people do not need to participate with the government process or nation building

because of the military government. They do not want to do politics because of military government.

M: Would you feel welcome if you would live inside the Buddhist community?

K: I will feel like a minority.

M: Do you know what kind of words or images people use when talking about Muslims?

K: The one thing is the one thing; the government are doing religious things in political. It's like a political trick.

M: How do you see Islam as religion?

K: I see Islam is peace. Islam don't suffer to other people by his behavior, action, habit. Muslim don't suffer to other people.

M: How do see Buddhism as religion?

K: Very good one. They believe... they are making their activities according to believing. All of the religions are good. Religion don't give the people the bad way. Religion don't show the people bad way. All of the religions are good?

M: So where do the bad things come from?

K: Most of the people who practices different religion, don't understand the accents of the religion.

M: How do you feel about the violence between Buddhists and Muslims?

K: I always think about a solution for this violence?

M: So what do you think is the solution?

K: We need to do interfaith dialogue. The second thing is that everybody needs to understand the different religion, so they have mutual understanding. The government and religious leaders should initiate to solve the problem.

M: Who do you think is causing the violence?

K: The hate-speech of Buddhist extremists and also some Muslims who practice Islam extreme.

M: So both parties are equally responsible?

K: Muslim are more responsible, because the Muslim community need to know how the Islam teaching should be integrated in other communities.

M: You work at the Islamic school right? Do they teach to be integrative like this?

K: In my school, we talk about that.

M: If people learn this, they will also act like that or is it more theoretical?

K: Very few percept act like that.

M: Do you know the background or teachings of extremists? Why are they extremist?

K: I assume that they are not studying the Islam, but practice the extreme. They don't understand the essence of Islam, but they practice very extreme.

M: What's their reasoning behind it?

K: [no answer]

M: Are those extreme people also living in Yangon?

K: Around the country, everywhere.

A: What is an extremist according to you?

K: If two communities blame each other, they blame extremist on each side. If they don't like other communities, they call other community the extremist on social media for example.

M: But who do you think is extremist personally?

K: Because of weak Islamic education.

M: Do you think that the interfaith situation was always like this?

K: Some publics abuse human right without understanding the aspects of human rights, this leads to hate speech and then the conflict happens after the 2010 election.

M: Who do you think is responsible for changing the situation?

K: All people.

M: Do you feel that there's a difference in things the government say regarding the religious conflict and things they do?

K: Government different in terms of behavior and action, different treatment.

M: What do you think about the interfaith marriage law proposal?

K: It's good. Every community has the right to protect their identity.

M: What do you think about the census?

K: I need to know the result of the census, before I can answer this question. Nothing different before and after census.

M: Did you feel judged on basis of your religion when they came to you for the census?

K: In terms of Rakhine State there's a lot of problems, but in Yangon not so much.

M: Do you feel a connection with the Rohingya, or is that separate?

K: There is some difference between the Rohingya and Muslim community.

M: What kind of difference?

K: [Don't know]

M: Do you feel Burmese?

K: Yes, like a Myanmar citizen.

M: So you do feel like you belong here?

K: I am proud of my citizenship. I decided to die in this country, because his is my native.

M: Do you feel that there's a difference in discrimination between different Muslim groups?

K: The religion is same, but understanding and therefore practice is different. Muslim communities are also fighting each other, but no discrimination.

M: What do you think about the 969 movement?

K: They release hate speech and attack the Islam. They are always talking about bad things of Islam. I think they destroy their own religion because of their bad behavior towards Muslims.

M: What do you think about what they say about Muslims being an identity threat to Myanmar?

K: That's not a real thing.

M: Where do you think this idea comes from?

K: Political trick.

M: Why do you have a beard?

K: I want to follow prophet Mohammed. I don't think this is culture, I just want to follow Mohammed.

M: Do you feel that you are treated differently than Buddhist men of your age would in Yangon?

K: There's no problem when going on the street. But for another scenario, I am scared for a certain kind of guys with bad behavior or disrespect. I am afraid.

M: Why do you think Buddhist people fear Muslim people?

K: Because they are not confidence about their religion. Because of that they attack other religions.

M: Are you married?

K: No, no time.

M: Would you marry a woman who is not a Muslim?

K: I never thought about this.

M: Would it be accepted?

K: No, because we would face so many problems because of the differences between the religions. The other way around it would also be impossible.

Notes:
Appearance is traditional Islamic; beard, dress.

Interview Nr. 9

Name interviewee: U Kyaw Minn

E-mail: ykyawminn2012@gmail.com

Name interviewer: Marit van Liere

Date interview: 21 May 2014

Location interview: Headquarters Democracy and Human Rights Party

Acronyms:

M: interviewer Marit

U: interviewee U Kyaw

M: Can you introduce yourself?

U: I come from Rakhine State, and my forefathers for many generations were born, were brought up, lived and died in Rakhine State. Worked for education department for 20 years. And since 1988 I was involved in politics. In 1990 I was elected, but unfortunately I didn't join parliament. Then I joined political groups, especially NLD. The group we formed was called CRDP. In 2005 I was put in prison for 55 years along with my family, because I took part in political activity. They saw me at the front. They want to punish me to not practice politics. They say I am undesired, unwanted in Myanmar, because of Rohingya. After seven years I was released under presidential amnesty. But I had to sign one clause, if I commit any wrong thing against the law I will be punished and have to carry out the rest of my sentence in prison. After release I was not healthy, I got Parkinson. Now still in politics, but I am not so free to exercise my political agenda.

M: In what way not free?

U: According to rule and regulations you are free, but in practice you are not free. If you want to do an activity outside, they will not approve or disturb. And the most difficult is that I cannot go to Rakhine State where all my supporters are.

M: Why can't you go there?

U: Rohingya have no rights, very restricted. There's no freedom of movement for any Rohingya.

M: What about your religious background?

U: I am not a religious person, but I believe in God. I am a Muslim.

M: Can you tell me something about the background of the DHRP?

U: I contested in election in 1990. We had a political party, regional, the name was National Democratic Party for Human Rights. We wanted to form a party on our ethnic name, but Rohingya is not recognized by present Myanmar military government. After my release we changed the name into Democracy and HR Party.

M: and you represent the Rohingyas?

U: Yes.

Myanmar people hostile to Muslims.

M: How?

U: Originally they are warm and gentile. When they have got racial ideology from elderly ones they become more hostile to Muslim, no reason. Muslim are most obedient people, law abiding, yet they hate Muslim. I think from somewhere outside the country. Maybe some international hidden organization that spreads anti-Muslim ideology. So my assessment is that that ideology came to Myanmar, especially to the military. Especially trained to hate Muslims, to destroy ... of Muslims. Especially Rohingya. Rohingya happen to be Muslim. They want to get rid of Rohingya. Rakhine should be exclusively Buddhist. A lot of suppression comes from time of General Ne Win. Rohingya are subject to thousands of discriminatory rules. You cannot go to university, no health care, not go from place to place, no proper education, no marriage, no business. Once you get involved in a quarrel with non-rohingya, first you got beaten to get a lesson, then you go

to prison. Sometimes you can travel with permit, on the way you are harassed or tortured. Permit is not easily given, you have to give a lot of money in every gate. A lot of discrimination. But only in Rakhine State.

M: Do you think this discrimination in Rakhine is because you're Muslim or Rohingya?

U: Very difficult to explain. Rohingya are Muslim, Muslims are Rohingya. I can't say. There are also some Buddhist who are Rohingya. They can enjoy some bribes because they are Buddhist. In that sense you can say that it is worse for Muslims.

M: What do the Rohingya want in Rakhine State?

U: Rohingya want nothing, just to live as human being. If you got the rights of the human being, you are comfortable. They don't regard us as human beings. Who is he? Man or Kalar? Kalar means Muslim. That means Kalar is not man. They are treating us as animals. But animals have rights. They can sleep and eat and meet freely. We cannot, because the military can always take us. An animal has nothing to fear, we can get disturbed always. Marriage is subject to needing a permit, which is not easy to get. It takes a long time and also requires to give money to the official concern.

M: But after the WWII, the Rohingya came together and wanted to have an autonomous part of Rakhine, right?

U: Where did you get that information?

M: In a report?

U: Actually it is not a strange thing, the Karen and Mon also tried to have their own land in that time. [Interruption] Anyhow, in the time of independence they tried to get their own independent state, to not join with Myanmar, to join with Thailand. In the same way, in Rakhine State also. An armed group as well in the name of Mujahedin. So the objective of Mujahedin, just to protect themselves from the Rakhine people. Because in that time at least two groups of Rakhine server, with arms. One is Rakhine Communist Party, other is Rakhine Independent Party. Their objective is to have independence from Myanmar. Just a few years before, there was WWII. When the war broke out. There was a vacuum of lack of administration, no rule of law because British and Japanese got out of Rakhine State. In that time there was indiscriminate killing. In that time the Rohingya took up arms, just to protect themselves. But after a few years, before 1965; it was a good time for the Rohingyas, very peaceful. They had citizenship rights. But in 1965 General Ne Win came and the rights were taken away. And now in 2012, everything happened.

M: Do you think anything changed at the transition in 2012 regarding discrimination?

U: All these discriminations are carried out, but these persons are still in power who are in politics. So I don't see any relief in this political transition. They are making space for other minorities, they can experience some relaxations through democratization. I don't expect much improvements in our lives.

M: If we speak about Yangon, do you expect people to treat you differently because of your religion?

U: Some months ago, when there was violence in many townships in Myanmar, we sensed that sort of things. We have been very cautious to go to talk, but this did not happen in Yangon.

M: And what about discrimination, not violence?

U: Yes, but this discrimination is hard to see, hard to prove. Examples: if you go to a shop, he does not want to sell you. If you want to take a taxi, he doesn't want to take you. Even some Muslims elderly politicians was driven out of literature meeting, disgraced. At present this is a bit quiet. In that time in most houses, shops and taxis you see a lot of 969. Now you still see, but not as much as before.

M: What means 969 to you?

U: Their religious symbol, it means that you are a good Buddhist. Attribute of the monks. This attachment to the symbol, it means that they have always attachment to Buddha. We don't have any objection to 969, no problem. But don't hate others, don't try to disturb others. Problem is that they try to make quarrel, to make trouble with other people, especially with Muslim. Muslim can be distinguished in this country.

M: Do people see you are a Muslim?

U: Yes, easily. I have an Indian face, not a Muslim. Sometimes they ask; are you a Hindu or a Muslim? But there are not so many Hindus anymore in Yangon.

M: What do you think of the thought of 969 that Muslims are a threat to the identity of Myanmar?

U: A lot of things in their agenda. They are openly condemning and criticizing. Muslim is an animal ideology. Islam animalism. Muslim terrorist. It is not a problem to condemn Myanmar Muslims. But when you condemn Islam some people outside of Myanmar, feel a bit uneasy, there were some protests in Malaysia against Buddhist.

M: How do you perceive other religions in this country?

U: There is a conflict between the minorities and the majority. It will be difficult to fill the gap.

M: But what do you think about Buddhists in this country?

U: They are officially recognized as a religion of special status in constitution. Just short of a state religion, in practice the government does everything as sole protector of this religion. They have duty to spread Buddhist ideology. Buddhists are free, they can hold meeting on the street without permit. They have curfew in Rakhine, but Buddhist can still meet and gather for religious meetings or conference. Buddhism is very strong and free. As minority we are suffering, we don't like this kind of freedom to suppress minority people.

M: Do you live in a Buddhist township?

U: for three years now. And I used to be a teacher, in a big Buddhist village in Sittwe. I was one of the teacher. In the same way in business and political field, we have close contact with non-Muslim. Formally Buddhist people are very sociable, but recently they became very narrow-minded, especially with dealing with Muslims. The military leaders have been teaching these things.

M: So what are they telling?

U: Anything, bad or good. They know nothing, but they are taught to think of these people as bad. I don't know why they hate us. But t the same time I have been studying Christianity or Buddhism. But I don't find something better in Buddhism. It's a private religion. You can practice it in the jungle, not in the city. A man who lives in the city, cannot live up to Buddhist religion.

M: What kind of words or images do Buddhist people describe when talking to Muslims?

U: Maletu, it means disgusting people. There is Kalar. These sort of things, in every community. We are not hurt for this term. But there is physical aggression and on land and property that is difficult. Especially Muslim in Rakhine, they don't feel secure. They are just waiting for bad news. They don't have any good news from anywhere. I know there are international declarations for IDPs, they should be resettles in the shortest possible time. This is responsibility of the government. It has not been two years that they have been forcefully displaced. Our children our born here, they should be citizens, but nothing happens. Nobody has citizenship cards. But they did got the right to vote in 1990. In constitution we have now the provision to just solely, in international, we have two rules for citizenship; if you are born somewhere, you are national of that country. Second on just sanguine, if you want to be a certain national, you have to have blood of that nation. In many countries they consider both. 1948 citizenship law is based on not

blood. One who can prove 3 generations in Burma, you are a Burmese national citizen. It cannot be revoked. Mentality now is that when you are not Buddhist, you are not Burman.

M: But do you feel like you belong here, like a Burmese?

U: Yes I feel I am Burmese, my sense of belonging is national Burmese. More attachment is Rakhine identity. I feel more Rakhine than Burman.

M: Who do you think is the cause of the violence and discrimination?

U: They hate Muslim. They want especially to get rid of Muslims from Rakhine State. They can drive out the belongings, the properties, the land properties of the Muslim, if the place is economically important. That's why they are not resettling the displaced people, they already have economic project place. They want to drive out Muslim from downtown area?

M: Who is responsible for change?

U: the central government. Even before the democratic government... in the time of so called SPDC government.

M: Do you feel there's a difference in what the government is saying what they do and what they really do about it?

U: These are hidden agendas.

M: So what are the hidden agendas?

U: Drive out the Rohingyas from all places, distribute this among Buddhist communities.

M: Only in Rakhine?

