

Religion, hate speech and social media in Myanmar:

Analysing methods of intervention

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ABSTRACT

Myanmar is home to one of the longest running intrastate conflicts in the world, involving a series of ethnic and religious clashes that have caused harm to all parties involved. The ideology of a homogeneity based on Buddhism and the Bamar ethnicity has marginalized minority groups, which make up a third of the population, and has particularly affected the Rakhine state's Buddhist and Muslim communities, the latter of which are subject to what international human rights organizations are calling an ethnic cleansing. Since the government relaxed restrictions to the access of foreign websites, the social media site Facebook has become a popular means to disseminate misinformation and rumours, and this has created mistrust and hatred against Muslims across the country, heightening the polarization between Buddhist and Muslim groups. This study will combine conflict analysis with the assessment of different approaches of countering hate speech to propose which methods of intervention are most suitable for this situation in Myanmar. Lederach argues that to counter hatred and avoid reoccurrence of violence, deep alterations of the parties' relationships is needed. This idea forms the basis for chapter three which examines educational methods, interfaith projects and social media campaigns to both prevent and change negative attitudes towards the religious 'Other'. It argues that education and awareness campaigns are more effective than the implementation of legal regulation as we need to combat the underlying issue. In addition to secondary sources, this study involved field research to collect information about how the youth are influenced by hate speech and counter hate campaigns in Myanmar.

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List of Abbreviations

NLD: National League for Democracy

SLORC: State Law and Order Restoration Council

Ma Ba Tha: The Association to Protect Race and Religion

Introduction

This thesis has been written as a response to the worrying rise of hate speech online and focuses primarily on Myanmar. It aims to analyse hate speech as a factor of Myanmar's internal conflicts and, through my own field research and an examination of existing literature, it attempts to suggest effective, long term methods to counter hate and build peace. Building peace and resolving conflict requires commitment to constructing a foundation of activities and actors, across all levels of society, which aim to achieve sustainable reconciliation.¹ As Wallensteen suggests, conflict resolution is far more than the absence of violence: it is the agreement of parties to respect each other and live together in peace.² Therefore, the core focus of this research is to discuss how Smile Education and Development Foundation can equip young people with the tools to challenge online hate speech and bring communities together.

This research is specifically focused on Buddhist hate speech, though this is not to suggest that there is no negative rhetoric or actions from Muslims or other minority groups. However, this study would suggest that by transforming negative attitudes towards Muslims and the religious/ethnic/cultural 'Other', the chance of future violence from either party decreases significantly.

Myanmar has a history of intrastate conflict which is largely down to the marginalization of minority groups; the Burman (Bamar) ethnic group constitutes two thirds of the country but controls the government and military, often failing to protect the rights of the ethnically diverse remainder of the country. To further understand the complex situation, a conflict assessment of Myanmar will be conducted in chapter one, using Mathew Levinger's four step assessment framework. The assessment will draw upon the marginalization of ethnic and religious groups as a driver of conflict and Buddhist/Muslim tensions, in addition to economic struggles and the oppressive military junta. It is important to address the key components of the conflict in

¹Lederach, J., (2003) *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*, Good Books, p.xvi.

²Wallensteen, P., (2012) *Understanding Conflict Resolution*, Sage, p.10.

Myanmar to understand how existing tensions can be exploited to spread hatred and mistrust against Muslims, who, as a consequence, are often blamed for problems within society.

One of the most common manifestations of religious intolerance, both in Myanmar and other contexts, is online hate speech. The internet has provided tools to enrich society, connect the world, and create educational information available to those who would not have had access to this before. However, these same tools have paradoxically become a platform to spread lies, prejudice and hatred that will often target religious or ethnic minority groups. Chapter two aims to deconstruct online hate speech and the consequences for Myanmar's Muslim community, focusing primarily on Facebook – the most used social media platform in the country. While such hate speech can be brushed off by some as bigoted ranting or merely painful words, many, including Foxman and Wolf (2013), and Waldron (2012), whose work is discussed in chapter two, believe it could serve as a warning sign for more severe consequences. Worryingly for targeted minority groups such as the Muslim community in Myanmar, hate speech's widespread appearance makes it seem increasingly acceptable. Once the youth become actively involved in these hate sites, they will be exposed to value sets and ideologies that soon become the norm. With a large percentage of internet users consisting of younger people, the focus of this report, the impact of this hate and the distorted truths that circulate online can affect many generations to come. It is what Waldron describes as a 'slow poison' threatening social peace.

Chapter three draws on the conclusions made in the conflict assessment of chapter one, and of chapter two's analysis of the harm of online hate speech in Myanmar, to evaluate the best possible methods of countering hate speech for this context. Through addressing religious peacebuilding ideas from Gopin, examining existing counter hate speech campaigns in Myanmar and from around the world, and bringing in points discussed in both focus groups, I will draw conclusions about methods of prevention, regulation, and counter narratives that may be useful in bringing together Myanmar's Buddhist and Muslim communities.

Before proceeding it would be beneficial to address the very term 'hate speech'. Waldron argues that the use of the word 'hate' can be misleading, and that it characterizes the problem as an attitudinal one. It would therefore suggest that the purpose of preventing hate speech is to punish people's attitudes and control their thoughts.³ However, it is the effects of hate speech that define it, not just the motivations. To define it more accurately, this study understands hate speech as speech written or spoken that is likely to stir up disrespect, vilification and hatred against members of minority groups.

Methods of Field Research

Research proposal

This study is a result of a research project carried out in Myanmar for the Smile Education and Development Foundation. The first step of this project was to write a proposal to clarify the objectives of the project and establish terms of reference with the organisation. As LeCompte and Schensul note a good research proposal is essential, particularly if the researcher is conducting research for or with an organisation. They add that planning with an organisation requires coming together to share ideas, responsibilities and agreements regarding how to proceed.⁴ Therefore, multiple Skype meetings in the months leading up to the field research between myself, Smile, and my dissertation supervisor were carried out for these reasons. Decisions were made such as: what the core research questions are; what a reasonable timeframe would be for the project; and which methodological approaches would be best suited to the project and the means available.

Establishing a research proposal included a process of narrowing down my original idea of studying religious tensions in Myanmar, to researching the dangers of online hate speech for the youth of Myanmar. One key component that should be included in peacebuilding initiatives is the involvement of young people. Though often ignored

³Waldron, J., (2012) *The Harm in Hate Speech*, Harvard University Press, p.34.

⁴LeCompte, M., & Schensul, J., (2010) *Designing and Conducting Ethnographic Research*, Rowman Altamira, p.88.

from the peace process, despite being deeply affected by it, young people are catalysts for social change. As the minds of the future, educating the youth on social issues that affect them can play a significant role in preventing them from turning to violence, and engaging them in peacebuilding efforts means that the community is more likely to achieve long-term peace.⁵

It was important to develop a research topic that would support peacebuilding efforts of Smile and to consider the organisations objectives. To best achieve this I read through the organization's strategic plan from 2015 and discussed with Smile what current projects they were working on, and where it would be most useful to have further research conducted. Additionally, I utilized my past experience studying both religion as an undergraduate and peacebuilding as a postgraduate to make this decision. It was decided that this project will aim to understand issues that often surround hate speech, counteracting hate speech, and the influence that hate speech can have on the young people. Successful counter narratives are important in breaking down barriers and negative stereotypes between ethnic and religious groups initiated and maintained through hate speech. This focus will fit in with Smile's goals as the organisation aims to promote religious freedom by empowering citizens to fight for social change, and to find effective methods to countering religious hate speech.

Secondary Data

The next step to my research was to look at a range of existing data concerning hate speech and social media. Secondary data helped to generate further research questions and develop research assumptions that will be tested in the new research process. As Tony Whitehead stresses in his paper *Basic Classical Ethnographic Research Methods*, it is important to explore all we can about a topic or population

⁵ Jamal, R., (2015) 'Young people call on UN to recognise their role as peace-builders', *The Guardian*, available at:

<http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/aug/24/young-people-call-on-un-recognise-role-peace-builders-global-forum-youth> [October 2015].

before moving on to collect primary research.⁶ This process enabled a comprehensive understanding of literature on hate speech, and was used to analyse and compare past examples of anti-hate narratives with the field research conducted.

Reflexivity

Charlotte Aull Davies defines reflexivity as ‘a process of self-reference’ and ‘turning back on oneself.’⁷ What this refers to in the context of social research is the ways in which the products of research are affected by the process of the research. As Davies points out, this is of particular significance for ethnographic research in which the researcher will inevitably be closely involved in the society and culture of those being studied. Awareness of the researcher’s connection to the study and their effects on it will promote the use of techniques, such as standardized wording of questions in interviews, which aim to limit their effect on social encounters.

I would like to use this section to acknowledge social, cultural and linguistic differences between myself as a white, British female from an academic background, and the Burmese Participants. There are many factors that can affect the accuracy of the qualitative data collected in research; difference in age, ethnicity, class and religion can create distance between the interviewer and the research participant. One factor works as an advantage in creating a more equal context for interviewing, as my research focuses on the youth demographic, is that at twenty-three I am of a similar age as the participants. Age difference could create a more formal environment where the participants may feel the need to be more culturally polite and respectful; with the researcher, participants, and translator (discussed next) all of the same age bracket, a more equal context for discussion is made possible. However, there was a possibility that linguistic and ethnic differences would affect research results for the reason that they may create distance between me, as the interviewer,

⁶ Whitehead, T., (2005) ‘Basic Classical Ethnographic Research Methods: Secondary Data Analysis, Fieldwork, Observation/Participant Observation, and Informal and Semi-structured Interviewing’, *Ethnographically Informed Community and Cultural Assessment Research Systems (EICCARS) Working Paper Series*, p.3.

⁷ Davies, C., (1999) *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*, Routledge, p.4.

and the participants. As Gunaratnam notes, race and ethnicity are defining and emotional dimensions in the interview process; particularly with minoritized research participants such as members of the Muslim community in Myanmar.⁸ Therefore, care and consideration were employed when approaching these topics, and I, as the interviewer, limited my participation to open questions that would aim to encourage discussion among the groups. One last point to address was that as the groups will be aware that I am there as an academic researcher to research hate speech and Buddhist/Muslim relations, they may unintentionally answer my questions how they think I might like or expect. It is hoped, however, that open discussions limited this.

Interviewing

The aim of interviewing was to develop an understanding of how online sources are integrated into communication and information sharing. My method of interviewing, as noted, was semi-structured interviews with two focus groups. Therefore, the interviews were formally bracketed with a set time and space and had a loose schedule to follow, but responses were open so as to attempt to limit the preconceived notions of the interviewer. Focus groups consisted of a mix of Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu men and women living in Yangon, between the ages of 15 to 25. The purpose of using focus groups was so that they can interact with one another as well as with the researcher. The limitations of these interviews were acknowledged, as interviewees were not able to provide uncontested knowledge about their social surroundings. As Davies notes, many analysts have come to accept interviewing as a process between the interviewee and the interviewer to develop understanding about the social world.⁹

As I acknowledged earlier, limitations arise during these interviews from not being able to speak the Burmese language. Malinowski argues that speaking the language of the native gives the ethnographer an important insight into the native mentality. He tells us that his use of the Motu language during his time in Mailu 'was no small

⁸Gunaratnam, Y., (2003) *Researching 'Race' and Ethnicity: Methods, Knowledge and Power*, Sage, p.82.

⁹Davies, (1999) p.94.

disadvantage.’¹⁰ However, with practical matters such as time restraints, interviews were conducted with the help of translators from the organization, both of the same age bracket as participants, who therefore helped reduce the distance between researcher and participants.

The questions asked during the focus groups can be found in the appendix at the end of this thesis.

Ethical considerations

Finally, ethical considerations were an essential part of this research. With any field research ethics must be carefully considered, particularly when interviews are involved in the research process. Davies breaks down relationships involved in social research into five categories: between researcher and sponsor; researcher and various gatekeepers; researcher and their colleagues (and their discipline); researcher and the general public; and finally, researcher and research participants.¹¹ Ethics are of particular concern for the latter category as this includes the research encounter itself, and will potentially have the most ethical implications. The following points were considered when conducting field research:

- Verbal consent will be given by all interviewees who wish to take part, and information regarding the project and what it will be used for will be given before any conversation.
- History of aggression in Myanmar towards those who speak out about politics could cause subjects to fear speaking openly about such issues as hate speech and political figures/ the government, therefore interviews and comments will be anonymous unless they wish otherwise.
- Due to the sensitive nature of politics in Myanmar, particularly with the upcoming election, interviews will be subject to the depth of which the interviewees wish to discuss.

¹⁰Malinowski, B., (2001) *Malinowski Among the Magi: The Natives of Mailu, Volume 1*, Psychology Press, pp.108,109.

¹¹Davies, (1999) p.46.

Literature Review

There are a number of areas of study that this research project will draw from. These include: conflict analysis and peacebuilding, Buddhist/Muslim relations, hate speech and its consequences, and methods of intervention. The purpose of this literature review is to give an overview of the relevant data that contributed to my study.

Conflict Analysis and Peacebuilding:

To assist my conflict assessment in chapter one I have used Levinger *Conflict analysis: understanding causes, unlocking solutions* (2013). I limited my use to the four-step assessment process to give chapter one (An Assessment of Conflict in Myanmar) the framework to analyse the conflict in Myanmar, and map out the factors that drive Buddhist and Muslim tensions. This text will contribute to my study as it will allow me to deconstruct the religious conflict in Myanmar clearly, and draw conclusion about the conflict and peace drivers, and what motivates the conflicts primary actors. This will form the basis for my study, as a good knowledge of the conflict is necessary to understand contextually relevant interventions.

