

UPPSALA UNIVERSITY

Department of Theology

Master Programme in Religion in Peace and Conflict

Master thesis, 15 credits

Spring, 2019

Supervisor: Håkan Bengtsson



UPPSALA  
UNIVERSITET

# RELIGION, CONFLICT AND CONFLICTING VIEWS ON THE RELIGIOUS "OTHER" IN MYANMAR

ANDREAS DYBKJÆR-  
ANDERSSON

## Table of Content

1. Abstract	4
2. Introduction	5
2.1 The Religious Other in Myanmar	5
2.2 Scope of the Paper: Theology of Religions - Baptist Christians - Northern Myanmar	6
2.3 Purpose of the Paper: Social Representation of the "Other" and "Theology of Religions"	7
2.4 Research Questions	8
3. Context - Religion in Peace and Conflict in Myanmar	8
3.1 Kachin State, Northern Myanmar	8
4. Theoretical perspectives	10
4.1 In-Group - Out-Group Dynamics and Social Identity Theory	10
4.2 Theology of Religions	10
4.3 The "Other and the "Religious Other"	12
5. Methodology	14
5.1 The "Other" - Theological and Social Representation	14
5.2 Discourse Analysis	14
5.3 Application of Method and Theory	16
6. Talking about the "Other" - Data and Sources	19
6.1 Myanmar Institute of Theology	20
6.2 The Association for Theological Education in Myanmar	20
6.3 Kachin Baptist Convention	20
6.4 Material and Data Collection	21
6.5 Ethical Considerations	21
7. Representing the "Other" - Analyzing "Theology of Religions" and Representation	22
7.1 Myanmar Theologians Declaration on Dialogue Across Religions	22
7.2 Theology of Religions Perspectives from Myanmar Institute of Theology	22
7.2.1 Universal Salvation, Anonymous Christians and Interfaith Dialogue	27
7.2.1.1 Changing Who "Them" and "Us" Are	27
7.2.2 The Existential Rather than Metaphysical Christian-Buddhist Question	29

7.2.2.1 The "Them" in "Them" and "Us"	29
7.2.2.2 The "Us" in "Them" and "Us"	30
7.2.2.3 The Role of the Christian Church and Theology	31
7.2.2.4 Images of "Baptism" and "Opening Up" in the Christian Church	33
7.2.2.4 The Existential Christian-Buddhist Question	34
7.2.2.5 An Existential Christian Buddhist Kingdom Community	35
7.4 Intra-Christian Exclusion of "False Teachers" and "Spies" in Kachin	37
8. Discussion and Conclusion	40
9. Bibliography	44

## **1. Abstract**

In Myanmar "othering" has severe consequences for religious groups, including contributing to escalate and sustain violent conflicts. Religious doctrine is among several other factors that inform the views on the "religious other". This paper analyzes "theology of religions" and representation of the "religious other" in one religious group in Myanmar: The majority Christian denomination, the Baptists, with a scope related to Northern Myanmar, particularly Kachin State. The findings are that there is no uniform way in which Christian Baptists in Myanmar, and related to Kachin State, deal with the "religious other". The findings suggest, however, that related to their "theologies of religions" Christian minority voices are mainly concerned with the Buddhist majority. This in a way in which the "religious other" from other religious groups are not of great concern. Conflicts and conflictual relations in which also religious identities across religious groups are present served but more as an implicit backdrop. Instead, positive social representation and explicitly encouraging peace-seeking engagement and relationships with the "religious other" were highlighted by some. Calls for cooperation among Christian groups were also highlighted. In addition, however, an important finding in the analyzed material was that there to a great extent was a Christian inter-group positioning with "in-grouping" and "out-grouping" - including affirmation or rejection of the "theology of religions" - of other Christian sub-groups or individuals. As such, the negative "othering" by some Christians were interestingly not mainly concerned with the "religious other", but with the "denominational other".

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 The Religious Other in Myanmar

"The pervasive nature of hate speech is alarming", Yanghee Lee, the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar wrote in her 2019 Report to the UN Human Rights Council (Lee p. 11). Understanding the way in which the "other" is represented in Myanmar remains vital. Relevant for the field of this Master Programme in Religion in Peace and Conflict is the representation of the "religious other" and how the "religious other" is spoken about - and which "theologies of religions" are at play and influence such representation.

In Myanmar "othering" is happening across various groups. Much research and focus has gone into the horrific representation of Muslims, in particular the Rohingya Muslims, where derogative "othering", propaganda and hate speech were among the tools to prime people to allow for and take part in what is now called a genocidal strategy leading 730.000 Rohingya Muslims to flee "the military's campaign of mass killings" - many the country to neighbouring Bangladesh (Al-Jazeera, March 5, 2019: "In Myanmar: Pervasive Hate Speech and Shrinking Freedom"<sup>1</sup>)<sup>2</sup>. These operations were Tatmadaw government military operations but included passive acceptance and active participation of local people. The identification markers and identity categories in which people were divided included religious ones - Buddhist and Muslim. Burma Times for example called it "Buddhist mobs", which "killed men, women and children, looted homes and torched Rohingya villages" (Burma Times, March 6, 2018: "The Ethnic Cleansing of the Rohingya in Myanmar Continues"<sup>3</sup>)<sup>4</sup>. It is worth exploring if violence across religious groups, here e.g. against Muslims, is not just state-sponsored, but informed among other things by religious teachings. Some researchers claim there is a need to focus more on and understand root causes of religious (here for example anti-Muslim) violence - and claim that causes are deeper, are linked to racism and that there are destructive tendencies

---

<sup>1</sup> 2019-05-20: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/03/myanmar-pervasive-hate-speech-shrinking-freedom-190305201420729.html>

<sup>2</sup> Rohingyas were without citizenship rights in Rakhine State (Blomquist p. 4).

<sup>3</sup> 2019-05-20: <https://burmatimes.net/2018/03/06/the-ethnic-cleansing-of-rohingya-in-myanmar-continues/>

<sup>4</sup> "Othering" helped make this possible including online "othering" to a large extent including social media with Facebook's infamous lack of action, which paved the way for bloodshed. Campaigns e.g. targeted and out-grouped Rohingyas among other things related to the religious identity of these Muslims. Online social media campaigns warned against Muslims conflating Muslims with terrorism (Fink p. 265) and asked Buddhists to take up arms - and vice-versa: To create violent conflicts between local groups, this was coordinated with other online social media campaigns in the same areas and dates targeting Muslims warning them and asking them to take up arms against Buddhists.

related to religious intolerance and conflicts deriving from ethno-religious nationalistic thoughts - including Burmese Buddhist nationalism (Zin p. 377).

On the other hand - examples on when violence was mitigated at local level included when local groups - including religious groups - could challenge the attempts of "othering" and "out-grouping". This by debunking claims that another religion or religious group were like negative representation claimed - including the claim that religious groups had violent plans against other religious groups. What made this possible was relationships between people from different groups, religious and community leaders in particular, and the view on the "religious other" *prior to the violent conflict* among communities and such religious and community leaders and influential voices offline and online (interview April 24, 2019<sup>5</sup>). This points to the importance of understanding the social representation of the "religious other". This view is in part religiously inspired, or with theological language, it may contain an explicit or implicit "theology of religions" i.e. the internal religiously inspired view on (or theology on) other religions and people of other religions.