U: Not obvious here, they are not very pleased to see a big majority of Muslims in downtown Yangon. There's about 2million Muslims downtown now, one fourth is Muslim, one fourth is Muslim, Buddhist is only half.

M: What do you think about the interfaith marriage law proposal?

U: It's nothing. Political game. USDP party has rented to get election. To get support of monks, the monks will organize for USDP party. Even the monks have not the right of voting. So the monks will demand the right to vote.

This party is called race, language, religion protection law. USDP is majority, so they will force it. Public is not satisfied, they feel that there are some restrictions in their freedom. Mostly educated people don't like it. There have been some protest letters. They already have protection Buddhist law. It was enacted in 1954. Any extremism is not good. Maybe Muslim extremism, maybe Buddhist extremism, not good.

M: Do you know whether there are Muslim extremism in Myanmar?

U: I don't know. Muslim in Myanmar are not extremist, they don't have any political mentality. They don't want to politicize their religion. They do their business, they go to mosque. This is not because of religious teaching, it's because of politicians who want to take advantage of religious. By means of political platform they use religious?

M: But don't you feel that there's space for extremism because Muslims feel discriminated?

U: Yes, it could be. But it will take a lot of time.

Discrimination comes from institutions, on the ground people don't know about discrimination. It is pushed from people from the top and the monks. Monks are also encouraged from people of the political stage.

M: Do you think all the monks agree with the anti-Muslim notion?

U: I don't think so. Some of them are employed by the USDP. Some sensitive monks, not all. Before there was no problem. With the previous elections they have created this mindset. They are financing these monks so they can survive. Behind the 969 monks, that is a big organized group with a big fund.

The violence in Sittwe is not from Sittwe, native don't involve in their own area. Most of them are strangers. That is an organized group.

M: Have you heard about the Ma Ba Ta?

U: Race and religion protection. It's the same as 969, the same group. The same Nazi organization that was in Germany. Not to marry another religious man or something. Burma is not going on progressive trend, US have already extended one year sanction. Other countries should do this as well.

M: Do you think it is acceptable for you or somebody from your family would marry a Buddhist?

U: Haha no, under their law they will be enforced nobody will be excluded.

M: And for you?

U: No problem [but why not really answer to the question]. If people cannot get married here, they will get married somewhere else.

Many times the government has been promising a lot, but they don't act like it. They treat us like foreigners.

They say Rohingya come from Bangladesh, they are Bengali. But they don't have proof. It is our land, it is Rohingya land. We can claim it. We have a lot of evidence. [Show quote from book from 17th century where Rohingya were already mentioned living in Rakhine State].

Unless you use force, they won't accept persuasions, argument. Sanction is good. Sanctions work a lot. Due to sanction, they have initiated this kind of democracy.

M: Do you know if the Muslim Liberation Organization of Burma still exists?

U: I never heard of it. I know some few persons on the border who act in the name of Muslim army or something. Not very active I think, they don't have any backing.

Notes:

'I am used as portal to salvation'

After interview, off the record:

Everywhere there is islamophobia, there are 3 reasons for this:

- Islam is the youngest religion compared to the other 3 big religions.
- Islam spread fast (Indonese, Middle East)
- Islamic traditions are strict, people don't understand.

Burka, praying 5 times a day, eat no pork, hallal food, no alcohol, cigarettes, beard. Very traditional, not modern. "I think that Muslims should try to be a bit more liberal so people can understand the religion more easily" [He dresses not traditional Islamic, so he practices what he preaches]

Interview Nr. 10

Name interviewee: Kyaw Lat (pseudonym)

Name interviewer: Marit van Liere

Date interview: 23 May 2014

Location interview: 365 Bar

Acronyms:

M: interviewer Marit

K: interviewee Kyaw

M: Can you introduce yourself?

K: I am originally from Sittwe, I lived there until I was 18 and then my family moved to Rangoon. I studied here, mechanical engineering and the master of development studies at the Rangoon Institute of Economics. During the thesis I got a scholarship to study in Bangkok so I did that and came back in 2009 and since then I've been working with NGOs and INGOs, UN organizations. First ... which is working on peace and conflict, social transformation and then work with Oxfam GB for 1.5 year. Now I am working with one of the USAID programs, named promoting rule of law. So I am working as a civil society specialist for 3 months now. The rest I am also part-time teaching at MIT (theology) and teaching at the MMC (conflict resolutions) and also doing some local CSO.

M: And what about your family?

K: I stay with my mom and sister here. My eldest brother stay with his family.

M: What is your religious background?

K: Let's say Muslim, Islam.

M: How do you practice that?

K: I don't practice in conventional way, so people ask me what I believe; I believe what I believe?

M: So what do you believe?

K: Hard to tell, if you have to give a name I say I am a Muslim, but I work with Muslims, non-Muslims, every class of people, Christian community. I even worked with Buddhist monks. I don't really engage with Muslim community. Only after the conflict I have to do something with this community. Before that I stay by myself.

M: And your family is Muslim as well? Does she practice in a more conventional way?

K: More than me. She doesn't engage in the Muslim community that much, but more than me. She goes to pray on Friday with friends.

M: How do you perceive other religions?

K: It's a bit hard to tell... I mean if you define a person he or she is religious, people think they practice in conventional way. Normally they don't engage so much with different religions. I see them as quite different.

M: How do you perceive Buddhism?

K: In normal, ordinary people they are quite sociable, engaged with others but it depends. It's the same with the other religions. They are the right people, they believe in the right way and practice. Everyone has its mindset.

M: How do you think that Buddhist and Muslims are living together in Yangon?

K: People are quite okay, until you don't want to talk to any other religion. For everyday life there is no problems. Because of they are socially engaged, they are more engaged in terms of business. Sometimes like the time during military regime, people don't want to talk about politics. Also in that scenario, people are quite okay. Let's say they try to avoid these kinds of things.

M: Did you ever face discrimination?

K: Lot of times.

M: How?

K: So many ways.

M: Can you give me an example?

K: Two things. The first thing is when I was living in Sittwe. The reason for our move was definitely because of these things (But he is no Rohingya). It was not ok to stay longer there. We have restrictions to travel.

M: And here in Yangon?

K: Not that much, but sometimes it's not okay. Sometimes I feel it depends on the way I perceive when I face this kind of... sometimes they want to talk to me in a discriminatory way, derogatory term. If feel pity to them. There people are very narrow minded. I am not that much angry, even they treat me in that way.

M: Can you give me some examples of the derogatory terms?

K: Mostly Kalar.

M: What does this mean to you?

K: It's like they are not our people... not from our land. So many meaning but it depends on the context in which they use it.

M: Can you also give an example of formal discrimination that you faced?

K: When I was in Sittwe and got a chance to go to the student exchange program in Japan in the 5th grade. But in the last minute I was rejected because I was a Muslim. This was the first time, it was so hard for me. And also in Sittwe before I take my matriculation exam, I was attacked by some of the Buddhist Rakhine 3 or 4. Just a week before I took my exam. They were intentionally attacking me not to take part of the exam. Here the college system is based on the score we get in the matriculation exam.

M: Do you think these kinds of things are aimed at race or religion?

K: Mostly on religion. I still have a copy of the official government of a letter that says not to recruit Muslim guys in the military.

M: But you said the situation is very good in Yangon.

K: Yeah, in Yangon it's quite ok. The systems are not going quite well, the discrimination I mean. It's Yangon, there are so many foreigners.

M: But still you face informal discrimination on the street. What do you think the reason is? Why Muslims?

K: Because of the propaganda and because of the global images, because of terrorism. And because of conventional media. And because of the propaganda mostly. Most Burmese are not educated, they are influenced by the monks. So many things. It's quite easy to influence in a bad way.

M: Do you think there is something you can do about it?

K: Maybe. I do what I could do to work with these communities to deal with these communities. But most people... when they finally find out I am Muslim they say: you are a different one.

M: Can you give me an example of images or labels they use on social media?

K: They use to insult Islam about God, about the prophet, about the ethnicity like Rohingya. In facebook it is more than 100 anti-Muslim pages. I just counted months ago.

M: Do they have a lot of followers?

K: yes, but mostly not with the real name and profile.

M: Do you also have anti-Buddhist pages?

K: Yes also...

M: Are the members Muslim?

K: Who knows. Less than anti-Muslim page. But who knows these pages are really set up by Muslims. And there are so many publication right now, journals. Mostly focused on

anti-Muslims by the monks, Ma Ba Ta and 969. Officially two; those who 100% targeting on anti-Muslim. One is Weekly One, I can show you. It is about anti-marriage law. The whole paper is on that issue. Most articles are written by monks. This is weekly one. About Burmese girls.

M: A Monk with a PhD, how is that possible?

K: They get the PhD in Sri Lanka. What I think the reason behind this is, that they get it from there. Because there are so many anti-Muslim organizations and monks in Sri Lanka.

M: Do you know how many copies?

K: About a thousand?

M: Do you think a lot of people read it?

K: I don't know. But I read it every week.

M: How do you feel when you read it?

K: Sometimes quite angry, but I get used to it. But sometimes it is quite funny. Last week a monk wrote about non-Muslim things. They didn't even know about Hindu and Muslim, it's quite funny to me. But if someone reads it who is not so well educated, they might believe it.

M: When you are just on the street, do you feel you are treated differently than a Buddhist man your age?

K: Not obvious. But sometimes. When I travel everyone has to bring their NRC. Our NRC card has name, religion and race. When they see my religion they treat differently; they ask so many questions. It's annoying.

M: Do people see that you are a Muslim?

K: Maybe not. Because some people thought I am a Hindu. Sometimes they ask me; are you a Muslim, I say yes. Sometimes they ask me; are you Hindu, I say yes.

M: But discrimination is not aimed at Hindu right?

K: No not really, but they don't know the difference. Sometimes they see Hindu as the Buddhist. They don't have such strong belief.

M: How do you perceive the social distance between Muslims and Buddhists in neighborhoods?

K: It depends on the place. In downtown Rangoon it is okay. So many Muslim shops. Many neighborhoods stay together. But outside Rangoon it is different. In this township where majority is Buddhist, if you are a Muslim and want to buy an apartment they usually don't want to sell you.

M: Do a lot of people from different religions work together?

K: Yes, mostly.

M: Do you know where that doesn't happen?

K: Not sure. Not familiar with these businesses.

M: So you have a lot of Buddhist friends?

K: yes, more than Muslims.

M: Would your community accept it if you marry a Buddhist girl?

K: Some of my friends will say it's ok, because they know how I believe. But majority won't accept it. Buddhist majority. You cannot register officially. Because it is officially prohibited.

M: But the interfaith marriage law proposal is not official right?

K: But all the judges they are not allowed to register any Muslim man or woman with Buddhist spouse.

M: But why do they want to get this law if it's in practice already?

K: It's not officially in practice, but it is informally practiced. Mosques normally don't accept it, because someone has to convert before the marriage.

M: How do you feel about this, that you are not free to choose whoever you want to marry?

K: it's hard to tell, because I never fell in love with a Buddhist girl. So far, no problem. But if someone would really fall in love, it might be a problem for them.

M: How do you feel about the interfaith violence?

K: It's quite different setting. The one that happened in Rakhine and in the mainland. In Rakhine it is targeted to Rohingya and mostly from the Rakhine Buddhist and nationalist. In the mainland, mostly from the government or state who want some kind of violence, who want to divert political intention.

M: Who do you think is blamed?

K: If I choose only one I will say government. Because the government didn't handle proper way.

M; and if you can say multiple?

K: RNDP (nationalist party Rakhine), Rakhine exile. Even before the conflict broke out in Rakhine, there were so many tensions. Arguing about historical background about Rohingya. It broke out only after the election. In Rakhine, most staff are Rakhine Buddhist. And police and security is Rakhine Buddhist. After election, all the seats were won by RNDP. They can do whatever they want. But there are some arguments between Rakhine politicians and the Rakhine business man. They are not happy because they have so many business deals with Rohingya people. Even in the market, labour... months ago I saw an advertisement in state paper. It is about training for construction workers. Before the conflict, most construction workers are Muslims, but the advertisement was for the Buddhist community, because they need the labour. We can see what is happening on the ground.

M: I heard that there are also small tensions between Rohingya and Muslim community?

K: Yes between Kaman (like myself), which is a sub-Rakhine group and Rohingya. Less than 50,000 Kaman in this country. Sometimes Rakhine needs to call Kaman, when they have Rakhine meeting. The other side, the Rohingya see that the Kaman with Muslim identity not because of the race. Recently the Kaman party by RNDP, signed a statement that Rohingya are not from our land, then there are some tensions. But actually on the ground, if you talk to Kaman; not all Kaman are Muslim. 10/20% are Buddhist. It's quite ok and common. Even I have relatives who are Buddhist.

M: Do you feel you belong here?

K: Why not, yeah. I feel I belong here, but most of the Buddhist feel I do not belong here. Sometimes I argue on facebook or when I talk, I have strong arguments and then they don't want to talk to me because of my strong arguments.

M: Do they also feel the same for Muslims.

K: Yes, even there are so many propaganda coming from the extreme Buddhist side. They see Muslims as bad people, they try to exclude them. If you check our history, since 1932 or 1936 these kind of anti-Muslim riots have happened before. This time, Muslims are soft target for the government or the political agenda to divert any attention.

M: But divert the tensions; from what?

K: For political game, government always use that thing.

M: Can you elaborate on that?

K: I think I have some books about that. Before 1988 there's also government trying to divert some kind of thing. Whenever these kind of riots come up, the main cause is one Muslim guy marrying or raping Buddhist girl. Same old reason.

M: Right now you would say the government is progressing in some way...

K: I am not saying that?

M: I know but why do they want to do that now?