An-Na'im's work on transforming African culture in *Cultural Transformation and Human Rights in Africa* (2002) was useful to discuss the role of culture and religion in peacebuilding. This book will not be used extensively, but will be touched on to reinforce ideas discussed in chapter three's argument (Approaches to Combatting Online Hate Speech) for the integration of religion within peacebuilding initiatives. An-Na'im suggests that religious beliefs and commitments are needed for generating the political will to enforce legal norms and implement concrete policies.¹² He advises that we must establish a constructive relationship between religion and human rights in order to successfully achieve a cultural transformation in which human rights become the norm for society.

¹²An-Na'im, A., (2002) *Cultural Transformation and Human Rights in Africa*, Zed Books: London, p.3.

Gopin is one of the leading researches in the field of religious peacebuilding. One of the most useful aspects of *Religion, Violence and Conflict Resolution* is that he recognises the importance of religion in conflict and peacebuilding.¹³ He argues that we must critically examine the decision making of religious actors and leaders, such as Wirathu or Aung San Suu Kyi, in order for strategies of peacebuilding to be successful in specific contexts. This will be a useful contribution as my study is formed on the belief that an understanding of Myanmar's conflict is an essential process in initiating counter narratives against hate speech.

Buddhist/Muslim Relations:

Horstmann's *Ethnohistorical Perspectives on Buddhist-Muslim Relations and Coexistence in Southern Thailand: From Shared Cosmos to the Emergence of Hatred?* evaluates how hate speech affects Buddhist/Muslim relations in Thailand. It will be useful therefore, to be able to analyse this context against a similar context: Myanmar. Myanmar's attitude towards Muslims which sees them as outcasts in society is similar to the situation in Thailand; Thai Buddhists are known to refer to Muslims as *khaek*, which is synonymous with the term 'visitor'.¹⁴

The Consequences of Hate Speech:

Hate speech has been discussed by Waldron (2012) and Foxman and Wolf (2013), and they bring two equally important perspectives on hate speech: Waldron focuses on the psychological harm caused by hate speech, Foxman and Wolf focus on the threat of violence that the incitement of hatred influences, stating that: 'hate doesn't just hurt, it kills.'¹⁵ To demonstrate this point, the latter use examples such as the shooting

¹³Gopin, M., (2002) 'Religion, Violence and Conflict Resolution', *Peace and Change*, vol.22, no. 1.

¹⁴Horstmann, A., (2004) 'Ethnohistorical Perspectives on Buddhist-Muslim Relations and Coexistence in Southern Thailand: From Shared Cosmos to the Emergence of Hatred?', *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Vol. 19, No.1, p.83.

¹⁵Foxman, A. and Wolf, C., (2013) *Viral Hate: Containing Its Spread on the Internet*, Palgrave Macmillan, p.28.

of members of racial and ethnic minorities by Benjamin Nathaniel Smith in 1999, a devoted follower of the white supremacist website World Church of the Creator.¹⁶

Waldron's concern in *The Harm in Hate Speech* is not about hate speech as motivation to certain actions; the real problem, he argues, is 'the predicament of vulnerable people who are subject to hatred directed at their race, ethnicity, or religion.'¹⁷ These vulnerable members of the community are minorities who have been hated or outcast from society in the recent past, such as the Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar. To be protected and treated as equals in everyday life would be an assurance that confirms their membership of society. This is what Waldron calls their dignity – it is their right to live their lives and go about their business without being undermined by the publication of hate speech.

Waldron's book suggests that legal restrictions would be one of the best ways to protect the dignity of minority groups. However, this study aims to evaluate the most successful methods of prevention and intervention to deal with the problem within society, as oppose to legally preventing hate speech. Therefore it was decided to bring in Foxman and Wolf's *Viral Hate: Containing Its Spread on the Internet* which goes further than just highlighting the consequences of hate speech by offering noteworthy methods to counter the problem.

Usefully for this study, Foxman and Wolf advocate a proactive attitude towards fighting hate speech which this thesis will also adopt; they believe we should not sit back and let it happen. Foxman and Wolf are adamant that 'laws addressed at Internet hate are perhaps the *least* effective way to deal with the problem.'¹⁸ As they point out, the prosecution of online hate speech in one country is a futile act when the speech can re-appear somewhere else on the borderless internet.¹⁹ Instead of implementing additional laws, they stress the importance of existing laws, education,

¹⁶ Foxman and Wolf, (2013) p.23.

¹⁷ Waldron, J., (2012) *The Harm in Hate Speech*, Harvard University Press, p.37.

¹⁸ Foxman and Wolf, (2013) p.60.

¹⁹ Foxman and Wolf, (2013) p.82.

digital literacy, and counter-speech. In the context of Myanmar and its history of unstable and ineffective laws, these methods of countering hate will be better suited than implementing legal regulation of hate speech.

Counter speech, they say, demands that we (both citizens and corporations) have the courage to label hate speech and take action against its spread.²⁰ When it appears that no one is countering hate speech individuals may come to accept the validity of that perspective, vulnerable people are at risk of feeling isolated from society. If a young Muslim comes across a message of Islamophobia on Facebook and sees it has been liked and shared, they are at risk of believing this is the view of the majority. Foxman and Wolf's encouragement to speak out is therefore important to note in understanding how we counter hatred online.

Foxman and Wolf uncover how many individuals and groups use online anonymity and freedom of speech to stream hate on the internet, an unregulated mode of communication, and address the dangers of hate speech citing examples throughout. Chapter one 'Hate Doesn't Just Hurt – It Kills' lists some of the most prominent organisations such as the National Socialist Movement, a neo-Nazi group in the US, and Stormfront, a white supremacist website with a significant internet presence. These examples can be compared to the context of Myanmar in understanding how hate organisations establish an online presence significant enough to have an impact on members of the community. They believe this kind of platform for communicating can allow racists, anti-Semites and bigots to collaborate and plot in ways that were not possible before.

Methods to Counter Hate Speech:

Interventions to Counter Hate Speech is a report by Strachan based on desk research written for the UK Government's Department for International Development. Strachan's primary question is: what evidence is there that programming

²⁰Foxman and Wolf, (2013) p.42.

interventions on countering hate speech have been effective, and what examples are there of proven successful interventions?²¹

Strachan acknowledges a number of difficulties that arise when researching hate speech and the effectiveness of counter hate speech. Firstly there is a lack of existing evidence on the effectiveness of strategies to counter hate speech due to the difficulties in monitoring such projects. Additionally, she notes the difficulties in identifying hate speech. Subtle forms of hate speech may be harder to identify and thus go unnoticed while causing potential damage.

The report identifies two main characteristics of hate speech which I will reference throughout:

1. Dehumanisation. This can be subtle and can, as Strachan notes, deny a group the 'characteristics of human uniqueness such as civility, moral sensibility, rationality and maturity.'²² This is similar to Waldron's notion of the damage to dignity, and is important as it considers the long lasting impact of hate speech and the effects that may not be as visible as physical violence.
2. Simplistic and unbalanced communication. This accounts for the violation of standards of argumentative integrity. Those who write or speak hate speech often present subjective arguments as objective truth and distort the truth to depict that group as the ones to blame for certain political or social problems.

This report is a useful and practical addition to this study as it focuses on finding evidence for successful strategies that have countered hate speech. Strachan identifies a number of primary factors that make effectiveness of interventions to counter hate speech more likely. She concludes that the majority of the interventions included in this report have been locally-led. Additionally, she notes that a comprehensive understanding of the conflict is essential before interventions to counter hate speech can be effective; a point has influenced this study's conflict analysis. It is an important step that many anti hate speech campaigns such as *No*

²¹Strachan, A., (2014) 'Interventions to Counter Hate Speech' (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1116), GSDRC, University of Birmingham, p.1.

²²Strachan, (2014) p.2.

Hate: Hate Speech Watch (nohatespeechmovement.org) do not include in their work. They use Hate Speech Watch to monitor reports of hate speech and identify action to take which, while being useful on its own, could benefit from further analysis of the contextual background of each case. Furthermore, Strachan suggests intervention such as monitoring hate speech is most likely to be more effective when accompanied by activities such as dialogue and training.

Additional Useful Texts:

Titely, G., Keen, E., Foldi, L., (2014) *Starting Points for Combating Hate Speech Online*, Council of Europe, Youth Department, available at: https://www.coe.int/t/dq4/youth/Source/Resources/Publications/2014_Starting_Points_for_Combating_Hate_Speech_Online.pdf [November 2015].

(2012-2014)'Umati: Monitoring Online Dangerous Speech: October 2012 - January 2013', iHub Research, available at: http://www.ihub.co.ke/uploads/default/files/umati/Umati_Report_Oct-Jan_2013.pdf [November 2015].

Chapter One: An Assessment of Conflict in Myanmar

Introduction

Myanmar has a long history of ethnic and religious conflict fuelled by an oppressive military rule that has neglected the diversity of the country, and affected all ethnic groups and religions. There has been violence specifically targeted towards Muslims since the British colonial rulers encouraged the arrival of Muslim immigrants. In this chapter I will aim to analyse the conflict in Myanmar, focusing on Buddhist and Muslim relations, by using Levinger's four step assessment process. This framework for analysis will allow me to critically evaluate the factors that drive conflict and peace in Myanmar, and to understand the extent to which religious actors and ideas are involved.

Though there are many different factors that drive conflict in Myanmar, the focus of this study is Buddhist hate speech, and this form of hate speech has primarily concerned itself with religion. We must consider how, as Gopin observes, religion plays the central role in the inner-life and social behaviour of millions of people, and this is especially true in Myanmar.²³ This is a point I noted when in the country. People are proud of their religious culture and identify themselves as their religious group. For example my tour guide in Yangon distinctly positioned himself in society as a Buddhist, and defined social groups in society by their religion. Additionally, many children are educated in the hundreds of monastic schools across the country, meaning from an early age they are introduced to a Buddhist way of life.

A detailed contextual understanding of Buddhist/Muslim relations, and the role of religion in motivating actors in Myanmar, is necessary for this study to proceed in analysing the dangers of hate speech in Myanmar (chapter two), and the best methods for intervention (chapter three). This chapter is essential for my study as the

²³Gopin, M., (2002) 'Religion, Violence and Conflict Resolution', *Peace and Change*, vol.22, no. 1, p.2.

success of peacebuilding interventions is reliant on the level of understanding of the conflict causes.

Overview of Conflict in Myanmar

Myanmar has one of the longest running civil conflicts in the world; the conflict is extremely multifaceted with a prolonged history of both ethnic rivalry and a struggle for democracy.

Military Rule

Military authoritarianism took over Myanmar through *a coup d'etat*, after the fourteen years of post-colonial democratic governance that followed independence from the British in 1948.²⁴ The military junta kept a tight control over any pro-democracy movements and engaged in brutal counterinsurgency campaigns aimed at denying rebels food, funding, information, and the platform necessary to gain supporters. To protect themselves from rebellion, the government limited access to the internet and severely restricted all forms of information gathering and dissemination, enforcing jail sentences on anyone who publishes unauthorized materials.²⁵ The military are also believed to have nullified election results, according to which pro-democratic movements have rightfully won; the most famous case of which being in 1990 when the National League for democracy (NLD) won a substantial parliamentary majority. In 2011, Myanmar's military government began to introduce gradual political and economic reforms and released around two thousand political prisoners. However, concerns remain about the pace of constitutional reforms and its treatment of Myanmar's ethnic minorities.²⁶

²⁴Worland, S., & Vaddhanaphuti, C., (2013) 'Religious expressions of spirituality by displaced Karen from Burma: The need for a spiritually sensitive social work response', *International Social Work*, vol.56, pp.384-402, p.40.

²⁵Human Rights Foundation of Monland, (2008) 'Suppressed: Freedom of Speech in Burma', available at: <http://rehmonnya.org/archives/124> [November 2015].

²⁶Human Rights Foundation of Monland, (2008).

Conflict in the Rakhine State

Myanmar has been home to serious conflicts between Buddhist and Muslim communities with both parties having suffered. The Rakhine State has seen the damaging impact of this conflict with an estimated 146,000 people displaced since 2012.²⁷ According to figures by Selth (2004) around 15,000 Rohingya's fled to Bangladesh to escape persecution in 1975, and another 200,000 joined them three years later to flee from a military operation.²⁸ They are said to have been suffering genocidal behaviour towards them, with the military attempting to erase the Rohingya ethnic identity, though this has been continuously rejected by Myanmar officials such as U Zaw Aye Maung, the Rakhine Affairs Minister for Yangon Region.²⁹

Buddhism and Islam in Myanmar

Buddhism is considered an inherent part of Burmese culture, dating back to King Anawrahta who set about embedding Theravada Buddhism as the religion of the Bamar.³⁰ South Asian Muslims, including many Bengali Muslims, migrated to Myanmar in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century; anger arose from many Bamar (largest ethnic group) Buddhists, directed against Muslim migrants, which blamed the British for 'Indicizing' the country, purportedly to the economic detriment of the Bamar.³¹ Since then a number of Myanmar's Theravada Buddhists have shown intolerance towards Muslims, and have participated alongside the government in the

²⁷Schissler, M., Walton, M., & Phyu Thi, P., (2015) 'The Roots of Religious Conflict in Myanmar', *The Diplomat*, available at: <http://thediplomat.com/2015/08/the-roots-of-religious-conflict-in-myanmar/> [November].

²⁸Selth, A., (2004) 'Burma's Muslims and the War on Terror', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp.107-126, available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10576100490275094> [November 2015], p.6.

²⁹Schissler, M., Walton, M., & Phyu Thi, P., (2015) 'The Roots of Religious Conflict in Myanmar', *The Diplomat*.