## **2.2 Scope of the Paper: Theology of Religions - Baptist Christians - Northern Myanmar**

Research on religious and ethnic "othering" related to Myanmar has to a large extent focused on Muslim Rohingya - see e.g. Min Zin: "Anti-Muslim Violence in Burma: Why Now?" or Francis Wade: "Myanmar's Enemy Within: Buddhist Violence and the Making of a Muslim 'Other'", where the latter describes how the construction of a Muslim Rohingya identity was constructed as an antithesis - and with clear in- and out-grouping (Wade p. 58). There are - unfortunately - several areas with violent conflict in Myanmar beyond the horrific Rakhine State example where the atrocities against the Rohingya Muslims took place. Research on "othering" related to other groups among others relate to the ethnic Karen - e.g. in *Ardeth Maung Thwanghai*: "The 'Other' Karen in Myanmar". However, research related to othering related to other ethnic and religious groups is more scarce. This paper has its focus not on the "othering" done by the *majority* ethnic/religious group on minority groups, but focus on a *minority* religious group and the social representation of the "other" and "theology of religions" done by this groups. This is a much less researched area and the in this way the paper is an attempts to contribute to research on "othering" related to Myanmar in this way.

---

<sup>5</sup> 2019-04-24: Informal interview with "Resource Person B" from a Myanmar organisation researching direct instigation of violence with the use of social media in Myanmar. (The identity of "Resource Person B" is disclosed due to security reasons. The identity is known to author)

This paper will, as is developed more below, focus on one minority religious group - namely Christians, and in particular the Baptist subgroup - related to Kachin.

In Kachin State in Northern Myanmar there are several factors and drivers of conflict - contestations regarding land, natural resources, political separatist struggles, discrimination of minorities etc. In Kachin more than 100.000 people have been internally displaced. Some fear that it could get worse and that similar situations and strategies like in Rakhine State could be deployed here - including the attempts regarding "othering" of groups across divides.

Therefore analyzing the representation of "the religious other" and the relationship among and across group identities (including religious identities) is of interest related to Kachin State.

In Kachin State the demography related to religious affiliation is different to most other parts of Myanmar with its composition of the two major groups: Christians along with Buddhists. Quite some research has been made on the Buddhist Burman/Bamar positive and negative view of the religious "other" - Buddhist forces for peace and other Buddhist forces spearheading violence - and it is relevant to analyze one of the religious minorities in Myanmar: Christians. To do so, and to limit the scope of the research in this paper, it will focus on selected Christian sources of data. These sources will relate to the largest Christian Church in Myanmar and largest denomination in Kachin, the Baptist Church. The scope relates to Kachin Baptist Convention in Kachin State in Northern Myanmar, but with the inclusion of national sources, which informs this.

### **2.3 Purpose of the Paper: Social Representation of the "Other" and "Theology of Religions"**

The purpose and interest of this paper is, by looking at texts from official documents, texts from theological institutions and a sermon to analyze and discuss social representation of the "religious other" and the applications of "theology of religions". This relates to narratives of religious tolerance or intolerance, including whether it promotes peace or promotes conflict. The focus is on how "theology of religions", logics/argumentations/narratives and views on the "religious other" are at play. An interdisciplinary methodological approach will be applied on these texts: A social science approach with focus on discourse analysis. As well as a methodological approach to analyze the collected data related to its theological content related to theological anthropology - i.e. the theological "view" of human beings. In particular there will be a focus on "theology of religions", which is, as mentioned, the discipline and theological "view" on other religions and people of other religions.

## **2.4 Research Questions**

The research questions of this paper are:

*How do Christian Baptist religious actors in Myanmar (and related to Northern Myanmar, particularly Kachin State) represent the "religious other"? In which ways are "theologies of religions" applied?*

Beyond the main research questions above and in order to relate it to the conflict-prone context of Myanmar, a further contribution by the paper is to look at if areas in the analysis imply motivation to peace-seeking or conflict-seeking relationship and/or engagement with the "religious other". This is, however, a secondary focus not to broaden the scope too much.

Religious actors in Myanmar is limited in scope to Christians, and here "Baptists". Actors related to Northern Myanmar are both from Kachin and from national Baptist organisations and theological institutions, like Myanmar Institute of Theology.

## **3. Context - Religion in Peace and Conflict in Myanmar**

### **3.1 Kachin State, Northern Myanmar**

In Kachin State, the northernmost state in Myanmar with about 1,5 million people and bordering to China and India there is a complex pattern of religious and ethnic groups - and of conflicts. The major violent conflict is between the government army, Tatmadaw, and ethnic armed groups, such as Kachin Independent Army (KIA). This since the ceasefire broke down in 2011. However, there are also underlying conflicts between various ethnic minority groups as well as conflicts which may be identified to run between and/or within different religious groups. Also conflicts related to natural resources - some of them with international interests (China etc.) are among important conflict drivers. As a result of the violent conflicts there are more than 100.000 internally displaced people (IDPs) and more than 170 IDP camps. The high number for IDPs in local communities is also a source of conflict between IDPs and host communities.

The percentage of religious and ethnic groups in Kachin State is a contested area, but the official numbers are: Buddhism (20%), Christianity (75%), Islam (1.6%), Hinduism (0.4%), Animism (0.2%) (The Department of Population, Ministry of Labour, Immigration and



Population, Myanmar on March 28, 2016: The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census Report).<sup>6</sup>

There is an intersection between religious and ethnic minorities. Bamar or Burmans are the majority in Myanmar and most are Theravada Buddhists. Minorities, e.g. ethnic Kachin are Christians, and are therefore "double minorities". Minorities have to various degree challenges regarding full access to citizenship as well as treatment by state and other societal groups (Fink p. 260).

The Christians include Baptists, Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Pentecostals and others, the Buddhists are Theravada Buddhists. In terms of ethnic groups in Northern Myanmar these include Bamar/Burmese/Burmans, Kachin (six subgroups), Shan, Chinese and others.

As the majority groups in Kachin state are Christians and I plan to focus on how Christian religious leaders employ social representation people from other religions. This in sermons and theological texts. The Baptist Church is the largest Christian sub-group (denomination), but is organized along different sub-denominational and ethnic lines, where, however, Kachin Baptist Convention by far numerically gathers most of the Baptists in Northern Myanmar (Kachin State, Northern Shan, Mandalay Division and Sagaing). I will therefore focus on Baptist religious leaders.

Religious actors are among those who are much engaged in humanitarian work for and with IDPs and run many of the IDP camps. Kachin Baptist Convention is responsible for more than 70 IDP of about 170 IDP camps in total.

As already mentioned, for the purpose of this paper, and for limiting the scope of research, the focus is as elaborated in the research question related to Christian Baptist sources with a focus on the "religious other".

The most important country-wide theological educational institution is Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT) based in Yangon. MIT trains many of the pastors and other future leaders to Baptist churches and organisations in Kachin - and is therefore chosen as a focus area for this paper.

---

<sup>6</sup> 2019-05-19: Department of Population Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population MYANMAR (July 2016). The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census Census Report Volume 2-C. Department of Population Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population MYANMAR. pp. 12–15.

#### **4. Theoretical perspectives**

The theoretical perspectives of this paper relate to the field of social science and theology related to "theology of religions", the "religious other", "othering" and "out-grouping" and "in-grouping".

##### **4.1 In-Group - Out-Group Dynamics and Social Identity Theory**

According to Social Identity Theory conflicts between groups have their roots in social and historical contexts. Here, the identity aspect is central and a key point in the theory is on self-categorization: Identification as a "group member" and thus expressing a social identity (rather than a personal identity) and a sense of "self" related to shared identities of a group (whether "student", "Christian" or "European") makes a person's self-esteem "intertwined with the group" (Philips and Jørgensen p. 101). In Social Identity Theory states that if identity is placed like this, the individual has to feel good about the group to feel good about oneself. Thus, in-group favouritism (favourising one's one group) and out-group discrimination (discriminating people from other groups) is the result and this can lead to conflicts between the groups (Philips and Jørgensen p. 101). However, this is historically and socially related - not automated group-identification nor competition. Instead, these are based on cultural frameworks of understanding: It is "this culturally relative process of interpretation that determines whether group identification leads to 'in-group favouritism' and 'out-group discrimination' or has another outcome altogether." (Philips and Jørgensen p. 102).