K: These Muslims are soft targets, the majority won't say a word if only Muslims are targeted. Some people don't dare to talk. I talked to journalist who were in Meiktila; they don't dare to report what they see because the majority will not believe them or will attack. But right now, if you check the political scenario what is going on, the USDP party, they are only one opposition party. Like in 2010 if there is election in 2015, the scenario won't be the same. The current majority USDP see that they can't cheat, if the election is fair. So they need so many diversion. They come up with anti-marriage law, riot and some of the UDSP members, those who are sitting in the parliament as MP, they have close ties with big businesses. If they come out with these things, they cannot do the business as they are doing. They want to divert. The good thing is that they can only divert by insulting the lady and the other. The government is quite sure that they won't compete in the elections in any ethnic region, their main target is the mainland. There are only two parties who compete. The lady is democratic icon and she talks about human rights, but she never spoke out about certain issues. And one vote is one vote, they just aim at poor, uneducated, not smart people because it's easy to influence. Do not bother with intellectual and smart people. So there's a lot of propaganda in the villages. And they also use the monks and monk organization. It's about prejudice, how they perceive people. Because of their perception, you can get these kinds of propaganda, leaflets since 1970s.

M: What do you think the prejudices are?

K: Muslims are bad, not smart, and not easily sociable. They don't practice Buddhist moral precept (not to kill animals, etc.). Muslim guys kill animals. These kind of teachings is going on; even if they are not vegetarian.

It's not fair to project their teachings on us. If a Muslim guy kills a cow and they sell in the market, where all Muslims and non-Muslims eat. According to Buddhist teaching they cannot kill for food, but in the common sense, if you hire somebody to kill; it's not according to the law. Why only blame to those... you know. And now who they are pushing them to kill. If there is no demand side, no one will go for their business.

M: How do you think the religious conflict develop?

K: Sometimes it's by propaganda, social media. And also teaching by extreme monks.

M: When do you think it started?

K: After Rakhine conflict in 2012. Sometimes before, as in 2003 in Mandalay but it's not that much serious during that time.

M: How do you think it grew from relatively small conflict in Rakhine to the whole country?

K: First one is that what happened in Rakhine, they repeatedly said they are against illegal immigrants, not against Muslims. But for me it was quite clear it was against Muslims. I know their mindset, I lived there for 18 years. My Buddhist friends do not agree with me. But it's quite clear.

If you check what has happened and if you check the riots, from Meiktila to other parts. Those who are really doing this kind of destroying, looting, killing; they are well organized. Come at the right time, with cards and bikes, bring the same kind of weapons. It's well organized, it's not accidently. More or less by the same group of people.

M: Who are those people?

K: Who knows... from the government side, maybe yes? From the USDP, who knows... maybe from the hardliners, who are sitting in parliament, who are having big businesses, maybe yes.

M: Who is responsible for change?

K: Everyone.

M: Do you think the religious issue is on the political agenda.

K: Sure, yes.

M: And do you think it's on the security agenda?

K: If they want to control, they can control. You can compare how the security personnel kept watching in Meiktila, you can search in youtube... compare with security person and police treat in the mining. It is quite clear. So how they treat the protestor, the monks, the villages there, how they treat the looting and burning in Muslim community.

M: Only to get votes?

K: You don't want to kill me, just burn business and house. If you are a Muslim guy doing business well, you only need to destroy the business.

M: Why is the government not doing anything?

K: So far... they are quite ok, they are not targeting power issues, political agenda. Some people are focused on the religious riots, but majority is Buddhist and more focused on political agenda, constitution amendment. And the thing is, the propaganda is quite changed. In 2012 they started with Rohingya, nationalities. And then it shifted to midland Myanmar, more focused on the Muslim businesses. Those people are exploiting Buddhist business, that's why Buddhists are poor. They want to intermarriage with the poor women. Those propagandas came up from 969, and then right now the propaganda changed again. Now it's from intermarriage law, from Ma Ba Ta. You can check the scenario how it shifted. And the leadership is shifted. Now mostly they don't focus on Wira Thu, during Meiktila, when 969 is really hot, the focus is really on him. But now mostly on the organization and the monks.

M: Why did that change?

K: The strategy changed.

M: Because of all the negative comments on Wira Thu?

K: Yeah...

M: Do you think there is a difference in what the government does with these issues and what they say they do?

K: Yes, because government is not really responding to control the riots, control the conflict. They say they are acting in a responsible way. If you check the recent attack on INGOs in Sittwe, the place where it started was just a 5 minute walk from the police station. So why did it happen? If you really want to control. It is quite simple.

M: What's your opinion on the 969 and Ma Ba Ta?

K: 969 is something like... no need to kill a group of people, if you can kill the business. 786 is symbol, quite the same. But before, when I was young, I see Buddhist restaurant use the 969, but it came up as against the 786. Symbol to use everything with Buddhist background. They even have stickers in Chin State, mostly Christian. I was quite shocked. So you can see how much they can do. And the donations come to Ma Ba Ta, people are donating. A lot of donations, not big amounts but a lot of people.

M: What do you think about the notion of the 969 that Muslims are a threat to Burmese identity?

K: It depends on propaganda, if you can think by numbers it is not a threat. It is not a threat to Buddhist community, it's a threat to Muslim community. If you compare to death numbers, 95% of victims are Muslim.

M: Do you think the possibility exists that the Muslim community will be done, and there will be a Muslim movement?

K: Sometimes I see why Muslim is soft target, there is no armed group in the Muslims.

M: Your job is promoting rule of law right, but do you think this will help?

K: To some extent, it depends on the willingness of the government. If they really want to change, they will change. That's it.

M: What's your experience with the census?

K: During the census I wasn't in Rangoon, but in Taungyi. One thing is that the census is politicized by the government. Whatever you put in, like Rohingya, it won't be read by the machine. Because of that there are so many issues.

M: Are you a first class citizen here?

K: Officially I am, but the way I am treated, I am not.

Interview Nr. 11

Name interviewee: Soe Min Lat

E-mail: soeminlat.mm@gmail.com

Name interviewer: Marit van Liere

Date interview: 31 May 2014

Location interview: Interviewers apartment

Acronyms:

M: interviewer Marit

H: interviewee Soe

M: Can you introduce yourself?

S: My name is Soe Min Lat. I was born outside Yangon in a village, small village. All the villagers are peasants, also my family. At those time the situation in the village is not like now, especially the road was very bad. I worked as a peasant. For 10 or 15 years I had to work in the field, gather the patty plants. I studied until grade 6 in my village, then I moved to my relatives' village; near Yangon, Yangon division. From grade 7 until grade 11. My family supported me financially for my education. Now I have a job, sometimes I provide money for them. After grade 11 we tried college, at age 20. I studied for three years in Myanmar literature in Yangon University. I had a job to get the money.

M: What is your religion and how do you practice it?

S: I am a Buddhist. To practice the religion is not special for me. I keep the sermon of Buddha in my mind. Even if I don't go to pagoda for pray, I keep them in my mind. Especially 5 presets; not to steal, not to drink alcohol, not to have sexual relationship with other waves, not to [could not understand], and not to kill the animal or human being. I go to pagoda especially on Sunday and full moon day, but not every week.

M: What is your perspective on other religions?

S: I am Buddhist, but every religion has peace. I like that one, I like peace. My perspective of Islam or Christian or Buddhist or Hindu... I wish everybody to have peace. Our Buddhist religion, the monk makes the sermon of Buddha's, they preach for the people, for the good things. To be the good person.

M: Do you hear negative things about other religions?

S: Yes of course. You may already know the situation in Myanmar. The Buddhist and Islam. The riot have been here many years. We can't point out, because of religions, those people. The two Islam raped the Rakhine girl, she is a Buddhist. The other people cannot bear, so the riots started from three people. But I don't want... the sermon Allah, something about Islam that I know from media. The religion show to rape the people like that. But I don't study the other religions.

M: Can you give more examples that is said on social media about Islam?

S: the riots in Rakhine state, it start from their side. That ladies, if she was my sister, how can I bear it? How can I bear it? Even they did not rape the girl, they cut the head. That's very bad. That's very bad and... nobody can forget and bear on that matter. It's very rude. Our religion in our country is not like that. We don't practice that way. Also Buddha prohibit to rape the women who don't want to accept it, and not to rape or have sexual relationship who have husbands.

M: And you're saying that Muslims do it differently?

S: Yes. I think they are very rude. Buddhist or Christians don't discriminate. To get married, there's no law. Every lady who is of age, can get married with other religions, we are very free. Muslim is not like that, they have to marry the people who respect their own religion. Now somebody tries to practice the law of marriage for Buddhist, this is not discrimination for the ladies, who is Buddhist. Cause also, even if we practice this law,

she can get married as she wants. This is the law for the ladies, who marry other religions.

M: Do people have specific words for Muslims that they use?

S: We want peace. Everybody who lives in this country, should practice the law of this country. Muslim or Christians, anybody. We don't discriminate, they should follow the law of this country. They have right themselves, we have right ourselves.

M: How do Buddhists and Muslims live together in Yangon?

S: We never had this situation before. The riot situation between Buddhists and Muslims. I don't know how Muslim religion is before. Now I know to some extent. That's why I don't want to say I don't like them. We are human, we should have respect on each other.

M: Not as it should be but in everyday life, how do you live together?

S: Most of the people are not so discriminate. Some Buddhist and Muslim are very friendly as neighbors. Burmese go to Muslim shop, no problem and the other way around, no problem. But now Muslim and Burmese live together in Yangon, they don't have any problem. Since before we have been living together. Because of the riot situation is alert for that religion, Muslims. The people are like before.

M: Do you think it's acceptable for Buddhist people to live in a Muslim neighborhood?

S: Yes, if they are good. Every culture, every religion is no problem. Because I think... I just want to say we want peace. If they are obeying and practice the law of this country, it is acceptable to live together with them.

M: And the other way around.

S: Yes, if they are good.

M: Do you have Muslim friends?

S: Very rare.

M: And do you have Muslim colleagues?

S: No, not in my office. But in other branches we have.

M: And as neighbors?

S: No, not in our street.

M: Would it be acceptable for you to marry a Muslim girl?

S: No, it would not. Be yes if she will convert to Buddhism.

But no Muslims in our villages. I have never seen black guys in village.

M: What do you think about 969 movement?

S: I think this campaign appeared with the riots. Muslims have 786, they have the meaning. We have the meaning of 969. 9 the Buddha's, 6 means the tamat, 9 sacrat for the monks.

M: What do you think about the message that they spread?

S: It is acceptable as a Buddhist. Muslims have 786, Buddhist should have 969. This is not discriminate. 786 have since before, long ago. 969 is right now, because of riot situation.

M: What do you think about the thought that Muslims are a threat to Burmese identity?

S: I don't like that message. If the Muslim is not good, the Burmese should be good themselves. Burmese means the people who live in Myanmar, Christian or Islam or Buddhist or Hindu. I don't like spreading the message is so bad, threat to Burmese. But if they are not good, we should be good ourselves. This is reasonable.

M: Do you think the 969 movement has support from the government?

S: Is not for government. It's for nation, for religions.

M: But do you think government officials support it?

S: It does not coincide with government officials. The government officials should not deliver that sermon, he has political word.

M: What do you think it means when people have the 969 sticker on their shop or taxi?

S: This is the Buddhist shop, Buddhist taxi, Buddhist company.

M: Do you feel that you are treated differently than a Muslim man your age would be treated?

S: No, I don't think so. But I don't know from their side. Yes they are Muslims, but they are human.

M: Do you know anything about whether Muslims are discriminated in Yangon?

S: As I told you they are teaching to kill or rape the people who are not Islamic. I have heard from media. I don't know exactly. But in physically nobody practices like that.

M: and in other places?

S: Maybe it's different. There are a lot of differences between Buddhists and Muslims in the places where riots happened. They scare each other. Before I joined Smart, I worked in Rakhine State. In the city where I was (Tyaupyu) was very stable, but although close to riot cities, it was very peaceful. But when I was there in November the riots started there as well. They are fighting each other. Burned houses.

M: Why were they first so peaceful, what happened?

S: The OIC (organization Islamic community) campaign make demonstrations. I heard that OIC is support for Muslims. In Tyaupyu also, they start campaign in day time and in night time the Muslim started to burn, the riots started from there. I know this because I was there. I took many photos after the riots, so many houses burned down. Some Muslims in the town moved to refugee camp.

M: Why do you think the Muslims fled the city when they started it?

S: They left the city and ran away, because I think they are not... Muslim and Rakhine people are different population. Muslims are less than Rakhine. In other cities where riots happened, the population is very much, more than Rakhine people.

M: How do you feel about the violence?

S: I just feel sorry, for the riots to happen to this villages. I heard Muslims have riots with Christians and Hindu in India. Now with Buddhist, I just feel sorry. We Buddhist live in our own country happily and peacefully, we don't have any problem. I just want to say the riots started by the Muslim.

M: So you think Muslims are the cause?

S: Yes. Cause is Muslim.

M: When do you think the violence started?

S: In 2003, nononono, in 2002.

M: When it got worse?

S: In 2012.

M: What's your opinion on the political transformation?

S: I am not sure. Political transformation is very wide, difficult to explain.

M: What do you think about the current government?

S: I think the government needs to change in some things. Such as to change the law. One of the parties is campaigning to prepare law 326 of 236. I don't know about what's in the law. But the president needs to control and prepare and change every sentence. In 2015 they have to do elections, within the 5 years the country is like before. Nothing is changed. It's not perfect.

M: Do you know which party you will vote on?

S: NLD, but I have ever asked the question to my monk, he reads many books. He has an idea about politics. I asked him if I should join NLD party, because I really wanted to join. But my monk only said: Do you want to make politics under party control? Politics is not for party. Politics is concerned with every party, all the people who live in this country.

M: Would you like Aung San Suu Kyi as president?

S: Yes, I think she is a reliable leader for our country. We lost this kind of leaders in many years. We think she can control the country as a good leader, or other leader who is not from military. Everybody has chance to become president. But she cannot be president because of the law. We want not only Aung San Suu Kyi, but a person who is qualified to lead the country in a good way. I don't think Thein Sein is qualified, because he is from the military. He has no ambition to be a president when he was born, now he leads the country as president because of situation. We don't like that. The people who is president from a country should have ambition from his childhood.

M: What are your feelings about the military regime?

