POLITICIZED RELIGION AS SOCIAL MOVEMENT IN A NASCENT DEMOCRACY: THE MABATHA MOVEMENT IN MYANMAR

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ABSTRACT

With the country's democratic transition, monks in Myanmar started a religious nationalist movement. The aim of the movement is to protect race and religion. The movement succeeded in passing four sets of laws which are largely criticized for its violation of human rights and targeting the country's minority Muslims. Throughout the trajectory of the movement, this study reveals how the movement was initiated, how it reached the stage of a country-wide network, how it managed to influence politics and to promulgate four sets of laws. I argue that political opportunities are perceived by the monks. Monks, having wide networks as scholars, preachers and influential figures–both in religious and social arenas, play the role of connective structures to enlarge the movement. The interaction with the opposition resulted in the movement relying upon the government of the day to push forward the agenda further to be able to make the four laws. I explain this phenomenon within a) social and historical pretext, b) political opportunities and c) the government's inclination to use religion to reach their political ends. I argue that the MaBaTha movement–in trying to recruit new members and to sustain the movement–used the frame that the movement's aims, goals and activities were in accord with the broader teachings of the Buddha, or in other words, in accord with *Dhamma*. While this movement easily got momentum and reached this point, I argue that counter-discourses were appearing. Nonetheless, the role of religion and Buddhist monks in politics will persist, and the four laws are currently in effect.

Keywords: politicized religion, religious nationalism, framing, Buddhist monks, the MaBaTha movement, myo-zaunt laws, anti-Muslim sentiments

To my father

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INTRODUCTION

When Myanmar started its transition from authoritarian rule to democracy in 2011, the reform process brought in political and civil liberties in the country. With increased space for civil society, media freedom and oppositional politics, monks' anti-Muslim activism regained a role in the polity. The dormant tension between the country's native Buddhists and Muslims broke out into a series of communal violence, resulting in arson, destruction of mosques and killing–starting from the communal fight between Muslims and Buddhists in Rakhine state in 2012. The movement, led by a social movement organization called "MaBaTha", emerged in late 2012 and grew into a nation-wide network of monks and laypersons. Its scope of activities also broadens from anti-Muslim hatred and anti-Muslim campaign to the realization and promulgation of four laws, which particularly target minority Muslims in a significant manner, such as birth control, the anti-conversion, monogamy and anti-marriage.

Though the constitution "recognizes special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens of the Union", article 34 guarantees religious freedom, the right to freely profess and practice religion. Several other provisions (article 364) forbid the use of religion for political purposes and does not allow an act that "is intended or is likely to promote feelings of hatred, enmity or discord between racial or religious communities". Article 392 of the constitution prohibits members of religious orders voting. Article 368 emphasizes that the Union shall honour and assist outstanding citizens, irrespective of their race and religion (*Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2008* 2008, 9, 151–2, 157). Thus, the constitution in Myanmar intends the country to be a secular state. However, the MaBaTha movement spread hate speech against Muslims. Moreover, these ostensibly unconstitutional activities are neither banned nor punished.

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned constitutional provisions, the Union parliament approved the inter-faith marriage law–which is criticized by local and international rights activists as discriminatory, especially to minority Muslims– with support of more than 90% of the MPs in 2015.

Looking at religious nationalistic movements and involvement of monks in the region, Sri Lanka shares similarities with Myanmar. Monks led the Sinhalese nationalistic movement based upon "unique" Sinhala Buddhist culture (Deegalle 2003, 83). This is similar to the case in Myanmar where religion is intertwined with ethnicity (Walton 2013). While in Sri Lanka, monks were involved in politics using prevailing discourses were such as monks should not isolate themselves to meditation in time of crisis and protect the country (Weiberg-Sazmann 2014, 294), in Myanmar monks still maintain the position that they do not get involved in politics. Indeed, the social movement led by monks gets involved in politics. But monks framed that this was only because of national cause. This will be discussed in details in following chapters. In Sri Lanka, as monks can actively involve in politics–they can vote and be elected, monks founded a political party called the Jathika Hela Urumaya (Devotta and Stone 2008). But in Myanmar, as monks cannot vote and be elected to public offices, it emerged not only in the form of a social movement organization but also managed to pass the laws. In the case of Thailand, monks are strictly under control of the bureaucracy, and they rarely get involved in politics (Helbardt, Hellmann-Rajanayagam, and Korff 2013, 51–53). Thus, it is interesting to find out how the monks managed to form a movement organization, and get involved in politics when they are not allowed to, still maintaining the position that as Theravada monks, they are not involved in politics.

Within a period of two years from 2013 to 2015, the movement became a huge social movement. It has involved in almost all fronts of everyday life, starting from the campaign not to use the allegedly Muslim-owned telecom company to the promulgation of an interfaith marriage law in the parliament. The organization has its chapters at township level, and the coverage is surprisingly large. They have covered 220 townships out of 330 townships in Myanmar. Due largely to a negative socialization process towards Muslims, and to influential actors holding a negative attitude towards Muslims, there has been anti-Muslim sentiment in Myanmar since post-independence era (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2013b, 136–147). But there has no such a huge movement like this, mostly led by Buddhist monks mobilizing lay disciples in social and political elements.

One of the MaBaTha movement's three major aims is to protect race and religion. But it never clearly mentions "from whom" they shall protect race and religion. At the time being, the narratives are implied–either explicitly or implicitly–towards the country's minority Muslim population. The narratives include not to buy at Muslim shops and not to marry any Muslim (details shall be discussed later). It can turn to any other race or group at any moment. Regarding the power and influence the MaBaTha is enjoying at the moment, it needs scholarly attention to understand this movement–how and why it has become formidable.

Monks' involvement in politics, or rather religion and politics in Myanmar, is not unusual. In 2007, monks protested in response to the rise of fuel prices in the country. The reason of the protest is the economic hardship under the military dictatorship. Monks sympathized with the struggling life of lay persons, and thus they protested against the government. When the initial protests were treated brutally by the junta, the movement spread into the whole country–in major cities, monks

marched in protest peacefully chanting the sutta (sermons) for compassionate love. The Saffron Revolution was reported as a pro-democracy and human rights movement. The movement was brutally crushed down resulting in casualties. Monasteries were raided at night–leaders and followers of the Saffron Revolution were arrested and jailed. Those monks who were involved in the protests could not come back to their respective monasteries in the fear that the junta would arrest them. Four years later, Myanmar started democratization with the new and controversially approved 2008 constitution. Till then, the popular opinion was that the majority of the monks were against the regime, and supported the opposition–fighting for democracy since 1988. However, when political opportunities were given out together with liberalization in 2011, monks use these newly acquired civil liberties to side with the government in a nationalist fashion to promulgate the discriminatory laws.

This study tries to explain the trajectory of the MaBaTha movement. The research questions are:– How has this movement become so big in the light of political openness and democratization in Myanmar? What has made this movement able to initiate, to sustain and to achieve the goals? How did the monks who asked for democracy and human rights in 2007 saffron revolution turn into religious nationalism and demand the promulgation of laws targeting Muslims?

In search of answers to these questions, this paper tries to explain the trajectory of the MaBaTha movement. While explaining the rise of political opportunities for the result of this nationalistic movement is simplistic, this study tries to provide a holistic account–combining political process theory and framing aspects– by using current social movement theories. Analyzing the substantial role of monks in society and politics, and nationalism as an impetus for the movement, it argues

that due to the strong networks possessed by scholar and preacher monks, the leader monks of the movement mobilized their peer monks and laypersons all over the country. Framing the issue of anti-Muslim hatred, the movement gained momentum. The political opportunities are used by these networks to achieve their goals. While using online and print media and a variety of ways to mobilize, monks use their role as community leaders to influence the lay disciples to achieve their set goals. With regard to the 2007 saffron revolution, this study argues that the revolution is in fact an anti-regime movement. The terms democracy and human rights were interpreted within the framework of Buddhism. When liberalization started to talk about minority rights, monks turned towards traditional religious nationalism, moving away from democratic values. The "socially engaged Buddhism" in fact does not have a firm ground in core liberal democratic values.

Chapter 1 presents a brief overview of the political opening in Myanmar and context of the situation. Chapter 2 discusses the conceptual framework and introduces the methodology. This chapter discusses why political process theory with apparent political opportunities paving the way for social movements is not enough–as it is static, and why it is necessary to look at agency or organizational strength and framing within a religious movement. The subsequent chapter will discuss the social and historical role of monks in Burmese history providing an explanation of how socially engaged Buddhism could easily turn into religious nationalism. This chapter will also explain the background for how the movement can easily recruit, sustain and reach its agendas–the given social and cultural factors which are necessary to keep in mind for the following chapters. Chapter 4 will discuss the formation and rise of the MaBaTha movement. The network factor, early social mobilization by monks and at the same time, how the movement itself can become an independent variable influencing the political process will be discussed together with the dynamics

of the movement. It will also elucidate how the MaBaTha movement turned into the stage of contentious politics. Chapter 5 will reveal the framing process throughout the movement. Conclusions and further questions are discussed at the end.

CHAPTER 1–THE POLITICAL OPENING AND THE MABATHA MOVEMENT

1.1 Political opening in Myanmar

Myanmar has seen a lot of changes in the year 2010 onwards, with the development to civilian government. The 2008 constitution has provided Myanmar with a political system with separation of power: the Hluttaw (the parliament), the Union government and sub-national government, and the judiciary branch are formed for the first time over almost six decades.[1] Although the 2010 elections are regarded both domestically and internationally as flawed, they still provided a considerate amount of political openness and a space for civil society. In the beginning, not much was expected out of the political change from authoritarian dictatorship to civilianized rule; only superficial changes were expected (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2012, 198, 206). Yet, the meeting of the President with Aung San Suu Kyi, the pro-democracy leader of the opposition, in August 2011 and subsequent invitation to exile political dissents to come back to the country were unexpected positive changes for the country (Callahan 2012). Political opening is in a way a long term effect of economic sanctions, the pro-democracy movement within the country, the Saffron Revolution, the pressure by international community, convincing the generals to speed up the process to discipline-flourishing democracy, and the reforms to "deflect international pressure". Desired result is achieved, with a large role of military in the politics (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2012, 203-4). However, the raison d'etre of the political reforms themselves is beyond the purview of this paper. Reforms in political, legislative and economic sectors were started. With regard to media freedom, the abolishment of censorship board, significant amount of internet freedom, and relaxation of

[1] While the author is aware of the existence of parliament in Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) regime from 1974-1988, this cannot be counted as democratic.

restrictions on politics have started since 2010. News about the opposition leader and opposition politics were not allowed until 2011 early September. However, local journals could start writing critical of the government and its activities. One scholar even notes that media freedom in Myanmar is more substantial than in Malaysia and Singapore. Exile journalists are allowed back to come into the country (Taylor 2012, 222; Holliday 2013, 92; Thuzar 2012, 205). This change also brought reforms in several important areas of public life. Economic reforms are initiated. Political protests are legalized. Though people were first afraid to use their newly granted civil liberties, trade union activists came into the political stage while most political prisoners were released. With new media freedom, civil society groups started their activist works. These groups are gaining space and undertaking their activities more freely (Holliday 2013, 94–95). Of course, there were still constraints such as the need to register with Ministry of Home Affairs, which was a tedious procedure consuming both money and time (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2012, 206-8). Meanwhile, the government even formed advisory bodies with former opponents (Jones 2014, 781). For vacant constituencies in Myanmar's parliament, a by-election was held in 2012 and, the major opposition led by the internationally famous pro-democracy icon, Aung San Suu Kyi, after accepting the 2008 constitution as a starting point for the country's renewed politics, started election campaigns. These by-election campaigns commenced a wave of a new realm where people could enjoy the openness of the political and civil atmosphere, and where people start to realize that mass mobilization by a particular political organization can be materialized which had never happened before. They started to see that people could gather together and implement their collective action, with much less fear, not like before. While National League for Democracy(NLD) and their leader, Aung San Suu Kyi started a sweeping electoral campaign, another important improvement is the media freedom. The media started to report as substantially free not as before; they started criticizing

both the government and the opposition with the abolishment of the censorship, which was seriously brutal under the military dictatorship (Nyi Nyi Kyaw, 2015).

1.2 Communal violence in Rakhine State and other parts of the country

With all these positive improvements in the country, in the country's poorest Rakhine state, the communal relations between the majority Buddhists and Muslims started to worsen and tensions became more acute. A series of communal violence was triggered by a rape case of a Buddhist woman by a group of Muslim men in May 2012 and subsequent killing of a group of ten Muslim passengers in the bus from Thandwe to Yangon by a group of Rakhines in Taungup on 3 June 2012. Muslims protested in front of a central mosque in downtown Yangon on the same day. The cases of communal violence did not confine itself but broke away into the whole country: similar episodes of communal violence broke out in other major parts of the country like Mandalay, Meikhtial and Lashio. These are unprecedented episodes without long intervals: Rakhine State in 2012, Meikhtila in March 2013; Okkan in April 2013; Lashio in May 2013; Kanbalu in August 201 and Mandalay in July 2014. The communal violence in Rakhine state were the most serious sectarian episodes in Myanmar's history since independence[2] (Nyi Nyi Kyaw 2015).