Thus, a focus on interpretation, cultural frameworks and representation is key. Related to the field of this paper, Religion in Peace and Conflict, in particular "religion" as part of cultural frameworks and religiously inspired interpretation and theology related to "in-group" and "out-group" is central. Another expression for this is the view on the "religious other" and "theology of religions" related to the "other", which is the focus on the next sections.

##### **4.2 Theology of Religions**

The view on the "other", and in particular the "religious other" are dealt with in section 4.3 below. However, this section 4.2 will first theoretically bring in the discipline of theology. This can be understood as an internal, religious lens - here with a focus on theological anthropology - in particular "theology of religions". "Theology of religions" concerns the attitude towards other religions and people of other religions. The focus on Baptists in

Myanmar makes it relevant to look at Christian "theologies of religions" and Baptist "theologies of religions".

One widespread typology or way of categorizing "theology of religions" positions is: 1) exclusivism, 2) inclusivism and 3) pluralism. A core feature in the "theology of religions" from a Christian perspective relates to the Christian notion of "salvation". The "exclusivist" position regards that salvation is exclusively available in Jesus Christ "to the extent that those who have never heard the gospel are eternally lost" (Kärkkäinen p. 24). This position also positions that the Christian church is the only place or vehicle for salvation. The "pluralist" position claims that salvation is found in other religions in various ways (and thus rejects exclusivism). The "inclusivist" position holds that from an ontological standpoint it is Christ who brings "salvation", but that this is made universally available by the revelation of God. This is the most widespread position across Christian subgroups (denominations) (Kärkkäinen p. 25). The three main "theologies of religions" typologies have been developed acknowledging that they do not encompass real-world complexities. However, the three positions are still widely referred to in order to have a basic typology. For the purpose of this paper, where a thorough "theologies of religions" discussion is outside the scope and purpose, the three positions are used as such reference point (Ariarajah p. 37; Kärkkäinen) and are discussed and developed further in section 5.2 below.

Baptists do not have an official theology of religions standpoint. Paul Knitter has a general typology, which relates to main Christian sub-groups. While acknowledging that "theology of religions" cannot be distinguished related to denominational/confessional boundaries, this can still be a helpful indication and is but to be understood in this way. To Paul Knitter the general pattern is: 1) the conservative evangelical position argues for Christianity as the only true religion, 2) and the mainline Protestant position holding that salvation is in Christ, but not solely, 3) The Catholic position holding "various paths to salvation, yet one norm, Jesus Christ" and 4) the theocentric position holding that God (not Jesus Christ) is the center which also holds that salvation is possible in various religions (Knitter in Kärkkäinen p. 24).

Building on the above, Baptists are assessed to "tend to be exclusive" in their approach to other religions, James Deotis Roberts claims. This e.g. with reference to a narrow application of the Biblical passage: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (John 14:6 in the Holy Bible, New International Version). However, Baptists are

"an extremely diverse group" where unity is not easily achieved (Roberts in Kärkkäinen p. 138 onwards).

Again, "theology of religions positions" are not fixed *within* Christian sub-groups (denominations) and people within sub-groups naturally propagate different views. Perhaps relevant for this paper is that there is an intra-Evangelical debate on theology of religions where traditional exclusivism is challenged. As an example John Sanders argues that Christians are saved through faith in Jesus Christ, but "others may have access to salvation by responding faithfully to the light given them..." (Sanders, from the book: "No Other Name", cited in Kärkkäinen p. 149).

### **4.3 The "Other and the "Religious Other"**

The "other" and the "religious other" are central terms in the analyses. In this paper both the term "other" is used about the "otherness" of the "other" in a broad sense (including identities understood broadly) as well as the term "religious other" where the focus is on the "otherness" related to religious identity. Tensions between religious communities concern a need for religious groups to find "social, economic, political, and spiritual spaces to be themselves" and thus "ways of conceiving the 'religious other'" is important to facilitate communal life (Ariarajah p. 34). It is acknowledged, related to the above, that it is not possible to separate out the "religious" dimensions from the complexities of being a part and section of human community (Ariarajah p. 34). While bearing this in mind and with a purpose of providing some conceptual clarification related to the "other", this typology with five positions is used:

1. The "other" *seen as a threat*, where the "otherness" of the "other" deteriorates so the "other" is seen as the "enemy" (Ariarajah p. 35).
2. The "other" *seen as different*, where the sense of threat is not there, but an overemphasis on the differences between religious communities makes relationships difficult (Ariarajah p. 36).
3. The "other" *as the alternative*, where "conversion" and relationship based on such notions and self-understandings of religions are present. This is of particular interest to this paper with its focus on "theology of religions" and will be developed in a bit more depth here with an example: Whereas e.g. Muslims and Christians view conversion in the discourse of Human Rights and the Freedom of Religion or Belief, e.g. many Hindus condemn it for the conflicts it creates. Arguments include that Christians and Muslims use "unethical" attempts to proselytize - and the other way that Hindus but seek to keep the unethical caste system. Here,

the "other" is the alternative, i.e. a way in which a low caste person through conversion (e.g. to Christianity or Islam) can step out - i.e. by changing to "the alternative", another religion. Another layer in this, however, concerns "Hinduism" to be but a spectrum of religious ways, "atheism, monotheism, polytheism, pantheism, panentheism, monism and so on", to seek a relationship with the Ultimate Reality - and with encompassing the possibility to move between them in one's spiritual life. This is contrasted by some Muslim claims to need to convert to the "final" revelation from God and some Christians "theologies of religions" claiming to have the "only" way to salvation - and thus be different e.g. to Indian religiosity (Ariarajah p. 37). Relevant for this paper is how the "other" is seen as the alternative and how conversion plays into this.

4. The "other" *as part of my own reality* relates e.g. to Christian "theologies of religions" the last two decades on plurality. Here Christological formulations have been moving away from an understanding of Christianity to be the "only" alternative related to other religions. In other words, a pluralist position, it seems. It is, however, a position, which fits other religious traditions "into one's own perception of reality in one's own terms". Thus, there is a temptation not to respect the "otherness" of the "other" nor allow the "other" to define oneself (Ariarajah p. 37).

5. The "other" *as partner and co-pilgrim* concerns a focus on allowing the "other" to define oneself and to engage in a truth-seeking and community-building conversation. This includes to accept the reality of neighbourhood. This means that the "others" are accepted also related to the fact that "others" are our neighbours. I.e. not to treat neighbours as strangers "and to isolate ourselves as religious communities from others" as this can "lead to much pain and suffering". Beyond being "partners and co-pilgrims on a spiritual journey" this position also entails engaging more critically with one another in "mutual correction, enrichment, and self-criticism" (Ariarajah p. 40).

This last position also calls for a rethinking of identity. S. Wesley Ariarajah argues that much religious identity is made in isolation from "others" and with an often implied exclusion of the "other" - perhaps even represented as rival identities. Instead identities are to be nurtured as identities in relationships with neighbours in which "others" are then perceived as "inalienable" parts of our own lives. The separating boundaries from the "other" can thus erode, which is seen as positive, as destinies are common and closely tied up in social as well as economic and political realms. Thus, "interdependence" is a key word to capture this

notion (Ariarajah p. 40).

## **5. Methodology**

### **5.1 The "Other" - Theological and Social Representation**

The methodological approach in this paper relates to the theological and social representation of the "religious other" as in section 4 above. The approach is interdisciplinary. It makes use of the discipline of theology and hereunder theological anthropology, in particular "theology or religions" and discussing implicit and explicit representation of the "religious other" in selected texts and interviews (see section 4.2).

It also brings in interdisciplinarity, including social sciences, and makes use of ways to analyze social representation of groups and individuals, which will be unfolded more in the following sections.