S: 1988 is very bad, but I didn't see it physically. I just read the books. But it has not become better. Military just to protect the country, they are not for ruling the country.

M: What do you think about the census?

S: It's good. If some foreigner asks how much population your country has; we answer 60 million; it's not sure.

M: What do you think about the intermarriage law proposal?

S: This is the cover for the girl who is Buddhist, protection. Even we practice this law, she can still get married as she like. If she has some problem, she has cover by this law. That's why we like it, we support.

M: What do you think when you see a Muslim on the street with Islamic dressing?

S: I don't like.

M: Why?

S: Because... I just don't like their appearance, long dressing, long beard. And also the Muslim ladies cover their whole body. We live freely.

M: What's your opinion on the government responsibility?

S: Our government has many responsibility, they need to emphasize and control. Not to have this riot again. Not good for democratic way.

M: What do you think about the involvement of monks in the violence?

S: They have strong desire, very proud for nation and religion. Because of that desire, I am Buddhist, I also have that desire to some extent. Because of the desire, they fight back. They cannot look on the situation.

M: Is there anything you want to say?

S: Yes! Everybody who lives in this country should obey the laws of this country, whatever their religion. That's all.

Notes:

After interview

Soe Min Lat posts messages on facebook and sometimes publishes articles on human rights, how we are all human beings, no matter our religion.

Interview Nr. 12

Name interviewee: Ashin Sandarwara

E-mail: ashin.sandarwara@gmail.com

Name interviewer: Marit van Liere

Date interview: 1 June 2014

Location interview: Apartment interviewer

Acronyms:

M: interviewer Marit

A: interviewee Ashin

M: Can you introduce yourself?

A: Original I come from mid-Myanmar. I stay in Yangon for job training. I study tourism now. My family is farmer, living in the rural area. I have four siblings, 2 sisters and 1 brother.

M: What about your religious background?

A: Since I was 13 years I became a novice, when I was 20 years we have to celebrate to become a monk. I was in monkhood for 17 years, after that I am really interested in politics so I stopped being a monk?

M: Why did you become a novice?

A: Every man should become a novice or monk before they get married for short or long term.

M: Why did you decide to become a monk?

A: IN these days, everyone should be afraid of Abbat, leader in the monastery. Everybody should obey him. However I want to quite or not, I have no choice. Even my parents are afraid, all the villagers.

M: How do you notice the special status of monks?

A: Special seat in the bus.

M: Why do you think why everybody is afraid of the Abbat?

A: Especially the villagers... especially the old monk lives in the monastery. And traditionally we have to send children to monastery for teachings, basic education. Most of the villagers stayed in the monastery under the control of the Abbat. So when they grow up they still are afraid of the Abbat. They use the cane to beat. Very strict.

M: Why do you think it's that strict?

A: At the same time they have to study at primary school and monastery.

M: Why do you think it's stricter in the countryside?

A: Most people from the city can afford to study. Most rural areas are poor, they have to rely on the Abbat.

M: Why did you get out of monkhood?

A: One is I am really interested in politics. Also a monk have no chance to get a vote in the elections. Now I can vote. I was happy in that life also, very peaceful but sometimes... by hobby is different from religion and what I am interested in. That's why.

M: What is your perspective on other religions?

A: Especially what I hope is development for the country, not religion too much. Most people from the countryside are so poor.

M: What is your perspective on Islam?

A: Islamic people, some are good, some are bad. We also have Buddhists who are good, who are bad. I don't want to discriminate any religions. We want to corporate with any religion to develop the country.

M: Does your view on Islam differs on Christianity or Hinduism?

A: I have some friends who are Christian, some friends who are Islam, although I am Buddhist.

M: What are the things that you see and hear on the media and social media?

A: I see a lot, every day I read the newspaper. They have many news about Islam, or between Buddhist and Islam. They are fighting. I don't know who is behind this news.

M: Do you have an example?

A: Protection for race and marriage. This problem is after 2012. Before 2012 we also have many different religions. We have no problem living together with them. After the 2012 after the by election, the opposition leader won the by-election. The coalition didn't like the opposition. My point of view is they are making problems. Maybe the ruling party because they don't want to give up power. They are very rich, they worry for their properties. In 2014 people are trying, the opposition leaders, to amend the constitution. So they really don't want to amend the constitution. They want to be some problem in Myanmar, so people are not focused on constitution. In the border of Bangladesh they start fighting again. Many different organizations try to amend the constitution, this is the people's desire. It's dishonest.

M: Do you think the things they say on media about Islam?

A: I think this is a political trick. In the border of China, Islam, Chinese ladies don't have a job. Human trafficking, they sell for money to be wife for Chinese men. Why they focus on protection for race and religion, it's concerned with the constitution. They have to think about these development issues. However they have no ideas to take care of Myanmar people in border areas. If we discriminate between Buddhist and Islam, about a million people are living and working in Malaysia. They will be in trouble. Why do they only focus on Islam?

M: Why do you think people hate Islam originally?

A: Sometimes I ask people in rural areas. They don't give any reason. I think this is a kind of jealousy, because most Islam people live in downtown area, have a big shop.

M: Do you think that other people tend to believe the messages on media?

A: Yes, most people believe. But I don't think educated people. They know what is right, what is wrong. Especially on social media, there are a lot of anti-Muslim pages.

M: How do you think Buddhist and Muslims live together in Yangon?

A: We have no problem in Yangon. We live together. I spoke with Muslim people at the station, he is working for company owned by military government.

M: Don't you think there is any small scale discrimination here?

A: I didn't see anywhere.

M: What do you think about the 969 movement?

A: This is the symbol of the protection for race and religion. But 969 is originally only Buddha, Tama, Sangar. Leader of 969, not now, but before he give hate speech a lot. It is became popular, but many years ago when he was in prison. Now he is popular again.

M: Why?

A: To find the problem, it's easy.

M: There are some monks who support the movement, right? What do you think about it?

A: I think they don't understand the political trick, we should explain. They think this is only patriotic. This is very different. If they want to issue the law of the marriage, after 2015 it will be nothing. Why they don't protect near the border. If you look back, we have no problem with the religions. Now it's like a bomb.

M: Do you think it's acceptable in the Buddhist community to live in a Muslim neighborhood?

A: For me, no problem. But if they are not enemies. It depends. Muslim also have some extremist. Buddhist as well have some extreme people. If he is good, we can live together. Religion is not important?

M: And to be colleagues/friends?

A: yes yes. But most monk has no wide views. Only 5% of monks have been to other countries. They don't know how developed other countries. We should arrange some leaders from the monks and send them to Europe or somewhere to get wide views. Living in the same rural areas, living in the same country, they cannot get wide views or compare.

M: Is it acceptable in the Buddhist community to be married to Muslims?

A: Most men don't marry Islamic ladies, very rare.

M: Why?

A: most Muslim ladies are not very beautiful.

M: What about the Buddhist women?

A: It happens sometimes. That's why the marriage law.

M: What does it mean to you when shops and taxis have those 969 stickers on their shops or taxis?

A: This is kind of organized to protect for religion, or something like that. Most people from Myanmar are taught by Buddhist, taught by Monks. They want to know what a Buddhist house is.

M: How do most monks see Islam?

A: If I say openly, most monks really hate Muslims. Also here in Yangon. Maybe 50/50.

M: Do they spread the thoughts among their followers?

A: Some monks, sometime they give a speech to be good Buddhist. However they don't say directly about Muslims. But sometimes they give the speech to believe Buddhist.

M: But do they say stuff about Islam as well?

A: Some monks they say. I am not sure, sometimes they translate some Islamic language to Buddhist, what their plan is.

M: Why do you think they are so anti-Muslim?

A: Most people, I don't know why, they really don't like... on website or facebook they can see how Muslim people killed people. They think all Muslims are the same.

M: Do they have negative stereotypes about Muslims?

A: I don't know.

M: Do you know about people using certain words to describe Muslims?

A: At the moment, no. but last 10 or 15 years ago we have some record how the Muslims are cruel, kill someone. Our country may lose independence, something like that.

M: What do you think about the spreading of the message that the Muslims are a threat to Burmese identity?

A: 969 have some leaders who give a speech to the people. We must understand Buddhism, kind of like instruction. I don't know that much, but originally 969 is good but they misuse the symbol.

M: Do you feel that you as a Buddhist are treated differently as a Muslim?

A: We treat everyone the same.

M: How do you feel about the violence?

A: I am so sad. The source of the problem is politics. They have responsibility for their problems, they have fully power. For many years already.

M: Who do you think the government is blaming?

A: The government has the 100% responsibility how to handle the problem. However the people from the NLD, they have no power. Ruling party has 100% of responsibility. They should fight the source of the problem. Without distinguishing.

M: Who do you think started it?

A: I can't say only one. Mainly the ruling party.

M: Do you also think the government is supporting 969?

A: Yes also 969 movement, they are behind them. For example in Mandalay the NLD organized the people to explain about constitution. They have no space for the speech, no permit. However it is public. From the Ma Ba Ta or 969 organization, when they give a speech they give a permission anytime, anywhere. We can compare these two situations. Why can they give the speech? Why the leader from the NLD have no chance? Why don't they give permission to speech? When you compare this, you can understand what the problem is.

M: What do you think about the political transformation?

A: We are worried for that. Aung San Suu Kyi is 69 years already. When she becomes president, she can only work for one term. It's more open, to get a job in parliament. They don't want to amend the constitution, they really don't want to be in trouble. She [Aung San Suu Kyi] doesn't give any problem, she only wants to change the constitution. Also international community should amend the constitution.

M: What do you think about the corruption?

A: They really want the corruption, they really want having the chance to corrupt. If they lose the power, they have no chance to corrupt.

M: Do you have the feeling that the government is discriminating?

A: Originally they don't have discrimination. You can do anything you want except for politics. Please don't take my seat.

M: Do you think there is a difference is in what the government says and say what they do?

A: Very hard to say. When president Thein Sein, I thought he is a really good man and want to change the country. Now after three years he is seen with senior military officers and leader of dictatorship. He has no 100% power.

M: Do you think the military is discriminating?

A: Authorities and military are the same. Most authorities come from military.

M: What do you think about the census?

A: I have no idea, but I think they really want to know about the population.

M: What do you think about the interfaith marriage law?

A: This is not the right time, because it comes from authorities, they only want votes. Most people from countryside love their religion, there is some propaganda that Aung San Suu Kyi is not really Buddhist. Some people think that when she will become president our country will become an Islamic country. That's why not to give votes.

M: Do you think the NLD is still the biggest party?

A: Until now yes, but I don't know the plans from ruling party. They have power. We have to see and wait what happens.

M: Do you think there are different groups of Muslims?

A: Yes they also have an Islamic organization, only for religion.

M: I mean regarding differences within the Islamic group.

A: We only see on the face and with the beards. Only Muslim, Muslim I knows. Black color, Muslim appearance.

M: How do you think the Buddhist-Muslim conflict develop?

A: It depends on the authorities.

M: Are there any other things you want to share?

A: My desire is to develop the country. For the country side people, they are so poor.

M: What do you think about the monks participating in the violence?

A: Not good, Buddhism is not violent.

M: Is 969 the same as Ma Ba Ta?

A: Yes I think so. Protection for race and religion.

Muslim is Kalar, Kalar is Muslim. 969 is Ma Ba Ta, Ma Ba Ta is 969. Same same.

Interview Nr. 13

Name interviewee: Chit Swe (Imam)

Name interviewer: Marit van Liere

Date interview: 1 June 2014

Location interview: Apartment Chit

Translator (partly): Aung Ko Ko

Acronyms:

M: interviewer Marit

C: interviewee Chit

M: Can you introduce yourself?

C: I am born in Yangon. I studied in Tamwe Yangon, I studied in Pakistan as well. Then I studied in the center for Islamic economics. I have four brothers and a sister. My hobbies are teaching about Islam. I am an Islamic scholar. I am also Imam. Sometimes I am Imam, but not permanently. Part-time teacher of Islamic studies.

M: How do you practice Islam?

C: I study it properly and completely. I pray five times a day, I recite the Koran daily. I teach Islam and I teach from half past 7 to four a clock. Then I teach children from 5 to 7.30.

M: What kind of things do you teach?

C: I teach about Islam. Islam is a complete way of life. Islam has community and society. Islam has 5 pillars; performance prayers, performing donation to poor people, going to Mekka, fastening, believing almighty Allah is just one God. Mohammed is messenger of Allah. It's a complete way of life. Another way of life is buying and selling, another one is society and communicating with Muslims and non-Muslims, another is nature, character, and Islam provides high character of humans. Even rules about how to use restroom. Islam is the only acceptable religion according to Allah. If you find another religion besides Islam, almighty Allah never accepts it. This is my opinion about Islam. This is an opportunity for me, to talk to you about Islam. Thank you for listening so carefully.

M: How big is your community?

C: Nowadays Muslim community is feeling peace. But because government of Burma is nowadays providing... they hard hardworking, providing peaceful people. Muslim people and non-Muslim people so now we are feeling peace. But every time there is violence in the country, we are very sad and facing tension. So nowadays we are feeling peacefull. We want peace forever.

M: How do you perceive other religions in Myanmar?

C: Also Christian religion is not feeling peace, like in Kachin state. This is very sad act from the government.

M: What's your opinion on Buddhism?

C: Buddhism is very good religion, but I think... and this is my opinion. But Islam is complete. That religion doesn't offer a complete way of life. Buddhism provides a character, good character good nature. But Buddhist people are not accepting, thinking in good character and nature, otherwise Buddhist religion is very good. Except it is not providing a community. That is why they are killing people, blaming people, not considering democracy, freedom and free and fair elections. But I respect every religion, including Buddhism.

M: How do you feel that Buddhists and Muslims live together in Yangon?

C: Muslims and Buddhists have been living together since thousand years. Not since one minute. We are living together. My opinion this conflict is instigation of politicians. Since thousand years they have been living together with love and peace. This conflict is for some time. For one year or five years. For one political period.

M: Do you feel there is some kind of segregation in the last couple of years?