With regard to causes of these conflicts, different academics and international bodies give different arguments. While International Crisis Group argues that these are adverse impact of transition (2013), some scholars and organizations blamed the involvement and failure of the state (Maung Zarni 2013) to protect (Human Rights Watch 2012; Physicians for Human Rights 2013).

[2] Myanmar gained independence from Britain in 1948.

Islamophobic mobilizations by Buddhist nationalist groups such as 969 and MaBaTha were also accounted for these episodes of violence (Walton and Hayward 2014).

1.3 The rise of Buddhist monks' movement

In this background context, the MaBaTha movement emerged in late 2012. There shall be no doubt that the 2007 saffron revolution might have significant impact on the country's way forward to democracy and democratization. Comparing to the 2007 revolution, the MaBaTha movement, similarly led by the monks, is much stronger and can cover more than 220 out of 330 townships of the country. The political space and opportunities are not comparable with the political opening since 2010. The movement is based on the anti-Muslim campaign and as mentioned earlier, it managed to pass the four sets of laws targeting Muslim minorities, using the political opportunities and cultural influences.

Matthew Walton and Susan Hayward discuss briefly about the rise of the 969 movement and the formation of MaBaTha movement in their working paper. In discussing the rise of the 969 movement, the paper only describes the "969" symbol used by the movement and give a comment regarding how the movement has been overstated for its unity. They rightly point out it is a decentralized movement. The MaBaTha movement is described as "it is difficult to characterize adequately the complexity of MaBaTha" (Walton and Hayward 2014, 15). It only hinted that some monks from the 969 movement like U Wirathu remained in the MaBaTha movement, and that the nature of the nationalist movement in Myanmar has been shifted tactically in response to "changing political opportunities". It also describes the ambivalence of some influential monks, particularly the Sitagu Sayadaw with regard to the activities of the movement. It discusses the

mobilization for the passage of the myozaunt laws (the laws to protect race and religion) and some interactions with human rights groups responding against the MaBaTha's idea for the new laws. While this has been the only academic study that touches upon the 969 movement and the MaBaTha movement per se, it does not provide a dynamic account of how this movement managed to become a formidable organization leading to the promulgation of the new laws–this study tries to explain this from social movement perspective.

CHAPTER 2 – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The major aim of this study is to reconstruct a narrative and explicate the trajectory of the MaBaTha movement, which has yet to get major attention from the academia. This endeavour entails a conceptual framework which will enable the analytical perspectives to examine the movement as a whole. It will also allow the study of the MaBaTha movement to link to the theoretical literature in a systematic manner and hence help to open future potential to add in other theoretical approaches. In this light, this study tries to explain the contemporary movement by using the political process model–one of the theories from social movement literature. The distinct nature of religious nationalism, to which the MaBaTha movement belongs, requires this study to consider the nature of religion in contentious politics, especially with regard to framing. The motivational aspects of framing will explain how the movements can overcome the free rider problem. I will start with a discussion of the political process model and then explain the need to study agency for motivations, internal dynamics, and recruitment mechanisms. Framing will be discussed to elucidate how the movement uses cultural and strategic processes while the nature of religious nationalistic movements also need a huge emphasis on the cultural and religious elements.

2.1 Role of political opportunity structures

Social movements are defined by Mario Diani (1992, 13) as:

A social movement is a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity.

Echoing this definition, Tilly argues social movements not as "a group, a quasi-group, or a group-like composite, but a complex form of social interaction"(1993, 5). It is important to conceptualize

social movements as a sustained challenge to power "by means of repeated public displays of that population's numbers, commitment, unity, and worthiness" (ibid.). This notion of social movements as a form of social interaction maps out what to look into for a particular movement. Tarrow's definition of social movements, while not neglecting the interaction aspect of social movements as "underlying social networks", explain the need of the role of "resonant collective action frames" to be able to initiate and sustain "the capacity to maintain sustained challenges against powerful opponents"(Tarrow 1998, 2). However, as the centrality is vastly on interaction and the nature of the movement itself, it lacks a theoretical explanation of why and under what conditions social movements emerge–one important research question this particular study tries to answer.

Under normal circumstances, the power is able to control and sustain the status quo using the means of coercion, among others. This, however, does not necessarily mean that there is no challenge to the authority. Challengers are always in the society for the reason mostly that they are excluded from the decision process or day-to-day politics of the country. As McAdam explains, "the opportunities for a challenger to engage in successful collective action do vary greatly over time"(McAdam 1982, 39–41). These variations are related to the ebb and flow of movement activity. To start a movement activity, the political process theory argues that the shift in structural political opportunities or simply the weakening or loopholes in political opportunities is perceived by the potential challengers to get involved in contentious interaction. Thus looking for an answer to how social movements start to form or materialize, the argument of this theoretical model identifies social movements as the result of combination of political opportunities and collection attribution of these political opportunities (ibid, 2, 36, 51). By political opportunity changes,

McAdam implies the changes in formal institutional structures and informal political alignments of a political system, which lead to structural changes favorable for emergence of social movements (McAdam 1995, 224).

The opening of political opportunities and the organizational strength of the contenders do not alone make social movements emerge. To overcome the free rider problem or simply to convince people to be involved in the movement, something is necessary. McAdam terms this cognitive liberation. To be able to not only start a movement but also to maintain it throughout the course, the political process theory identifies three factors to be interactive: the political opportunities, organizational strength and cognitive liberation. By cognitive liberation, this model assumes the movement actors' and participants' perceptions that the current situations–specific to the social movement–are unjust and thus needed to be challenged to get better via collective action (1982, 53).

With regard to the emergence of political opportunities, questions arise as to take them objective or if they are subjectively perceived. McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly suggest that opportunities and threats should not be taken as objective categories, but instead they depend on the how different actors in the movement perceive and attribute them subjectively. This is also changed during the movement and the entire episodes, actors and actions are also interactively framed by all the groups concerned. This phenomenon can be observed not only from the challengers' side but also other groups (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 14, 44–45). The actors might use innovative action to broaden the pre-existing mobilizing structures or use the existent mobilizing structures as such (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 45). This includes the emergence of movement as an

independent variable causing an impact on the opportunities and the organizational strength (McAdam, 52).

With regard to the organizational strength, McAdam's political process model suggests that it is necessary to have formal organizations so that they can give directions to the existent informal groups(1982, 54). Tarrow, on the other hand, remarks that in social movements, some movements lack formal leadership but leaders come out of the movement or from "cognate groups from which they borrow resources." Tarrow proposes three different aspects of organizations to distinguish. The first aspect is the formal hierarchical organizations, which are formal organization with goals having preferences to implement those goals. The second aspect is "the organization of collective action at the point of contact with opponents" and he identifies social networks at the base of a society as the source of recruitment into social movements. The third category is the connective structures. The emphasis is upon these connective structures as the linkages for coordination and aggregation between movement organizations. These linkages, when internalized, allow movements to persist even without formal organization. Yet, collective action can be controlled by its leaders. Thus he argues the most effective form of organization is "based on partly autonomous and contextually rooted local units linked by connective structures, and coordinated by formal organizations. Nonetheless, Tarrow warns a possible caveat that sometimes too much autonomy makes it difficult for leaders to implement coherent strategies(1998, 123–124). This study, while trying to explain the trajectory of the movement of study, will also look for which kind of organizational strategies have been used to recruit members to this movement. The informal leadership or the lack of a formal leadership institution is hypothesized.

Using this frame, I will explore what the political opportunities are, how they are perceived and attributed, what determinants of organizational strength are, how resources are attained and how the movement is sustained.

2.2 Role of Agency

As mentioned above, the political process model does recognize the importance of cognitive liberation though the emphasis is on structural factors. However, the cognitive liberation aspect of the political process model does not explain what is responsible for this process. McAdam explains the steps of cognitive liberation as a result of emergence of a social movement and attributed this to "interpersonal networks" within the organization (McAdam 1982, 49-50, 51). This is to be put in Popp's way, making an analysis where macro and micro are connected without giving the micro-macro aspect of explanation (Opp 2009). It does not reach to the point where cognitive liberation is caused –if not wholly but substantially– by framing which is actually motivated and materialized by the movement actors and frame alignments that occur throughout the time with counter frames, etc.

The need to explain what causes cognitive liberation in social movements sheds light to the need of analysis of framing processes. As much as the structural elements of political opportunities and organization are important, the role of agency and culture should not be ignored. Even though mobilizing structures and cultural framing were added in the political process model, Goodwin and Jasper point out the fact that the strategic processes and cultural processes are mistakenly presented or largely ignored when the whole emphasis is on the structural perspective (1999, 29, 52). After realizing of the need to incorporate these processes, collective action frames and

respective frame processes have recently been regarded as a central dynamic in political process theory (political opportunity structures) in explaining both descriptive and analytic purposes in social movement studies (Benford and Snow 2000, 612). Together with the emphasis on framing and frame analysis, the paradigm in social movement theory has shifted from structural, non-voluntaristic approach to (at least include) agency-mediated, voluntaristic process due to the proposition that movement actors are those who involve in developing and maintaining meaning for the concerned movements. Emphasis has also shed on ideas and actors as an important aspect for understanding and exploring social movements and other related activities of the social world (Snow and Benford 1988; Selbin 2003, 118). On this note, it becomes clear that the frames of the movement need to be investigated as this can provide an understanding of the local strategic and cultural processes of how they are framed. The reason behind is also due to the fact that the movement activists need to possess world-views that can justify themselves for any act. The need to defend their faith via frames is required so that they can have an expectation that "what they did would lead to radically new social and political orders"(Juergensmeyer 1996, 3). This article uses the definition of framing as "an active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction" (Benford & Snow 2000, 614).

2.3 A holistic approach

This paper would like to incorporate McAdam's framework with the elaborated framework by McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly–known as the dynamic interaction approach and framing aspects, as discussed above. Thus, my combined theoretical framework is to look into how different political opportunities enable and how people perceive these opportunities and attribute, and how frames evolved to enable collective attribution.

While the above-mentioned theoretical framework is to explain the social movement of the monks, it is important here to note that the nature of the movement studied in this paper requires attention that the movement is within the established order of Theravada Buddhism. In broad sense it pertains to a category of religious nationalism. The nature of Theravada Buddhism, the theoretical background for religion and politics, especially of religious movements are deemed to be necessary to explain the nature of frames involved to recruit new members to the movement.

Mark Juergensmeyer, in his seminal essay, points out that secular nationalism has failed because people perceive it as religiously inadequate (1996, 11). The religious movements are politicized in a sense because they see a problem with politics in such that "the moral and ideological pillars of social order have collapsed". Thus, they propose religious solutions in the realm of politics. Religious nationalism can be categorized into two broad categories as ethnic and ideological. In ethnic religious nationalism, religion is used or "politicized" to make a political identity together with race, history or culture (ibid, 4, 20). Ideological religious nationalism is stronger in the sense of using religion or religionization of politics (Helbardt, Hellmann-Rajanayagam, and Korff 2013). In this case, religious nationalists reject the western "secularism" and instead "combines traditional religious beliefs in divine law and religious authority with the modern notion of nation state". Thus, Juergensmeyer suggests the ethnic religious nationalism politicizes religion using "religious identities for political ends" where ideological religious nationalism religionizes politics (1996).

In Theravada Buddhism, there is a strong doctrinal distinction between the supra-mundane or other-worldly and mundane or secular. The monks (*bhikkhus*) are doctrinally required not to

involve in mundane activities and limit themselves to supra-mundane actions for "attainment of the higher levels of insight and realization" (Reynolds 1979, 11–16). Theravada basically promotes detachment from country, ethnicity, and property (Helbardt, Hellmann-Rajanayagam, and Korff 2013, 43). At the same time, even for the laity, the doctrinal approach is to follow the Buddha's teaching of loving-kindness. Having said that, it is obvious that the Buddhist attitude, at the face value, is towards "a path leading to total abstention from engaging in violent activities" (Deegalle 2003, 128).