### **5.2 Discourse Analysis**

The use of discourse analysis will in this paper be applied in an attempt to analyze and discuss the "social representation" of groups and individuals. This relates to "in-group" and "out-group" relations and dynamics (see social identity theory, above) and the attitude towards the "other", in particular the "religious other" (see section 4. above).

Analyzing discourses relates to interdisciplinary approaches in various social domains on the structure of language related to patterns and how this is employed by people/social actors i.e. understanding discourse as a particular way of understanding and talking about the world, or an aspect of the world/social world (Philips and Jørgensen p. 1). In this social constructionist theory and approach language is central and much more than a channel for information - it is "a 'machine' that generates, and as a result constitutes, the social world" (Philips and Jørgensen p. 9). The revered focus on and view on the power of "language" and discourse is also a source of criticism of the theory. In addition, a problem with the approach is the distinction between the discursive and non-discursive (see more in Philips and Jørgensen p. 89 onwards). There is a continuum of views from discourse seen as "fully constructive of the social" to discourses "as mere reflections of other social mechanisms" (Philips and Jørgensen p. 19). It is outside the scope of this paper to discuss this in detail. For the purpose of this paper with its focus on social representation and in-group and out-group positioning,

discourse analysis is found relevant and used as a method regarding data analysis and discussion - and thus perhaps closer to the second position on the continuum.

Central aspects include *discursive struggle* - that different discourses representing particular ways of understanding and talking about the world are struggling to give meaning of language in their particular way, including to search for dominance/hegemony of one's discourse over that of other discourses (Philips and Jørgensen p. 7).

*Intertextuality* relates to how one text draws on contexts and meanings from other texts (here understood in broad terms - utterances, spoken words etc. Not only written texts). Through this, e.g. the combination or usage of other texts, discourses and thus the social and cultural world is, in this theory, understood to be changed.

*Discursive psychology* relates to how people's selves, thoughts and emotions (identities) are both formed and changed/transformed in social interactions (Philips and Jørgensen p. 7).

When applying discourse analysis as a methodological approach to analyze a text (broadly understood) in this paper, there are concrete ways to engage with applying this. It includes analyzing the *representations of social actors*, in short called "social representation" or just "representation". Social identities of social groups or individual people can be brought to the foreground or hidden in background by those representing them (e.g. authors, a pastor holding a sermon etc.) Whether consciously or unconsciously (e.g. part of a culturally accepted discourse and view on the "other") such social representation can help legitimize or delegitimize - and/or encourage listeners or readers to get sympathy or antipathy with the social group or individual person. Social representation can help to align with or create hostility against a social group or individual (Machin and Mayr p. 12).

Another aspect is on how people speak, in particular the use of verbs related to social groups, e.g. when they are quoted. Therefore also called "quoting verbs" (Machin and Mayr p. 58). This as the social representation of social groups is flavoured according to the use of verbs. It is an interpretation of peoples' actions, words, intentions etc.: For example by using the verb "grumble" the person choosing this verb (consciously or unconsciously) delegitimizes a person, adds the connotations and gives the interpretation not to take a person serious or not to take the issue a social group or a person raise serious (e.g. an argument or complaint) (Machin and Mayr p. 58).

Related to intertextuality, social representation can connect and place social actors in other or wider discourses. Social representation can put emphasis on the collective or the individual, focus on the specific or generic, can create a sense of either personalised or impersonalised representation etc. (Machin and Mayr p. 12).

### 5.3 Application of Method and Theory

By bringing together the selected theoretical and methodological perspectives for the purpose of this paper and its analysis, a couple of points are to be made. When bringing in theological anthropology and in particular "theology of religions" related to the "other" and "religious other", one could relate the above perspectives methodologically to use these in the analysis later.

The below attempt to bring together this in a schematic overview - well aware that such overviews risk simplifying - has the purpose to compare and let key theoretical and methodological speak to each other, which is seen as a helpful way to conclude the chapters on theory and method - before looking at data, sources and analysis in the following chapters.

<b>"Theology of Religions" - main positions</b>	<b>Ariarajah's 5 positions</b>	<b>Expected attitude/relationship with the other</b>
A. "Exclusivism"	1. The "other" to be seen as <i>"a threat"</i> or as <i>"an enemy"</i>	Animosity, hostility. Demonizing "othering" and "out-grouping"
	2. The "other" to be seen as <i>"different"</i> - overemphasis on the differences between religious communities	Separation. Emphasis on differences makes relationship difficult. "Othering" and "out-grouping".
	3. The "other" to be seen as <i>"the alternative"</i>	Objectification. The "religious other" is seen as an object where conversion/proselytization of the "alternative" religious "other" to one's own religion is pursued. Objectifying explicit "othering"
B. "Inclusivism"	3. The "other" to be seen as <i>"the alternative"</i>	Second-class attitude. Whereas conversion is not needed in "inclusivism" the "the alternative"



		position sees the religion of the "religious other" as second-class related to one's own religion. Implicit, lesser "othering".
	5. The "other" <i>as partner and co-pilgrim</i>	Cooperation and (unequal) partnership. Despite perhaps second-class attitude towards the "religious other", engage in conversation and cooperation - but due to its unequal "inclusivist" position it is only in part able to work against "othering".
C. Pluralism	4. The "other" <i>as part of my own reality</i>	Temptation to define and subdue the "religious other" against their will: Seeking to overcome "othering" of the religious other, but not respecting the "otherness" of the "other" nor allowing the "other" to define oneself.
	5. The "other" <i>as partner and co-pilgrim</i>	Cooperation and equal partnership. Interdependence. Allowing the "other" to define oneself. Actively seeking to overcome "othering" of the religious other and engage in a truth-seeking and community-building conversation and cooperation.

In addition to the schematic overview, the purpose below is to go through the three main "theology of religions positions" - first "exclusivism", then "inclusivism" and "pluralism" - and relate these to Ariarajah's position of the "other".

*A. Exclusivism:* Here, the basic "theology of religions" position "exclusivism" could be expected to relate to S Wesley Ariarajah's position of the "other" to be seen as "*the alternative*" (see p. 12). I.e. where the Christian theological soteriological position is that the other cannot obtain salvation and needs to "convert" i.e. to change from one religion to another as there "rival identities" are at play between religious groups (Ariarajah p. 40). It may also encompass the position to see the "other" as "*a threat*" or as "*an enemy*" (see p. 11) - or the position to see the other as "different" (see p. 12), which to Ariarajah creates difficulties in relationships between religious communities by overemphasizing differences (Ariarajah p. 36).

Baptists are assessed to "tend to be exclusive" (Kärkkäinen p. 138) and position described above, including the claim to have the only way to salvation (see p. 12), is expected to be among the positions in the analyzed material. What is interesting is both if this holds true and how "in-grouping" and "out-grouping" as well as "representation of social actors" (see p. 14) (or: "representation", in short) is analyzed to take place, i.e. related to bringing in discourse analysis. It is expected that the social representation is treating the "religious other" somewhat as an object. There may be a representation of the "religious other" which enforces an "us" and "them" division, creates antipathy and delegitimizes the "other" (Machin and Mayr p. 12). This is, however, a starting point (or hypothesis, if you like) to be tested.

*B. Inclusivism:* The "theology of religions" position "inclusivism" may relate to a "religious other" position, which treats the "other" at best to be a second class "other" related to their religious identity. Salvation is available if looking at it from a soteriological standpoint, but not in a primary way (Christianity is the primary way in this position). It is not as clear which of Ariarajah's positions related to the "other" this could relate to, but probably not "*threat*" and not foremost "*alternative*" with the emphasis in this position on conversion, which is not a primary concern in "inclusivism". Rather, it may relate to the position to see the other as "*different*", perhaps with an overemphasis on differences (Ariarajah p. 36). Here it is interesting both if this position is found in the analysis and if so, how the "representation", i.e. representation of the social actor - the "other" or "religious other" - is. Again, possibly the representation of the "religious other" as affirmed and included, but perhaps with notions of being "second class".