C: Propaganda for violence and conflict, otherwise they are living together and touching each other. This is nature of universe. If the people are living together, they will fall in love, they will fall in everything.

M: Have you ever faced discrimination?

C: No, I didn't face that kind of behavior of Buddhist people. They are very good people. They are affectionate. In a couple of years they are spreading hate speech about Islam. But this is propaganda.

M: What do you feel about the hate speech?

C: I feel very sad, very upset. We can't talk anymore. This is propaganda. Because they are talking hate speech, not by himself. Forcing other people to speak like that. We have to forget it.

M: Don't you think a lot of people believe the hate speech?

C: Uneducated and unqualified people believe it. They don't have education and knowledge about Islam, they are not knowing about reality. They are believing in closing eyes and ears and hearts. If they focus on reality and study about Islam they will not believe it, never.

M: Have you ever met a person that believed the hate speech?

C: No.

M: Have you never been called a bad name, or a swear word?

C: I a time I was called like that. After performing as Imam I was going home. During the water festival they were drinking. With alcohol they were abusing me. They abused my mother and me 'Kalar'. But I forgive and forget him, because he is drunk. He is not knowing what he is saying.

M: What does Kalar means to you?

C: Kalar means sir in Rakhine language, but they abuse this word. We are feeling Kalar is abusing, but the original meaning is not abusive. We feel they want to call us Kalar, meaning foreign resident.

M: What do you think is the reason for people calling you that?

C: They want some reaction. They are convincing us to give a bad reaction, like abusing.

M: Do you feel that the government discriminates?

C: There are 2 kind of groups in the government. Some of the government officials are very good persons, behaving very well. But some officers, behaving badly and discriminating.

M: Do you have an example?

C: I went to Nay Pi Do, visiting places. They are calling us in, checking us very well. We feel this is discrimination, because they are not checking and questioning other people, and they are looking to us very afraid. Like they are afraid of us.

M: Why?

C: Because they are feeling we are terrorists, person of Osama Bin Laden. But we believe in peace. We are Muslims, we are no terrorists. Terrorists are no true Muslims.

M: Can you do something about this do you think?

C: Every person who is living in Yangon, Myanmar is responsible. Even me and other Muslim people and Buddhist people. For every person we have to behave well. We have to represent as good people. I think this is our fault, my fault because my nature and character maybe affecting him.

M: What do you think about the 969 movement?

C: I think this movement is a terrorism community because they are teaching and spreading violence. This community is terrorist community. 969 are terrorists. They don't

want peace. They want this violence and conflict. In New York Times was stated Wira Thu is a terrorist.

M: You see a lot of 969 stickers on shops and taxi's right? What do you think about this?

C: they want to advertise their community 969.

M: But what do you think it means?

C: Nothing. He belongs to 969.

M: Would you go into the shop?

C: No, never, never.

M: Do you feel that you are treated differently than a Buddhist man your age would be treated?

C: No, very differences between Buddhists and Muslims. Buddhists believe monk is son of god. But Muslim people do not believe anything like that. Imams are respective person, messengers.

M: [Repeating same question differently]

C: We respect every person, if he is Muslim or non-Muslim. I respect every person. I don't treat Muslim people or Buddhist people differently.

M: [Repeating same question differently]

C: They treat Muslims differently. Because we are not Buddhist, but Muslim. We don't accept another God.

M: How do you treat you differently?

C: Muslim people believes is very stupid. They look at us as being stupid. Our beliefs are stupid beliefs. Are deeds are stupid deeds. They want to spent life free, not with bonds or rules or guidelines. But Islam provides us with law and rules about spending life.

M: Is it acceptable in the Muslim community to live in a Buddhist neighborhood?

C: If you travel you know the Muslim, you know the company of Muslim.

M: Do you have friends who are Buddhist?

C: Yes, a lot of friends. We played football together in childhood. Also I have so many Christian friends on social websites. We can share our knowledge and our everything, no problem. Islam allows to make friends anywhere.

M: Is it acceptable in the Muslim community to marry a Buddhist girl?

C: In this point, Islam guides us to not marry Buddhist people, men or women. Islam allows us to marry Jews and Christians, because they are also sons of prophets and messengers. They believe in one God. If Buddhist convert to Islam totally, completely than Islam allows us to marry them. Islam doesn't allow us to marry Buddhists, because their acts and performances are very different. We can't live together like this.

M: Do you think the Buddhist community would think it is acceptable for you to marry a Buddhist boy or girl and convert them?

C: Buddhist community can't accept it I think. They don't want to convert their children to Islam. They want to see their children as a Buddhist forever. They can't accept it. But I think this is the case for all religions.

M: How do you feel about the violence between Buddhists and Muslims?

C: This is propaganda of politicians. Propaganda of opposition party and the army. Because the army doesn't want to take over to non-army people, democracy. That's why they are making violence.

M: Who do you think started it?

C: This is starting from Buddhist. Because when somebody is raped by anyone, they are taking action by the law, by the government. Not like this. They are targeting Muslims and Islam. They want to make violence, conflict, terrorism.

M: Who do you think is to blame for the violence?

C: I think the government of Burma. These days they are providing this. They have to provide security for us. Highest blame is to government of Burma. They are not complete blame, because they have to obey other people's orders.

M: But don't you think most people blame Muslims?

C: Buddhist people blame us and we blame them and the government. I think Aung San Suu Kyi is very responsible. She is nobel price holder. She has to talk about us, she has to fight for us. Muslim people vote to her in every city in the whole country. But she fights for us little, she speaks about us little.

M: Do you feel that you belong here?

C: I am born in Yangon. My father is born in Yangon, Myanmar and my mother and siblings as well. All my relatives are living here and born here. So why don't we feel nationalists? We are Burmese.

M: Aren't you hurt when some people say you don't belong here? Like the thought that Muslims are a threat to Burmese identity.

C: This is meaningless thinking. Their opportunity is very high. Buddhist people help the government. Their community is preaching in whole country. Their opportunity is highest. But they don't have to be afraid of us. We are peace people. Violence is not good for anybody.

M: What kind of opportunities are you talking about?

C: they are the majority of the country.

M: How did the religious conflict develop?

C: The violence is appearing since last ten or twenty years. They are making plans since last 10 or 20 years. Now this conflict is out of eyes of people.

M: Did anything change at the political transition?

C: Oh yes, political transition is changing to democracy. They also want democracy, slowly, slowly, but they don't want complete democracy. Because they believe that this democracy, they have to face losses and risks and damages and law. Myanmar government and the public of Myanmar is changing to democracy slowly.

M: But did anything change after the transition regarding the religious conflict?

C: Before 2010 the government is army force. After 2010 they put their uniforms aside, still the same army government. Army government rule the country peacefully. But then they changed to democracy. They are doing violence and conflict and terrorism and democracy. They want to see the public that democracy is not good, that democracy causes a lot of problems so they create the problems.

M: Is there a different in what the government says and say they do about the violence?

C: Yes. At the start of the violence the government said that they can't control the violence and the 969 movement. But when the government wants to be chairman of ASEAN, they are controlling the situation completely, 100%. Now we are feeling that they are controlling the situation, it is in their power to control. But before 2014 they are not doing like this.

M: Do you think Ma Ba Ta and 969 movement are the same?

C: Yes, it's the same community.

M: What do you think about the interfaith marriage law proposal?

C: This is against democracy. This is against human rights. In human rights, every person is free to convert to Islam or marriage to any person. Muslim or no Muslim. In our country they make rules and regulation about convert to Islam and marriage to any person's religion. In whole world you can marry whomever, convert to any religion. In America, in Britain. This is human right.

M: What do you think about the census?

C: I think the census is needed and should be in every country. We will know the population of the country. Then we can make policies, budget to every section and department. Census is good thing. But in our country the goal is... to show the Muslim majority to whole world. The UN want to majority of people of Myanmar. They want to know the majority of Islam, majority of power of Islam. The target and goal is good, they want to provide facilities to the people.

M: What's your experience with filling in the census?

C: It's ok. In Yangon we are not facing any problem, but in other states... like Arakan state they are facing problems. Because they can't say truly that they are a Muslim.

M: At the mosque, do you ever talk about the religious conflict?

C: Because mosque is for performing prayers, for guiding to the people about Islam. Not like violence and conflict. These are political issues, so we are not discussing these issues.

M: And at school?

C: No, we are not discussing these issues. We are focusing on our lessons.

M: Was there ever discrimination at the mosque?

C: I said before I face this kind of thing one time. Except this incident I never face like this. They are also good people. Their nature is very good.

M: Is there anything you want to share?

C: I want to say to the whole world, to America, British, please help us. Please talk about us. Please talk about our rights. Please talk to our government directly and indirectly. Please don't torture Muslim people or anybody. Don't be silent.

Notes:

Very nice and warm man. Dresses like traditional Muslim. Lives in Muslim neighborhood. Lot of education, good job. Felt like he wanted to teach me all positive things about Islam; received English translation of Koran.

Interview Nr. 14

Name interviewee: Jacob Maung Maung

Telephone number: 095132678

Name interviewer: Marit van Liere

Date interview: 02-06-2014

Location interview: Glasses shop near Jacobs house, downtown

Acronyms:

M: interviewer Marit

J: interviewee Jacob

M: where do you come from?

J: I was born in India in 1947 and I came here one or two years later. I studied philosophy. I also joined religious school. Around 1991 I joined Muslim University Association, when I studied. In last year of university I became president also. After school I joined Muslim Center. There they are giving seminars. I give religious lectures there. I am a landlord, so I do not need to do any job.

M: Why did your parents go to Burma?

J: My parents stayed with me almost whole life. In 1964 Burma nationalized all our properties. My father got a shop. In 1978 he migrated to Bangladesh and lived there for 20 years and came back. In the meantime I joined a Muslim organization. There's no need to make money. My parents came back to Burma after 20 years. My mother is still alive, 88 years old. I have six children, four are in England, two are with me.

M: I am interested in the Muslim-Buddhist conflict.

J: It's a political issue. Divide and rule. They make everything public and like to rule that. They study how to divide. First they divide by religion. Then they divide by ethnicity. Like that they dividing us. From 60 years. Now our time comes. By the name they are called Burma Buddhist, Chinese Buddhist. They are creating these names. Now Indian Buddhists are moving here. It's a political issue.

M: Why do they create this?

J: They like to rule. For 60 years they are ruling. They arranged everything for their generation, they don't want to lose it. Those with power don't want to lose their power. It's not a religious issue, it's a political issue. Religious people are not fighting. It's created by the government.

M: Do you notice something from this in Yangon?

J: People slowly learn the magazine, all persuade them. They think it's true. They make them believe all these things. Also in Yangon. Actually everybody has their own living standard. No one is free for all these things. That's how they are creating it by tv and radio. But it is increasing now. Can't say what's happening in the future. Problems are rising everywhere, especially for Muslims. There are three kind of enemies; among us there are enemy. ... third enemy is an organization from India, RSS. When they gave independence to Pakistan, they decided that all Muslims had to go. Now they are working on the ground in Myanmar. They persuade Burmese nationals and Buddhists and government officials. Majority doesn't know all these things. There is election in 2015, everybody is waiting for that. There will be many problems that we have to face.

M: Do you notice something like discrimination in Yangon?

J: I didn't, but sometimes when we go for taxi, the taxi driver sees us and asks for double the price. In the villages they are getting more than us. Definitely when they dress like this. We are afraid to wear like this, with the beard.

M: What is your perception of Buddhists?

J: Every religious teaches to be kind and helpful to others. They come from the same root. If we really practice the religion, there will be no problem.

M: What do you think about the 969 movement?

J: It's an Indian movement. There is a sign of India in the logo. It came from another country and feed all the problems. This organization came from 2000.

M: You live in a Muslim neighborhood right? Why did you choose to live here?

J: This is my parents' choice. From the beginning my parents chose this place, in a Muslim area.

M: Why don't Muslim and Buddhist live together in the same neighborhoods?

J: Before one or two years there was no problem. But since 2 or 3 years it is a problem. Not every Buddhist hate Muslims, those who are educated not.

M: Do you have Buddhist friends?

J: Yes, many, because I studied with Buddhists.

M: What about colleagues?

J: Yes, I work together with Buddhists. But I don't have direct colleagues, because I am a landlord. But in the business also, there is no problem. They make profit out of each other, so they don't make problem. Uneducated, illiterate people make the problem. And by the way; government has created the ...

M: Is it acceptable to marry a Buddhist?

J: Yes. My grandfather married a Buddhist. But now not every Burmese Buddhist... Monks are creating this problem. Ladies think it is their right to marry all religions.

M: Can you explain 786?

J: It's a numeral, alphabetical thing. The Buddhist think it means something like Muslims gaining power in the 21st century.

M: But there is some kind of ideology behind it right?

J: Muslim don't believe like this. The only meaning is 'we start with the name of Allah'.

M: Do you feel that Buddhists treat you different than a Buddhist?

J: Buddhist have a different ideology, they practice like a Buddha. They are very simple persons. Politicians are creating these things. That's why they created the 969 movement.

M: If shops have the 969 sticker on them, do you go in?

J: Yes, I go in. But I don't eat there, because it's not halal. We buy where it is cheap.

M: Do you feel that you belong here?

J: This is other people's creation.

M: So you do feel like a Burmese citizen?

J: Yes I do. My grandfather, father, children are Burmese citizen. For 5 generations now. We are not going to leave this country. We love this country.

M: What kind of things do people say in the hate speech?

J: Muslims are going to govern in the 21st century. And besides that, Muslims are descendent of foreign countries. They like to be ministers.

M: is there also hate speech from Muslims?

J: No, we don't have the capacity. We are a minority, we can't speak these things. There will be more hatred. We stop the people, asking them to be patient. Government is divide and ruling.

M: But this is not the official policy right?

J: No they are playing this game.

M: Who do you think started the violence?

J: The government allowed them to do. The military was in front of them, but nobody dared them to stop. If the government tries to stop, it will stop.