Religion, in the case of Myanmar, has been used to justify violence, hatred and anti-Muslim movement (Nyi Nyi Kyaw 2015; Maung Zarni 2013). Regarding the role of religion in violence, religion generally was considered no more than an explanatory factor. But in religionization of politics, religion is more important than a tool for political aims but "politics becomes an instrument of implementing religious practice" (Helbardt, Hellmann-Rajanayagam, and Korff 2013, 36). In this regard, Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka is interpreted in a way that the religious task of the monk is not limited to the "liberation" only but also entails to socio-political issues, i.e. the interpretation is made in a largely secular way(ibid, 42). Culturally, Sangha in Myanmar is responsible or assigned the role to legitimize the ruler(ibid, 46). Abeysekara (2001) argues that the attempt to theorize religion and violence without acknowledging them as "discursive categories" is flawed because the current literature emphasizes to take religion and violence at face values. In fact, they are all discursive categories as he rightly points out that "the questions, terms, and parameters defining which persons, practices, and knowledge can and cannot count as religion or violence, civilization or terror are produced, battled out, and subverted in minute contingent conjunctures." Thus he argues that religion and violence are, in other words, formed or formulated

within "competing authoritative "native" debates and discourses"(2001, 1–5). Thus, it is important to explore the discourses to fit monks in the nationalistic movements in Theravada doctrine if we would like to understand how Buddhist monks–who are required to stay away from politics–get involved in politics as a social movement organization.

2.4 Methodology

Due to the scarcity of documentation and written resources, in finding the answers to the research question, in-depth interviews are used together with the journals, magazines and other printed materials by the MaBaTha organization. Nonetheless, key informant interviews not only reveal the interviewee's reflections and interpretations of the movement itself but they serve as an important tool of data collection to reach for "motives, beliefs, and attitudes…identities and emotions of movement activists" (Della Porta 2014, 229) and thus it brings human agency, which this study intends to explore. Thus, interviewing people who are actively involved in the movement and within the movement organization enables one to find out the narratives, mobilizing strategies, development and also the internal dynamics of the movement. The "micro-dynamics of commitment" are particularly worth looking into to find out how how new members are recruited into movement organizations, tactics, and the future plans for the movement organization (Della Porta 2014, 231; Rathbun 2008, 686; Blee 2013, 624). Traditionally brought up as a Buddhist and a person who closely followed the developments of the movement, I can easily identify the key informants. Snowball sampling method is partially used as it is particularly useful to find out less well-known, but yet still important members of the movement (Blee 2013, 624).

A total of 19 interviews are done. In-depth interviews are done with the leaders of the MaBaTha movement to investigate how the movement was initiated; what the objectives were; how new members were recruited; what methods were used to sustain the movement; the internal dynamics within the movement; and what frames evolved over time. To check the claims of the movement actors, interviews were also done with monks–some are writers and public intellectuals–dissenting with how the MaBaTha was mobilizing people and the fact that the MaBaTha became related to the politics. Activists from civil society who do not share same ideas with the MaBaTha were also interviewed. Some leader monks from the Saffron revolution were also interviewed. Volunteer teachers from the Dhamma school were also interviewed. The interviews started with the ethical aspects: the information disclosed would only be used for scholarly purposes and would not be disclosed to any media. I asked the interviewees if I could mention their names and/or they could be off the record when they wanted to tell me internal details, which I would not mention the name (See Appendix for the semi-structured interview topic guide).

The interviews were conducted from July to September, 2015 in Yangon, Mandalay and Mawlamyine in Myanmar. Thus, the period covered in this study is from the initiation of the movement in 2013 to the time of interviewing in 2015. The interviews with leader monks from the MaBaTha central headquarters were conducted in Yangon. Mandalay, the largest city for monk population, is assumed an important area for interviews and as the headquarter for the movement in Upper Myanmar. The 969 movement started in Mawlamyine and hence I went to Mawlamyine as well to conduct several interviews.

The duration of interviews depends on individual interviewees. Six interviews lasted for about two hours and other interviews were around one hour. Some monks from the movement would like to explain lengthily, sometimes taking more than two hours. Some monks tried to be as discreet and diplomatic as possible and depending on the trust issue they avoided to give details. Being a layperson and bounded by the cultural norms between a monk and a student, I had to try very carefully and cautiously to interrupt them–when it is necessary to–and get back to the topic of the conversation. Two very senior monks answered the interview in a sermon-like fashion. Once in a monastery, I was even asked if I were a Buddhist before answering the interview. One of the lay disciples around the senior monk expressed his concerns that the information given were not to be used to defame his revered Sayadaw, though I had already assured the senior monk that the interview would not be disclosed to any media outlets. Triangulation is done with journalistic sources and the existing literature on the MaBaTha movement.

CHAPTER 3 – ROLE OF MONKS IN BURMESE SOCIETY

3.1 Social and historical contexts

Juergensmeyer argues when secular nationalism cannot guarantee itself as a solution for moral legitimacy, politicized religious movements emerge trying to provide panaceas to the society. He argues that the reasons of rising religious nationalistic movements can be found in "social and historical contexts" of societies (Juergensmeyer 1996). This is particularly important in this study because Buddhist monks in Myanmar have a specially privileged role in the society–as teachers, community leaders and opinion shapers of the society. This role–evolved over time historically–gives advantages to monks in mobilizing the public, recruiting new members to the movement, and sustaining the movement activities–to be discussed in the following chapters. Thus, this chapter tries to explain these factors by giving a background of the role of monks throughout history in legitimating the political authority; as educators of the society; and the formation of "political monk" in Burmese society. It argues that the socially engaged Buddhism which evolved during the authoritarian regime reflects the important role of Buddhist monks in society. However, it is not necessarily based on ideals of democracy and human rights–though some monks and scholars try to argue this form of Buddhism within democratic framework.

3.1.1 Role of monks throughout history

Looking at the authoritarian nature of the Burmese society, Maung Maung Gyi in 1983 remarked that the contemporary Burmese society is a law-of-status society, with "an absence of equal treatment concept within the society". In this society, monks are viewed as the first in order of importance (1983, 170–171). One reason for this importance may be due to the fact that Buddhism can be found in both institutional and personal levels. The role of religion in spiritual, social,

intellectual, artistic and political life is huge in Myanmar, compared to other Theravada Buddhist belief systems in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Sri Lanka (Steinberg 2006, 94–97; Gravers 1999, 22).

3.1.2 Role of legitimation

The role of Buddhist monks–especially the relationship between the state and religion– is the role of the Sangha to legitimate the political authority(Aung-Thwin 2009, 7). The earliest records show that since the fourteenth-century, the *thathanabaing*[3]had political influence and authority over the royal court (Smith 1965, 15, 31–34). The legitimacy of the monarchy and the Sangha are hugely interdependent and "the kings used the Sangha, so the Sangha used the monarchy". These traditional attitudes are deeply entrenched and hugely influential in the contemporary Burmese society. The stronger the monarchy was, the more united and stronger the hierarchy of the monastic order was (Aung-Thwin 2009).

During the colonial period[4], the demise of the monarchy and hence the lack of political authority to enhance the ecclesiastical order and to appoint the *thathanabaing* had weakened the traditional role of the monastic order within socio-religious and political arenas. The British rule, trying to govern the country in a secular fashion, made it clear in 1935 that there shall be no special legal status for the Sangha in the society. This lack of religious authority, however, left the Sangha without its "chief moral arbiter" and the top-down hierarchical structure of the Buddhist Order was destroyed (Aung-Thwin 2009, 11). But the socially privileged role of the Sangha still remained.

[3] It means the lord or owner of the Buddhist religion–*thathana* from Pali *sasana*(religion) and *paing* meaning the owner. This role is similar to the primate or the Pope.
[4] 1824-1948.

It is important to note, however, that successive governments after independence used Buddhism and the Sangha again to legitimize the state authority (Steinberg 2006, 94–97).

With regard to political legitimacy for the state, legitimacy for a government is formulated by the notion of *dasa raja Dhamma* (ten king-law virtues) within the religion, in Myanmar. Burmese political thought, as Huxley argues, incorporates ethics into the constitutional law. The king, who is a Buddhist, is "bound to be a good king" (Huxley 2007, 39). The legitimacy, which is interpreted within Buddhism is related to nationalism as well– as a saying goes "To be Burmese is to be Buddhist". Thus, nationalism which is based upon Burmese identity is closely attached to Buddhism. Hence, nationalism has become "a single pervasive element that is used to invoke legitimacy in any of the Burmese governments since independence" (Steinberg 2006, 110). This intertwined notion of religious nationalism has been used by political authority not only to legitimate their actions but also for their political ends.

U Nu, the first prime minster of independent Burma used Buddhism for encouraging unity in the country. U Nu used traditional Buddhist beliefs to reinterpret socialism (Sarkisyanz 1965, 217). Charney also notes that while this is partly because Nu himself was a devout Buddhist, Nu had used the promise to make Buddhism the state religion to win the election in 1960 (2009, 90, 100–103). The caretaker government led by General Ne Win in 1958-1960 also used Buddhism to counter communism insurgency by framing that "Buddhism is in danger" (ibid, 102). The military regime used nationalism to legitimize its administration and took the role as the protector "not only of the state but also of the customs and culture of the Burmese people". Steinberg even points out the Union Solidarity and Development Association(USDA), the organization by military regime,

mobilized people via the nationalism claims for mass rallies and anti-Thai diatribes, when there was a border dispute with Thailand in 2002 (Steinberg 2006, 109–111). The USDA later transformed itself into the Union Solidarity and Development Party(USDP), which was the party in power for 2011-2015. It is largely possible that the military-backed USDP will use this nationalism as a political tool to mobilize and organize people if necessary.

3.1.3 Educational role

Though the Theravada Buddhist monks are supposed to stay away from mundane world of politics, before the colonial rule, monks also played an important role in several functions of the modern secular state, like education, and social control in the periphery where the centre could not reach. Some monks even served in diplomatic missions by the King (Smith 1965, 15, 31–34). Before the western secular education was introduced by the colonial rule, monasteries basically served as schools. Monks were the sole educators for all the young children of the country. Ranging from a farmer to the king, all Burmese were products of the monastic education. This has earned monks the social prestige as the teachers of the society (ibid, 18–20; Schober 2007, 55–57). With the colonial rule and secular education, this traditional role of monks has also declined and even became "irrelevant" in terms of "literacy, religious instruction, ethics and discipline". But still, the Sangha is seen as "the only repository left for its traditions and values" (Aung-Thwin 2009, 11) and as very important community leaders (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2008, 133). One leader monk I interviewed[5] explained that the term "Saya-Daga" (teacher-layperson) came from this condition that monks used to be "actual" teachers for the whole country and so they were always referred to

[5] Interview with U Paññā Wara, Central Committee Member, Aug 18, 2015, Yangon.

as "Saya". The term "Sayadaw" is formed by putting Burmese suffix "daw" which refers to the royal status as monks were teachers of the monarch, as well.

3.1.4 Nationalist movements and the formation of political monks

The rise of nationalism in Burma is not a new phenomenon at all, dating back to 1930s during the colonial rule. As mentioned above, the Theravada monks are not supposed to get involved in political activities. But the monks did get involved in the nationalist movements and even led them. It is ethno-religious form of nationalism, putting ethnically Burman and religiously Buddhist at the center. No other expression serves to explain this more than the ubiquitous saying of "to be Burmese is to be Buddhist"[6] (Walton 2013, 4, 8–10). The first person who brought nationalist ideas and advocated for home rule (*swaraj*) to Burma–in a similar way like the India National Congress–is a monk by the name of U Ottama (Gravers 1999, 34; Edwards 2007, 167). Aung-Thwin even noted–based on the monks' involvements in modern politics in the society–that the annexation of Burma by British resulted in the "political monk" (2009, 12). Since then, the role of monks in subsequent nationalist movements has not stopped.

Burmese nationalism being a religious nationalism is in this regard not different from Hindu nationalism. Taking one particular religion, namely Hinduism as the distinctive factor for national identity, religious form of Hindu nationalism claims that other religions must assimilate to the Hindu centre. The role of Hinduism is indispensable as shaping India and thus have "cultural and political primacy". In this regard, India is perceived as a Hindu nation (Hindutva) with consequent

[6] For those who converted to Christianity, they are treated as aliens and never accepted –if not shunned– back into the society. See more in Gravers (1999).

political implication of formation of political Hinduism, requiring a unity for all Hindus (Varshney 2002, 56–57, 59, 61–71). In Myanmar, as much as religious nationalism is concerned, monks involved in these social mobilizations, and they thought it is their duty to lead the public.

After the secular education by the British rule was imposed, the role of monks as teachers of the society was reduced. However, remaining as religious leaders of the community, they are still very important community leaders. Monks also started involving in civil society organization, even during military dictatorship. As it was the only way to get involved not politically but socially, the organizations gave monks the position of patrons. Some monks founded their own civil society organizations. These civil society organizations include charity clinics, educational network, free funeral services and Sunday dhamma schools. Even monks who are not involved in this kind of social activities still remain as community leaders. So for monks who engage in this kind of activities, they definitely have tremendous influence over the community.