³⁰Nilsen, M., (2015) [The Rise of Political Buddhism in Myanmar](http://www.tricycle.com/blog/rise-political-buddhism-myanmar), *Tricycle*, available at: <http://www.tricycle.com/blog/rise-political-buddhism-myanmar> [November 2015].

³¹Coclanis, P., (2013) 'Terror in Burma: Buddhists vs. Muslims', *World Affairs Journal*, available at: <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/terror-burma-buddhists-vs-muslims> [November 2015].

destruction and expulsion of Rohingya Muslims.³² With a history of persecution, Myanmar's Muslim community are already at a disadvantage and lack what Waldron (2012) describes as a right to dignity - their social standing that entitles them to be treated as ordinary members of society and protected by human rights standards.³³

Levinger's Four Step Assessment Framework

To critically analyse the situation in Myanmar further and get to grips with the main factors that drive the conflict, Levinger's four step process of conflict assessment will be used, though I will limit my use to the first three. These steps are: dividers and connectors, actors or parties, drivers of conflict and peace, and indication of the conflict trajectory.³⁴

Dividers and connectors

Dividers are sources of polarization between groups in a region; one example of a divider that Levinger gives, which relates closely to the situation in Myanmar, is the 'horizontal inequality along ethnic or geographic lines, with certain groups facing systematic marginalization.'³⁵ There are around 135 ethnic groups in Myanmar but the Bamar ethnic group makes up about two-thirds of the population and controls the military and the government.³⁶ The Panglong agreement of 1947 which was set out to defend the rights of minorities has not been respected by Myanmar's government or military; ethnic and religious minorities, such as the country's Muslims, still have no real protection within the constitution, which many believe will lead to the

³²Zarni, M., (2012) 'Buddhist Nationalism in Burma: Institutionalized racism against the Rohingya Muslims led Burma to Genocide', *Tricycle*, available at: <http://www.tricycle.com/feature/buddhist-nationalism-burma> [November 2015].

³³ Waldron, J., (2012) *The Harm in Hate Speech*, Harvard University Press, p.5.

³⁴Levinger, M., (2013) *Conflict analysis: understanding causes, unlocking solutions*, United States Institute of Peace, pp.95-106.

³⁵Levinger, (2013) p.98.

³⁶Oxford Burma Alliance, 'Ethnic Nationalities of Burma', available at: <http://www.oxfordburmaalliance.org/ethnic-groups.html> [November 2015].

‘Burmanisation’ of these minorities.³⁷ This marginalisation has had a significant impact on the tensions between ethnic groups in Myanmar, and played a key role in the conflict. The educational system adheres to this hierarchy with the curricular often neglecting the study of religions other than Buddhism, and imposing ethnic discrimination (for example, the teaching of ethnic nationality languages was prohibited in 1962).³⁸

Another divider, closely related to the inequality between ethnic groups, is the opposing interests between these different groups. First we must acknowledge that there are economic and political factors that fuel conflict between groups, as is true for conflict between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims. The Rohingya Muslims are not only seen as a threat to the Rakhine Buddhists’ own identity, but as competitors for the state’s resources. The oppression from the state and the competition of natural resources create opportunities for violent confrontations between Buddhists and Muslims, similar to the tensions between Thai-Buddhists and Malay-Muslims in Myanmar’s neighbouring country, Thailand.³⁹

The primary focus for this study is the exploitation of these tensions to encourage mistrust of Muslims. One of the reasons for the scepticism and fear is the awareness that few South and Southeast Asian countries remain Buddhist states. Areas that once belonged to the ancient Brahman-Buddhist kingdoms such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Afghanistan are now recognized as Muslim states. Fundamentalists (such as Wirathu, who will be discussed in the next section) warn that the Buddhist identity of Myanmar is under threat and argue that the country’s Muslim community

³⁷Oxford Burma Alliance, ‘Ethnic Nationalities of Burma’.

³⁸Lwin, Thein, (2015) ‘Languages, Identities, and Education – in Relation to Burma/Myanmar’, *English.Panglong.org*, available at: http://english.panglong.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/images_docs_lwin-language-article-english-15thoct11.pdf [November].

³⁹Horstmann, A., (2004) ‘Ethnohistorical Perspectives on Buddhist-Muslim Relations and Coexistence in Southern Thailand: From Shared Cosmos to the Emergence of Hatred?’, *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Vol. 19, No.1.

aim to 'capture' the country in the end.⁴⁰ Not only does this create mistrust between groups, but it suggests that there is an agenda within the Muslim community to attain more power in Myanmar. For the Buddhist majority, particularly those with the same desire for a Buddhist nationalist identity as Wirathu, this would be a significant clash of interests. The fight to maintain a Bamar-Buddhist identity opposes the interests of the ethnically diverse remainder of the country. As one participant of focus group one pointed out, this may be worse for Muslims: 'Hindus and other religious minorities face little discrimination because of the belief that the Buddha is from Hinduism, they therefore understand their religion more than Islam.'⁴¹ Islam is less familiar than Hinduism and is therefore more likely to be marginalized. It must be noted that the Bamar ethnic group are by no means universally against Muslims or supportive of the persecution of them. Colcanis discusses how his contacts in Yangon told him many Buddhists were willing to harbor Muslim friends in the city when dangers arise and, in some cases, even stand with and protect them.⁴² Campaigns that could be described as connectors in conflict will be addressed in chapter three, and these will highlight the efforts to promote peace and tolerance between religious and ethnic groups.

Levinger argues that these dividers and connectors are merely potential sources of polarization or cohesion, rather than root causes in themselves, and are only made possible when political leaders seek to persuade and mobilize their constituents to either escalate or de-escalate conflict.⁴³ For example, global climate change has caused environmental conflict in Sudan, and though this may lead us to describe the environmental changes as a root cause of conflict and a major divider, it is the exploitation of these problems by political leaders that provokes violence between

⁴⁰Hodal, K., (2013) 'Buddhist monk uses racism and rumours to spread hatred in Burma', *The Guardian*, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/18/buddhist-monk-spreads-hatred-burma> [November 2015].

⁴¹Participant, Focus Group One, *Interview by Davis, B.*, (2015).

⁴²Coclanis, (2013).

⁴³Levinger, (2013) p.97.

pastoralists and farmers.⁴⁴ It is therefore important to understand the actors and parties of the conflict and their influence, as I will examine next.

Actors or Parties

Levinger's second step of his conflict assessment framework looks at the actors or parties of the conflict. He describes actors as 'the cast of characters that drive the drama of conflict – each one with its own histories, motives, resources, and relationships with other members of the cast.'⁴⁵ One of the most significant actors in the context of Myanmar is Aung San Suu Kyi and her political party the National League for Democracy. Suu Kyi is the daughter of General Aung San, one of the instigators of the Panglong agreement, and has spent more than fifteen years in detention after becoming engaged in the country's nationwide democracy uprising. After the military introduced the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) to tighten restrictions on oppositional groups, Suu Kyi and others from the opposition founded the NLD. One significant feature of her campaign was the appeal she held for Myanmar's various ethnic groups, which could arguably act as a connector.⁴⁶ A young Muslim in an impoverished village (hit by the cyclone in 2008) told me that he strongly supported Suu Kyi, as she would help Muslims like him who had been neglected by the government, if the NLD were to win the election.⁴⁷ As the most famous national figure in the fight for freedom and democracy, she has great influence over many people; it is therefore important that she has acknowledged the ethnic diversity and the rights of all citizens.

One issue that has drawn criticism towards Suu Kyi is that she has remained silent over humanitarian crisis that has been described as 'genocidal Buddhist racism against the Rohingya.'⁴⁸ However, it has been argued by some that expressing support for the

⁴⁴Levinger, (2013) p.97.

⁴⁵Levinger, (2013) p.100.

⁴⁶Abrams, I., (1999) *Peace 1991-1995*, Political Science, p.10.

⁴⁷Personal Communication, *Interview by Davis, B.*, (2015).

⁴⁸Zarni, (2012).

Rohingya would be political suicide for the NLD and Suu Kyi who has been branded by some as a 'the Muslim lover'. One Buddhist resident of Mandalay expressed his concern for Myanmar's future, claiming that if the NLD were to win the November elections, the country's national identity and Buddhist majority would suffer, and 'mosques will take over the city.' Despite this, Suu Kyi has played a major role in inspiring peace and non-violent protest. She has shown that even in times of violence and hardships, peace is possible, and says that despite repression, imprisonment, and the prevention of her presidency, she 'never learned to hate' the SLORC or the army.⁴⁹

The next actors to bring to attention, though a more detailed analyses will be conducted in chapter two, is Wirathu and The Association to Protect Race and Religion, otherwise known as Ma Ba Tha. Wirathu is a Buddhist nationalist monk who rose to prominence in 2001 when he created the '969' movement; a nationalist campaign to boycott Muslim businesses. He was jailed for 25 years in 2003 for inciting anti-Muslim hatred but freed in 2010 under a general amnesty, after which he returned to preaching hate and continuing to lead the 969 movement.⁵⁰ Ma Ba Tha was founded in 2014 when central figures from the 969 movement started campaigning for laws aimed at controlling Myanmar's Muslim population and protecting the 'Burman race'. Four laws banning polygamy, restricting interfaith marriages and religious conversions, and enforcing birth control measures were passed by the government earlier this year.⁵¹ Ma Ba Tha and Wirathu play central roles in inciting hatred against Muslims, advocating discriminatory laws, and promoting an exclusive ideology of Burman-Buddhist identity. As noted in the first of Levinger's steps, this marginalisation of ethnic minority groups is a key factor in dividing society and driving conflict, which brings us onto the next step: drivers of conflict and peace.

⁴⁹Suu Kyi, A. S., (2008) *The Voice of Hope: Conversations with Alan Clements*, Rider, p.41.

⁵⁰Hodal, (2013).

⁵¹Nilsen, M., (2015) *The Rise of Political Buddhism in Myanmar*, *Tricycle*, available at: <http://www.tricycle.com/blog/rise-political-buddhism-myanmar> [November 2015].

Drivers of Conflict and Peace

The third step of Levinger's conflict assessment framework asks: how do actors use dividers to provoke conflict/ promote peace? This step will be used to draw conclusions from the previous two sections about the motivations of the actors, and their means of mobilising their constituents to provoke hate or promote peace. Most importantly for this study, this section will focus on the role of religion as a driver in both conflict and peace, using various economic or political situations to their advantage. Some key questions to consider are shown below.

- How are key actors using dividers to escalate conflict, or connectors to de-escalate conflict?
- What are the motivations of these actors?
- What resources do they have at the disposal?⁵²

Buddhism has become increasingly politicized by Ma Ba Tha and Wirathu. Special advisors from the United Nations have warned that 'the promotion of a political agenda that is based primarily on the protection of a particular religion or ethnic group is dangerous, particularly in a country as richly diverse as Myanmar.'⁵³ They argue that the anti-Muslim rhetoric can promote violence and is furthering the marginalisation that religious minorities have faced for decades. As discussed earlier, Wirathu is motivated by the ideology of a Buddhist nationalist identity that excludes the Muslim minority. Through his growing support online and in the sangha, he is able to play on the fear and scepticism towards Muslim neighbouring countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Bangladesh, to promote the restrictive laws of Ma Ba Tha that aim to control the Muslim population, thus ensuring Myanmar remains a Buddhist state (though consisting of only a small percentage of the population, Muslims pose no real threat). The fear or 'divider' generates anxiety over the higher

⁵²Levinger, (2013) pp.103-106.

⁵³Dieng, A. and Welsh, J., (2015) 'UN Special Advisers' Statement on Myanmar', *United Nations Human Rights*, available at: <http://bangkok.ohchr.org/news/press/SpecialAdvisers.aspx> [November].

birth rates among Muslims (which mainly occur in poorer families) and Buddhist conversion to Islam in interfaith marriages.⁵⁴ Fear that Muslims are threatening the future of Buddhism makes the Buddhist populations increasingly receptive to anti-Muslim agitation from Wirathu, the 969 movement, and Ma Ba Tha.

Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and the NLD use peaceful methods of protest to show society that non-violence is possible, and to prevent further conflict. Suu Kyi is one of the most famous politicians in Myanmar, therefore her 'resources' would be her popularity (though, as noted earlier she has been criticized for both supporting Muslims from some citizens, and for not supporting Muslims by others). Regarding Levinger's second point, Suu Kyi has been motivated by religion, though the NLD has had a clear policy not to mix politics and religion.⁵⁵ In *Letters from Burma* (2010) she describes how her political work and non-violent approach to conflict has been strengthened by teachings of members from the *Sanga*.⁵⁶ While Buddhism can be used by Wirathu and Ma Ba Tha to promote their political agenda, the teachings of Buddhism can also promote a non-violent and tolerant approach towards minorities.

Additionally, though Wirathu may not be considered by many as a true adherent to the Buddhist faith, it is still through the religion that he channels his hate and uses it to mobilise his supporters. There are many factors that drive conflict and it is rarely the case that one, such as religion, would be singled out as the lone cause of a conflict. In *Religion, Violence and Conflict Resolution* (2002) Gopin argues that even if the motives for conflict are economic disenfranchisement, injustice and inequality, the revolt against the status quo may in fact express itself in religious terms.⁵⁷ As I mentioned earlier, the way in which the Rakhine state have been economically exploited and culturally discriminated has heightened tensions between the Rakhine Buddhist and

⁵⁴Nilsen, (2015).

⁵⁵Network Myanmar, (2015) 'NLD, Ma Ba Tha in war of words over campaign claims', <http://www.networkmyanmar.org/index.php/politics/national-league-for-democracy> [November 2015].