We get two names, so it's easy for Burmese to call us. A Muslim name and a Burmese name.

M: Who do you think is responsible for change?

J: Responsibility of government, but after the election things will change. We can't say how long it takes place, the government don't like democracy. They have 25% of the seats for themselves. Something will calm down, change.

M: What do you think about the intermarriage law proposal?

J: Nobody thinks about religion, people think about love. After that, religion comes into the picture. Regarding Christian and Islam it is very easy. Same religions. Buddhists don't believe in creation, they first have to believe in creation.

M: Did you experience any difficulties with the census?

J: No. As I told you, most of the Yangon people came in the British time. They came with the British. All these people count as foreign, not a nationalist. All the people that came here, became married here. Most mothers are Buddhist. So they have been claiming it as Burmese, because of marriages. My father is Indian, my mother is Indian. We never talk about I was born Indian. People who make benefit to this country shouldn't be discriminated. But discrimination goes deeply. This government won't choose Muslims. Also in sports. Discrimination goes very deeply.

M: What are areas where Muslims have less rights?

J: In jobs, companies Muslims don't have rights. And in military also. There is no choice of quality.

M: Have you personally experienced discrimination by the government?

J: Yes. They did all these things. For other races also. Not Buddhist, the Burmese race is the most precious. Other races are below them. To me it happened once. When I was nine class I was selected for a football program. They asked me to join and I had a beard for religious reasons. They said I should shave it and then I could go, or otherwise I couldn't go. This discrimination goes back a long time. Another example is this Muslim with a high function. He became vice-president. But when the president stepped down, the Muslim vice-president couldn't become president because of religious discrimination. He wasn't seen fit to have such a high position. This discrimination is started from military. There are three parts; military must rule the country, Burmese nationals must rule the country, Buddhists must rule the country. If people go against the military, they will kill them all.

M: Do you feel like anything changed at the political transition?

J: No, it will take time. But when business opens, we can't think of all these things. The thing is, with the business, things will change.

M: Is there anything I didn't ask yet that you want to tell?

J: We are just small people. We can't do anything. This is working in the upper level. They do for own power, to remain their power. If they think it is better for themselves, they will do it. It will depend on the power holders.

Notes:

It's also about an attitude. Kind, they are kind. They will be aggressive.

Interview Nr. 15

Name interviewee: Zubaidah H. Ghaffari

Telephone number: 0931274148

Name interviewer: Marit van Liere

Date interview: 03-06-2014

Location interview: Coffeeshop

Acronyms:

M: interviewer Marit

Z: interviewee Zubaidah

H: Husband of Zubaidah

M: Can you introduce yourself?

Z: I was a lecturer, but resigned in 2000 and went abroad. I tried to find a job in Singapore and go to Brunei. And then I tried to find a teaching job there, and stayed there for two years. Then I came back to Myanmar and started to work at the international business center. Now I am working as a chairperson for Muslim women council.

M: What does this organization do?

Z: Sharing with other women networks and organizations. Many ethnic organizations. Our intention is to pull our women from the house. And to do capacity building and raise gender awareness. We give trainings. And we attend some seminars/workshops.

M: how do you practice your religion?

H: We go to the mosque, no problem. We are the same as other Burmese people, we speak the same language. We are also Burmese. But there is some kind of islamophobia, because there is a lot of immigration.

Z: But how do we practice our religion?

H: We practice fasting. Every week of fasting, the lights will be off in our neighborhood. Things like that. In the nighttime we go to the cemetery to pray there, in that night the lights will be off. My own brother was colonel in the army. Because he was a Muslim he couldn't be lieutenant colonel. Later, they stopped allowing Muslims in the army altogether. Some kind of Islamophobia is going on. Also it is true that there are some extreme Muslims, but they cannot do anything here. Also among Buddhist monks, there are extreme types. Everything against the Muslims. Not buying at their shops, not marrying their women. There used to be many intermarriages. Later they started burning Muslim shops. Security forces just ignore when there are attacks on the Muslims. When they are killed even. Even when they intervene they shoot at Muslims.

Z: And in our area, we are disturbed. In the night we cannot sleep. Every street has our own guard, our own security. Every time they are spreading bad news about a certain street. They will come with weapons, like knives. They will come and destroy your house, and everything you have; ID card, passport, everything important. Many people are ready to fight again. They can come anytime. You are not allowed to defend yourself.

H: People prepare, speaking from their fear in the mosque. The police are coming to tell us to hand over our arms. But people don't want to hand them over, because when they give them away, people will come and attack.

Z: Another group comes and say to protect us. And we believe them. Coming without uniform, but at the same day they come back in the night and attack us. They are the same people. It's the government.

M: Does that make you scared of Buddhist people?

Z: Yes sometimes in the bus. The conductor is so rude sometimes.

Some monks are just wearing the clothing, they are not really monks.

M: Why did you choose to dress like this (Burmese)?

Z: If we wear this kind of clothes (hijab)...

H: We dislike this kind of clothing.

Z: We need to look similar to the people here. All the time we are together, so we need to show this identity. If we need to wear, we wear it.

M: Do people see you are a Muslim?

Z: Yes, they do. If you look at features, you can see it. My features; people know. One of my parents came from Pakistan in British days.

H: And my grandfather is from Bangladesh. So we are mixed blood.

M: Did you ever face discrimination in Yangon?

Z: Of course, different kinds of discrimination.

H: Not everywhere. There's a lot of education, pamphlets going on. Pamphlets are coming out. Actively in Yangon not so much. Because it's the capital.

Z: But for young people there is some discrimination. They suffer. Let's say if you are graduated and Muslim here, if you apply in private company or in government you have no chance. You always have to mention your religion. When applying in private sector, they don't want to hire a Muslim graduate. I think there is some instruction from above.

H: The government creates some trouble to gain political power. Religious trouble. We have done nothing. Muslims are just doing their business. Most are having small shops, doing legal businesses. Why? Some of the very fundamentally kind of monks, they consider Muslim population rising. There are no missionaries among Muslims, we don't do that. They know that. In Buddhism; if you want to go to Nirvana, it's like paradise, a woman cannot enter nirvana. In her next life she has to become a man. This is the religious teaching. They may be decreasing because of their own teachings; there are so many monks. And a lot of nuns, who cannot have children. In some villages, they don't make enough money to raise a child and send their child to the monastery. By that way there are a lot of monks and nuns.

M: Do you also experience discrimination in interactions with people in everyday life?

Z: For example in this shop, this is a Muslim shop. But all the workers are ethnic Burmese Buddhist people. They don't want Muslim people, because some monk will come. One example is that three or four monks came in this Indian shop. Later they came back and said they forgot money and asked the owner to give the money back. The owner didn't dare to argue and gave it back, but they left nothing. We cannot speak up, because they will accuse us of making problems. One time at this market close to a big mosque, a lot of people came and started to sing a national song. Not the actual national song, but they had a new national song. A lot of shops there are Muslim. We understand this situation. But some men don't understand. During the water festival, we stayed in the mosque to practice religious things to avoid the water festival. It's always at our conscious. We cannot say something about bad experiences in front of Buddhist people. Some understand, some don't. This is also some kind of discrimination. We are not free to talk. Also here, we only talk because these people don't understand English. We have to avoid monks. Not all monks, there are good monks. The silent majority is good. Buddhists are good people. We have family who are Buddhist. Because 969 propaganda, some people are not very happy with us. That is sure. In their hearts, they suspect us from something.

M: What kind of words do these extreme Buddhists use when talking about Muslims?

Z: They use Kalar. They use disrespectful words. Wira Thu has a website, every day I used to read his website. He never mentions Muslims alone, he adds something degrading.

M: What does it mean to you?

Z: Indian. We don't feel happy with this word. To all Muslims they say Kalar. If Muslim is a good word, they use Mo Kalar (Muslim Kalar). They use it for bad behavior. In any religion there are good and bad people.

H: How large do you think the Muslim population is? I think it's more than 10 percent.

M: Do most Muslims prefer to live in a Muslim neighborhood?

Z: No, but after the Sittwe incident we don't dare to stay with the Buddhist area. There is a governmental rule. In this area no chance to buy or rent to Muslims. They started to do this rule 10 years ago. Automatically Muslims come to the same area. For them it's very easy to do everything; to cut power or water. After fasting month we have a party, happy day. They will be no power around that day. We have to cook, so that's hard. That's discrimination, during festival days of Muslims.

M: Do you have Buddhist friends?

Z: Of course! In my job area, very few percent are Muslim. Our colleagues are Buddhist. That's good, because they are educated. But in grammar school they are bullied. If Muslim students came late; punishment. If Buddhist students came late; no punishment.

M: Why do you think there are more uneducated Muslims than Buddhists?

Z: Among the parents, traditional thinking. Muslims can't get the job, why going to higher education? They are going into business.

M: Is it acceptable in the Muslim community to marry a Buddhist?

Z: We are not allowed. But as a human; it happens.

H: We cannot marry outside religion.

Z: It's very rare. But in rural areas it happens, because all are mixed. We are trying to stop this problem. Whenever I see a young couple, I try to stop them. Don't make a problem if possible.

M: Do you feel you belong here?

Z: No... No... I don't feel... I want to feel like that, but I don't feel. I had to collect my ID, passport, certificate, all belongings last year to get up and runaway. In that situation, how can I feel like a citizen? When I walk in Brunei, I go to the embassy. And in Malaysia the same. But I didn't stay, I didn't get a proper ID because I am a Muslim. In 1990 we got together to get IDs card, only me I didn't get. The rest of my colleagues did. I went to the official, and tried to find my card. I didn't mention Islam. But then he said; we gave to all the Buddhist teachers. He thought my face is like a Buddhist. So I didn't get the ID, but by another way. Even though I pay a lot of tax money, how can I feel like a citizen if they treat me like this? I am educated, a very useful citizen here.

M: What do you think the 786 is?

Z: This is not a problem. Just numbers.

H: It's a numerology. Nothing religious in this. It is Arab. It means 'in the name of God'.

M: Don't you think Muslims are spreading hate speech in the name of 786?

Z: I don't think.

H: No, we are not allowed to eat all meat. This just shows where to get halal food. Just in the name of Allah.

M: Do you go in shops where they have 969 stickers on the wall?

Z: Not much in Yangon. In rural area so many.

M: What kind of hate speech are the Buddhists spreading?

Z: A lot. About our religious works. In our religion they call for prayer 5 times a day at the mosque. They try to misinterpret these callings. They try to change the meaning. There is a lot of media. We try to explain but we are just a small group, are voices are not very loud. We try to explain by interfaith, by individuals. But 969 is very free, they have a lot of chance. Individual cases; they will highlight the news and then Buddhist people will hate us. Sometimes they create bad news, not real news. It's not fair. After 2015 elections...

H: Our prayer call is offensive. There is only one God, who is great. But they think we are against our ideology...Especially the extremists. They are attacking.

Notes:

Did not look Burmese, but dressed like them. Seemed a bit exaggerated, but why?

Husband came along, why?

Interview Nr. 16

Name interviewee: Jue Jue Tan

E-mail: juejue.than.islama@gmail.com

Name interviewer: Marit van Liere

Date interview: 04-06-2014

Location interview: Coffee shop

Acronyms:

M: interviewer Marit

J: interviewee Jue Jue

M: Can you introduce yourself?

J: I am from Bago and now I live here in Yangon. When I finished university I came to Yangon and I studied different subjects, not concerning with NGOs. Then I attended interfaith trainings. From that I got the network. I started to work in the interfaith projects. It started in 2011, then I resigned in 2013. And work as freelance trainer and now I am working for the global platform. I am 27 years old.

M: How do you practice your religion?

J: When I was a teenager I didn't know so much. Here I attended some courses, and studied more about religion. Nowadays I am not the serious believer, but I study the books and teachings and try to practice it.

M: Why do you wear your hijab?

J: It's included in the Koran. First I didn't, but I started around 2010. Before I also wore sleeveless and I really liked it, but I thought I should do this anyway.

M: Have you ever got bad reaction because of your dress?

J: Yes, at the end of 2012 I travelled to the IDP camps for the interfaith project. At the border they didn't issue the border pass to me. Only to me. He asked me to not wear the hijab, because of our safety. Then I did so. In the Koran... if I face these kinds of situation I don't have to wear it. One of my sisters she went to Mon State one month ago. The head of the monastery asked the girls with the hijab, to take it off. It's the compound of the monasterys so they had to take it off.

M: Did you ever face discrimination in Yangon?

J: Not only in Yangon, everywhere.

M: How exactly?

J: Somewhere we go near by the educated people it's not a problem. But when we go outside... do you know the word Kalar? Most people say like that. Even when they are friendly with me, they just know my ethnic, then they always call me Kalar. And on the bus; some others treat like that. Most of the Muslim people face these kinds of situations.

M: How does it make you feel?

J: When I was a child I was feeling disappointed. At that time there is not too much obvious discrimination. Now there is more. Even in that time I was always feeling disappointed. But during the current situation I know what kind of people are using that kind of words but I still feel bad. I try to explain what kind of things they use. But sometimes I can't explain. On the street, I don't know this person so how can I explain? When trying to explain, they try to create a problem.

M: What's your perception on other religions?

J: When I was a teenager I already studied a little bit about religions. Then I worked for interfaith issues. Because this is my concern.

M: What do you think of Buddhists?

J: As for me, it's not too much affecting on my perception. I have many Rakhine friends. I know that all of the religions teach the good things. We always discuss about that.

M: Can you explain what you exactly do at Action Aid?

J: The trainer and communication associate. I work for communication between other organizations and within the global platform. I am not working for Action Aid, I am working for global platform.

M: What is the view of NGOs of the interfaith conflict? What's their opinion on who is to blame or what is the solution?

J: In my opinion this is because of the system; the government system of our country. Maybe it will include everything, education and immigration. And the important thing is the discrimination between the people. This is my opinion. I don't know the Action Aid opinion.

M: Do they see the interfaith conflict as something that stops development?