3.2 Socially engaged Buddhism

One question this study needs to answer is the international perception of monks as one of the democratic forces in Burma, giving the epic example of 2007 saffron revolution. The main thesis is the emergence of "socially engaged Buddhism" and its ethos. I argue here that while the social engagement of Buddhist monks –not a new phenomena as such– took momentum after the 2007 saffron revolution and 2008 Cyclone Nagis, this form of social engagement does not necessarily uphold the ideas of human rights and democracy. Rather, the movement can only be seen as anti-regime movement.

The conceptualization of "socially engaged Buddhism" is formulated by Julian Schober, among others. Socially engaged Buddhism in her view emphasizes on social justice, development and peace. She sees these ideas as "interpreted in light of social issues such as human rights and democracy". This kind of Buddhism, she claims, transcends traditional boundaries between Theravada and Mahayana schools. This is in her view "a significant religious development". Thus, she sees examples of the Sangha's contestation of the secular state, giving out the examples of Buddhist resistance since 1920s. The aim of socially engaged Buddhism is basically "the sangha's moral obligation" for the benefit of the community. The Ten Duties of Kingship (*das raja dhamma*) included the duty to provide economic prosperity. But she misleadingly claims that this discourse is for "human rights and democracy"(2010, 120–121, 132–134, 144). This reminds one to go back to Sarkisyanz's argument that "the tradition about the Buddha's omniscience" made Buddhists inclined to interpret "*any* idea in so far as it is good and correct must have been part of Buddha's teachings"(1965, 217).

As evidence suggests, the All Burma Monks Alliance(ABMA), which claimed to be the leader of the 2007 protests, made political demands to the government (Zöllner 2009) but they did not include anything about the democracy and human rights. The four demands announced by ABMA only entailed to release all political prisoners and to start dialogue with democratic forces–apart from an official apology, and to reduce commodity prices, which was the immediate cause of monks protests. Actually, the report by international media put simple things into politicization, to relate to the country's politics and political players (Zöllner 2009, 46–51).

In fact, there are concerns that building legitimacy of government on Buddhist grounds "created a deeply-rooted tendency toward an undemocratic privileging of Buddhism"(Hayward 2015, 32). The way the saffron revolution frames Buddhism and democracy and human rights is problematic: it assumes that democracy and human rights ideals are compatible with Buddhism. At the same time, the traditional notion of legitimate government–the righteous rule and the custom of the ruler as the protector of religion–can become "undemocratic" or might be worrisome for the minorities. Because as described above, the legitimacy based on Buddhist righteous rule also creates an obligation of the state to support Buddhism and propagation of Buddhism as righteous ruler (thathanapyu-min-kaung-min-myat).[7] Thus, when political opportunities emerged, and communal tensions rose between Muslims and Buddhists, the monks were easily turned into their traditional nationalistic ideas–largely based upon religion–and mobilized people against Muslims.[8]

[7] Interview with U Paññā Wara, Aug 18, 2015, Yangon; Myazedi Sayadaw, Secretary-General, Headquarters, Aug 16, 2015, Mawlamyine; Dr Thawpaka, Central Committee member, Aug 4, 2015, Yangon.

[8] Interview with U Thawbita, leader in the Saffron Revolution, Aug 10, 2015, Mandalay; U Seindita, leader in the Saffron Revolution, Aug 10, 2015, Mandalay; Moe Thu (Mandalay), Writer/monk, Aug 3, 2015, Yangon.

CHAPTER 4 – THE RISE OF THE MABATHA MOVEMENT

As social movements are based on "underlying social networks"(Tarrow 1998, 2), the existing social networks are explored in this chapter to understand how the movement started, and with what objectives and motivations. This chapter also tries to explain how the movement actors perceive the political opportunities in a subjective manner while objective structural changes were already discussed in the previous chapter.

I argue that the contemporary MaBaTha movement's major and immediate aim is to promulgate laws to protect Buddhist women from the danger of other religions, especially from Muslims. The long term aim includes providing programs and activities (*yin-kyay-leinmar thin htan*, classes to teach Buddhist manners and culture). This long term aim is not very obvious and the movement initially focused on the promulgation of the laws to protect race and religion. In reconstructing the narrative of the movement, I argue that the movement is in fact a combination of three pre-existing networks, namely the Ganawasaka Sangha Network or informally the "969" movement, the Dhamma school movement and the Theravada Dhamma Network, and influential individual monks. The connective structures are based on the personal charisma of an influential scholar monk from a big monastery. Ideological concern or at least the shared concern which is an organizing factor for the whole movement is the perceived need of a law to protect Buddhist women. Attention was due to the infamous 969 movement but I argue that the consequent incorporation of the infamous "969" movement into the newly formed MaBaTha movement is in fact a strategic action taken by the activist monks not only to unite and make the movement strong but also to save the name of the 969 movement and its activities as a whole. The movement's internal dynamics are also presented here – the Dhamma school movement, one faction within the

MaBaTha movement implicitly trying to keep a distance from it. However, I argue that the overlaps between the role of monks from local chapters as MaBaTha monks and as Dhamma school teachers or hosts nonetheless make the Dhamma school movement as together with the MaBaTha movement.

4.2 Early social mobilization of monks

4.1.1 The Ganawasaka Sangha Network

The Ganawasaka Sangha Network (GNS) is the pre-existing network founded on October 30, 2012 before the formation of the MaBaTha movement. Actually it is the GNS that draws attention from domestic and international media(Walton and Hayward 2014). The movement was formed in response to a triggering rape case of a Buddhist Rakhine woman by a group of Muslim men in the country's controversial Rakhine State on May 28, 2012. This case incited the communal violence in Rakhine state between the two local communities: the Rakhines and the Bengali or Rohingya[9]. The media also covered the case, including the government's media calling the assailants "Kala", an offensive use towards people of Muslim faith. The rage and anger over the rape case caused a cascade of communal violence in Rakhine state, and the already existing fear and dormant hatred of Muslims in the country rose. At this time, two monks in Mawlamyine in lower Myanmar, U Thatdhamma and U Wimila,[10] started to form a network called "*Thathana Palaka Ganawasaka*

[9] Rohingya is a disputed term used for a community of Muslim people living at Myanmar-Bangladesh border. Successive governments of Myanmar deny the existence of Rohingya as an ethnic minority. Instead, the official position is that they are Bengalis, meaning migrants from neighboring Bangladesh. The Rakhine community sees this as a territorial threat if the Rohingya were awarded the status of an ethnic minority.. They are stateless people as both Myanmar and Bangladesh governments do not recognize them as citizens. But they claim they belong to Myanmar. See more Holliday (2014).

[10] "U" is the honorific title for monks and men.

Sangha Network" (the network of scholar monks)[11]. Both of them were the head monks of two big monasteries in Mawlamyine. They usually met regularly twice a month to discuss monastic and religious education for their student monks. After the communal violence in Rakhine, the news reported that the representatives of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation were coming to Myanmar and reporting back to the Islamic states and opening a country office (Al Arabiya 2012; Anadolu Agency 2013). U Thadhamma revealed, "If we accept the presence of OIC in the country, we will face similar situations like Pakistan, Afghanistan and Indonesia.[12] We need to express our desire not to accept any OIC presence. There are several other ways than protesting and demonstrating on the streets. We can also express our desire by signature petition." U Thadhamma perceived the newly open political landscape as an opportunity. He recounted that he collected signatures and then informed the local authorities that they would protest. In fact, it was a strategic manner. He revealed:

In the past, when we expressed our voice to the local authorities, i.e. by means of signed petition, they never responded. So we thought strategically: we informed the authorities we would protest on the streets. But we did not intend to do this. When they realized that we would go out on streets to protest, state-level religious authorities came and we gave them our signed petition.[13]

They came up with the idea to mobilize "teacher monks" (*sarcha sayadaws*) in the whole country for their anti-Muslim campaign. The slogan of the campaign was "to revere unity more than your own life" and to build a united network of monks against the Muslims. Thus they thought that the time had come to unite all the monks and lay disciples in the country to show their opinion both

[11] Here, the expression basically means this is a network of monks, who involve in teaching Buddhist scriptural studies at monasteries.
[12] This is one of the recurring frames of the movement. Buddhist monks recounted the Buddhist past of these countries, and assumed that if the Muslim problem or Islamization as they call is not solved, Myanmar might have a similar fate like Afghanistan which used to be a Buddhist country. This will be discussed in the following chapter in details.
[13] Interview with U Thadhamma, Co-founder of the 969 movement, Aug 16, 2015, Mawlamyine.

domestically and internationally that they did not want any OIC representation as an immediate concern and to unite Buddhists vis-à-vis Muslims as a broader concern. They came up with three slogans for people of Buddhist faith; to be loyal to one's own race and religion, to buy only in Buddhist shops, and to marry only Buddhists. This even became a song, the 969 sermons start with this song (Marshall 2013). They also came up with a logo to differentiate Buddhist shops from shops owned by other religions. The symbol and the logo "969" started to come out.

They called the 969 symbol "the Buddhist symbol" and urged in their sermons that every Buddhist must use it to differentiate from people of other faith. The "969" symbol is an appealing composite of symbolic power using several religious and cultural symbols within Buddhist society. The symbol has the Buddhist flag as the background, which denotes the six colours of the aura which emanate from the Buddha's body; three numerical digits "969" representing the 9 virtues of the Buddha, 6 of the Dhamma and 9 of the Sangha–the most revered "triple gems" of the Buddhist faith; the circle representing the 24 types of conditional relations which is equivalent to the sum of the three digits "969"; and the ancient pillar of Asoka including four animals:– the lion to symbolize "courage", the elephant for "strength", the horse for "nimbleness", and the cow for "tolerance". Each composite symbol has been widely used by Buddhists. Traditionally, Buddhist shops use "Buddham, Dhammam, Sangham" on their signposts in Burmese language as a religious symbol for favourable conditions and to show devoutness. One composite in the symbol–the 24 types of conditional relations– come from the Patthana book of the Abhidhamma pitaka[14]. Burmese Buddhists believe that the Pattahna book is the one which will disappear first in the

[14] Buddhist scriptures are divided into three pitakas (baskets), namely Sutta, Vinaya and Abhidhamma.

decline and final disappearance of Buddhist faith. The small stickers of 24 conditional relations can be seen on a variety of places–homes, motorbikes, cars, shops and even private offices. In the middle of this new symbol, the Asoka pillar was put. It has been used by famous Buddhist monks, e.g., one of the most famous scholar monks Mahagandayone Sayadaw, Pa-Auk Forest Sayadaw and Sitagu Sayadaw. Thus, the new invention "969" Buddhist symbol is in fact a combination of religiously and culturally important symbols which people of Myanmar are familiar with. But the only difference is that the new 969 symbol can imply that the shop or the person using it follows the ideology of the 969 movement.

The monks, being teacher monks of two big monasteries, could easily mobilize their junior colleagues, and organize talks to introduce the 969 symbol and the 969 ideology. Moreover, they travelled the whole country to distribute the 969 stickers and to mobilize the campaign, sometimes "8 talks in a day". U Thadhamma in his words recounted:

We realized the need to introduce this symbol. We travelled around the country to give introductory talks and to urge every Buddhist to use this. It was not a difficult task for me. We went to every sermon house (Dhamma yone) whenever there is one. We went to the laypersons responsible for the Dhamma yone and asked them to organize the talk. Even if they said that they were not used to Dhamma sermons, we waited them to organize an audience and gave a talk– sometimes it was only five persons, but we still talked. We went in a group of five monks. If we give a regular sermon, people will get bored. So we talked only for 15 minutes. Thus, the whole city of Malamyine was covered. Then the whole Mon state. Where did we get money? When we went for Dhamma talks, people donated for future activities of the 969 campaign. We did not use any money from the donations for our personal expenses. Some Monks criticized us for giving talks without being invited. [15] *We follow the example of the Buddha–he was not invited to give his first sermon. We use all the money for the campaign activities–for more stickers and other materials.* [16]

[15] The tradition is that monks give sermons only when they are invited.
[16] Interview with U Thadhamma, Aug 16, 2015, Mawlamyine.