⁵⁶Suu Kyi, A. S., (2010) *Letters from Burma*, Penguin, p.160.

⁵⁷Gopin, (2002) p.2.

Rohingya Muslims. Ethnic conflict involved resource deprivation and decades of land confiscation; arbitrary taxes have left many landless, which has resulted in a competition of resources and land between these ethnic groups.⁵⁸ Though this intra-state conflict is fuelled by more than just religion, it has become a gateway to Myanmar's Islamophobic attitude towards the rest of the country's Muslim community.

Religious traditions can change drastically depending on the influence of leadership as displayed by Wirathu, a Buddhist monk with support from members of his sangha and many Buddhists across Myanmar. It is important to acknowledge that this influence can be positive, however. Gopin notes that activists should examine ways of coexistence within the sacred texts and histories of religion, and use this as a basis to promote reconciliation among conflicting groups such as Myanmar's Muslims and Buddhists.⁵⁹ Religion can be a driver for peace as much as it can be used to influence hatred.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the different factors that contribute to Buddhist/Muslim conflict in Myanmar and assessed the significant role of religion in driving conflict and peace. The military and their government's repressive regime which fuelled ethnic tensions, the competition of natural resources, and the hierarchy of the Bamar Buddhist majority have created opportunities for violent confrontations between Buddhists and Muslims. Wirathu, the 969 movement, and Ma Ba Tha have exploited the tensions between Myanmar Buddhists and Muslims for their own political gain. Stimulating fear by displaying Muslims as criminals and suggesting they have an agenda to take over Myanmar has influenced mistrust and, consequently, has allowed laws to pass which aim to protect the 'Burman race'. Both the Rohingya Muslims who

⁵⁸Masood, A., (2013) 'Myanmar: Ethno-Resource Conflict in Rakhine State?', *Foreign Policy Journal*, available at: <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2013/08/05/myanmar-ethno-resource-conflict-in-rakhine-state/> [November 2015].

⁵⁹Gopin, (2002) p.8.

have been subject to what many describe as attempted ethnic cleansing, and Muslims generally, have legitimate grievances regarding their treatment at the hands of the Bamar-controlled state.⁶⁰

Though there are many factors that have driven the protracted conflict in Myanmar, hate speech, which I will expand on in chapter two, manifests itself in religious terms. Hate speech primarily targets Muslims, and in doing so furthers the polarization of religious and ethnic groups whose tensions have existed since the failure of the Panglong agreement. The politicization of religion emphasises the existence of boundaries between Buddhist and Muslim communities, which promotes discrimination and exclusion. Through this chapter I have shown how religion is used to position members in society, with the Bamar-Buddhist identity group maintaining their sense of superiority in the state at the top of the hierarchal spectrum, and Muslims struggling to be acknowledged as legitimate citizens of Myanmar at the bottom, though many of them have resided there for over a century.

⁶⁰Coclanis, P., (2013) 'Terror in Burma: Buddhists vs. Muslims', *World Affairs Journal*, available at: <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/terror-burma-buddhists-vs-muslims> [November 2015].

Chapter Two: Analysing Online Hate Speech and its Impact on Buddhist/Muslim Tensions in Myanmar

The rapid development of online platforms such as social media has enabled a wider and instantaneous distribution of content that we did not have access to before. These platforms provide significant information about both the community and the outside world. Furthermore, whereas political parties and the government would have had control over news and information being sent out to the public in the past, the internet rarely faces these restrictions; online, everyone can be a publisher. While this can be a good thing in a country such as Myanmar, where freedom of expression, particularly concerning politics, was heavily restricted by censorship laws until 2011, the ease and rapidity of the creation and dissemination of hate speech make propaganda even more difficult to trace and control. This chapter aims to evaluate how the internet allows individuals and groups to incite hatred, and why this can be so detrimental to those targeted by hate. After a detailed analysis of the real harm of online hate speech - looking at theories from Waldron's *The Harm in Hate Speech* and Foxman and Wolf's *Viral Hate*, I will discuss how it is being used in Myanmar to incite fear towards the Muslim community, using evidence from my own field research. Understanding a) how social media is used as a platform for hate and b) the impact that recurrent hate speech can have on minority groups, particularly in country with protracted internal conflicts such as Myanmar, is essential before devising methods to prevent and counter hate speech.

How Hate Spreads on the Internet

To understand why the internet is so important regarding hate speech we must ask how hate spreads online. Every hate organisation and what we might class as 'extremist' groups (such as ISIS or the Ku Klux Klan) have their websites and social media sites, and these all act as a source for hateful propaganda and lies. The internet provides members of these groups a shield of online anonymity where they can speak more openly about their ideas than they would in front of an audience, and facilitates communication with like-minded individuals or groups across the world. The low

profile of individuals such as these and their autonomy from an established organisation makes them almost impossible to monitor and control. In the past, people who did not have the means to be heard through politics or the newspapers would take to the streets handing out leaflets and speaking to people to promote their beliefs. Today, the internet allows free access to an audience of millions. Consequently, hate can be spread faster than ever through websites and social media platforms.

This study's focus is hate towards Islam; one of the most targeted groups in both Myanmar and across the world. The presence of anti-Islam rhetoric has grown significantly since 9/11. It does not take long to find anti-Islam Facebook pages such as World Against Islam, Stop Islamization of the World, and Anti-Islam Alliance which seek to vilify the religion and its adherents, all of which have thousands of followers liking posts and sharing anti-Islamic content.⁶¹

Founded in 2004, Facebook is currently the biggest social networking service based on global reach and total active users with 2015 seeing 1.49 billion monthly active users.⁶² The social media platform sees thousands of groups and pages where people come together based on similar interests. While this can healthily contribute to society through pages that promote education, positive activism, and support pages, it can also be used as a tool to spread lies and target groups or individual members of society. A noteworthy example of the popularity a hate movement can achieve through Facebook is the British movement Britain First. With over one million followers on Facebook (which saw a significant rise after the ISIS attacks in Paris), Britain First are one of England's most controversial and vocal far-right movements. The group have surpassed the English Defence League (EDL) and the British Nationalist

⁶¹These pages can be found here: *World Against Islam*, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/worldagainstislamofficial/?fref=ts> [November 2015]; *Stop Islamization of the World*, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/SIOTW/?fref=nf> [November 2015]; *Anti-Islam Alliance*, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/Anti-Islam-Alliance-104201582969970/?fref=ts> [November 2015].

⁶²Number of monthly active Facebook users worldwide as of 2nd quarter 2015 (in millions), *statista.com*, available at: <http://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/> [November 2015].

Party (BNP) with their anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic rhetoric by disguising their online campaigns as support for the Christianity, the Armed Forces, the monarchy and even animal cruelty. Controversy arose over the groups' use of Lee Rigby's photo – a soldier killed by Muslim extremists in 2013; Rigby's family released a statement calling on far-right extremist groups not to exploit the soldier's death, but Britain First have continued to use his image on Facebook to promote their Islamophobia. In addition, they often use pictures of Union Jack and the Queen to depict themselves as a patriotic group, who are, as they say 'dedicated to preserving our ancestral ethnic and cultural heritage, traditions, customs and values.'⁶³

The most important point we can take away from these examples is how groups now have a platform (social media) to reach an audience of millions. Online groups can draw in followers by showing their support for something many people would also support, such as war veterans, or Buddhism in the case of Myanmar. Over time hate can begin to make its way into the posts and articles they share, which in turn are liked and shared by their followers, then liked and shared by the friends of these followers. Internet hate speech can mislead millions of innocent people, particularly social media's largest users – young people, and has the potential, as Foxman and Wolf argue, to recruit the next generation of bigots, racists and homophobes.⁶⁴

The Consequences of Online Hate Speech

Now we have an understanding of how the internet facilitates the growth of hate groups or individuals inciting hatred, we can address the impact of hate speech and the damage it can do to society, particularly to minority groups. It is only after an understanding of how hate speech affects people and where the real danger lies that we can successfully approach methods of countering hate speech. To demonstrate the consequence of hate speech Waldron's *The Harm in Hate Speech* asks us: what would a well ordered society look like? The example he uses to set the tone for the book is of a Muslim father, out for a walk with his family who are confronted with a sign telling

⁶³Britain First, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/OfficialBritainFirst/> [November 2015].

⁶⁴Foxman, A. and Wolf, C., (2013) *Viral Hate: Containing Its Spread on the Internet*, Palgrave Macmillan, p.32.

people like them to go back where they came from.⁶⁵ Is a well ordered society - which he defines as a place committed to upholding the fundamentals of people's reputation as ordinary citizens - one where people are confronted with visual hatred like the Muslim father is? The harm in hate speech, Waldron argues, is the damage to dignity, and it is this damage that prevents an equal and fair society. As noted, aggressive hostility against Muslims cannot only be found in Myanmar, but all over the internet; this significantly hinders our chance to become a society closer to the one imagined by Waldron.

Following Waldron's thought, one of our biggest concerns would be the damage to the dignity of the minority groups who are subject to seeing this hate speech online and on the streets. To clarify his use of the word dignity, Waldron defines it as a status term; it indicates the importance of paying attention to the way in which a person's status as a member of society in good standing is affirmed and upheld.⁶⁶ The danger of hate speech is not the offence that it may cause, and our concern for the dignity of an individual does not mean we are simply trying to prevent this offence or prevent their embarrassment. Our concern looks at the way things are for the individual in the interactions of social life, and aims to understand the connection between social status and living life as an equal member of the community. Members of the Muslim community in Rotherham (UK) told the BBC that their lives and businesses have been disrupted by the racism that has emerged over the last couple of years, which they believe is a direct result of campaigns by the EDL, BNP and Britain First.⁶⁷ For these people, their right to dignity - to live their lives as citizens of the UK - is being undermined by the publication of hate speech. It is a process that Vollhardt would define as 'dehumanization', and it denies the group of a sense of civility, moral sensibility and individuality.⁶⁸ As Waldon and Vollhardt have each implied,

⁶⁵Waldron, J., (2012) *The Harm in Hate Speech*, Harvard University Press, pp.1-2.

⁶⁶Waldon, (2012) p.142.

⁶⁷(2015) 'Britain First: The "most dangerous far-right party"?', *BBC News*, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6LZt8BWqbE> [November 2015].

⁶⁸ Vollhardt, J., Coutin, M., Staub, E., Weiss, G. and Deflander, J. (2006). Deconstructing Hate Speech in the DRC: A Psychological Media Sensitization Campaign. *Journal of Hate Studies*, 5:1, 15-35, p.26.

acknowledging the damage that hate speech can have on individuals and their right to be equal citizens is vital in understanding the long lasting impact of hate speech - which is not as visible to us as violence.

After recognising the importance of Waldron's concern for the long term damage to groups and individuals targeted by hate, we need to address the violence and harassment that online hate influences. Foxman and Wolf (2013) address the real and measurable influence of hate speech, citing examples of incidents in the United States against homosexuals and the bombing of abortion clinics, often inspired by content found online.⁶⁹ Britain First are a further example of how a Facebook group or a website can influence hate-inspired acts; many marches and protests have been organised through their Facebook page and their comments, and many of these have ended in violence.⁷⁰ Britain First condoned the harassment of Muslims after one incident, advocating further actions from the proactive members of their community. After five supporters turned up to abuse a group of Muslim volunteers who were offering to talk to the public about their religion, Britain First posted on their Facebook page: 'well done to our Northern activists who confronted Islamic Extremists.'⁷¹

The side effects of hate sites can carry over from the virtual world and into the real, and though we cannot know exactly how far online hate affects the real world as it is largely speculative, it is still a major concern. One of the most notable cases of real world hate from online activity was the anti-Muslim attacks that followed the circulation of *The Innocence of Muslims*, an example used by Foxman and Wolf. In 2012 an Egyptian-American blogger publicized the fourteen minute movie trailer that featured a derogatory portrayal of Mohammed in an Arabic post online, and then

⁶⁹Foxman and Wolf, (2013) p.29.

⁷⁰Lo, J., (2014) 'Far Right Britain First's Brick Lane March Ends in Violence', London 24, available at: http://www.london24.com/news/crime/far_right_britain_first_s_brick_lane_march_ends_in_violence_1_3613477 [November].

⁷¹TellMAMA: Measuring Anti Muslim Attacks, (2015) 'The Only Extremists We See Are the Britain First Sympathisers here', available at: <http://tellmamauk.org/the-only-extremists-we-see-are-the-britain-first-sympathisers-here/> [November 2015].

emailed it to an email newsletter known for its anti-Islamic beliefs. Soon after, *The Innocence of Muslims* was attracting attention from groups in predominantly Muslim countries such as Egypt, Libya, Iran and Yemen which instigated violent protests and riots.⁷² As Foxman and Wolf acknowledge, the video does not explicitly call for violence or fit into what we might classify as hate speech, but it does reveal the impact of viral hate and the speed that a societal response can be triggered.⁷³

Although Waldron is right to stress the importance of the damaging effects on people targeted by hate speech, the threat from people who are influenced by it is also a concern for the wellbeing of the community. Both the danger of influencing individuals or groups to commit violent protests or attacks, and the damage to the dignity of minorities, are serious consequences of hate speech and need our attention. Although he makes a clear distinction between the two and argues that it is the latter we should be concerned with, violence on the streets that is specifically targeted towards a minority group sends a similar but threatening message of hostility, and acts as what Levinger (chapter one) describes as a divider. In other words: both the violence and the psychological/dehumanizing effects of hate speech indicate that online hate is source of polarization between different groups in society.