*C. Pluralism:* The "theology of religions" position "pluralism" with its soteriological position to believe in salvation for the "religious other" may in other aspects relate to the latter two of

Ariarajah's positions. I.e. the position of the "other" as *"part of one's own reality"*. Here, perhaps, the social representation risks, if this position is found, to be rejecting the "other" from defining oneself and deny the "otherness" of the "other" (Ariarajah p. 37). "Theology of religions" "pluralism" (and perhaps some "theology of religions" "inclusivism" positions) could also be related to Ariarajah's position to see the "other" as *"partner and co-pilgrim"* in common truth-seeking and community-building (Ariarajah p. 40). The latter position may represent the "religious other" as equal and create sympathy and legitimize with the "other" (Machin and Mayr p. 12). Or, with Ariarajah's words, social representation may be as "co-pilgrims" and "partners" and encompassing "them" and "we" into a "common we". This related to action - i.e. with a quest to be a common one. What is interesting with Ariarajah's division of this in two positions is that the latter may be expected to treat the "other" as a subject (not object), whereas the first (with its risk of not letting the "other" define oneself) may jeopardize this.

## 6. Talking about the "Other" - Data and Sources

In the selection of data and sources related to the Baptist Church in Myanmar - and related to Kachin State, Northern Myanmar - there has been a focus on sources with a certain kind of public reach (published and written sources and an encyclical-style sermon). The following material is chosen:

1. Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT) - individual theologians on their "theologies of religions" and representations of the religious "other".
2. A common Christian ecumenical position on the religious "other", and implicit "theology of religions", in the so-called "Declaration of Myanmar Theologians" organized under Association for Theological Education in Myanmar (ATEM).
3. A sermon by the General Secretary of Kachin Baptist Convention - a sermon which served as an "encyclical"/pastoral letter (a written sermon distributed in March 2019 to be read aloud in all Kachin Baptist Convention churches - more than 300 churches) and analysed for the implicit "theology of religions" and representation of the religious "other".<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> This material is collected by "Resource Person A".

## **6.1 Myanmar Institute of Theology**

To place the data and material in its context, it is relevant to highlight that Myanmar Institute of Theology is "a leading seminar in Myanmar" as it is formulated on its webpage and its Mission Statement says that since established in 1927 its focus was and is "primarily to serve the Baptist churches in their leadership promotion", but also "with its foundational basis in God's word and standing in its Baptist faith tradition, is fully committed to serve all the Christian churches to equip men and women from all streams of life for serving God in the churches and in the world" (MIT webpage<sup>8</sup>). Myanmar Institute of Theology is central to the formation of pastors and new leadership in the Baptist church, including in Kachin State. This is thus of interest of focus on related to the representation and view of the religious "other" as this is portrayed, taught and theologically reflected upon. Concretely, the data and material from Myanmar Institute of Theology is by two theologians: Hlaing Bwa and Edmund Za Bik. The criteria for choosing these two theologians relate to the fact that they are published in Myanmar Institute of Theology official publications with a focus on the context of Myanmar ("Contextual Theology"). They were selected as they were contributions, which related to the "religious other", where other contributions related to theology related to the context in other ways (e.g. climate change or gender questions in Myanmar).

## **6.2 The Association for Theological Education in Myanmar**

The Association for Theological Education in Myanmar (ATEM) has its mission to "help upgrade theological institutions and promote relevant theological education that will help equip God's people for the mission and ministry" (ATEM webpage).<sup>9</sup> The association brings together members in two categories: Denominational bodies (including Myanmar Baptist Convention of which Kachin Baptist Convention is a regional member) and school/theological institutions (ATEM website).<sup>10</sup>

## **6.3 Kachin Baptist Convention**

Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) is "a Myanmar Baptist denominational body whose members practice the Baptist faith" and comprises of 15 association and more than four

---

<sup>8</sup> 2019-05-17 <http://www.mit.edu.mm/mit-about.html>

<sup>9</sup> 2019-05-23: <http://atemmyanmar.org/home/>

<sup>10</sup> 2019-05-23: <http://atemmyanmar.org/member-schools/>

hundred churches and 400.000 members. Its headquarters are in Myitkyina, Kachin State (Kachin Baptist Convention website).<sup>11</sup>

KBC is a member of Myanmar Baptist Convention (MBC) - the national Baptist convention in Myanmar with 650.000 members and a history with English and American missionaries since 1807 and 1813. The main purposes of MBC are: "a) to preach and propagate the good news of Jesus Christ in Myanmar and throughout the whole world; b) to abide in Baptist faith and practice; c) to educate its members for Christian maturity and discipleship; d) to be united with other Christians in Christ for mission and service; and e) to be good citizens of the country" (World Council of Churches webpage)<sup>12</sup>.

#### **6.4 Material and Data Collection**

The collection of the written data available in English was selected by the author of this paper with the intention to analyze these written sources with their relations to MIT and ATEM.

In regards to the sermon related to Kachin Baptist Convention, a resource person was commissioned to identify a sermon with content related to theology of religions and the religious "other" directly or indirectly from the last three months in Kachin Baptist Convention churches in Kachin State in Myanmar. "Resource person A" was chosen in his/her capacity of being a pastor in a KBC church to have knowledge of theological language and references<sup>13</sup>. The resource person was also chosen due to language barrier and was been asked to translate from Kachin to English - and summarize longer paragraphs. Kachin is the official state language in Kachin State and furthermore it is used in sermons rather than the Myanmar/Burmese language.

#### **6.5 Ethical Considerations**

The main bulk of data and sources concern public figures and published material, which is used with quotations, references etc. Regarding the ethics of using other people and their words/texts as data, here names are anonymized (e.g. using the terms "Resource person A") not to cause harm (Booth et. al p. 83) as inter-group relations and attitudes are sensitive in conflict-prone Myanmar.

---

<sup>11</sup> 2019-05-23: Facebook text last revised 2018-04-20: <https://www.facebook.com/OfficialKBCKACHIN/>

<sup>12</sup> 2019-05-23: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/myanmar-baptist-convention>

<sup>13</sup> The identity of "Resource Person A" is disclosed due to ethical research considerations reasons. The identity is known to the author.

## **7. Representing the "Other" - Analyzing "Theology of Religions" and Representation**

The focus in this section is on the social representation of the religious "other" and adoption or application of "theology of religions" at national-level theological institutions with relationships to the Baptist churches in Myanmar and in a sermon by the secretary general of KBC in the conflict-prone Kachin State. This will be followed by a discussion

### **7.1 Myanmar Theologians Declaration on Dialogue Across Religions**

In the following section the focus is on analyzing a common Christian ecumenical Declaration in Myanmar. The analysis relates to representation of the religious "other". The Declaration was organized under Association for Theological Education in Myanmar (ATEM) related to a meeting from 16-18 December 2002 and published in K. Zau Nan (ed.) "Theology Under the Bo Tree" in 2014. In the Declaration representatives from theological institutions from all over Myanmar and "member churches involved in theological education and mission" came together to "review, rethink and formulate our theology for Myanmar in the context of present day challenges" (Declaration of Myanmar Theologians, in Zau Nan p. 433).

The Declaration identifies the need for critical analysis and identified six "critical issues": 1. Spiritual issues, 2. Economic issues, 3. Socio-political issues, 4. Environmental issues, 5. Mission issues and 6. Religio-cultural issues (Declaration of Myanmar Theologians, in Zau Nan p. 434).

Related to "theology of religions", the social representation of the religious "other" and out-grouping, analyzing this Declaration is of interest related to its paragraph 6. on "Religio-cultural issues". The Declaration states: "We are living in a religio-culturally pluralistic society whereby all religions and racial groups should have equal rights of constitutional equality. In our practical reality, however, we come across religio-cultural inequality and discrimination. We feel obligated to create a religious peace by having dialogue across cultures, races with our neighbours in this pluralistic society" (Declaration of Myanmar Theologians, in Zau Nan p. 435).