The campaign got international and domestic attention when a bigger communal violence broke out in Meikhtila, a major town in upper Myanmar–Buddhists using 969 stickers and slogans during the violence activities. The 969 monks had not yet arrived at Meikhtila yet when the violence broke out. But the 969 symbols were already been ubiquitous in the country. U Thadhamma commented, "We could not confine the 969 stickers only to be used by our network; people might copy it and use them as it was a campaign throughout the country." [17]

The "969" monks and the initial movement regarded that their movement was not related to politics. The distinction made by the leader monk of the movement, U Thatdhamma, is that they did not talk about "party politics" but only for protection of race and religion.[18] Thus, framed in this way, the movement also tried to get approval from senior monks. U Thatdhamma revealed, "When it is about protection of race and religion and the danger of Muslims, senior monks instantly agreed with the idea of the movement." It included Karen Sayadaw, the secretary of the State-level Sangha Maha Nayaka and the influential Sitagu monk.[19] This phenomenon is understandable because the majority of the monks in the country, including senior monks, have anti-Muslim sentiments. The cultural and religious power of the 969 logo basically convinces the senior monks to use it as Buddhist symbol. And the frame to protect race and religion goes well with senior monks. [20]

[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Interview with U Aung Myaing, Central Committee member, Aug 3, 2015, Yangon.
[20] Interview with U Teikha, Senior Patron, Upper-Myanmar MaBaTha, Aug 7, 2015, Mandalay; with Moe Thu (Mandalay), Aug 3, 2015, Yangon.

One of the nationalist monks the 969 movement tried to recruit included U Wirathu. U Wirathu was jailed in 2003 for partial responsibility of anti-Muslim riots in Mandalay. At the time of the movement, U Wirathu was released–he returned back to monastic teachings and started to engage in political activities such as being involved in Letpadaung copper mine protests in central Myanmar (Marshall 2012). The 969 monks showed deep respect to U Wirathu for being a scholar monk and lecturer in famous Masoyein monastery, where around 3000 monks resided to study Buddhist scriptures. They confessed that through his sermons they achieved an understanding of the need to protect one's own race and religion. U Aung Myaing told the author, "They met with U Wirathu and asked U Wirathu to join the 969 movement, but instead U Wirathu replied that he would not take any official position but he would work together with them to the main theme."[21]

Thus, the 969 movements gained momentum promoting the symbol and their slogans. Since the announcement of the movement in Oct 30, 2012, they travelled extensively to preach their ideas in almost all big cities and even small towns. They talked about the importance of unity and the impending danger of Muslims.[22]

4.1.2 The Theravada Dhamma network

The Theravada Dhamma Network is also a pre-existing network even before the 969 network. It was mainly composed of lay people. This was led by U Aung Myaing, Dhamma Caka U Maung Maung and Daw Paw Shwe, among others. This network, being led by U Aung Myaing, who used to be a monk and studied together with U Wirathu and U Thadhamma at the Masoyein monastery,

[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid; Interview with Dr Aung Naing Oo, MP, Mon-state Hluttaw, Aug 16, 2015, Mawlamyine; Moe Thu (Mandalay), Aug 3, 2015, Yangon.

asked influential monks to be the patrons of this network. The aim of the network is basically "to hold anniversaries of Buddhism being promulgated as State Religion" (Naingan Taw Batha Nae, i.e. the Day of State Religion). When the MaBaTha movement is formed and led by respectable Sayadaws, this network also joined into the movement and U Aung Myaing became one of the lay members of the central committee.[23]

4.1.3 The Dhamma Schools

The Dhamma school foundation is one of the three networks that joined together to form the MaBaTha movement. The Dhamma School Foundation was founded by U Thathana Wara in May 2012. The idea of the foundation–largely inspired by Sunday Buddhist schools from Sri Lanka–is to provide Buddhist lessons for young Buddhists on Sundays, from the elementary school till high school. At the time of interview, Sayadaw U Thathana Wara, the founder of the Dhamma school foundation, mentioned there had been 397 Dhamma schools countrywide, and the Dhamma school foundation had trained 19, 167 teachers for the Dhamma school trainings from 2013 May to 2015 July. He used to be a student monk in Inn Sein Ywarma Monastery (the monastery of the chairperson of the future MaBaTha organization). Thus, when the idea to unite and organize the future MaBaTha organization, U Thathana Wara–hoping the new organization would share similar aims with the Dhamma school and being a devout and grateful former student monk of the Inn Sein Ywarma Monastery– hosted two pre-meetings at his monastery.

Later, the leader monks of this foundation found out that the MaBaTha had some components that they did not share–especially the MaBaTha's strong anti-Muslim campaign. U Thathana Wara

[23] Interview with U Aung Myaing, Aug 3, 2015, Yangon.

noted, "The Dhamma School Foundation's one and only aim is to teach young children Buddhist knowledge and culture in modern teaching methodology, especially with child-centred approach. Though I used to be one of the key persons of the movement in the beginning, I told my foundation not to mix with the MaBaTha movement when I found out the MaBaTha was campaigning with anti-Muslim discourses. I used to invite MaBaTha Sayadaws for closing ceremonies of Sunday school activities. When they preached anti-Muslim sermons, I told the whole organization not to invite them for talks to the children anymore."[24] The Dhamma school foundation tried to keep a distance from the MaBaTha movement. However, at the township level, the two groups have several overlaps–the activities related with Buddhist manners and culture classes for young children (in Burmese "*yin-kyay-leinmar-thin-tans,*" classes for culture and politeness) by the Dhamma school foundation are mostly hosted in monasteries of the MaBaTha monks, and thus they share similar activities.[25]

4.1.4 Individual Monks

Individual monks, especially preacher monks, are also an important strength of the movement. Due to the rising communal tensions in the whole country, preacher monks started to talk on the Muslim issue, including Sayadaw U Wirathu and U Paññā Wara. U Paññā Wara preached a sermon called "the different paths for life" ("*bawa-lan-gwe"*) about a Buddhist woman who suffered from a marriage with a Muslim man. It was broadcasted by a major TV broadcaster, MRTV-4 inadvertently. This sermon is one of the most significant sermons that gave the

[24] Interview with U Thathana Wara, Founder, Dhamma School Foundation, Aug 4, 2015, Yangon.
[25] Interview with U Dhamma, Head Monk of a local Dhamma School, Aug 9, 2015, Mandalay; Wai Mya Aye, Teacher, local Dhamma School, Aug 9, 2015, Mandalay; Khin May, Teacher, local Dhamma School, Aug 9, 2015, Mandalay.

movement a momentum.[26] Thus, the 969 monks met with U Paññā Wara. They wanted U Paññā Wara in the 969 movement as well, but U Paññā Wara said he could not take an official position in the movement.[27]

4.2 The formation of the MaBaTha Movement

In this section, I discuss the aims of the MaBaTha movement, how it organized to achieve the support of different monks, and the dynamics within the movement. The movement strategically tried to incorporate the 969 movement, partially in response to the shift of political opportunities. The movement's interaction with the opposition and rights activists pushed it towards working with the government.

4.2.1 The preparatory meetings and announcement of the formation

It was claimed that U Paññā Wara came up with the idea to make a law to prevent future events of communal violence between Muslims and Buddhists. The monks felt that marriage with a Muslim man is the beginning of communal tensions. He said:

> *Usually when a Muslim man and a Buddhist woman were thinking to get married, the woman got a promise that she could confess her own religion after the marriage. But after the marriage the tone changed–only conversion would entitle her to be a legal wife. Some did, but some girls did not abandon Buddhism. They rather left the husband. Then tensions arose in the community and this is the way the communal violence started. So if this condition could be prevented with a law, there would be no more bullying and no conflict.*[28]

Thus to make it law, they realized the need to petition the government and thus to be a strong force. Only with a large support from the monks and laypeople, this proposal could be considered by the

[26] Interview with U Wirathu, Central Committee member, Aug 11, 2015, Mandalay.
[27] Interview with U Aung Myaing, Aug 3, 2015, Yangon.
[28] Interview with U Paññā Wara, Aug 18, 2015, Yangon, Yangon.

government and thus materialized. They needed influential monks to give leadership to the movement as they thought they were still young to lead a movement successfully.[29] U Wirathu being close to Sitagu Sayadaw, asked the monk to lead the movement. While Sitagu Sayadaw seemed to be ambivalent to the MaBaTha movement (Walton and Hayward 2014, 15), the author found out that he had been involved with the movement even before the movement was formed. He saw "*Amyothayay*" (national cause)" as faultless, and suggested those who asked him to lead a movement to approach the Ywarma Sayadaw. He said, "I will help."[30]

The initiator monks of the movement thus approached Ywarma Sayadaw as an appropriate person who could unite monks and laypeople and form a movement organization. He used to be a political prisoner due to his involvement in the 1988 uprising. Being released from prison, he stayed away from politics but later started working for the State Sangha Maha Nayaka[31] Committee organization till his retirement in 2011 as the Vice-Chairperson. "*Sar-thin-taik*" or "learning monasteries" in Myanmar are similar to universities in Western sense, hosting and teaching a large number of young monks for monastic and religious studies–the biggest monasteries like "Masoyein Monastery"[32] have almost 3000 monks. Ywarma Sayadaw, being a famous scholar monk, has been the head monk of his "Inn Sein Ywarma Monastery" that has almost 500 student monks for Buddhist studies. Apart from this, he also hosts summer programs–short programs for monks from all over the country. As within the Buddhist order, monks have the strongest

[29] Ibid.
[30] Interview with U Aung Myaing, Aug 3, 2015, Yangon.
[31] This committee is a state-backed Supreme Committee for Buddhist Order in Myanmar.
[32] U Wirathu is a lecturer-monk from Masoyein monastery.

hierarchy–the head monk is highly revered and obeyed by the young student monks.[33] Thus his network is not only about his big monastery, but an extensive network of "kyaung-tai" Sayadaws (head monks of monasteries). Young monks study in big monasteries and leave to become "*kyaung-tai*" Sayadaws in different places, mostly their native towns. The yearly turn over in a big monastery like Inn Sein Ywarma Monastery is about 200 young monks per year. U Parmaukha, a former student monk in Ywarma monastery, explained that this situation equipped the Ywarma Sayadaw with a broad network of monks all over the country. His previous position as vice-chair in the state-led Sangha Maha Nayaka body is an advantage for him to unite up the whole network of head monks. While critics commented the MaBaTha organization emerged because the Ywarma Sayadaw wanted the chairpersonship of a big organization,[34] this huge network of monks and monasteries provided the MaBaTha movement the necessary might to start organizing.

The first meeting to form an organization held at Inn Sein Ywarma Monastery– though attended by eight leader monks–was in fact representative of all layers of monks in the country. The composition of the first meeting included three kinds of monks:– scholar monks with big monasteries, preacher monks and tipitaka monks. They all have strong connections with Ywarma Sayadaw–either as former students in his monastery or as acquaintances. U Wirathu and U Paññā Wara used to live together in Masoyein Monastery. This meeting aimed to convince all layers of monks to support this organization. It is important here to understand the nature of monks and their roles: Tipitaka Sayadaws, preacher monks, and heads of the student monasteries. Tipitaka exams

[33] Interview with Dr Thawpaka, Aug 4, 2015, Yangon; U Parmaukha, Central Committee member, Aug 2, 2015, Yangon .
[34] Interview with Moe Thu (Mandalay), Aug 3, 2015, Yangon.

are the highest examinations in the monastic order–requiring monks to recite the whole scripture.[35] Thus, any monk who passes this examination becomes a Tipitaka Sayadaw and is highly revered both by the Sangha and the laity. They are one of the most influential monks. Preacher monks also have a big audience and influence over laypersons as they go around the country to give Dhamma talks. They make direct contact with the public and depending on popularity, he might give almost 200 sermons a year. U Wirathu and U Paññā Wara are preacher monks. U Wirathu noted that though he can be regarded as a preacher monk, as he still serves as a teacher monk which limits him to travel extensively throughout the country giving Dhamma talks, he could only give around 50 sermons a year.[36] The topic of the sermons varies depending on the monks.[37]For the MaBaTha movement to get support from the layperson, preacher monks are regarded as a source to distribute the ideology and to educate people not to be nonchalant about the "impending danger" to race and religion. Thus, duties are assigned for U Thilekkandarbhivamsa and U Eaindapala, two tipitaka Sayadaws, to convince tipitaka Sayadaws; for U Paññā Wara and U Wirathu to convince preacher monks; and Ywarma Sayadaw to convince heads of the student monasteries.