Fear of the Other

So far we have discussed the consequences of online hate and underlined two main problems: violence and psychological/dehumanizing effects on citizens. One of the most significant ways online hate groups are able to achieve this is through the process of 'othering'. Groups and individuals who incite hatred like Britain First and Myanmar's Wirathu indoctrinate fear into the minds of their followers and construct a negative image of the Muslim community, or the minority targeted. Hate speech aims to define and limit a group by their ethnicity, religion, race, sexuality, et cetera, and will then associate that group with characteristics that would exclude one from society. Such a process could arguably be described as 'othering'; a concept identified

⁷²Foxman and Wolf, (2013) p.38.

⁷³Foxman and Wolf, (2013) pp.37,38.

and popularized by the likes of Jean-Paul Sartre and Edward Said.⁷⁴ By highlighting weaknesses and creating homogeneous cultural perceptions of the 'alien' minority, they become the subordinate Other. Fear of the Other often brings people together and can work to the advantage of a group hoping to boost their number of supporters.

One of the difficulties with the process of othering online and through social media is that the Other are not given the chance to defend themselves against misinformation. In her report on interventions to counter hate speech, Strachan defines this characteristic of hate speech as 'simplistic and unbalanced communication.'⁷⁵ She adds that perpetrators of hate speech will often present subjective arguments as objective truth, thus violating the standards of argumentative integrity. This is true for much of the anti-Muslim narratives online in Myanmar and across the world. Hate speech of this kind often presents misinformation and *fearmongering* ideological statements as the truth, blaming political events or social situations on the Muslim community with no chance for them to engage in rational dialogue to defend themselves. With many of these anti-Islam Facebook pages, including Wirathu's anti-Muslim rhetoric, it is not about disagreement of ideas; it is about people and their identity group. A good example to demonstrate this point is a picture from Stop Islamization of the World's Facebook page:

⁷⁴Said, E., (1978) *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books, pp. 329-352.

⁷⁵Strachan, A., (2014) 'Interventions to Counter Hate Speech' (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1116), GSDRC, University of Birmingham.



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This picture, like many others, seeks to undermine the religion and create fearful and misinformed perceptions of Islam as a religion of 'rape, beheadings and burning people alive', which augment the fear incited by world event such as the November Paris attacks by ISIS. Unbalanced communication feeds into the process of othering by objectifying Muslims and reducing them to these incorrect statements and stories. This process ignores the dignity of the target group - whom many people never encounter face to face; arguably, that group are eventually perceived as an abstract idea based on words and rumours, rather than as people in the community. It is one of hate speeches most serious consequences for the Muslim community in Myanmar: the dehumanization of a group based on their religion, used as a means to permit persecution.

Social Media and Hate Speech in Myanmar

Now we have established an understanding of how hate speech attracts an audience on social media, how it can spread the fear of Muslims as the subordinate Other, and the harm it can have on Muslim's right to live as equal citizens, I will turn my attention to the situation in Myanmar to evaluate how hate speech has become an issue of

⁷⁶Stop Islamization of the World, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/SlOTW/?fref=nf> [November 2015].

concern. The situation in Myanmar has recently caught the attention of the United Nations (UN). The UN Secretary-General *Ban Ki-moon* recently expressed his concerns:

The continuous resort to hate speech, the incitement of communal animosities and the abuse of religion for political purposes resorted to by extreme elements among the majority community in Myanmar.⁷⁷

It cannot be denied that religious hate speech has been used for political gain in Myanmar. The association to Protect Race and Religion, otherwise known as Ma Ba Tha (another actor discussed in chapter one's conflict assessment) have been running a nationalist campaign which justifies itself by claiming that the country's Buddhist identity is under threat from Islam. Hate speech was similarly used in the presidential elections for the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2006, which contributed to a polarization of the country and gave the campaign an ethnic underpinning.⁷⁸ Additionally, the use of religion requires attention, as it is through promotion of Buddhism that anti-Muslim rhetoric justifies itself, as will be discussed shortly.

Firstly, let us situate Myanmar within the context of social media. Taking a step forward from the oppression of the military regime, citizens of Myanmar are now able to express themselves with a newfound freedom of speech through online platforms. The reforms of 2011 saw authorities relax their restrictions to access foreign websites like the BBC, the Democratic Voice of Burma, Radio Free Asia, Facebook and YouTube.⁷⁹ As participants of both focus groups noted, Facebook is the primary online platform used by young people across the country. The use of Facebook is aiding the growth of anti-Muslim sentiment in Myanmar, led by a small but increasingly influential movement of hard-line Buddhist nationalist monks. Wirathu, one of the actors discussed in the conflict assessment of chapter one, is the most prominent of

⁷⁷(2015) 'UN chief hits out at Myanmar election "hate speech"', *The Nation*, available at: <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/breakingnews/UN-chief-hits-out-at-Myanmar-election-hate-speech-30272128.html> [November 2015].

⁷⁸ Vollhardt, Coutin, Staub, Weiss and Deflander, (2006) p.15.

⁷⁹Buncombe, A., (2011), 'Burmese Junta Relaxes Access to Foreign Websites', *The Independent*, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/burmese-junta-relaxes-access-to-foreign-websites-2356125.html> [November 2015].

the Buddhist nationalist monk, dedicated to inciting fear and paranoia among the people of Myanmar and calling himself the 'Burmese Bin Laden.'⁸⁰ Wirathu told a reporter 'I call them troublemakers, because they are troublemakers,' in reference to Muslims, and added that he is 'proud to be called a radical Buddhist.'⁸¹ He also claimed that there is a 'population explosion' of Muslims and threatens that they will 'capture' the country in the end.⁸² These opinions are seen by the thousands of followers of Wirathu's Facebook and through his YouTube videos which have been watched tens of thousands of times. Though Wirathu is becoming internationally renowned for his extremist views, appearing on the front cover of *Time* magazine in 2013 with the headline 'The Face of Buddhist Terror', he has had few vocal critics inside of Myanmar. Abbot Arriya Wuttha Bewuntha of Mandalay's Myawaddy Sayadaw monastery has spoken out to criticize his views, however. He argued that 'this is not the way Buddha taught. What the Buddha taught is that hatred is not good, because Buddha sees everyone as an equal being. The Buddha doesn't see people through religion.'⁸³

So just how influential can anti-Muslim content found on Facebook be? Participants from both focus groups agreed, when asked the question 'what are the main sources that young people get information from?' that Facebook is the main resource.⁸⁴ Matthew Schissler from *Paung Ku*, a civil society organisation in Myanmar, describes the way people now use Facebook in Myanmar as a practice similar to the way information was gained during the decades of paranoid authoritarianism. In this period, the country's state-run media was often biased, and published the opinions of the Junta officials as fact. 'Rumour and word-of-mouth information are more credible

⁸⁰ Hodal, K., (2013) 'Buddhist monk uses racism and rumours to spread hatred in Burma', *The Guardian*, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/18/buddhist-monk-spreads-hatred-burma> [November 2015].

⁸¹ Fuller, T., (2013) 'Extremism Rises Among Myanmar Buddhists', *The New York Times*, available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/21/world/asia/extremism-rises-among-myanmar-buddhists-wary-of-muslim-minority.html> [November 2013].

⁸² Hodal, (2013).

⁸³ Hodal, (2013).

⁸⁴ Focus Group One and Two, *Interview by Davis, B.*, (2015).

than the news and government announcements in a place where censorship and propaganda have long been the norm' Schissler explains, adding that 'social media adds a megaphone to this.'⁸⁵ Facebook is a new platform to distribute the rumours, but this platform allows access to a far greater audience, and misinformation can be created and disseminated at a greater pace. When posed with the next question: 'how *valuable* is Facebook as a source of information?' a number of participants from both focus groups believed that it was 'mostly valuable uneducated people,' and that 'they believe the information, and then it is spread.'⁸⁶ One participant from focus group one then noted that it is considered valuable to the youth: 'youth see news and then share it' he argued, and added that, because of social media, the youth have particularly bad attitudes towards Muslims and openly show hate.⁸⁷ Additionally, for some cases it can be strong religious beliefs that affect the value of an article; when discussing the anti-Muslim narratives among fundamentalist Buddhists, a member of focus group one suggested that 'for people who read these articles and strongly believe in their religion and are sensitive about that religion, they believe the information.'⁸⁸ For example, a Buddhist may be more likely to believe Wirathu's warnings of a supposed 'population explosion' among the Muslim community, or a statement claiming that '100 percent of rape cases in Burma are by Muslims; none are by Buddhists,' according to his research.⁸⁹

From these points we can make a number of conclusions: a) Facebook follows on from the word-of-mouth method to distribute information freely, b) uneducated people are more likely to believe and spread misinformation, and c) the youth are most vulnerable to misinformation online and are therefore susceptible to anti-Muslim beliefs. Therefore, we know when devising methods to counter hate speech that we

⁸⁵Holland, H., (2014) 'Facebook in Myanmar: Amplifying hate speech?', *AlJazeera*, available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/06/facebook-myanmar-rohingya-amplifying-hate-speech-2014612112834290144.html> [November 2015].

⁸⁶Focus Group One and Two, *Interview by Davis, B.*, (2015).

⁸⁷Participant, Focus Group One, *Interview by Davis, B.*, (2015).

⁸⁸Participant, Focus Group One, *Interview by Davis, B.*, (2015).

⁸⁹Wade, F., (2013) 'Poison in the Sangha', *The Revealer*, available at: <http://therevealer.org/archives/17859> [November 2015].

need to focus on the youth demographic and implement educational initiatives (as will be discussed in chapter three).

The Impact of Hate Speech on Myanmar's Muslim Community

In the previous section we have seen how Facebook plays a vital role in the dissemination of misinformation in Myanmar, and discussed how factors such as religion or lack of education influence people to accept this information as truth and share it among their friends. I will now expand on how hate speech affects Myanmar's Muslim community and their ability to live as equal citizens, and argue that the wide spread anti-Muslim rhetoric on social media has become a source of polarization between religious groups.

As discussed in section *The Consequences of Online Hate Speech*, hate speech can have a significant impact on both the individuals who may be susceptible to believing hateful ideologies, and those who are being targeted. In Myanmar, the Muslim community are increasingly becoming the subjects of hate speech and hateful narratives. Aung San Suu Kyi told the BBC that tensions have been heightened as a result of a worldwide perception that 'global Muslim power was very great.'⁹⁰ Anti-Muslims rhetoric from Wirathu and his followers plays on this global fear in an attempt to Other the community and outcast them from society. The process of othering and excluding one particular group can be enhanced by the promotion of a sense of national identity that the group does not fit into. Ervin Staub (1989) has suggested that the 'cultural self-concept of a people greatly influences the need to protect the collective psychological self.'⁹¹ Nationalism arises from the pride of this collective cultural identity and the desire to maintain it, thus members of the community who are not part of the dominant identity group are perceived as inferior and a threat to the cultural identity. Subsequently, the 'us' and 'them' differentiation begins and can become engrained in the culture, which in turn makes it easier to

⁹⁰BBC, (2013) 'Suu Kyi blames Burma violence on 'climate of fear'', available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-24651359> [November 2015].

⁹¹Staub, E., (1989) *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence*, Cambridge University Press, p.18.

scapegoat members of the 'inferior' group. Scapegoating a group diminishes our responsibility and allows people to feel connected as they join to exclude the Other. Straub suggests that devaluation of a subgroup helps to raise low self-esteem.⁹² Myanmar's history of conflict and instability - including the Japanese invasion and the British colonial period – allows Wirathu to play on the country's low self-esteem by offering Buddhist citizens a strong sense of cultural and national identity. The monolithic country that Wirathu and likeminded thinkers aspire to cannot tend to the rights of every group within the culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse country. Acknowledging this, the International Crisis Group (ICG) recently urged the government of Myanmar to find way to create a new sense of national identity which would embrace the country's cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, including the clarification of the legal status of the Rohingya.⁹³

Though Strachan argues that it can be difficult to monitor how much of an impact online hate speech can have on society because we cannot accurately attribute certain changes to that hate speech,⁹⁴ participants of both focus groups both acknowledged how propaganda shared on Facebook can influence anti-Muslim attitudes. Members of focus group one believed that this kind of hate speech does cause violence, and has led to very real consequences for the Rohingya Muslims who not only lost their right to vote in the November elections, but are no longer accepted as citizens, despite many of them having resided there for generations.⁹⁵ The exclusion of the Muslim Rohingya minority led them to literally be referred to as the 'other'.⁹⁶ As I addressed earlier, Waldron is concerned over the loss of dignity of minority groups that affect

⁹²Straub, (1989) p.17.

⁹³Domínguez, G., (2014) 'Myanmar 'needs a new sense of national identity'', *Deutsche Welle*, available at: <http://www.dw.com/en/myanmar-needs-a-new-sense-of-national-identity/a-18019522> [November 2015].

⁹⁴Strachan, (2014) p.1.

⁹⁵A greater history of Myanmar's Rohingya Muslims can be found here: Selth, A., (2004) 'Burma's Muslims and the War on Terror', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp.107-126, available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10576100490275094> [November 2015], p.111.

⁹⁶Radio Free Asia, (2014) 'Myanmar Will Not Recognize Rohingyas on Upcoming Census', available at: <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/census-03132014181344.html> [November, 2015].

their ability to live as ordinary citizens. The hate speech that targets Muslims not only damages the dignity of the group as a whole, but adds to the struggles of the Rohingya Muslims who are losing their rights as civilians.