J: I don't know too much about what they are thinking, but they are still support to make the interfaith workshop. In the last weekend we did the interfaith workshop. For that, I proposed and they accepted it. Their opinion is 50/50 or something like that.

M: Does Global platform take sides or are they neutral?

J: No bias.

M: Do you know about government interference in NGOs like in Global platform?

J: It will be. Because some kind of the permission of projects. If the government don't give the permission they cannot work. They have to follow the government rules. Our platform is mostly for youth. At that time we created activist things, but sometimes the head of the action aid office don't like our global platform so much because they try to align with the government and we promote activism.

M: Do you know if some of the governmental rules are about religion?

J: I am not sure.

Now within this three months, some of the groups (anti-Muslim groups) promote the new rules against marriage law.

M: Do you think the global platform has a certain role in the conflict?

J: I don't think so. They try to give space to all religions. Most of the Muslim people are far away from this kind of work. The global platform tries to promote this, try to give space.

M: What do you think the reason is to discriminate? Why Muslims?

J: They also discriminate ethnic people. Even Buddhist people. It can be the mechanism of the politics. One of my friends is Kachin. Her aunt is married to a general from the military. At another time, this guy cannot get a higher position because he is married to her. It is faced to all people. But they use it mostly for Muslim people because it's a mechanism.

M: What kind of mechanism.

J: It's a political trick. If people face difficulties and want to change something, they try to divide attention. It's always like this, always the same. The education in the inside is international level, but compared to outside it's not like that. In the classroom there is no space for critical system. It's a one way system that they use. People cannot think. And the other thing is because of the business. It's not a good system for the businesses. Most people have to find the money. They have no time to think about other issues.

M: What can you as an individual do to avoid the discrimination?

J: What I am doing is I try to make the workshop and from that I ask some trainer, who are liberal on religious issue. They are my teacher as well. I try to make these kinds of workshops more and more. This gave me liberal minded networks. I hope it will be acceptable in the next 5 years.

M: Have you ever thought to not wear your hijab to decrease discrimination?

J: In a conflict situation?

M: No, here in the city.

J: Totally no. because even in the conflict situation, my mother said to not wear it. At the time I am not sure if I take of outside Yangon. But in Yangon it is still safe so I am not thinking like that.

M: Do you ever see or hear hate speech aimed at Muslims?

J: Sure. When I went somewhere nearby the pagoda, at that time they are making the speech about the meditation and religion. They said: you know the Bangladesh, Malaysia, Afghanistan, and Indonesia before this started they were the Buddhist country but nowadays the Muslim people are rich and reproductive and try to get the country. Now they are the Muslim countries, this is obviously the situation so you should be aware. In Arakan state most people from Bangladesh came into our country. We need to be aware.

M: How does this speech make you feel?

J: At first time, I was seriously wondering why they are talking like that. I know a little bit, it's not like that. I was surprised why they talked like that. Again and again I heard like this, sometimes I think I need to explain. Not only me. We need to spread our teaching more and more.

M: Do you live in a Muslim neighborhood?

J: My home is in Mingalar township, near the Muslim people. But I stay in my office a lot, which is not in a Muslim neighborhood.

M: Why did you choose to live there?

J: I never choose my house, my mother did.

M: What kind of colleagues do you have? [She understood work]

J: Mostly Buddhists. When I was in Bago. I studied there, not too many Muslim people are in the classroom. Out of 400 people, 11 people were Muslim. So a lot of Buddhist friends. Difficult to stay with Muslims all the time.

M: Do you know of situations where Muslims cannot get a certain job? In which sectors?

J: In government sector. In some kind of companies. Even me, in 2009, I always were thinking to work like bank staff. I tried to work as bank staff. When I handed in my CV they accepted me, but when they saw me (even though I wasn't wearing my hijab), I have to show my ID card. At that time they saw Islam. They didn't tell me anything but I wasn't selected.

M: Is it acceptable in the Muslim community to marry a Buddhist?

J: It's based on interreligious. My uncle married a Buddhist girl and changed to Buddhist. Another uncle also married a Buddhist, but she converted to Islam.

M: Do you think this changed, because your uncle is a different generation?

J: It is based on your parents. My parents let me choose myself.

M: Where do your parents come from?

J: From Bago.

M: What about your ethnicity?

J: Burmese-Indian (from my father's side). I am half and half.

M: Do you feel you belong here? Like a Burmese citizen?

J: Sure. That's why I work for this company. I feel that I have a responsibility for that.

M: What do you think about the 969 movement?

J: I heard it's around for some time, 2000. It didn't start recently. It started in Karan state. I feel it's some kind of discrimination. But I don't feel it can create this kind of conflict.

M: Why not?

J: When I started to know about the political things and history, I already know we got this kind of discrimination. This feels normal to me. That movement cannot create that much problems. But within this period, we have a transition. Some of the opposite

parties want to change the constitution and we face some issues in the middle states, so we have a lot of issues. At the time, they use these things as a mechanism.

M: What do you think about the idea that Muslims are a threat to the Burmese identity?

J: If you are feeling the negative feeling on me, what kind of things I do you always see on the negative side. But for me it's not a problem. It's a mechanism. I know that. I want to change this, I want to create space between people.

M: What exactly is the 786?

J: We remember the god Allah with everything we do. In that, they use the Arabic alphabet.

M: Do you have the feeling that there is also hate speech coming from Muslims towards Buddhists?

J: Not at all, but in some other places they have a trauma. At that time, they talked about this; like we should prepare. After the conflict situation, after 2013. After Rakhine State conflict they didn't feel that it was a religious conflict. After Meiktila they started to feel as a religious conflict.

M: Why didn't Rakhine conflict feel as a religious conflict?

J: Rakhine State feels as being far away from Burmese state. And far in education and everything. Most people from this side think that people from there are rude and uneducated, not only Muslim, also Buddhist. So this is not a religious problem. This is a conflict between those groups, ethnic groups.

M: What do you think the government should do?

J: First is the immigration problem. Second is that they should create the education system, a world education center. They need to prepare for international standard, repair.

M: What about the everyday discrimination; what can they do about that?

J: Difficult to tell. It's already inside of the people's mindset. Now we try to promote the training to change the mindset.

M: What about the government?

J: I don't know how to say. The government should care in every place. Not only the religious, but also the ethnic issues. They have the power and energy to do these kind of things. But if they don't want to do, we can't talk to them. If they want to change, it will change. What we are thinking is; even though the government talking something to change within the religious, but the mindset of the people are already inside. We have to change from the public. Bottom up. It will be effective, I hope so.

Interview Nr. 17

Name interviewee: U Shwe Maung

Name interviewer: Marit van Liere

Date interview: 07-06-2014

Location interview: Coffee shop

Acronyms:

M: interviewer Marit

U: interviewee U Shwe

M: Can you introduce yourself?

U: I was born in 1965, my father was a police officer. I joined Yangon institute of technology and graduated in 1994. I was supposed to join Singapore Shipyard cooperation. But there was a refugee repatriation program started. I saw the tragedy of Rohingya people. Instead of going to Singapore, I decided to join UNHCR. Up to 2001 I worked there. Then I saw how difficult the situation was for the Rohingya and I saw the travel restriction, and I was a part of that. Because I was a Muslim. I asked at the airport; I needed a travel autorisation. I asked why; I have a NRC, I am a Myanmar citizen. They said; we don't have an answer, only instruction. For all the Muslims they needed authorization. This was a bad experience for me. From that day, as of today, more restricted, sometimes fluctuating. When I set up my own company when I quit the UN, the 08 referendum. We thought with our brain. Every political transition, Rohingya will become always victim. It is better to not become a victim. The constitution shows friction between the government and the NLD. Without constitution the government didn't want to hand over power to the NLD. In that time, Rohingya people had to make a big decision. Personally, I said to not object. If we object, what would be the result? Nobody has sympathy for us, nobody said anything. People were suffering, no freedom of movement, no freedom of trade. At least, we have to tell the government how we are treated. If we object, there will be more oppression. So the Rohingya people supported the referendum, for the chance to get relief. The government was very happy with us. Then slowly, we started dialogue very slowly. They agreed that we were able to explain them that we are suffering for the last twenty years. IN the election, we want our rights back. In that discussion, the military government decided to give some rights. Then I realized it's the thinking of give and take in politics. Then we were thinking how we should pass the election; with either the ruling party or a Rohingya party. But if we go in the opposition party, the government may again have a grudge. They [NLDP] offered us out of 9 seats, 5 Muslims, 4 Rakhines. In Union level; three seats. National level two seats. The majority population is 90% Rohingya. We are majority in numbers, not in capacity. My father was a police officer, as one of the only ones, but when he retired he wasn't replaced by a Rohingya. We asked for more seats, but we didn't get them. If I had not worked for UN, I would not have won the election. I didn't win because of the party, I won because of myself. I always listened to the people. I raised issues of the people. People are very familiar with me. So finally I won. All the government staff was Rakhine. They don't like USDP. They don't like Rohingya's. They don't like Burmese. I was threatened by extreme Buddhists, threatened by monks. Not only Rakhine monks, all kind of monks. After the elections, my rival filed a case to a committee that I misused a case. Finally I proved that he was lying, so I could confirm my seat. We have been trying to smallen the gap, but my rivals have been trying to widen the gap between Rohingya's and the rest of the community. For example the lady who was killed and raped, they put it as an agenda. Then they killed 10 Muslims on 3 June 2010. Once they were killed, the government created an investigation commission. There were arrests under Rakhine

leaders. Politically this was good for us. In that period the extremists were slowly trying to divert the problem. Since all pressure was going to Rakhine, they wanted to divert.

M: How do you think the conflict spread to the whole country?

U: This is not a war between Bengalis and Rakhine. This is a war between Muslim and Buddhists. Because Rakhine are Buddhists, they they are trying to make propaganda. Indonesia, Brunei, Malaysia, they are Buddhist countries but became Muslim. We cannot recognize Bengali as citizens, so they make propaganda. In 2012 we had by-elections. In the election, most of the Muslim in center Myanmar, supported NLD. Out of 40 candidates, almost all won by NLD. Before the Muslim supported USDP, but now they supported NLD. So the USDP don't like Muslims. If no by elections, I think there would be no such activity across Myanmar. In politics, every political party has their own strategy. Since by election, Muslims became victims. In Meiktila, most of the victims are Muslim. At the same time, monks are also anti NLD, because Muslims are pro NLD. They think NLD is enemy of Buddhism. Since then the anti-Muslim propaganda was spread. Since it happened in Rakhine state, it is a good opportunity.

M: How is it possible that there are only Rakhine Muslims in the government?

U: Because we supported the 2008 constitution. And another reason was international pressure. Myanmar wanted more international legitimacy. They wanted a number of Muslim MP. But without the agreement of the USDP party, we three [Muslim seats] cannot do anything. And in the eyes of the Buddhist, Rakhine Muslims and other Muslims are the same. Both Kalar.

M: Have you ever been discriminated within the parliament because of your religion?

U: If you ask me to show, I cannot tell you because they won't tell me if they discriminate because I am Muslim. But I can feel it. Because I am a Muslim; 'Because Dr. U Maung commits so many crimes through the media, he won't take any action by the president.' But when I spoke on behalf of Rohingya, then the president sent a letter to the speaker of parliament. I feel this is because I am a Muslim. While there were more MPs speaking out against government. Discrimination we can feel it. Everytime I try to speak up, the president punishes me. When other MPs try to speak up, they are not punished.

M: Is the religious conflict on the political agenda?

U: although religion is not allowed in politics, politicians always try to take advantage of religion. Religious issues are always in politics.

M: you have a ministry of religious affairs, right?

U: Yes. But this ministry is not so important in the discussion. Myanmar Peace Center is more important, but still no significant development. Because of census, I am in dialogue with minister of immigration. He always asks 'what should we do'. They are not trusting us on the ground. Then I told; the president should remove his work. He will send Rohingya to another country.

M: Do you know if the religious conflict is on the security agenda?

U: According to the government they are saying that this religious issue is a threat to national security. They said: Citizenship issue is a question of national sovereignty. And Buddhism is main religion of this country, everybody is responsible to protect Buddhism. At the same time the constitution says that Hinduism, Islam, Christianity are existing in this country. Existing is very weak. In the constitution, when you read about Buddhism, you get the idea that they want to focus on Buddhism. We need to protect, so that Buddhism is not diminished. At the same time, the monk group, 969, they say that Muslims can accumulate and convert Buddhists to Islam, then the line of Buddhists will be diminished. This is their worry. I saw a lot of Muslims converting to Buddhism in Yangon. To be free from discrimination they converted. But behind the screen there is a political agenda. If people say that they can convince majority of the people, therefore

Aung San Suu Kyi is afraid to stand up for Muslims. If she stands up, she loses support. I was explained the policy of NLD yesterday; Aung San Suu Kyi doesn't discriminate religion or forsake human rights. But she can't stand by Muslims, all Buddhist people will blame her and she won't be able to become president. When we compare NLD, USDP and other parties; they don't speak out. It is all linked with political agendas, but by law it is separate.

M: What is the exact difference in the policy regarding this religious conflict and what is published to the public?

U: People are not considered with security. Most of the Myanmar people are very religious, compared to other Asian countries. Whenever, in the time of regime, in times of trouble, they try to make religious conflict. People can be easily controlled by religion, therefore there can be played with religion. My analysis is: they are not hating people individually. In Yangon I can go anywhere, no problem. But when people are together they say we are Buddhist; it's an agenda. Here, persons are very kind, their belief is misused and they promote propaganda and hatred. They are promoting hate speech more and more.

M: Do you think the 969 is supported by the government?

U: I think it is supported by the president and his cabinet. Not by parliament speakers. I have an example; when the parliament speaker went to US; he said, we should not allow 969 activity. But when Wira Thu was in the New York Times Magazine, (face of terror), presidents office strongly objected and they mentioned Wira Thu as son of Buddha. All monks are son of Buddha, but son of Buddha should not preach hate speech. Presidents Office never pressed Wira Thu to not speak hate speech. They never stopped him.