Meanwhile, the response by Speaker of the Union Parliament–on his trip to the US–to questions regarding how the government would respond to hate speech by the 969 movement changed the political opportunities of the movement. Thura Shwe Man answered that "action would be taken". This might have alarmed the 969 monks and sympathizers (May Sitt Paing 2013; Kipgen 2013). The state-Sangha body also issued a directive banning the use of 969 symbol for inappropriate

[35] For details of the nature of the exam and the voluminous amount of scriptures to recite, see Win Pe (1999).
[36] Interview with U Wirathu, Aug 11, 2015, Mandalay.
[37] For the nature of a sermon, see O'Connor (2015).

purposes without defining what was entitled as "inappropriate purposes". This opportunity shift required monks to reconsider the 969 movement–to be able to continue the movement but to not have problems with the government and the state-Sangha body.[38]Therefore, at the first summit for the MaBaTha organization at the Saykeindaryama monastery on June 13, 2013, the already infamous 969 leader monks were invited. The 969 monks did not know why they were invited and had doubts if the senior monks would ask them to stop their movement. But they were insisted to attend that meeting by the host and they went.[39] The summit echoed the State-led Sangha body's announcement on the use of the 969 symbol–not to use it inappropriately. But the expression "inappropriate" was rather vague. The 969 monks accepted the Summit's decision–they participated very actively under the leadership of the senior monks.[40] When the co-founder of the Thathana Palaka Ganawasaka Sangha Network, U Thatdhamma, declared on the first anniversary of the MaBaTha that all the groups and networks linked and established by the Ganawasaka network were by nature the MaBaTha members, the MaBaTha became very strong with a countrywide network.

After this meeting, the meeting to officially launch the MaBaTha organization was held two weeks later in Aung San Taw Ya Tat-U Kyaung. More than one thousand monks from all over the country attended this meeting and they selected the central executive committee of the MaBaTha. This committee was composed of people from the three different networks: the 969 movement, the Theravada Dhamma Network, U Thathana Wara from the Dhamma School Foundation and individual monks including U Paññā Wara and U Wirathu. U Aung Myaing recounted, "The

[38] Interview with U Aung Myaing, Aug 3, 2015, Yangon.
[39] Interview with U Thatdhamma, Aug 16, 2015, Mawlamyine.
[40] ibid.

committee had formed and a meeting was called. But no one knew what they would discuss and how the constitution for the organization would be formed. Some people even did not know each other. Only at 10p.m. in a closed door meeting, the meeting assigned U Thathana Wara from Dhamma School and me (Aung Myaing) to draw a constitution."[41] This meeting declared officially that the MaBaTha would be collecting signatures to petition for a "myo-zaunt" law (the laws to protect race and religion).[42]

4.2.2 The interaction of the movement with the political opposition

The movement's aim to pass an anti-marriage law got a huge amount of media attention–rather negatively to say the least. Media started to report that this would be led by U Wirathu and thus the movement achieved negative attention from the media.[43] However, the proposed draft law by the MaBaTha included the requirement for a non-Buddhist to be converted to Buddhism if he wants to marry a Buddhist woman. If this requirement was not fulfilled, the sentence of 10 years in prison was proposed in the draft and all belongings and properties shall be taken over and given to the Buddhist woman.[44] This turned a new page in the MaBaTha movement regarding the movement's use of political opportunities and the potential to form new alliances. The movement had to justify its actions. Frames were evolved from this period onwards–both within the form of Buddhist context and within the framework of human rights. These frames and some recurrent frames will be discussed in later chapter, especially devoted for framing. In this section, I will discuss how the movement interacts with the democratic forces, which was the political opposition at that time, and how they became close to the military-back government. As the movement itself

[41] Interview with U Aung Myaing, Aug 3, 2015, Yangon.
[42] Interview with Dr Thawpaka, Aug 4, 2015, Yangon; U Wirathu, Aug 11, 2015, Mandalay.
[43] Interview with U Paññā Wara, Aug 18, 2015, Yangon.
[44] The emergency Buddhist women marriage law (draft)

can become an independent variable causing an impact on the opportunities and the organizational strength(McAdam, 52), I will argue that the military-back government also used the movement to campaign for themselves and against the political opposition.

Due to the obvious neglect of human rights in the proposed draft, Aung San Suu Kyi–when asked by a reporter of her opinion on this upcoming agenda by the monks to pass a law–replied that this was a violation of human rights and women rights (*Radio Free Asia* 2014). Myo Yan Naung Thein, who was the secretary of the Central Research Committee, also made a comment in a local media that the "myo-zaunt laws" were a form of "cheap and petty politics"[45]. Monks were confused and bewildered by the leaders' candid comments.[46] They thought these laws were necessary to protect Buddhist women from non-Buddhists, especially Muslims.[47]

This can be seen as a period when the MaBaTha monks did not know what to continue to pass the laws. Instead, they put efforts into organizing the campaign to get more signatures. They preached about the importance of this "myo-zaunt" law in their sermons. For monks, it is not a tedious work of organizing a crowd, finding a place and giving a talk like politicians. They gave sermons on the need of these laws on several types of occasions–the novice-initiation ceremony, regular annual talks, or food-donation ceremonies ("sun-kywe"). This makes an innumerable amount of sermons and an uncountable amount of followers are there. "For the monks who went back from the summit, the campaign to get signatures for a petition was rather a simple job," recounted Sayadaw

[45] Interview with U Aung Myaing, Aug 3, 2015, Yangon.
[46] Interview with U Paññā Wara, Aug 18, 2015, Yangon.
[47] Interview with Dr Thawpaka, Aug 4, 2015, Yangon; Myazedi Sayadaw, Aug 16, 2015, Mawlamyine; U Wirathu, Aug 11, 2015, Mandalay.

U Wimalabuddhi, better known as Myazedi Sayadaw who is the General Secretary of the MaBaTha organization. He continued:

> *It's not like politicians having to go from door to door or trying to gather his or her followers for a talk. We as monks do not need to do that. People are easily convinced to sign the petition when they come and visit the monastery. They go back to their home and ask other people as well to go to the monastery and sign the petition.*[48]

Within less than one month of the signature campaign, the MaBaTha declared on July 21, 2013 that they have collected around 1.5 million signatures for the petition.[49] U Wirathu mentioned:

> *In 2013, we have already got 4 and a half million signatures, within a month. I am responsible for upper Myanmar. I got 10 million kyats from U Paññā Wara, who is responsible for lower Myanmar. We made photocopies of the petition sheets. I asked the monks from this monastery to distribute them to their respective villages. I even made a temporary pandal in front of my monastery, and using a loud speaker, I urged them to sign–some people were still afraid. Whenever I went, a lot of people came and signed. When a lot of people were seen signing the petition, people did not have fear anymore. Thus, I collected a lot of signatures for the petition.*[50]

While the MaBaTha–mostly in rural areas–was quite successful in collecting signatures for the petition, the topic became quite controversial in urban areas. Wirathu being such an infamous and controversial figure, and as he was the one who was trying to provoke and incite the racial and religious hatred, people were afraid that the "myo-zaunt" laws would come out as they had thought. Even the name the "myo-zaunt" law is already something to criticize. The head monks of the monastery tried hard to collect more and more signatures so that they could make a legitimate claim. Meanwhile, in the whole country, the riots between Muslims and Buddhists were happening and the potential for more attacks were rising. In this situation, the agenda to propose the "myo-

[48] Interview with Myazedi Sayadaw, Aug 16, 2015, Mawlamyine.
[49] Announcement No.6, MaBaTha
[50] Interview with U Wirathu, Aug 11, 2015, Mandalay.

zaunt" laws indeed seemed to most of the political actors an inappropriate response and something that could ruin their name internationally. Thus, the "myo-zaunt" laws had an indeterminate future. U Paññā Wara emphasized the point how difficult it became to contact to NLD legislators after the opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi publicly condemned the proposal to make the "myo-zaunt" law.

The attempt by the MaBaTha to convince civil society and rights activists also failed. When these groups express their concern with the proposed marriage law by the MaBaTha, the MaBaTha held a workshop, in response, to discuss the proposed "myo-zaunt" laws, and invited famous politicians and rights activists, including Ko Ko Gyi of the 88 generation. The monks wanted to listen to what they had to say.[51] But the rights activists were upset when they encountered it was hard to explain the monks why these "myo-zaunt" laws were not only inappropriate but also breaching standard human rights.[52] Monks were also disappointed with politicians and rights activists, especially after Ko Ko Gyi, one of the most important politicians who had asked for this workshop, and other well-known activists did not show up on the second day of the workshop.[53]

With lack of support from the political opposition led by pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, the monks changed their opinion on her. Almost all leader monks of the movement I interviewed replied that they used to have a lot of respect and reverence to her. U Wirathu, the Time magazine's face of terror, hang up a wall poster of the opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi in his monastery.

[51] Interview with Dr. Thawpaka, Aug 4, 2015, Yangon; U Parmaukha, Aug 2, 2015, Yangon; U Aung Myaing, Aug 3, 2015, Yangon.
[52] Interview with Myo Lin, civil society activist, Aug 9, 2015, Mandalay.
[53] Interview with Dr. Thawpaka, Aug 4, 2015, Yangon; U Parmaukha, Aug 2, 2015, Yangon .

During an interview, one close disciple of U Wirathu described his fondness of the lady by using English word "crazy".[54] U Thatdhamma, the leader of the Mawlamyine Ganawasaka Sangha Network, enthusiastically told the author how he actively campaigned for a huge public welcome on her visit to Mawlamyine in 2013, spending a lot of money. However, the movement was disappointed when reportedly she said she was against the idea of the "myo-zaunt" law. Monks thought that at least she should have a glance of what is proposed in that "myo-zaunt" law.[55] U Paññā Wara noted, "It was impetuous and politically unacceptable that the lady did not read it at all–let alone gathering information on what the movement really wanted." The monks tried to contact NLD to meet and explain her what was proposed in there several times but no meeting resulted.[56] The frustration that the lady did not want to meet up and let them give a chance to explain to her was clearly expressed in a very upset tone by one of the secretary monks (a tipitaka monk) during the 2nd anniversary summit of the MaBaTha movement. The monk's frustration was very high: in his address to the audience, U Thilekkhandarbhivamsa said, "the fact that even a word of promise– like she(Aung San Suu Kyi) is not neglecting the urges and aspirations of the monks and the people–was not uttered by her shows that she is not considering to protect race and religion."[57] These situations made the religious nationalistic monks and supporters hope less on Aung San Suu Kyi for their cause.

4.2.4 The movement and the Suu Kyi "presidency"

At the same time, the opposition started a signature campaign in May 2014 ((Ei Ei Toe Lwin 2014a) for constitutional reforms–especially targeted at article 436, which describes the provisions

[54] Interview with Pyay Way, formerly a monk, Aug 24, 2015, Yangon.
[55] Interview with U Aung Myaing, Aug 3, 2015, Yangon.
[56] Interview with U Paññā Wara, Aug 18, 2015, Yangon.
[57] Speech by U Thilekkhandarbhivamsa at 2nd anniversary of the MaBaTha organization.

for constitutional amendments, and article 59 (f) which forbids the leader of the opposition to be eligible as a presidential candidate[58]. The campaign's slogan is that "every citizen shall be eligible for the presidential post". This was strongly disliked by the MaBaTha movement because there was a huge fear that Muslims and people of other faith might become the president of the country if every citizen is eligible. Currently, only a citizen belonging to 135 "national" races is eligible for presidency.[59] The concern was based on the assumption that a Muslim president would not promote the religion of Buddhism and would not protect the race.[60] The fact that people can elect the president in a democracy if and only if they like, did not convince them. Several monks I interviewed argued that the OIC and rich Muslim countries would try to rule the country via a Muslim president with huge financial support. Monks also mentioned that they had no intention of getting involved in politics only with one exception–if it became related to *national* affairs ("Amyothayay"[61]).[62]The emphasis of being a "taing-yin-thar"[63] to be eligible for the president is necessary. He said, "the campaign started to amend the article 59(f), but the proposal gradually changed to amend the article 59(b) instead."[64] He even referred to the country's founding father, General Aung San, claiming that thr article 59(f) was invented by Aung San himself, to protect the country from foreign influence. U Ko Ni, the interlocutor of this campaign, happened to be a

[58] The article requires that spouse, children and their spouses of a presidential candidate should not be citizens of a foreign country. Aung San Suu Kyi has two British sons.
[59] The article 59b of the constitution requires the President to be "a citizen of Myanmar who was born of both parents who were born in the territory under the jurisdiction of the Union and being Myanmar Nationals".
[60] Interview with U Paññā Wara, Aug 18, 2015, Yangon.
[61] The term is in fact complex to translate. The official translation is "national" but "*amyo*" means "race" and "yay" means "affairs". So it can also be transliterated as "the affairs for the race".
[62] Ibid; Interview with U Wirathu, Aug 11, 2015, Mandalay; with U Thatdhamma, Aug 16, 2015, Mawlamyine.
[63] The constitution limits citizens who are not "Myanmar nationals" to be eligible for president. To be a national, a person must belong to one of the 135 groups of ethnic nationalities. See more Holliday (2014, 410).
[64] Interview with U Paññā Wara, Aug 18, 2015, Yangon. Compare this to the above footnote.

Muslim, and this augmented monks' concerns and fears that the opposition party had become a hub for Muslims.[65] A public talk by NLD for the Union day–U Ko Ni was planned to be a speaker–had to be cancelled in February, 2014 because the MaBaTha monks objected to him as a speaker (Wa Lone 2014).