Foxman and Wolf liken online hate propaganda against minority groups like Myanmar's Muslims to the Nazi propaganda of the 30's and 40's, which was designed to make the general population tolerant of increasing anti-Semitic behaviour over time.⁹⁷ In the case of Myanmar, a steady increase of misinformation online and dehumanising statements against Muslims that incite fear such as: 'when they are strong they are like a wolf or a jackal, in large packs they hunt down other animals,'⁹⁸ can have a significant long-term impact on people open to persuasion due to lack of education, youth or ignorance. This propaganda has the potency to make the majority of the general population tolerant of Muslim persecution, just as Nazi propaganda made the persecution of the Jews possible. As Foxman and Wolf argue, whether it is conscious or not, people may think that if they see these ideas everywhere, there must be something to them.⁹⁹ This is particularly true if they are not educated about that particular religion, as was suggested in focus group one.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, human rights abuses - for example in August 2013 when a Buddhist mob of 1,000 people burned dozens of homes and shops down in the region of Sagaing (following rumours that a Muslim man tried to sexually assault a young woman)-¹⁰¹ are ignored by the authorities, and do not receive the indignation they would if it had been another

⁹⁷Foxman and Wolf, (2013) p.33.

⁹⁸Kaplan, S., (2015) 'The serene-looking Buddhist monk accused of inciting Burma's sectarian violence', *The Washington Post*, available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/05/27/the-burmese-bin-laden-fueling-the-rohingya-migrant-crisis-in-southeast-asia/>, [November 2015].

⁹⁹Foxman and Wolf, (2013) p.32.

¹⁰⁰Participant, Focus Group One, *Interview by Davis, B.*, (2015).

¹⁰¹ Wilson, S., (2013), 'Buddhists burn Muslim homes and shops in Burma', *The Telegraph*, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/burmamyanmar/10265942/Buddhists-burn-Muslim-homes-and-shops-in-Burma.html> [November 2015].

group targeted. This adheres to what Foxman and Wolf believe to be a decline in standards of civility triggered by the uncontrolled flow of content on the internet.¹⁰²

Measuring the Danger of Wirathu's Hate Speech

Now we have discussed how harmful hate speech can be in society, and the role it can play in dividing communities within it, I will suggest a useful method that can be used to judge the danger of certain hate speech. Susan Besesch, senior fellow at World Policy Institute, places emphasis on evaluative monitoring as a means to prevent group violence in a report titled: *Dangerous Speech: A Proposal to Prevent Group Violence* (2012). She defines five variables which affect the dangerousness of hate speech:

1. a powerful speaker with a high degree of influence over the audience,
2. the audience has grievances and fear that the speaker can cultivate,
3. a speech act that is clearly understood as a call to violence,
4. a social or historical context that is propitious for violence, for any of a variety of reasons, including longstanding competition between groups for resources, lack of efforts to solve grievances, or previous episodes of violence,
5. a means of dissemination that is influential in itself, for example because it is the sole or primary source of news for the relevant audience.¹⁰³

The most dangerous speech act, Benesch explains, is one for which all five variables are maximised. We can apply this method of evaluation to the hate speech spoken by Wirathu and the anti-Muslim nationalist movement in Myanmar, and observe relations to all five points.

¹⁰²Foxman and Wolf, p.33.

¹⁰³Benesch, S., (2012) 'Dangerous Speech: A Proposal to Prevent Group Violence', *World Policy Institute*, available at: <http://www.worldpolicy.org/sites/default/files/Dangerous%20Speech%20Guidelines%20Benesch%20January%202012.pdf> [November 2015], p.2.

1 - Wirathu is a prominent and influential speaker, as mentioned, with thousands of followers on Facebook and Youtube which allows his posts to be shared across the nation. Wirathu's ability to accumulate a significant amount of support by sharing hate and misinformation is largely to do with his status as a monk. In the eyes of Myanmar's Buddhist citizens who have been taught for centuries to consider Buddhism as the highest moral plane, how could someone of such spiritual authority be wrong?

2 – Advocates of the anti-Muslim campaign draw on the global demonization of Muslims in the wake of 9/11. Wirathu's words are both creating and playing on this fear of Islam and a rising Muslim population in certain parts of Myanmar.

3 - Buddhist lynch mobs have killed hundreds of Muslims and forced thousands from their homes, while Wirathu denies any role in the violence, it is unlikely that his anti-Muslim preaching has not strongly influenced these attacks.¹⁰⁴

4 – As I discussed in chapter one, Myanmar has suffered from a long history of ethnic and religious tension. The military backed government's preoccupation with homogeneity based on Buddhism and Burman (Bamar) ethnicity has consistently undermined Myanmar's religious and cultural diversity. The failure to recognise the rights that the 1947 constitution granted to ethnic and religious minorities, and to resolve the tensions between these groups, led to the rise of insurgency groups and further conflict.¹⁰⁵ The way in which Wirathu scapegoats Muslims and calls for unity to defeat them has allowed him to utilize society's already existing tensions; it works to his advantage that Myanmar's background of civil war and instability has resulted in fear and distrust.

5 – Wirathu has taken advantage of loosened restrictions on expression during a fragile time of transition, and broadcast his hatred through Facebook and Youtube. In 2014 violence erupted in Mandalay after Wirathu posted on

¹⁰⁴Fuller, (2013).

¹⁰⁵O'Shannassy, T., (2000) *Burma's Excluded Majority: Women, Dictatorship and the Democracy Movement*, CIIR, pp.9,10.

Facebook claims that a Buddhist woman was raped by Muslims; more than 600 officers have been sent to control the crowd of 300 Buddhists. Muslim shops were damaged and the windows of a mosque were smashed.¹⁰⁶ As discussed, Facebook is influential as a news source in Myanmar as information shared online is considered to be more credible for many citizens than information from the government. This particularly applies to the youth who are more likely to be Facebook users; consequently, this makes hate speech more effective long term. The attitudes and beliefs of young people are important for they are the minds of future governments and political figures.

Benesch's framework to assess the danger of hate speech allows us to map out the degree of Wirathu's influence on his audience and how he has manipulated social circumstances to evoke emotional responses. This is useful to reflect on as it brings to attention the need for initiatives that take into consideration the tensions that Wirathu plays on.

Conclusion

One of the most significant points that comes out of this analysis that hate speech can play a significant role in the dehumanization of Muslims. Being continuously exposed to misinformation about Islam, which serves to paint Muslims as the enemy, can make society more tolerant of that group's persecution. Painting them as criminals and rapists, as Wirathu does, portrays them as human rights abusers, which in turn supposedly forfeits their own human rights. As a result of this dehumanization, Muslims are deprived of what Waldron calls their right to dignity, and are not considered equal citizens.

Another incredibly important point for this study is that Facebook is considered a valuable source for information for youth in Myanmar. Therefore, misinformation about Muslims is easily disseminated and believed, particularly, as noted by

¹⁰⁶ Mezzofiore, G., (2014) 'Wirathu's 'Buddhist Woman Raped' Facebook Post Stokes Anti-Muslim Violence in Mandalay', *International Business Times*, available at: <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/wirathus-buddhist-woman-raped-facebook-post-stokes-anti-muslim-violence-mandalay-1455069>, [November 2015].

participants of the focus groups, among the less educated. This highlights the need for initiatives that encompass educational tools, as I will discuss and evaluate in chapter three.

Chapter Three: Approaches to Combatting Online Hate Speech

In chapter one I conducted an assessment of Buddhist and Muslim conflict in Myanmar and demonstrated how religion has become politicized by Buddhist nationalists, like Wirathu, who provoke the mistrust of Muslims to unify the Bamar Buddhist identity group. Furthering this, chapter two examined how these tensions are amplified through hate speech, and the consequences that online hate speech can have on its targeted minority group. The primary concerns discussed in this chapter were the psychological harm hate speech has, such as the othering and dehumanization of Muslims, and the potential to provoke violence through its damaging ideologies.

To guarantee long-lasting peace we must devise a solution to counter hate speech which encompasses Myanmar's history of ethnic and religious tensions. Lederach, a prominent scholar of peace studies, posits a theory of conflict resolution which aims at deep alterations of the conflict parties' relationships, in order to avoid reoccurrence of violence.¹⁰⁷ This approach is useful in the complexity of Myanmar's internal conflicts as it focuses less on short term solutions, and more on facilitating peace through changing the structural patterns that cause violence. This chapter aims to outline and assess different methods of countering hate speech that generally fall into three categories: prevention, regulation, and counter-narratives. Its purpose is to use these methods to evaluate what would be the most successful way to counter hate speech in Myanmar.

Anti Hate Speech Movements in Myanmar

Firstly, let us look at counter hate speech campaigns that have been initiated in Myanmar.

The Panzagar campaign (known as 'Flower Speech' in English)

¹⁰⁷ Lederach, J., (2003) *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*, Good Books, p. 11.

This began as a response to the anti-Muslim sentiment and has now got over 75,000 followers on Facebook.¹⁰⁸ In 2013 an activist named Nay Phone Latt who spent four years in jail for his online activism, launched the campaign that aimed to raise awareness of the dangers of hate speech and violent language online.¹⁰⁹ When asked if there are many positive campaigns on Facebook, focus group one discussed this campaign as an initiative that has been created to counter hate speech, though observed that it may only be used among people who are already open-minded towards religious and ethnic diversity.¹¹⁰

My Friend Campaign

Focus group one also discussed this campaign which is aimed at countering religious discrimination that arises from hate speech, and encourages people 'to be peaceful living with one another.' One participant explained the process: 'so she is Buddhist and I am Muslim, we would take a selfie and post it on Facebook. Then we write "I am Muslim, she is Buddhist ... we live peacefully."' ¹¹¹ This campaign encourages the posting of photographs of interfaith-friendships, from people with any religious backgrounds. When asked if any of the participants know anyone who has had their attitudes changed by this, one told us of a Buddhist friend from school who was sensitive about religion and did not really want to be friends with Muslims, but when she (the participant, a Muslim) asked if she wanted to be involved in the campaign and take a photo with her to post on Facebook, she was keen to take part. The participant added that once she had done this, her friend became more tolerant of Islam and curious about it, wanting to learn about religious beliefs such as eating Halal. Though this is just one incident, it is a good example of the development of relationships that can be key in preventing violence in the long term. Participants did advise that My

¹⁰⁸Panzagar Facebook page available at: <https://www.facebook.com/panzagar> [November 2015].

¹⁰⁹Pen America: free expression, free literature, 'Nay Phone Latt, Myanmar', available at: <http://www.pen.org/defending-writers/nay-phone-latt> [November 2015].

¹¹⁰Participant, Focus Group One, *Interview by Davis, B.*, (2015).

¹¹¹Participant, Focus Group One, *Interview by Davis, B.*, (2015).

Friend Campaign was not popular, but this example has shown the impact campaigns can have on relationships and attitudes for the youth. One important point the participant made here was that her Buddhist friend was keen to be involved as she liked taking pictures to post on Facebook, as many young Facebook users do in Myanmar and across the world, showing us that it is useful to use a method that is relevant to young people's lives. If more people were to have taken part in this campaign, it would have been more visible online to those who are also coming across hate speech, and may have influenced more people like the Buddhist friend.

Prevention

Identifying hate speech

It is important to understand how we can identify hate speech in addition to understanding how we can counter or prevent it. Vollhardt (2006) notes that the ability to identify more subtle forms of hate speech at an early stages makes countering it more likely to be successful, thus preventing its gradual increase and normalization, which, as he believes, would otherwise result in violence of different forms.¹¹² Therefore defining what is and is not hate speech is an important process in the counteracting of it. As Strachan (2014) distinguishes, there are two main characteristics of hate speech: dehumanisation and simplistic and unbalanced communication.¹¹³ Dehumanizing descriptions of groups, such as the use of animal names, can be an indicator of hate speech and future violence. For example, in chapter two I mentioned how Wirathu used the simile of a wolf or a jackal who, in large packs 'hunt down other animals,' to describe Muslims.¹¹⁴ Examples of this form of dehumanisation can be found throughout history such as the Nazi's use of the word

¹¹²Vollhardt, J., Coutin, M., Staub, E., Weiss, G. and Deflander, J. (2006). Deconstructing Hate Speech in the DRC: A Psychological Media Sensitization Campaign. *Journal of Hate Studies*, 5:1, 15-35, p.26.

¹¹³Strachan, A., (2014) '*Interventions to Counter Hate Speech*' (*GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1116*), GSDRC, University of Birmingham, p.1.

¹¹⁴Kaplan, S., (2015) 'The serene-looking Buddhist monk accused of inciting Burma's sectarian violence', *The Washington Post*, available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/05/27/the-burmese-bin-laden-fueling-the-rohingya-migrant-crisis-in-southeast-asia/>, [November 2015].

Judenschwein ('Jewish Pig'), or the Hutus use of *inyenzi* or 'cockroaches' to describe the Tutsis.¹¹⁵ In addition to what we would call 'animalistic dehumanisation', 'mechanistic dehumanization' is a characteristic of hate speech that involves labelling others as inert, cold, rigid, passive, or superficial.¹¹⁶ As these characteristics show, dehumanization can be much more subtle than we might assume, and once an individual or group is continually referred to in one of these ways, the public's threshold for using more extreme forms of dehumanizing hate speech are both lowered.¹¹⁷ To further the evaluation of the early stages of hate speech, it would then be useful to consider Susan Besesch's five variables that assess the level of danger particular hate speech has, as I applied in the case of Wirathu in chapter two.