M: But in 2001 he was imprisoned because of hate speech right?

U: Yes, but now the political situation is changed. [Off the record explanation of new party]

M: Do you know if the government tries to influence NGOs in their policy on religion?

U: Yes. They say when you make development aid, they should be always equal to Rakhine and Rohingya. This is also clearly told in a workshop in 2012. But aid is not the business of religion or equal ratio, it is based on beneficial; based on need assessment. For example MSF Holland. I know them very well. I know they not only recruit Rohingya. They have Rakhine staff. But the Rakhine officials are always instigating, to not support Rohingya. They always try to have it this way, that organizations can't support the Rohingya. In that sense we can say that the Union government are trying to use UN and NGOs so that they can not support, cannot help much.

M: What is the current status of the religious conflict on national level?

U: It depends on the policy of the union of Myanmar. Although we have local governments, but according to the constitution, every chief minister of states are nominated by the president. If they object, local parliamentarians have to show what's wrong. They are all under the head of the union government. They are doing things with guidance from Union. Policies come from above. The policy of union government

M: Do you think the religious conflict spread to Yangon?

U: Yangon is relatively less effected. This is commercial city, people are always busy with their business. But still effected. But they still say Muslims cannot buy apartments in some buildings. In the Muslim areas we try to let them know to live in harmony. Before, a lot of taxi drivers had the 969 stickers. But now they are almost all gone. When they have this sticker, Muslims don't take this taxi. People want to make money. And sometimes people don't want to hire Muslim contractor.

M: Have you ever been discriminated in society?

U: I have a number of telephone calls of unknown persons saying discriminated words. When I was in Sittwe I was discriminated.

M: Do you think there is discrimination in businesses in Yangon?

U: Especially in construction. But in normal business, like tea shops or grocery shops it is normal. Most of the discrimination happens in the monastery, there they preach anti-Muslim. I want to tell you the truth. I have not experienced any significant restriction, hatred here. On printed media, there is discrimination (eleven). Local print medias I feel they discriminate. People read that. I fear that if people read this, it will get dangerous. But when I walk nothing happens. I don't know what will happen in the future.

M: Do you think Muslims can get the same job as Buddhists?

U: For government no way. But for local company, there will be some discrimination. But mostly Muslim employer will discriminate. Because although Buddhist employer could discriminate, should not, because we are the minority. For example a friend who is also Muslim MP, his staff is 99% Buddhist. Only 1% is Muslim, because of his policy. When he hires only Muslim, they will say he is anti-Buddhist, pro-Muslim. Whenever Muslims apply to Buddhists they can get recruited. But for government job, no way for Muslims. And they won't get promoted if they have a job. One of my brother in law, he was retired 6 years ago. He told me he feels discriminated. When you compare government and general people, people are normally good.

M: What kind of hate speech do you hear in Yangon?

U: Not to do business with Muslim, not to eat in Muslim restaurant, not to allow to build mosques, not to use Muslim car. Eat with Buddhists, work with Buddhists. Muslims kill people. Muslims kill monks. In Afghanistan they destroyed the biggest Buddha image. In Indonesia, Muslims occupied the whole country. Muslims are sending their kids to Islamic teachings.

M: What exactly does the government communicate to the public regarding the religious conflict?

U: They make some interfaith dialogue committee. I did not see good impact. They make dialogue with good Muslim and good Buddhist. For good people, no problem. They should call who are bad. Look for the towns where is a problem, but they don't go to the conflict area.

M: In speeches to the public, how do they talk about the religious conflict?

U: They took side of Buddhists. For example in Meiktila, when the religious minister gave briefing at the parliament, he used to blame Muslims who killed monks. But according to the Muslims, the monks went nearby mosque to make problem. But all blame goes to Muslims. I feel that the religious minister is biased in the parliament.

[Long story about conflict in Rakhine State, where all the fire was at the Muslim areas. In the reports was stated that Muslims burned their own houses down. So how is it possible they were killed, if they were not forced to go out their houses?]

M: Did you approve the interfaith marriage law proposal?

U: Interfaith marriage law will not affect Muslim I think. Because initially Muslims, whenever they marry, can only marry Muslims. That is our Islamic system. But still, for example my father in law, has two wives. The first was a Muslim, but the second a Chinese Buddhist. Like my father in law, I saw several. No single Buddhist will marry a Muslim by force. Because of propaganda, the law is so popular. After the law, Buddhist women cannot marry Muslims anymore. I think a marriage is a very personal right. Limit love by law. In my opinion this law is violating the constitution and human rights, I don't like that.

Interview Nr. 18

Name interviewee: Hnin Aye Ko

Organization: partner Norwegian People's Aid

E-mail: hninayeko@gmail.com

Name interviewer: Marit van Liere

Date interview: 9 June 2014

Location interview: Office

Acronyms:

M: interviewer Marit

H: interviewee Hnin

M: Can you introduce yourself and your organization.

H: I am the director of the partner NGO of Norwegian People's Aid. We are implementing peace programs, give Human Rights trainings, and interfaith youth workshops. We try to solve the root causes of the interfaith conflict. Our general objective is the prevention of the spreading of violence. We give workshops in risky townships. The last years we have been giving workshops in 21 townships, which were affected by 969. Those workshops are attended by townships administration, people of the four major religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam), religious leaders and police.

M: What is your perception on the religious conflict?

H: The root causes are more complicated than international community thinks, the problem is chronic. The problem is not limited to Rakhine State, but since 1990 riots have happened in townships as Yankin. Multiple root causes:

1. Because of government. Since colonial period, after independence the government uses Muslims in the political playground, they get easily used in political tricks.
2. Many extremist people in Myanmar: strong religious Muslim leaders, they have a strong background but poor literacy and language. Those leaders are blamed, which leads to vulnerability, which leads to isolation and the teaching of this isolation to the community which leads to aggressiveness. And another Muslim group are the retired persons who are very proud and want to live quietly. Nobody negotiates between those two groups.

3. Rich Muslim people (small number) in big cities take many opportunities from the government (either illegally or legally). The grass root is the victim of the opinion of Buddhists about this small group of people.

The government prohibited reconstruction of destroyed mosque, Muslim children and poor people become the victim. But on the other hand, Muslims need to be more transparent so mutual understanding will be improved.

M: What's the role of the government in the conflict?

25% is political, 20% is religious and the rest is social cause. I have access to information of the Muslim side and I have been a witness in riots. The government (police nor soldiers) doesn't take action in the riots. And the government approves the interfaith marriage law. When discussing this law with monks, it really shows that they want to protect their race and religion. This is very difficult to solve.

M: What is the role of hate speech in the conflict?

H: Spreading of hate speech is very systematic, it is even spread to the remote areas. Muslims have no systematic plan, only to increase their power. Therefore Muslims who have money, higher position and having contact with the funding agencies are rather selfish. Our objective is to solve the rumors. In the 969, some political background may be present. Monks have a strong unity, whereas Muslims are selfish and have very little interest to negotiate and collaborate with each other. No one considers for the grass root community. Islam is peace but worldwide they show it like its terrorism. Buddhists regard us/Muslims as foreigners. Census is necessary for economic development, but Muslims political persons used it as a political tool.

M: Is your NGO biased in any way?

H: Since 2006 we have been recruiting people from all kinds of different religions. 60% is Buddhist, 20% is Christian and 20% is Muslim. In 2010 we developed our own NGO which we registered at the ministry of home affairs. In 2012 we got the registration.

M: Does the government have rules for NGOs?

Yes, there are definite rules. To maintain the status of NGO you have to obey some rules: no profit, not too focuses on religions, no political activities. For sensitive issues the government should take responsibility, they are very strict.

M: Does the government put religious issues on the political agenda?

H: The state division government need official permission to be able to act on their own. Centralization of the government is still very much alive. Some state division governments have positive attitudes to solve the problems, but don't know how. They are waiting for NGOs. We need permission as well from the presidential office, this is very difficult for security reasons. They are very reluctant to give permission because of possible violence.

M: Does the government put religious issues on the security agenda?

Example: a police officer participated in one of the workshops. He told that they have emergency plans, for serious situations. But to use it they need permission. Another example: In a township the state government was warned about a possible conflict in time, but nobody had taken action.

M: How does the government control the NGOs?

H: We have to hand in a report every 4 months, including a budget. And we have to hand in reports after every workshop to the township administration.

M: How do Buddhists and Muslims see NGOs?

H: Buddhist NGOs started to implement in 2000, while Muslim NGOs were implemented after the riots. In workshops we have to clearly state our intentions for monks who believe that this NGO aims at peace for Muslims. Once we were blamed during an interfaith workshop by a monk who thought we only wanted peace for Muslims. And I am advocating for the census, because the UNFPA and ministry of population is very good and neutral. They trained our team to give messages about the census. Some Muslims blame me for not focusing on race and religion as the political ways although I have wide coverage.

M: How did the conflict develop?

H: In Meiktila it happened because of minor personal clash. The situation became worse and worse because of strangers. The communities have lived in peace for years with natives. Strangers are Buddhist terrorists. The Muslim men who create problems are also not native, strangers.

M: So where do they come from?

H: They are so called-Muslims, but when being interrogated by the religious leaders, they didn't know the basic concept of Islam. Maybe somebody sent them.

M: Who could that be?

H: I don't know... it might be a political trick: there are changes in the government system, like salary increase. Now with all the developments, the raise is lower than it should be. Majority of staff has desire for transition. Government staff doesn't know about human rights. In the ministry of religious affairs, the majority is Buddhist staff. Uniform is brown/white, like Buddhist dress. Religious celebrations other than Buddhist, have to get permission of the local government.

M: What kind of discrimination in Yangon?

H: Formal: prohibition of building/reconstruction of mosques, restrictions for religious teachings and schools, difference in obtaining national registration cards and the marriage issue. Informal: buying/selling from Muslim businesses, not intentional but because of hate speech people are afraid, I feel a change and see eyes change when I say I am Muslim. Monks were very kind to me, but when I told them I handled interfaith issues, they became hostile in some townships as they think that I am coming for the sake of Muslim community.

Maybe I don't face so much societal discrimination because I like to be integrative. I don't avoid any shop (except non-halal and pork) and I am very familiar with Buddhist people and culture. I respect monks.

Example: When kids see a Christian priest and a Muslim Imam, they like the priest because he gives candy, but they are afraid of the Imam, because of self isolation. But their dressing styles are almost the same. It's not because of the dress, it's because of the isolative nature of the Muslims. So the Muslims should try to improve social relationship with the community.

M: How about social distance? I heard about Buddhists thinking that they are the owners of this land and Muslims guests, and about Muslims being thought that they should live within their own community, as reasons for the Muslim neighborhood, what do you think?

H: Buddhist communities have that kind of idea of ownership, because of little education. To me, nobody owns, everybody is a guest.

Reason for isolation is extremeness and too little knowledge about meaning of Koran. It's difficult for Muslims to understand the exact meaning, there's a lot of misinterpretation of the language. Religious leaders are vulnerable. Everybody blames them because of clothing but nobody helps them. They become isolated as well. They should build their capacity. So Muslim religious leaders are blamed, become vulnerable, get isolated, aggressive and teach this to their community.

On conclusion, I would like to advise the Muslim leaders to clarify the rumors in time and to prove Islam as PEACE.

Interview Nr. 19

Name interviewee: Khaing Thitsar

Name interviewer: Marit van Liere

Date interview: 10-06-2014

Location interview: Smile Office

Acronyms:

M: interviewer Marit

B: interviewee Buddhist girl

M: Can you introduce yourself?

B: I'm from the dry zone in Myanmar. That's very strong in religion, in Burma religion. My family strongly believes in Buddhism.

M: What about your education?

B: I did a bachelor in economics. My job is finance manager at Smile. I was introduced by Smile through a youth leadership training.

M: How do you practice your religion?

B: During festival days all of my family goes to the pagoda.

M: How do you see Buddhism?

B: It is very pure and true.

M: How do you see other religions in Myanmar?

B: Religious thinking in previous times was very pure and very right. But present time thought is not equal.

M: How do you see Muslims and Islam?

B: Islam is very good, but some thoughts are very strict. Buddhism is not so strict.

M: Do you have the feeling that other Buddhist people treat Muslims different than Buddhists?

B: I think all are equal.

M: What do you think of the 969 movement?

B: I don't like it. Because our religion is very pure. 969 is a symbol. Our religion is not that symbol, so I don't like it.

M: What do you think of the ideas of the 969?

B: I think those are not related to the 969. I haven't received information from the 969.

M: Did you hear about their speech that Muslims are a threat to the Burma identity?

B: Don't know.

M: Did you ever see Muslims being discriminated in Yangon?

B: Physical they are not the same. Some persons fear the Muslims. Because of how they look. If you are Muslim, you should look normal. We don't live together. We live separate, that's why there is no transparency and there is discrimination.

M: Do you have an example of discrimination?

B: With getting a taxi. And some belief is frustrating, there is different religious stereotypes.

M: What kind of stereotypes?

B: Buddhist religion is all equal, men or women. But Islam religion is, men and women is different. I think Afghan, Pakistan, religion is very strong. There is fear.

M: Did you ever hear hate speech about Muslims?

B: I don't know, but I am working together with Muslims together. That's ok. We are so close. I live in Yangon about 10 year, I didn't hear hate speech so far.

M: Do you also are separate in business?

B: All together.

M: Do you think it is separate in families? To marry each other?

B: That's ok. My home in my childhood was near the Muslim home. We live together and that's okay. That home; father is Buddhist, mother is Muslim. Our environment is mostly Buddhist, but all equal in that time.

B: I think some people and me respect other religions. We try to understand other religions. We don't do hate speech or such activity. Sometimes there is strong religious fight, very difficult.

M: In this fight, who do you think the reason is?

B: I read some story and see news of the world. Not researched.

M: Anything else you want to tell me?

B: This conflict is raised in Myanmar. Buddhist religion is very pure. But some people are very frustrated. I think our religion loses value. I want to cry.