In the article 74(1) of the 1947 constitution, the law only requires–to be eligible as a member of the legislature–not be be a foreign citizen and not to "enjoy rights and privileges of a subject or a citizen of foreign power"("The Constitution of the Union of Burma, 1947" 1947). It did not limit one to be born of parents of Myanmar nationals or to have children who are foreign citizens. But both the USDP, the party in power, and the MaBaTha organization used the rhetoric that the article 59f of 2008 constitution was invented by Aung San himself to hinder the constitutional reform campaign of the political opposition.[66] This controversy also separated the monks from the opposition because they perceived the opposition's attempt to change the constitution as a potential threat to safeguard the race and religion.

As the monks were not happy with the current situation, they tried to show their public concerns in the forms of protests to support the "myo-zaunt" law. Three public protests were held in Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon and Mandalay.[67] The protests included very emotional talks, e.g., Yin Yin Nu, a writer in Mandalay, got into tears while she was giving a talk for the need to protect race and religion.[68] The signature campaigns in support for the "myo-zaunt" laws were held all over the

[65] Interview with U Paññā Wara, Aug 18, 2015, Yangon; U Wirathu, Aug 11, 2015, Mandalay.
[66] Interview with Moe Thu (Mandalay), Aug 3, 2015, Yangon; Myo Lin, Aug 9, 2015, Mandalay.
[67] Interview with Dr Thawpaka, Aug 4, 2015, Yangon.
[68] Video Record of the protest in Mandalay by the MaBaTha organization, Upper Myanmar.

country. This is the time where the MaBaTha began relentlessly looking for potential allies and started to look out to the ruling USDP party. [69]

4.2.4 Close alliance with the ruling party

The movements wanted their agenda to be taken up by the opposition but it was so bitterly objected and criticised by rights activists and opposition alike. They have thus started working closely with the government–they took up a position that if the government would fulfil what they wanted, then be it as it may. And the frustrations towards the opposition got higher as the opposition started to accuse them of having a secret deal with the government. The religious affairs minister visited Ywarma Sayadaw several times after the petition with 1.5 million signatures were submitted to the President.[70] A booklet published and sold at the MaBaTha headquarters described the situation: "Probably the promulgation of the myo-zaunt laws is a political opportunity opening up for President U Thein Sein. But indeed, he had the chance to perform a duty which other political parties did not want to undertake" (Aung Myaing 2014, 64). The president submitted four sets of bills– on religious conversion, interfaith marriage, monogamy and population control– to the parliament in February, 2014 (Ei Ei Toe Lwin 2014b; *Radio Free Asia* 2014). The bills were discussed in parliament, mainly from USDP members and approved in August, 2015. The MaBaTha held a huge ceremony to commemorate this special occasion at Thuwunna stadium in Yangon, and it was attended by 30,000 people. Wirathu said, "I am especially grateful to the President, who has enacted the race and religion protection laws despite international pressure"(Ghosh 2015).

[69] Interview with U Parmaukha, Aug 2, 2015, Yangon .
[70] Interview with U Paññā Wara, Aug 18, 2015, Yangon; U Parmaukha, Aug 2, 2015, Yangon; Lin Htin and Kyaw Thiha, researchers, Center for Diversity and National Harmony, Sep 15, 2015, Yangon.

This chapter argues that due to the ability to use up political opportunities and having an organizational strength as monks, the contemporary MaBaTha movement grew immensely. Using anti-Muslim discourses in a time where the tensions between the two communities simmered into conflict, the movement was spread widely and wildly over the country. The role of social, cultural and network factors are discussed while providing a dynamic account of how the movement recruited leaders, followers and laypeople. Opp mentions that in a social movement, certain events can change the incentives of movement actors in different directions (2009, 19). Following this, I also argue that though the MaBaTha leaders wanted the opposition to take their stand and support the laws and promulgate it as soon as possible, the time factor, due to the opposition's unwillingness to take this up as their agenda led to the fact that the movement became closer to the government. The opposition was occupied with the proposal to reform the constitution to be more democratic and controversially to be able to make the opposition leader the president. Thus the government took up a position. The government took advantage of this and started supporting the MaBaTha movement, probably as a campaign strategy.[71]

[71] Interview with Moe Thu (Mandalay), Aug 3, 2015, Yangon; Myo Lin, Aug 9, 2015, Mandalay; Lin Htin and Kyaw Thiha, Sep 15, 2015, Yangon.

CHAPTER 5 – THE FRAMES OF THE MABATHA MOVEMENT

Till now, I have described the organizational initiation and the internal dynamics of the movement. But as Opp argues structural perspectives are incomplete if it does not include identity and framing for consideration (Opp 2009, 21). In this chapter, I discuss the frames of the movement, which resulted from the MaBaTha monks' sermons/magazines, and other responses from monks and laypersons who do not agree with either form or content of the MaBaTha movement. While the mainstream media outlets frequently reports the activities of the movement, the movement requires means of public outreach to propagate its central claims and to respond to the media reports. The MaBaTha movement publishes weekly "Thar-ki-thwe" journal and other publications such as speeches and meeting records, and this is the means to reach to the public. Analyzing the discourses and articles published in these journals can provide us which frames are used for the movement, how these frames develop over the course of time in dynamic social interaction and how the movement frames relate themselves to the Buddhist culture in the country. This part of the analysis looks for how the perception or the fear of the need to protect race and religion evolved with regard to the framing process. I argue that while the Buddhist monks in Myanmar spread the ultra-nationalistic and anti-Muslim sentiments, they have to try their frames fit into the "sacred" Theravada Buddhist doctrine, where Buddhist monks are not supposed to be involved in mundane activities. This provide the legitimacy and subsequent public support for the movement as the framing process can relate itself to the religious Buddhist doctrine as religion still persists as an important identity for most of the Burmese population. Gravers (2015) suggests that the anti-Muslim claims center around the perception of Buddhism as "endangered identity". Not completely disagreeing with him for this argument, as some of the frames include depicting Buddhism as "endangered identity", instead most of the frames center around the claim that the

need to preserve Buddhism is compatible with Theravada Buddhist doctrine or in other way, in the will of the Buddha.

In fact, there was already a precedence where Buddhist monks had to try to frame their political vision as in accord with the Buddhist doctrine. One striking example is by U Ottama, the prominent nationalist monk during independence struggle. While he tried to urge people to fight for independence, he framed this within Buddhism arguing how the Buddha made self-sacrifice in the Pancavudha Jartaka[72], and another jartaka story of the king money who sacrificed his life for the good of his fellow moneys (Sarkisyanz 1965, 132). In the same way, during the course of the movement, it has to legitimize the claims for the continuity of the social mobilization process by using jataka stories.

5.1 Frames to justify the activities within the Buddhist doctrine

The activities of the MaBaTha mainly emphasize to safeguard and protect the Bamar race and Buddhism, resulting in discrimination and neglect for other races and religions. Although discourses are made in a manner that they aim to protect all 135 races, it is simply a rhetoric because the identity that the MaBaTha maintains and promotes is based upon the Bamar race and Buddhist faith. Thus, they made it clear that all the 135 national races they aim to protect will come into account only if they are Buddhists (MaBaTha's statement(a)). They blatantly neglected the fact that national races in Myanmar confess different faiths, not limiting only to Buddhism. Whenever they responded to media, they claimed that they were trying to protect all the 135

[72] Jartaka stories are a collection of stories of the Buddha's previous lives.

national races but in reality they never differentiated how they would protect the Kachin race, e.g., which was one of the national races and predominantly confessed the faith of Christianity.

Doctrinal Buddhism cannot justify the activities of the MaBaTha movement because they are discriminatory. The doctrinal Buddhism teaches non-discrimination and loving kindness to all beings. But the movement used frames to justify their activities within the framework of Buddhism. Here the frames serve to make readers or people believe that their activities are according to the teachings of Buddhism. Buddhists are familiar with the thirty-eight virtues as taught by the Buddha. One includes "to support your relatives". The MaBaTha extends the semantic meaning of "relatives" to "race", using Jartaka stories of the Buddha's previous lives (Ashin Thuganda 2013: 31; Ashin Thawparka 2013: 11; Ashin Wunna Thiri 2013: 18). The stories tell how the future Buddha-to-be in his lives as animals, always serves or tries to serve for the welfare of the race. They point out the three ways the future Buddha-to-be practises to become a Buddha and one way is "nyattatta cariya" (i.e. for the welfare of relatives). This frame is furthermore supported by the claim saying "One who looks only for himself is selfish and narrow-minded" (Thuganda 2013, 31). The doctrinal Theravada tradition sees the ultimate aim of it to use the Buddha's teachings to be liberated in this very life (Reynolds 1979, 18). But this principle or teaching is totally put aside by all these discursive processes. Instead of following the Buddha's original teachings, they try to relate to the past stories of the Buddha and imply that even the Buddha cares to protect the race. The claims become like "to protect one's own race is within the Buddha's doctrine" (Thuganda 2013, 31).

This is further clear in the famous Sitagu monk's sermon. Once he was asked when he practiced meditation, he replied "I did not meditate at all. … Because by chance, if I got enlightenment, all

my charity activities including hospitals, universities and *parahita* (welfare) work would have to be stopped. That's why I have postponed "nirvana". I don't meditate or try to get nirvana" (Nanissara 2013a, 12). This outlook is against the face value of Theravada Buddhism but it makes the readers or the followers believe that the actions of the MaBaTha movement are within the Theravada Buddhist doctrine. Another frame tries to argue that all the activities and the myo-zaunt laws are according to six principles/conducts for Buddhist monks (Narada 2013, 43-44).

5.2 Active process of framing

Due to the outbreaks of communal violence in Myanmar in 2013, the Organization for Islamic Countries (OIC) representatives came to Myanmar to inquire about the circumstances. They discussed about having a resident OIC representative office in the country. Then the MaBaTha movement started to protest against the possibility of an OIC representative in the country. They outreached to the public that the biggest organization after the United Nations(UN) in the world was the OIC, which is composed of fifty-seven Islamic countries. One article argues that the Muslim countries in the UN can vote always in favour for the Muslims making the claim that the presence of an office for permanent representative for OIC in Myanmar can be an issue threatening the sovereignty of the country (Daweindabivimmsa 2013, 46; Nanissara 2013b, 8). At the same time, when the Rohingya issue broke out, the frames were that the Rohingyas are illegal Bengali immigrants threatening the stability and the position of Buddhism within the society. They tried to use these frames not only to appeal to the opposites but also to gain more support from those who already believed in their activities.

5.3. Negotiated Frames

The activities of the MaBaTha movement with regard to hate speech and communal violence outbreaks were questioned by the media. In response to questions on whether this was in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha, one monk writes, "When it is asked that the doctrine is to avoid all evil, that is true. But when it is about your welfare and the welfare of the world or your race, defensive action should be taken in accordance with dhamma/vinaya (the teachings and the rules)" (Thawparka 2013, 12). In this statement, it is made clear that the action should be in accordance with the rules but how to be in accordance with which rules is never made clear. It is intentionally made vague so that people believe that this is in a way justifiable within Theravada Buddhism. Similar frames center around the narrative that these activities are all to make a fence to protect your own house as it were, and people who love their race and religion should not complain about this (Thudhammasarabivimmsa 2013, 9-10). The movement also urged Buddhists not to buy or deal with Muslim businesses and particularly stick to the Buddhist own businesses. These are also made justifiable by the frames mentioning that this is in a way "to propagate the Buddhist sasana (teachings)" (Thawparka 2013, 12-13; Tilokarbhivamsa 2014, 8). The framing includes misquoting the famous Mingun Sayadaw not to do business with people of other faiths.[73]

5.4 Misinformed Frames

Frame contests occur throughout the movement process (Benford and Snow 2000, 625). A frame does not necessarily need to be true though the word "frame" already suggests the intention behind it to manipulate or provide modified or conditioned information. But we presume that at least a

[73] Interview with U Thatdhamma, Aug 16, 2015.

frame ought to use at least on some facts. In a country like Myanmar, where education level of the public is considerably low, media is not competent enough to provide necessary or at least required information so that people can decide whether the information in a frame is reliable or plausible; people tend to believe "authority", i.e. in this case the religious authority. The MaBaTha movement involves several misinformed or false frames. One of the most interesting ones comes from the world famous Sitagu Sayadaw, who is believed by many to be competent in English language. Hanna Beach in her controversial Time magazine article suggests that due to the Muslim conquering over Indonesia, Malaysia and other countries, Buddhist monks have a vague impression that they might face a similar fate in their country if they do not protect the religion (Beech 2013). But the Sitagu monk wrongly interpreted or made a frame that Hanna Beech, who was a reporter from world famous Time magazine, did not even know or tried to lie about Muslims conquering and converting the local Buddhists to Muslims in Indonesia, Malaysia, Afghanistan. And at an important summit of the MaBaTha organization, he talked about how Bangladesh used to be a culturally rich Buddhist land. In fact, he ironically supported Beech's claim that monks were worried or afraid of this coming into reality. The false frame here is that even global media like Time magazine was trying to conceal the fact that those countries used to be Buddhist countries, thus claiming they had an agenda, and urging people to boycott the Time magazine and the reporter (Nanissara 2013b; 2013c, 52-53). The government took action in this suggested fashion, banning that issue of Time magazine and banning her further entry to report the country (Myitmakha News Agency 2013). In this way, the leaders of the movement explicitly suggested that the enemy of the entire races and Buddhist population is the Muslims.