The social representation, discourse and language gives various connotations. With a discourse analysis lens, the word "neighbours" may, beyond its daily usage, have clear intertextuality qualities (Philips and Jørgensen p. 7). This by referring to the famous words by Jesus in the context of the Sermon on the Mount:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?” (Matthew 5:43-47 in the Holy Bible, New International Version).

In this passage Jesus concretely and radically re-interprets the known social representation of the "enemy". This from "hate your enemy" to "love your enemies". It is outside the scope of this paper to do further exegesis related to the Biblical text, but it is noteworthy to highlight how the theologians from different churches in this Declaration refers to the radical ethics and the accepting view related to the "other" in the Biblical text - accentuated with the word "love" even of "enemies" ("love" otherwise extended only to "neighbours"). This is written by Christian theologians in a context of violent conflicts and discriminations of ethnic and religious minorities, including of Christian minorities.

Another aspect is that the authors of the Declaration "feel obligated to create a religious peace". The way to this is "by having dialogue across religions, cultures, races with our neighbours in this pluralistic society". In this passage it is not clear, e.g. what "religious peace" entails. Drawing on discourse analysis, this resembles impersonalized and generic representation (Machin and Mayr p. 12) at a very general level I.e. "religions, cultures, races" and "pluralistic society" rather than more concrete personal representation. It may also be the nature of declarations, which as a genre often tend to be somewhat generic to encompass the perspectives of a broad group of signatories.

When claiming that "all religions and racial groups should have equal rights" this language has intertextual links not primarily to e.g. religious, Biblical and theological language, sources and discourse, but to national constitutional rights, i.e. a judicial discourse. It also resembles intertextuality related to "human rights". However, it is noteworthy that the authors have chosen "rights" which is a broader language than "human rights" (which, however, is most likely meant to be encompassed). What is also interesting in this representation of social actors is that: "all religions" and "racial groups" should have "equal rights". Here there is a focus on "groups" and not "individuals". Such social representation is highly problematic from a human rights perspective (as well as from a national judicial discourse), where the

right of *individuals* is essential. *Collective rights* of religions or racial/ethnic groups is not sufficient for various reasons including that we all have multiple identities, that "membership" of groups can be fluid, dynamic and changing (in-group - out-group relations) and more fundamentally that there are different interests and power dynamics at play within groups, which may violate the rights of individuals within groups - individual rights that should be protected. Michael Freemans puts it well: "The most difficult problem raised by the concept of collective human rights is how to reconcile the recognition of such rights with individual human rights and other individual human interests, such as the interest in autonomy. Collectivities can violate individual human rights" (Freemann p. 39).

When the authors of the Declaration wrote: "In our practical reality, however, we come across religio-cultural inequality and discrimination" this is a social representation of inequality and discrimination between social *groups* (religio-cultural social groups, that is). As argued above, there is no explicit focus on discrimination of *individuals* e.g. across or in groups. The social representation has an emphasis on the collective not the individual (Machin and Mayr p. 12). In addition, with the knowledge of the discrimination related to "religio-cultural" social groups, this formulation lends itself to an understanding of discrimination of religious and ethnic minority groups, i.e. religiously to Muslim, Christian and Hindu groups etc. To have this discrimination, there is an implicit social representation of someone "discriminating" other "religio-social" groups. Since the categories are not e.g. "Military" or "Government" or similar, which are fairly neutral terms as they describe societal functions, this is easily understood as implicitly representing the Burmese Buddhist majority to be discriminating. I.e. a negative view on a wider out-group (i.e. beyond e.g. the responsible Government). At least it is open for interpretation when "discrimination" is mentioned, but the language in the Declaration is not clearer on who is claimed to be "discriminating". Perhaps this also says something about the expected audience for the Declaration, i.e. that the audience may be expected to be from religio-ethnic minorities. This is supported by that there is a strong focus on "Christian theology", which has to "address the root cause of poverty and challenge the unjust socio-economic systems which victimize the masses in our society" (Declaration of Myanmar Theologians, in Zau Nan p. 434). In addition there is a strong focus on the engagement of churches, e.g. "to take their prophetic roles more seriously and practice and active non-violent approach to address the existing socio-political systems and structure" (Declaration of Myanmar Theologians, in Zau Nan p. 435). Here the social representation is at a general level related to "systems" and "structures" victimizing "masses". This is a generic



representation, which is highly depersonalized - again raising the question who are the actual human beings being represented to be behind the actions.

Moving to the 5. "Mission issue", here the Declaration claims that Christianity has made "an immense contribution to the country in all dimensions of life" in the national history. And that: "We therefore reclaim this historical heritage and take it as a challenge for the years to come in our mission enterprises". The social representation of "Christianity" and reference to "mission enterprises" of the (past,) present and future is a positive representation of this. This to the extent that it may relate to a *discursive struggle* (Philips and Jørgensen p. 7) related to that of other discourses. A discursive struggle as there are negative social representations of Christian missions in Myanmar and e.g. present-day Buddhist-Nationalist voices are negative towards other religious groups. Indeed the end-goal of ultra-nationalist movements is to have an exclusively Buddhist population (Fink p. 274), their followers have increasingly turned against both Muslims and Christian minorities in various states - beyond Rakhine (Fink p. 264 onwards). and Buddhist ultra-nationalist monks were among those with hateful anti-Muslim rhetoric in Rakhine (Al-Jazeera, March 18: An Unholy Alliance: Monks and the Military in Myanmar)<sup>14</sup>. The adoption of Christianity has been an important cultural marker (dividing marker) in Myanmar not only between ethnic minority groups and the Burman majority group, but also creating internal boundaries within Myanmar ethnic minority groups along religious lines: Christian, Buddhist, animist etc. (see Thwanghai, 2012, p. 25 on the "Karen" ethnic group). Thus, affirming Christianity and "mission enterprises" is not uncontroversial. It is controversial in general and controversial in a Myanmar context historically and presently and thus may be a contribution to a "discursive struggle". What is furthermore interesting is that what "mission" here entails is vague and not elaborated (e.g. which theology of religions it concerns etc.).

In further analyzing the attitude towards the religious "other" and the theology of religions expressed in the Declaration, related to 1. "Spiritual issues" the Declaration states: "We recognize that Christian spirituality tends to be exclusive and other-worldly and thus we fail to contact the unjust systems around us. We recognize that different churches have formulated their own spiritual formulation and there is no common platform to exchange and formulate a vital contextual spirituality" "(Declaration of Myanmar Theologians, in Zau Nan p. 434).

---

<sup>14</sup> 2019-05-08: <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/specialseries/2019/03/unholy-alliance-monks-military-myanmar-190309083316608.html>

Here, the social representation of churches is one of disconnected units in former separation ("no common platform") but with a strong call for this to change. There is a call for ecumenical cooperation, i.e. cooperation among churches. Interestingly, what is also represented as "exclusive" and "other-worldly" is Christian spirituality with the consequence to "fail" to contact "unjust systems around us". Here there is a use of a "quoting verb" in the social representation (Machin and Mayr p. 59). The verb "fail" is strong in the sense that we want to "succeed" and not "fail". Thus the representation of the "we" (the anticipated reader of the Declaration) is in this discourse represented to risk failing and thus encouraged to take action not to do so.