Education and Awareness

While I have placed this section under prevention, methods to promote education and awareness are also useful to fight existing hate and prejudice. Human rights and respect must be encouraged through education; most importantly in the classroom, but as chapter one address, there are flaws in the educational system in Myanmar, such as the lack of teaching about religion or ethnic minority groups. Therefore, these values should be encouraged at home, through the media, and through interactions with people in communities. As Foxman and Wolf believe, 'educating current and future generations about the relationship between hate speech and democracy will have a far greater positive impact than any set of laws that seek to govern or limit hate speech.'¹¹⁸ They believe shaping the ideas, attitudes and values of citizens can strengthen our shared commitment to democracy and the rights of all citizens. Schools and colleges have the ability to combat the threat of online hate among their students by regulating hate speech that they understand to be dangerous, but simultaneously upholding freedom of speech and encouraging the examination of ideas, including unpopular ideas.

¹¹⁵Thompson, A., (2007) *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, IDRC, p.88.

¹¹⁶Vollhardt, Coutin, Staub, Weiss and Deflander, (2006) p.27.

¹¹⁷Vollhardt, Coutin, Staub, Weiss and Deflander, (2006) p.27.

¹¹⁸Foxman and Wolf, (2013) p.153.

As hate speech in Myanmar is based around persecution of a religious group, religious education would be beneficial among the youth. Where schools do not teach about religions other than Buddhism, debating and discussion groups out of school can be a useful way to introduce people to new ideas and new beliefs. This method can also open the minds of those involved, and can teach them how to develop opinions based on reason, leading to a more critical approach to Facebook content. Foxman and Wolf use the example of an interactive campus-based website used as a platform to share rumours and gossip for fun. They explain how JuicyCampus had enabled free speech and anonymity which consequently resulted in sexist, racist and homophobic posts among the more harmless content. Instead of banning JuicyCampus out of respect for freedom of expression, Pepperdine University encouraged students to engage in dialogue about the hate that was exposed on this website.¹¹⁹ Creating a space for dialogue and reflection would be a useful way to introduce Myanmar citizens of all ages to different beliefs and attitudes.

As we have seen in previous chapters, the internet is the paramount source for communication and information in the world today. Therefore, media training is a vital tool in aiding both the prevention of hate speech and countering hate speech. Titlet, Keen and Foldi believe that digital media literacy needs to begin promoting the ability to read text closely and carefully, and develop the skills necessary to read critically.¹²⁰ They add that it would be useful for young people to become content creators themselves therefore actively engaging in creating their own digital media, which, as they say 'helps demystify the medium in significant ways.'¹²¹ Engaging young people in anti-hate campaigns online and, within this, incorporating them in the process of media production or written work, could play a significant role in teaching young people how to address the internet's range of information subjectively. This is also a

¹¹⁹ Foxman and Wolf, (2013) p.159.

¹²⁰ Titlet, G., Keen, E., Foldi, L., (2014) Starting Points for Combating Hate Speech Online, *Council of Europe, Youth Department*, available at: https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/Publications/2014_Starting_Points_for_Combating_Hate_Speech_Online.pdf [November 2015], p, 80.

¹²¹ Titlet, Keen and Foldi, (2014) p, 80.

though came up in a meeting hosted by the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue.¹²² Not only does it teach the youth how to approach content they find online, but media training can also give the necessary tools to people who want to make a change.

Regulation

Regulating Hate Speech Versus Freedom of Speech

One option that is regularly discussed by scholars, particularly Waldron, is the implementation of laws that regulate hate speech. A particular form of hate speech that is currently recognised as a serious crime under international law is incitement to genocide. This crime saw Julius Streicher, editor of the anti-Semitic newspaper *Der Stürmer*, tried and executed during the Nuremberg Tribunal and has been one of the key charges against defendants of the Rwandan Genocide, which saw almost a million Tutsis killed.¹²³ Defining speech as ‘incitement to genocide’, however, can be a complex process, and great care is needed. It is particularly difficult to do across different culture where one mode of speech may be perceived as directly encouraging aggressive action in one culture, but not in the other. The reason it is important to reflect on what incitement to genocide is when discussing hate speech, is precisely because of this fine line between the two. Arguably, this could make a case for the legal regulation of hate speech, but as Foxman and Wolf believe, legal restrictions are the least effective way to deal with the problem.¹²⁴

Discussing the prohibition of incitement to hatred, Kyung-wha Kang, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, describes how ‘the fine line between freedom of

¹²²Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, (2015) ‘Working Meeting on Youth-Oriented Online Hate Speech: Summary’, available at: http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/youthandmediaalpha/files/2015/06/HS_Working-Meeting_Report_Final_15-04-21-EM.pdf [November 2015].

¹²³More information on both these cases can be found here: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, ‘Incitement to Genocide in International Law’, available at: <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007839> [October 2015].

¹²⁴Foxman and Wolf, (2013) p.60.

expression and hate speech has come increasingly under focus.’¹²⁵ There are a number of international human rights treaties that attempt to find a fair balance between the two including the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR). Article 19 of the ICCPR states that ‘everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.’ This does not come without restriction however; article 20 adds that ‘any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.’¹²⁶ It should be noted that Myanmar is not a signatory of the ICCPR, however, but if they were a signatory, would it help to prevent incitement of hatred online? Wirathu would undoubtedly be going against article 20, but so do many online hate groups such as the UK’s Britain First, whose content could be classed as advocacy of national and religious hatred, yet they are not considered to be breaking any laws. As Foxman and Wolf observe, the ICCPR has had little impact on U.S. jurisprudence.¹²⁷ For this reason, I would highlight the need for methods of prevention and counter narratives over legal regulation; as a participant of focus group one said, it is our responsibility to be considerate of other people, and restricting freedom of speech will not solve the underlying issue here.¹²⁸

We have seen how difficulties not only arise when trying to permit freedom of speech and prohibit encouragement of hatred, but the fine line between what is classified as ‘hate speech’ and what can be considered ‘incitement to genocide’ leads to further complications. Knowing how to counter and control this therefore requires careful consideration and any action that we take must be done in accordance with international human rights standards.

Monitoring Social Media

¹²⁵United Nations Human Rights: Office for the High Commissioner of Human Rights (2012) ‘Striking a balance between freedom of expression and the prohibition of incitement to hatred’, available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/Strikingabalancebetweenfreedomofexpression.aspx> [October 2015].

¹²⁶‘International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights’, *United Nations Human Rights*, available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx> [November 2015].

¹²⁷Foxman and Wolf, (2013) p.

¹²⁸Participant, Focus Group One, *Interview by Davis, B.*, (2015).

Facebook has a strict policy to remove groups from the site that makes racial, gender, religious, or sexual orientation attacks against individuals or groups. However, Facebook's existence is based on being a free and open social media platform; it therefore permits offensive content that it does not deem as threatening. As one member of focus group one noted, a page can be reported many times yet it may not be taken down. Marne Levine, VP of Global Public Policy has said on behalf of Facebook that they have found that posting insensitive or cruel content often results in many more people denouncing it than supporting.¹²⁹

We prohibit content deemed to be directly harmful, but allow content that is offensive or controversial. We define harmful content as anything organizing real world violence, theft, or property destruction, or that directly inflicts emotional distress on a specific private individual (e.g. bullying)¹³⁰

However, this does not fully consider the impact of the existence of what may be brushed off as mere bigotry, satire or humour, but is actually a manifestation of prejudice and hate.

As reporting the content in an attempt to remove it from Facebook may not be an effective method of intervention, a better method may be the monitoring of hate speech. To highlight the value of online monitoring methods, Strachan uses the example of Umati, a project that monitored Kenya's online space to produce a database of hate speech.¹³¹ She observes that this type of intervention often serves as a foundation for further intervention, which is the case for one Umanti report that aimed to understand where most 'extremely dangerous speech' can be found online. For example, this report revealed that Facebook is 'the online space where most online users prefer to engage in dangerous speech' within their community, with more activity deemed as 'dangerous hate speech' than twitter, online news articles, or

¹²⁹Levine, M., (2013) 'Controversial, Harmful and Hateful Speech on Facebook', *Facebook.com*, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook-safety/controversial-harmful-and-hateful-speech-on-facebook/574430655911054> [November 2015].

¹³⁰Levine, (2013).

¹³¹Strachan, (2014) p.5.

blogs.¹³² The intention of Umati is to qualitatively analyse the data it collects so it can contribute to research in the areas of technology, human monitoring, education on ethnic and religious diversity, and the influence of religion on speech.¹³³ By identifying and understanding the use of hate speech online in Kenya, attempts to find non-government ways to reduce its effects of violence on the ground can be made. Therefore, similar initiatives would be useful to implement in Myanmar to gain a deeper understanding of hate speech.

Counter Narratives

Firstly, I want to address why proactive counter narratives are so important. One of the problems with the visibility of hate speech online is that the targeted group may believe the opinion is more accepted in society than it actually is. In addition to prevention and regulation, is important to visibly support and show solidarity with that group, and to address the presence of hatred but show it is not a shared belief. This is a point expressed by Vollhardt; he argues that when rejection of the hate speech is expressed by people who belong to the same social group as those who are behind it, it is less likely that the entire group will be perceived as antagonistic. It can therefore reduce the potential for cycles of violence.¹³⁴

Social media platforms often receive a great amount of criticism and blame for shaping the thoughts and ideas of the youth. However, Twitter and Facebook have both shown the power to draw world-wide attention to campaigns or ideas through their 'trends' or 'hashtags'. The hashtag 'NotInMyName' is an online campaign to counter islamophobia after the growing threat of extremist groups such as ISIS and al-Qaeda. The campaign, started last September by Active Change Foundation in London, was launched to show British Muslims challenging ISIS and to show the world that

¹³²(2012-2014)'Umati: Monitoring Online Dangerous Speech: October 2012 - January 2013', *iHub Research*, available at: http://www.ihub.co.ke/uploads/default/files/umati/Umati_Report_Oct-Jan_2013.pdf [November 2015], p.24.

¹³³(2012-2014)'Umati: Monitoring Online Dangerous Speech: October 2012 - January 2013', p.10.

¹³⁴Vollhardt, Coutin, Staub, Weiss and Deflander, (2006) p.31.

terrorist groups like ISIS do not represent Islam and its beliefs.¹³⁵ One positive aspect of this campaign is its simplicity and ease to participate in; additionally, its visibility can make it highly effective by drawing attention to the problem, which may intrigue its audience to look further into it. Though it may be simple, the 'NotInMyName' trend has been shared by thousands of social media users, helping to counter negative perceptions of Islam and show people that terrorist groups such as ISIS do not represent Islam. This is one of many social activism campaigns to raise awareness. The 'SandraBland' hashtag illustrated how social media is a powerful tool in the hands of activists. The hashtag became popular after scepticism arose surrounding the circumstances of Sandra Bland's death (police claimed Bland committed suicide in jail three days after being arrested for what many considered, after a video of the arrest became available online, to be an unfair arrest). These social media campaigns that draw attention to injustice can often result in change: in 2013 feminist campaign groups called for the ban of online pages they said promoted violence, and this led to Facebook admitting they needed to do more to identify and remove controversial, harmful and hateful content.¹³⁶ As these kind of campaigns spread internationally through Twitter or Facebook, it may be a useful method to draw attention to human rights abuses or discriminating attitudes that affect Myanmar's communities.

Furthermore, businesses can play an important role in countering hate by giving young people the tools to find their voice, promote peace and develop through education. In an interview Farah Anwar Pandith, who works for the American government as a Special Representative to Muslim Communities, argues that not only should the government create platforms where voices can be heard, but businesses should be creating them too.¹³⁷ He gives the example of TED, a global set of educational conferences available through the TED app for smart phones, Facebook, and Twitter.

¹³⁵ Mosbergen, D., (2015) "This Is Not Islam': #NotInMyName Campaign Revived After Paris Attacks', *Huffington Post*, available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/notinmyname-paris-attacks_56494ef7e4b045bf3defbf7a?v3ac3di [November 2015].

¹³⁶ Lee, D., (2013) 'Facebook bows to campaign groups over 'hate speech'', *BBC*, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-22701082> [November 2015].

¹³⁷ Pandith, F., (2013), 'Social Media in the Muslim World', *U.S. Department of State*, available at: <http://www.state.gov/s/srmc/2013/206743.htm> [November 2015].

These outlets can be available to people in Myanmar, though only to those who can afford the technology. The platform not only educates people but has the power to make people heard. For example, Ted held a conference in Uganda for the youth ‘because [they] wanted to have young people from Africa be heard.’¹³⁸ Pandith believes that there is power in the voices of society who want to push back extremism; we just need to give them a platform. Helping the non-traditional actors such as the youth demographic is important in debunking the idea of us and them. Giving a voice to Myanmar’s non-Bamar ethnic and religious groups could help strengthen their credibility as members of society and create an awareness of their presence. Burma News International (BNI) is a group of small ethnic media outlets (many of which are based in Thailand) aiming to establish their collective voice. Though the environment is still considered to be unsupportive of ethnic media, many believe this will help bridge the divide between the Bamar and other ethnicities.¹³⁹

One important point to consider when discussing these ideas for campaigns in Myanmar is religion. Throughout chapters one and two we have acknowledged that religion is involved in many aspects of conflict in Myanmar; as chapter one addressed, religion can alter the social behaviour of society, and the existence of strong religious/ethnic identity groups can help in marginalizing the ‘subordinate’ religious Other. Drawing on Gopin’s ideas, the involvement of religion within peacebuilding initiatives could be beneficial and may promote better interaction between religious communities.¹⁴⁰ Using Buddhist values social media campaigns such as compassion, and drawing on specific teachings from scriptures could be key to encouraging religious groups to engaging in a positive interaction towards both their own faith and practice, and the religious Other.

Examples of Anti-Hate Campaigns

¹³⁸Pandith, (2013).

¹³⁹Dolan, T. & Grey, S., (2014) ‘Media and Conflict in Myanmar: Opportunities for Media to Advance Peace’, *United States Institute of Peace*, available at: <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW92.pdf> [November 2015] p.22.