5.5 The Anti-Muslim frames

The immediate cause for the emergence is the MaBaTha movement is in fact due to the communal violence between the Rakhines (one of the eight major ethnic groups in the country) and the allegedly illegal immigrants (Bengali) or Rohingya–the term they use to call themselves. But the anti-Muslim sentiment is prevalent in Myanmar throughout history due to the poor socialization between the Buddhists and Muslims, not like between Buddhists and Christians (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2013a, 136–148). Thus, the movement frames never try to differentiate between native Muslims and the controversial issue of people at the Burmese-Bangladesh border. One leading monk, Wirathu is quoted as saying "around 90% of Muslims in Myanmar are "radical bad people" (Beech 2013).

Another blatant "false" frame concerns with the controversial "myo-zaunt" laws, which are claimed to protect Buddhist Burmese women from forced conversion and to provide appropriate legal rights in their marriage. In fact, already existing and legally effective (till this new bill is promulgated as law) 1952 Burmese Buddhist women special marriage act provided all necessary legal and material rights to Buddhist Burmese women (Horsey 2015). Notwithstanding this fact, the duty to promulgate this "myo-zaunt" law has, since the founding days of the organization and hence the founding day of the movement, been one of the two principle ambitions of the movement (the MaBaTha organization 2013, 1). In defending this controversial "myo-zaunt" laws, the monks use several false frames. They see, in the light of the communal violence, the cause of the outbreaks was one conspiracy where one group of people tried to rape a Buddhist woman and when the public got outrageous due to this and responded to this violently, Buddhist homes were set to fire. In fact, this is totally upside down with what had happened on ground. In almost every communal

outbreak, Muslim minorities were those who suffered most (Nyi Nyi Kyaw 2015). But the monks saw these outbreaks were caused because there were no legal protection against Buddhist women from Muslim "hunters". Thus, whenever they talked about the need of a law, they talked about the situations before the formation of the 1952 law, (thus inciting anger and sympathy from the Buddhist crowd for its own female population), then neglected the existence of 1952 law and concluded that the country was in urgent need of a law to protect the race (Natmingyi 2013, 16). When criticisms from other camps of monks came out that this can be an act which would be monks no longer entitled to monkhood (parajika), the monks from the movement defended that as they did not do this intentionally targeting any particular person, i.e. on anonymity; they argue this law was totally in accordance with *dhamma* (the doctrine) and *vinaya* (the code of conduct for monks to follow). When human rights activists attacked this is not what proper *Sangha* (the Buddhist order) should do, they put the blame back on them using the discourse that because human rights activists do not really protect the rights of their female citizens, the monks have to do all these instead (Moe Tain Shwecar 2013, 23-24) and this is in fact in accordance with duties of the monkhood (Thura Nanda 2013, 43).

At the same time, the organization always makes a self-image that they are never discriminatory and they do not have any prejudice or hate to a particular group or religion. Rather they are simply trying to protect the race and religion from external enemies. When the protests broke out against the proposed presence of OIC in the country, the MaBaTha headquarters issued out a statement blaming those who used placards reading "Islam is an animalistic religion to propagate by breeding fast and we are against it"; the headquarters stated that this kind of behaviour is discriminatory and against the MaBaTha's established rules and norms (the MaBaTha's statement 11/2013).

In this chapter, I discuss the frames evolved during the course of time of the MaBaTha movement. While the MaBaTha needed frames to convince, mobilize and recruit supporters, the framing process started from the beginning of the movement as they declared their intention to make the laws to protect race and religion. This was seen as inappropriate for Buddhist monks and thus the movement's frames are mainly focused on justifying their activities to make laws. Other frames include anti-Muslim frames, misinformed frames. This chapter also discusses how the frames are negotiated throughout the process in a dynamic way.

CONCLUSION

Democratic transition in Myanmar starting from 2011 has brought forth liberalization in economic and political arenas. This can be seen as a structural shift providing political opportunities for challengers–protests and demonstrations were allowed legally for first time in almost five decades. The contemporary MaBaTha movement, composed of and led mainly by Buddhist monks, emerged by spreading anti-Muslim discourses and demonstrations while anti-Muslim sentiments were already dormant in the country. The anti-Muslim demonstrations particularly emerged in response to the immediate communal violence in the country's southwest Rakhine State. While the communal tensions in Rakhine State were at first between ethnic national Rakhines and self-acclaimed Rohingya Muslims–the controversy being on the ethnic status of Rohingya people, these protests and movements united to form the contemporary MaBaTha movement, largely targeting Muslims without differentiation between ethnic Muslims and Rohingyas. The MaBaTha organization emerged as a social movement organization. When social movement manages to change public life, it goes into contentious politics (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). When the MaBaTha tried to pass laws to protect race and religion, it went into contentious politics and finally succeeded with the result of four laws. The MaBaTha movement is one of the biggest social movements in the country, having a wide coverage of local chapters in 220 townships, out of 330 total in Myanmar.

This study tries to answer the question how this movement was initiated, sustained and arrived at preferred political goals, emphasizing the role of the social movement organization or the role of agency. While political opportunities provide space and structural advantages for actors, this study argues that the MaBaTha movement is a composite of pre-existing social networks based on the

concern or fear of minority Muslims. The trajectory of the movement is explained by using the political process model of social movement theory. The wide social networks–networks among monks themselves and networks with laity–provided monks the tools to organize the campaign. These networks were united under influential monks. The monk's role in social and religious arenas are immense that they could easily turn their existing networks to form a huge movement organization. The role of the cultural and strategic processes is also explained–especially with regard to how laity is easily convinced when requested by monks to sign petitions.

The MaBaTha movement entered into the realm of politics when it tried to pass the laws. The movement was criticized for muddling religion and politics. To sustain the movement, it had to respond to these critics. This study argues that this is the start of the framing process where the MaBaTha had to justify its intentions and use religion as a discursive category– trying to validate their actions within the Theravada context–to convince both the elites and grass-root supporters. The role of frames, counter-frames, and recurrent frames can be observed. I argue that the most recurrent frame throughout the movement is the legitimizing frame–the activities of the movement are in accord with the teachings of the Buddha and Theravada doctrine.

The movement allied with the ruling party after negative interaction with the political opposition. The dynamics are discussed–especially when the opposition wanted to amend the constitution to let Aung San Suu Kyi become president, but the MaBaTha movement opposed this move as a necessary safeguard for protection of race and religion. The Thein Sein government used this movement by passing the laws they wanted–with apparent reason to win political support from movement sympathizers. Social movement literature concentrates mainly on opponents

challenging the state power. In this case, the movement tried to influence the policy process in the form of politicisation of religion, where the movement actors asked for a passage of laws based on religious nationalism. The nature of religious nationalism and the legitimizing role of Buddhist monks and their influence seems to be a winning card for the power in the election for the then government. This is also the case of political authority using religion for their desired affects.

The MaBaTha movement–a loosely decentralized movement body with the political preference to pass the laws to protect race and religion–has now finished its immediate task. The movement now turns its attention to the case of anti-Rohingya and anti-Muslim campaigns, and activities and Buddhist classes for young school children. The movement is now not very active politically, but it can revive again if the current government would try to repeal the previous four sets of laws. The fact that anti-Muslim sentiment is still strong in the country remains as one of the challenges for the newly elected government–to unite the country in peace and harmony, and to provide religious minorities equal opportunities as citizens.

Under authoritarian dictatorship, the 2007 saffron revolution was largely composed of monks. Upon the emergence of the MaBaTha movement, the monks who opposed the military regime in 2007 turned against the opposition and worked together with the military regime in light of the Muslim hatred. Due to gaps in socialization and dormant anti-Muslim sentiments in the country, monks started to mobilize people using anti-Muslim discourses when political opportunities emerged. During the authoritarian regime, a form of Buddhism called "socially engaged Buddhism" in which monks served society through a variety of charity organizations and clinics were not based on modern democratic values. Due mainly to the tendency to interpret democracy

and its tenets within Buddhism does not necessarily stop a form of religious nationalism when chances were given. Thus, monks started religious nationalistic movement against Muslims ignoring the rights of minorities and moved away from the democratic opposition. The Dhamma schools, a former participating network of the MaBaTha movement, have a different idea not to spread anti-Muslim hatred–at least in the leadership level. But on ground, the hosts of the Dhamma schools are mostly members of the MaBaTha organization. It is apparent that the impact of the MaBaTha movement will result in negative attitudes towards Muslims resulting in negative long term socialization between people of different faiths.

Though the MaBaTha monks hinted not to vote for National League for Democracy (NLD) (Samet 2015), people voted for NLD in a landslide faction. However, this does not give a ground to say that the MaBaTha does not have enough influence. Possible hypotheses are that people preferred to vote against the authoritarian regime even after the MaBaTha hinted not to vote NLD, or that due to the fact the laws for protection of race and religion have already been promulgated, people hope that NLD might not appeal it and in this light voted for NLD.

The inclination to interpret modern democratic values within traditional belief systems will perhaps continue to exist–possibly in different ways. Aung San Suu Kyi, after her party took power in 2016, came to Yangon–the headquarters of the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee–to see the member Sayadaws. In her address[74]to the State Sangha body, she also refers to "dasa

[74] The formalities between the Sangha and the laity requires a translation other than an address. The State's newspaper uses "articulation of the government's policy". See "the Global"

raja Dhamma" (the ten king-law principles) and describes, "avirodha" which means the ruler should not oppose the will the people. In Burmese, she said "the royal authority should not go against the monks, novices and laity". She proposes that if this duty is fulfilled the duty to protect race and religion will be fulfilled as well. However she also emphasized that "the elected new government has an obligation to help and realize the wishes and aspirations, in accord with Dhamma, of the variety of ethnic people of different faiths" (Aung San Suu Kyi 2016) . Thus, she frames the four noble dhammas of "loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity" in line of non-discrimination based upon race, colour and faith. As it has been argued in the preceding chapters, religion as a discursive category is used to frame this time towards the ideals of non-discrimination. The frames of non-discrimination are put within the context of Theravada Buddhism. The ten kingly virtues are again emphasized giving the political signal that the government will not go against the will of the majority but at the same time, it has the obligation to take care of minorities of faith and race. In light of the anti-Muslim campaigns by the MaBaTha movement, and especially of individual monks, Walton and Hayward argue that "vague pronouncements in favour of "peace" will be insufficient to address the rhetoric of nationalist movements", and suggest that Theravada Buddhism has rich resources to be used to "inculcate attitudes and policies supporting religious pluralism"(2014, 51). Aung San Suu Kyi's speech can be seen as an implementation of this suggestion–at least in a rhetorical level. Religion and politics has closely intertwined in Myanmar in the form of ethno-religious nationalism. How the new democratically government will try to achieve multi-culturalism and religious harmony–especially for ethnic minorities– needs further attention. It is still a relevant question whether a new form of secular nationalism would emerge–given the fact that the constitution provides provisions for secular state.

APPENDIX

Interview Topic Guide

The formation of movement organization

motivations, aims (content), and tactics (structure)

Recruitment mechanisms

The MaBaTha movement's activities

- The promulgation of the "myo-zaunt" laws
- the MaBaTha's stand with anti-Muslim sentiments and anti-Muslim sermons
- Personal stand (What do you think of the anti-Muslim discourses and sermons preached by some MaBaTha monks?)
- Individual monks, their role and representation for the MaBaTha movement
- MaBaTha movement's public demonstrations
- Internal dynamics, organizational division of labor
- The MaBaTha movement and anti-Rohingya issue

The MaBaTha movement and the constitutional reform, especially for the article 59 (f)

The MaBaTha movement with other groups

- the interaction with the state/how the movement asks the parliament to promulgate the laws
- the interaction with the then opposition and human rights activists
- the relationship between the 969 campaign and the MaBaTha movement

To interviewees who do not share the MaBaTha's views

- Opinion on the MaBaTha movement
- Opinion on the need to protect race and religion
- Opinion on the 969 movement and the Dhamma school movement

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