Regarding the question on if and how the Declaration concerns an internal discussion on "theology of religions", there are sentences like "God is the Lord of history and calls us in Christ to be agents of transformation in His holistic mission" (Declaration of Myanmar Theologians, in Zau Nan p. 433). While "holistic mission" of God indicates a affirmation of holistic, or integral mission, which seems to, intertextually, to relate to what evangelicals since the International Congress on World Evangelization in 1974 in Lausanne call holistic/integral mission and which concerns a broader view on "evangelism and social concern" to be connected and not mutually exclusive (Stott, 1996, p. 24) and recognize that all humans have some knowledge of God through "general revelation in nature", but "deny that this can save..." (Anderson and Stransky cited in Bik p. 423). However, what the referral to "holistic mission" today entails is not clearly elaborated in the text. This except when the Declaration explicitly describes salvation in 4. "Environmental issues": "We recognize that Christian salvation has focused mainly on human salvation. But, it has neglected the ecologically oriented salvation. As a result, a holistic concept of salvation including humanity and nature should be integrated in its wholeness." (Declaration of Myanmar Theologians, in Zau Nan p. 435). Here "holistic" is brought in explicitly as developing holistic mission. Interestingly, nature and "ecologically oriented salvation" is highlighted, but it is less clear how salvation regarding "humanity" is to be understood, i.e. whether in a "theology of religions" lens there is an "exclusivist", "inclusivist" or "pluralist" - or another - position. in other words: Nature is saved, but it is unclear if among humans only Christians are saved. It is telling that the social issues and the "pluralist society" is recognized, but the explicit social representation of people of other religions is more vague.

The nature of the document, being a declaration with several authors from various churches, naturally adds to it being more encompassing and general.

## **7.2 Theology of Religions Perspectives from Myanmar Institute of Theology**

This section concerns analysis and discussion related to Myanmar Christian Baptist theologians from the leading Baptist-affiliated theological institution Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT) - professor Edmund Za Bik and professor Hlaing Bwa<sup>15</sup>. This with a focus on "theology of religions" and the religious "other" and how it this is narrated related and in a Myanmar context.

### **7.2.1 Universal Salvation, Anonymous Christians and Interfaith Dialogue**

Edmund Za Bik's article "Universal Salvation in the Context of Interfaith Dialogue in Myanmar" can be seen to be a contribution to an intra-Evangelical (Kärkkäinen p. 149) or intra-Baptist or broader intra-Christian theological discussion on "theology of religions". Bik is clear in his (somewhat colourful and polemic) critique of what he finds to be a widespread exclusivist "theology of religions" position in Myanmar. He states that the chief obstacle to any meaningful interfaith dialogue in Myanmar "still is the Christians' unhealthy self-righteous holier-than-thou pietism and attitude toward non-Christians who are disdainfully looked upon as a bunch of hell-bound, godless peoples" (Bik p. 415). Edmund Za Bik finds this position to be "un-Christian" and rooted "in a narrow understanding of what it takes to be a true Christian". He propagates "Universal Salvation" and finds that there is a "need to dismantle this faulty Christian notion of salvation as the Christians' exclusive birthrights; that salvation is more universal in character and scope than we usually tend to think it to be; that there is actually no room for arbitrariness and senseless exclusivism based on a particular religion in the divine economy of God's salvific plan; and that salvation is open to anyone who does the will of the Father or who follows the way of Christ" (Bik p. 415).

#### **7.2.1.1 Changing Who "Them" and "Us" Are**

Edmund Za Bik is interestingly changing who are the "them" and "us" in the representation of social actors (Machin and Mayr p. 84). Bik applies what seems to be different from conventional categories in his context and from this he argues against other dominant "theology of religions" positions. Bik's concern with the social representation of the religious "others" relates to a "them" or "non-Christians", in his language. But it is only included to the extent that it is used to represent and affirm that religious "others" are included in "Universal

---

<sup>15</sup> Edmund Za Bik taught Systematic Theology, Christian Ethics and Philosophy at Myanmar Institute of Theology (is now emeritus). Hlaing Bwa is director of Judson Research Center of Myanmar Institute of Theology

Salvation". His main focus and social representation concerns Christians, where he mocks and exaggerates exclusivist positions and Christians who hold this view. In a previous part of this paper it was discussed that there were no automatic 'in-group favouritism' and 'out-group discrimination'. What Bik rejects is, interestingly, a Christian "in-group" and a non-Christian "out-group". Instead he constructs a social representation of a new "out-group". Bik's apparent intentional out-grouping is of Christians with exclusivist "theologies of religions". This with a discursive struggle, discourse and language of them to be "un-Christian" and outside (or only narrowly within) what it is to be "true" Christian. It is almost like he uses the out-group pattern on how he sees exclusivist Christian "disdainful" attitudes to religious "others" and applies a similar out-group discourse on exclusivist Christians. The negative linguistic representation of these social actors clearly discourages us as readers to align with exclusivist Christians (see Machin and Mayr p. 58).

For example Bik also uses the terms "discrimination", but in his discourse he socially represents Christians with an exclusive theology of religions as those who have a discriminatory (and unhealthy) attitude: "On these exclusive texts are grounded unhealthy, discriminatory Christian attitude toward other partners in dialogue" (Bik p. 417).

Edmund Za Bik identifies "exclusive" Biblical texts (e.g. Acts 4:12: "And there is salvation in no one else...") and "inclusive" Biblical texts (e.g. Acts 10:34: "... God shows no partiality, but that in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him"). Bik does not include nor discuss a pluralist position, but focuses on exegesis of seemingly "exclusivist" texts. He argues along the line that it is not the name constituting a person's real identity, but instead the way of life. It is the "how" and the essence/being, the "what" put together (Bik p. 421). Inspired by Raimon Panikkar and Karl Rahner he argues that people of other faiths "who truly embody the way of Christ are anonymous Christians" (Bik p. 422). This is a position with a focus on the normativity of Christ (similar to a "theology of religions" inclusivism position) and the universality of the Spirit (the Holy Spirit of God in Christian theology) (Rahner in Kärkkinen p. 194 onwards). The main thing here is that Bik seems to be concerned with social representation of people in need of "healing" and that in a Myanmar context "the first thing we ought to do is to heal ourselves by removing un-wholesome Christian attitude toward people of other faiths by being open and actively promote inter-faith dialogue" (Bik p. 431). This representation is powerful, as in a discourse of "illness" one would like to seek the cure.

## 7.2.2 The Existential Rather than Metaphysical Christian-Buddhist Question

In Hlaing Bwa's article "Doing Theology in Myanmar on the Way to Democracy" the intent is to engage inter-disciplinary and cross-culturally since for Christians to express faith in Judeo-Christian and Greco-Latin and Western philosophical ways is a different mode of thought, as Bwa formulates it. The Myanmar context is one of Buddhists and widespread Buddhism and of different ethnic groups. It is a context of aspirations and sufferings of people in Myanmar. Theology has to answer to this socio-political and cultural setting (Bwa p. 379).

### 7.2.2.1 The "Them" in "Them" and "Us"

Hlaing Bwa makes use of an account of history to explain the animosity between "Burmans and ethnic" groups, which he says is prolonged "to this day" (Bwa p. 381). Looking at this with a discourse analysis lens, there is an "us" and "them" representation (Machin and Mayr p. 84), but the historical account includes the colonial period and its consequences. The "us" and "them" is being represented to be a result of this colonial imperialism and its "divide and rule" politics.