¹⁴⁰An-Na’im, A., (2002) *Cultural Transformation and Human Rights in Africa*, Zed Books: London, p.3.

Inter Faith Week

Inter Faith week is a campaign in Britain that promotes and encourages interfaith encounters and activities including discussion groups, music and arts festivals, competitions and school visits to local houses of worship. Salman Farsi, a spokesman for a London mosque said that for years his mosque has been a target for far right groups.¹⁴¹ As part of Inter Faith Week this mosque held an Islamic awareness course, open to the public, in which they were taught about Islam's intellectual history, the diversity of beliefs and denominations within the religion, and the history of Muslims in Britain. According to course organizer Juber Hussain, many of the participants had questions about Sharia law, and Islam's stance on divorce, inheritance and polygamy.¹⁴²

So what can Myanmar learn from this? Gopin argues that interfaith interventions like this have the potential to change the attitudes of people, and notes the development of the Catholic Church's attitude towards Judaism, which has progressed from providing educational materials.¹⁴³ A campaign like this not only shows the targeted minority, like Myanmar's Muslim community, that there are people willing to listen to them and learn about their beliefs, but it gives participants a chance to address fears, rumours and questions they have. However, these courses will arguably only attract those who are already open minded and willing to learn about Islam.

All Out

All Out is a global online campaign aiming to help the LGBT movement work towards equality and bring awareness to the public through education and engagement.¹⁴⁴ All Out have a primary campaign website, but they also have a significant following on

¹⁴¹Kuruvilla, C., (2015) 'How The UK Is Strengthening Interfaith Bonds After Paris Attacks', *Huffington Post*, available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/how-the-uk-is-strengthening-interfaith-bonds-after-the-paris-attacks_564ef088e4b0d4093a573479?yazqto6r [November 2015].

¹⁴²Kuruvilla, (2015).

¹⁴³Gopin, M., (2002) 'Religion, Violence and Conflict Resolution', *Peace and Change*, vol.22, no. 1, p.14.

¹⁴⁴*All Out*, available at: <http://allout.org/en/> [November 2015].

Facebook and Twitter where people can get information about offline events and read information about LGBT rights across the world. Similar to Amnesty International, All Out spread the word about human rights abuses to campaign for action; one example of this was when 5 LGBT women were arrested in China for protesting gender inequality but were soon released after All Out drew international attention to the injustice, putting pressure on the Chinese government to release the women.¹⁴⁵ Additionally, they have put pressure on PayPal (internet payment system) to sever ties with anti-LGBT hate groups which resulted in the removal of these 'extremist' groups.¹⁴⁶ A report by Titley, Keen and Foldi (2014) states that the weakness of this campaign is in its visibility; if it is not marketed to a large enough audience, its potential will be limited to those who have already heard of it.¹⁴⁷ However, it has achieved many significant results that deserve recognition.

Young, Jewish and Proud

Young, Jewish and Proud is a campaign created by young leaders from Jewish Voice for Peace. They are dedicated to promoting peace, democracy and human rights in Palestine and Israel by working with activists in these areas, among other peacebuilding organisations. They support both Israelis and Palestinians in their fight for justice and security and want to bring an end to all violence against civilians. They devised The Young Jewish Declaration in 2011 which was written by young people to express their global concerns against the wrong attitude that some Jewish people have to others, and to address the stereotypes about Jewish people.¹⁴⁸ The declaration, available on their website or through video format on Youtube, is divided into four parts: we exist, we remember, we refuse and we commit.

¹⁴⁵Jacobs, A., (2015) 'Taking Feminist Battle to China's Streets, and Landing in Jail', *New York Times*, available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/06/world/asia/chinese-womens-rights-activists-fall-afoul-of-officials.html> [November 2015].

¹⁴⁶Titley, Keen and Foldi, (2014), p.71.

¹⁴⁷Titley, Keen and Foldi, (2014), p.71.

¹⁴⁸Young, Jewish and Proud, 'The Young Jewish Declaration', available at: <http://www.youngjewishproud.org/about/>, [November 2015].

Young, Jewish and Proud have created a platform where people of all other faiths can listen to the voice of the young Jewish community. They express pride of their identity, which is important for the Jewish community, while also supporting self-criticism. In their fourth section of the declaration they state that they 'commit to re-envisioning "homeland," to make room for justice.' The comments section on their web page has received hundreds of messages from both Jews and Muslims who engaging in discussions with each other. The website has the ability to promote such dialogue and also has the potential to bring young Israeli and Palestinian voices together for peace.

Approaching Social Media Responsibly

Finally, we must encourage young people to use the internet responsibly, and to think about how our actions online might affect others.¹⁴⁹ We may think that liking a hateful status or post on Facebook is harmless but plenty of research, including my own field research, shows that people are deeply influenced by the perceived social context in which they operate. Rather than being discouraged by hateful messages we should use hate speech as motivation to spread our own positive messages; we cannot underestimate how great the impact of our positive messages may be. Below are some of Foxman and Wolf's most useful suggestions I would like to highlight for the situation in Myanmar:

- *Support positive messages.* Share and recommend social media pages or posts that you find positive and informative.
- *Discuss what you have seen with other people.* Talk to others about content you have found to be distressing or frightening, share it with teachers, parents, religious leaders or report the material you deem to be inappropriate to the company. Facebook allows you to report content and gives you a number of options to describe why that content is inappropriate or offensive (for example, whether it is offensive to religion, race or sexuality).

¹⁴⁹Foxman and Wolf, (2013) p.141.

- *Think before you act.* Though Facebook is a fast paced environment, it is important to think before responding to content you agree or disagree with. Debates on social media, particularly when they concern one's own religion, are often emotionally charged and focus more on prompt replies than accuracy, logic and truth.¹⁵⁰

Conclusion

A theme that has been observed in the assessment of the conflict landscape in Myanmar is the marginalisation of minority groups and the lack of cohesion among the estimated 135 ethnic groups. Because of this, it is important to give a voice to non-Bamar ethnic voices through social media and online campaigns. As chapter two addressed, the freedom of social media can cause significant social harms, but this freedom can similarly be used to support tolerance and acceptance. The initiatives that have been discussed throughout this chapter should aim to promote the acceptance of Myanmar as a multi faith country and tolerance between different faiths. Interfaith Facebook campaigns, media training to encourage awareness of the subjectivity of online content, and creating space for balanced dialogue both online and offline, are all useful ways to use the media's freedom to promote tolerance and peace. Though it is difficult to measure the success of particular interventions as we cannot be sure the decline of hate speech in a particular case is down to that one campaign, there have been certain cases discussed here where we can observe a measurable impact, and where pressure from the public has resulted in change.

¹⁵⁰ Foxman and Wolf, (2013) pp.141-143.

Findings and Conclusions

This study highlighted a number of driving factors in the Buddhist/Muslim conflict, specifically focusing on Buddhist hate speech, including: anger towards the migration of Muslims during the last two centuries; the military governments failure to tend to the needs of Myanmar's ethnic and religious diverse population; competition of resources between groups; and the combination of Buddhist religious fanaticism with Burmese nationalism. This highlights why peacebuilding initiatives need to acknowledge the complexity of the context it is dealing with. In this context, understanding the ethnic and religious diversity and the homogeneity of the Buddhist, Bamar state allows us to acknowledge the need for initiatives that encourage the acceptance of Myanmar as a multi faith, multi ethnic country. To co-exist in a well-ordered society each group must accept that society is not just for them but for others too. Waldron does not suggest that we need to love or befriend those who differ on matters of religion, but rather that 'they must be able to engage in ordinary dealings among people.'¹⁵¹

Chapter two examined the role of social media in the spread of hatred in Myanmar. Social media sites have changed the way news is disseminated and how people communicate their reaction to events in the news. People who have hate-based beliefs are given a platform where they can comfortably share these beliefs and find like-minded individuals or groups who affirm their convictions. To some it may seem innocent and harmless to simply 'like' a Facebook page or share racist Facebook statuses, but these acts can have serious consequences; Wirathu and likeminded individuals or groups can use hate speech to transport destructive ideologies which scapegoat and dehumanize the subordinate Other. The seemingly harmless acts can result in psychological changes, such as the devaluation of Myanmar's Muslims, which makes further, more destructive acts possible.¹⁵² The normalisation of hatred towards

¹⁵¹Waldron, J., (2012) *The Harm in Hate Speech*, Harvard University Press, p.219.

¹⁵²Straub, p.17.

a particular group allows a gradual increase in the degree of expressed hatred; this can allow violence in the form of structural and political exclusion all the way to genocide.

As chapter one discussed, dividers and connectors are only potential sources of polarization, and are only made possible when political leaders use them to persuade and mobilize their constituents. There are many political, economic or social reasons that motivate religious leaders to target a group in society and turn their supporters against that group. What is important to remember is that religion plays a significant role in the lives of many people, which suggests that the exploitation of religious beliefs or religious identity groups in hate speech can influence the adherents of those religions. From this we can argue that methods aiming to promote education and awareness would be key in preventing this. Encouraging tolerance and a critical approach to what leaders say, or what content on Facebook claims, will prevent the mobilization of citizens based on misinformation.

This study highlighted the primary factors that allow hate speech to thrive as: lack of education, particularly as the school curriculum does not encompass the study of minority religions or ethnicities; a strong sense of nationalism or belonging to an identity group (in this particular study, Bamar and/or Buddhist identity group), which is exploited to achieve emotive responses towards the anti-Muslim propaganda; and the exploitation of existing social and economic disenfranchisement. Chapter three considered these factors and suggested initiatives such as interfaith Facebook campaigns, creating spaces for dialogue, media and digital literacy training, and using social media to bring attention to discrimination and the abuse of human rights, such as the various 'hashtag' campaigns which give the otherwise voiceless a voice. But what makes an online anti-hate-speech campaign successful? Re-posting supportive anti-hate messages has positive elements; it shows good intent at the very least, which may effectively make the targeted group feel that they are not alone. However, supportive campaigns such as the recent '#prayforParis' posts often go viral for a couple of days and then fade out, with no real or long-term impact. What is needed with Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites is a proactive attitude towards countering hate from the youth. If the youth are actively engaged in promoting peace and tolerance online, its visibility will grow and present itself to those who are

susceptible to believing the similarly visible hateful content. Online campaigns are most effective when they fill us with the indignation to act against inequality and prejudice.

Chapter three showed education to be a key theme in both focus groups; many participants believed that the best way to effectively counter and prevent hate speech is through educating people. Education is needed to cultivate morals that reduce the attraction of hateful behaviour later in life. Arguably the greatest weapon that hate groups have is misinformation; the viral nature of social media and misinformation has resulted in distorted perceptions among the west about Islam; the lack of knowledge about the religion makes this easier. In an interview conducted by Mark Juergensmeyer, Wirathu explained that one of the reasons he did not trust Muslims is because he believes they are 'secretive', since their mosques were not open to everyone. Juergensmeyer then noted a conversation with a local Muslim leader who said that the mosques were closed solely to prevent people from coming inside with their shoes on and desecrating the worship space.¹⁵³ Critics have pointed to Wirathu's lack of education to explain his intolerance for Muslims; we often fear what we do not understand.¹⁵⁴ Both knowledge of the Muslim religion and their community, and dialogue between Wirathu (or someone with similar views) and members of their community could prevent such beliefs and misinformation, thus aid in preventing the spread of negative perceptions.

Peacebuilding in Myanmar should aim to bring about awareness and acceptance of the religious or ethnic Other and replacing the 'us' and 'them' mentality in society, growing from the rise in hate speech. It is often the case that fear of the Other stems from unfamiliarity and ignorance, and that attitudes can be changed through friendship and being taught more about that mysterious Other, whom you may have heard about only through negative news headlines. Two interviewees both told me similar stories of how, as Muslims, their friendships with Buddhist classmate had

¹⁵³ <http://religiondispatches.org/chatting-with-myanmars-buddhist-terrorist/>

¹⁵⁴ Hodal, K., (2013) 'Buddhist monk uses racism and rumours to spread hatred in Burma', *The Guardian*, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/18/buddhist-monk-spreads-hatred-burma> [November 2015].

taught the Buddhist friend about Islam, and had gotten rid of misconceptions that they had had from lack of education and rumours. Deconstructing the identity groups by promoting interfaith relationships is key in demystifying the Other, and in breaking down the social barriers that polarize different groups within society.

One participant of focus group two said: 'we need to change each other. It's important to change the government and support Aung San Suu Kyi, but we need to change ourselves and our ideas one by one.'¹⁵⁵ This thought supports the argument throughout this study that initiatives should promote awareness, understanding, and respect of others. Changes in the government are important, but changing our ideas and becoming more tolerant of different religious or ethnic groups is key to long lasting peace.

¹⁵⁵ Participant, Focus Group Two, *Interview by Davis, B.*, (2015).

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Appendix A

Focus group discussions took place in Smile Education and Development Foundations office in Yangon, October 2015. The focus groups were led by myself and Dr Mark Owen - director of Winchester Centre of Religion, Reconciliation and Peace, and head of Winchester University's MA Reconciliation and Peacebuilding. Interview questions were as follows:

- What are your opinions on Buddhist/Muslim relations? Are they negative/positive?
- What are the main sources of influencing opinions on religious groups? What is it that makes these influential?
- Does it influence yours or your friends' views?
- Is there a clear difference between attitudes in different generations?
- Do you think pro-Buddhism speech has a negative impact on religious minorities?
- Does hate speech cause violence in your opinion?
- What do you think the best tools for countering hate speech are? Should more be done to restrict it?
- How do we balance freedom of expression and control hate speech?