On one hand the "they" is used to represent "ethnic people" of Myanmar, who are portrayed as victims: "... suffered under the oppression of the Burmese Buddhists" and thus saw the "intruding whites" as liberators *and* saw Christianity as a religion providing a strong identity "to resist the oppressive power" (Bwa p. 381). Hlaing Bwa being a Christian creates a clear "us" and "them" social representation here. The sympathy created here is with the "ethnic people" and the religions mentioned: "natural religion" and Christianity. Though these two categories (ethnic and religious groups) are overlapping it is not developed how ethnic groups may belong to other religious groups, which is neglecting large minority groups and to some extent conflating religious and ethnic identities. It may be worth noticing that in terms of religions and who sympathy is created with in the social representation this includes some, but not all religious groups. The social representation of religions in Myanmar is of "Buddhism", "natural religion" and "Christianity". It is interesting - and potentially problematic when knowing the attitude towards religious minorities in Myanmar - to note that e.g. Hinduism or Islam is not dealt with. Interestingly, intra-faith sub-categories or denominations (Christian sub-groups) are not dealt with either. Nor are explicit ethnic groups (except Burmans) mentioned<sup>16</sup>. Due to the difficulties in engaging with this complex context at such detailed

---

<sup>16</sup> This except later when ethnic minorities are mentioned by examples: "... the Karens, the Kachins, the Chins, the Was, the Lahus..." (Bwa p. 391).

level, this is to some extent understandable, but it is, however, creating a simplified representation of social actors - and thus making it generic (Machin and Mayr p. 12) - in particular the lack of inclusion of other key religious minority groups.

On the other hand Hlaing Bwa uses "they" to represent both Buddhists (religious identity) and Burmans (ethnic identity). This "they" he contrasts to the British and their divide and rule policy, adding that it later is adopted by the Myanmar military government as well (Bwa p. 385). Related to the British he e.g. says that "Burmans" with the British colonial expansions felt they lost "...the sovereignty, territory and their domination over the ethnic people within their domain", felt they lost "...their culture, the vitality of their religion which is Buddhism, because Buddhism is the main driving force that made the Burmans into a civilised nation and is inseparable to the life of the Burmans" and that the Burmans felt that the "ethnic Christians", as he calls it, "enjoyed more advantage" related to trade, natural resources, education and health sectors (Bwa p. 381-382) and Christian mission was seen as "a threat" to Buddhist nationalism (Bwa p. 391). Hlaing Bwa further points to that beyond philosophical and doctrinal interest by animists in welcoming and adopting Christianity, the Burmese Buddhists saw this development as a "danger" for Burmese Buddhism and as a "colonial instrument" (Bwa p. 382). What is interesting in this is that this social representation makes the British colonial power into a *third category* represented to be a root cause behind also current conflicts. The social representation creates sympathy with Buddhists and Burmans. Thus both Christians, Buddhists and people of natural religions (and related ethnic categorisation of Burmans and "ethnic people"), are represented to be "victims" of colonial expansion and worthy of sympathy. The "them" and "us" is not bi-polar, but there are three main actors if accepting the synthesis of religious and ethnic representation of 1) the British, Christian (white, colonial) 2) the Buddhist Burmans, 3) Christian ethnic groups (and national religions). The social representation is such that sympathy is created with the latter two of them.

Further analyzing the social representation suggests that it strongly links ethnicity and religion. This explicitly with its claim that "Buddhism" is "inseparable" to the life of Burmans (Bwa p. 381-382) and that "the ethnic people cannot be separated from Christianity which becomes the root and foundation in their nation building" (Bwa p. 391). But also implicitly merging the categories with e.g. the use of the term "ethnic Christians" (Bwa p. 382). The latter is imprecise and problematic from a sociology of religions point of view. If assessing the categorisation *not* to the extent in which it "fits" sociology of religions "boxes", it is

assessed to have a function for its readers and be useful to communicate a group identity in a Myanmar context. This seems not readily to be lending itself to a "Western" sociology of religion school of thought if it narrowly is seeing religion as a "self-contained system" which it is possible to keep separated from "culture" in general as well as from "other societal spheres" (Brekke p. 59). In other words, this could be used to add to the debate and critique of such theorizing and approach.

#### **7.2.2.2 The "Us" in "Them" and "Us"**

Moving to how Hlaing Bwa is representing an "us" (or, rather "we") this is at times encompassing the people of Myanmar. E.g. "... we may discern first how God is leading us, the people of Myanmar...". This is, however, closely interlinked with representing another "we" to be Christians of Myanmar but with an emphasis on their role for the greater "we", e.g.: "... we need to evaluate the role of the churches in Myanmar and what really is our call today in the midst of the people struggle for democracy" (Bwa p. 380).

An indirect social representation of the current situation of Myanmar and all people in it is through history. Hlaing Bwa claims that history "shows" that when dictatorships fall and there is a transition to democracy violent conflicts and chaos often erupt. "What might that conflict and chaos look like in Myanmar?" (Bwa p. 386), he asks his reader. He thus implicitly creates a "we" of common concern to prevent and mitigate the conflict and chaos.

#### **7.2.2.3 The Role of the Christian Church and Theology**

In Hlaing Bwa's gives a historical summing up on how ethnic people in the first wave of missionary endeavours adopted Christianity, but lost their indigenous culture, which to Hlaing Bwa was negative. It had to do with the theology and "gospel", which asked for full replacement of what was represented as "evil" in their culture (Bwa p. 391). Furthermore, though having a positive function as a "liberation theology" and as a theology to be an important basis to organize ethnic national life, it also had a negative function not to be a "unitive force" and "reconciling power". Instead it brought alienation especially from Burmese Buddhists. Hlaing Bwa interestingly shifts perspective to see it from the perspective of the Burmans: "Nevertheless, for the Burmans, it is the gospel that divides the true blood relation of the people in Myanmar" (Bwa p. 392). In addition, Hlaing Bwa states that this we have to take seriously "if we want to present the gospel that unites and reconciles the people

especially in this world tormented by destructive divisions and conflicts" (Bwa p. 392). The social representation here is one that presents a key purpose of the "gospel" to unite and reconcile people - contrasted with loaded words as "tormented" and "destructive divisions" and "conflicts". It is also worth highlighting how the use of the word "true" and "true blood relation" of the people in Myanmar gives priority and precedence to the relationship between people in Myanmar. The former "gospel" caused division of what Bwa represents as "true". Thus this "gospel" is implicitly represented as close to a "false" category, at least regarding which consequences it had.

On this backdrop, Hlaing Bwa, is using positive linguistic means in his social representation of Khin Maung Din, a source he later builds on to further his own views. It is clear to see how he puts to the foreground that Khin Maung Din is a professor: "Prof. Khin Maung Din" (Bwa p. 395) and the use of honorifics helps to increase legitimacy in the eyes of readers (Machin and Mayr p. 84). Hlaing Bwa also attempts to legitimize Khin Maung Din by placing him in a broader discourse (Machin and Mayr p. 12): "This indicates the change of our theology as prompted in the 80s by a prominent lay philosopher and theologians ..." (Bwa p. 395). The use of the wider context is both by introducing him to be part of a significant historic change in the field of theology "in the 80s" and placing him with other "prominent" personalities. This encourages us as readers to align with Khin Maung Din and his positions. Similarly, he also uses the title and words of the president of Myanmar Institute of Theology, Samuel Ngun Ling, to give credit to his argumentation by including Samuel Ngun Ling's view that: "... dialogue should be our life-style... seeking for common truth ..." and that we are to remove barriers for Christians and neighbours of other faiths in Myanmar to develop "a common struggle for issues that are presently faced in the society" (Samuel Ngun Ling, in Bwa p. 396).

Interestingly, Hlaing Bwa also presents Khin Maung Din to be "provocative and controversial" in his time, but also presently. Probably this is to ease the reader beforehand to listen and possibly accept to content of the message. Perhaps he finds that some readers may disagree initially. It is, in addition followed the linguistic representation of the "majority of Christians in Myanmar" to be "still" "deeply rooted" in the mission theology inherited from the missionaries of the first wave of globalization (Bwa p. 395). This is a representation of "still" being stuck in something old or out-dated. It is linked to an old story from 1936 where the negative connotations of this "mission theology" is represented to be "expressions of the resentful Old Testament God" (Bwa p. 395). With an intertextual reading, it is not wishful to be linked to the Old Testament and its "God" for Christians to whom core teachings of the



New Testament and the theology here, e.g. the image of and relationship to God, is seen as developed further on the basis on (some would claim as a "correction" of) Old Testament theology. Thus, this representation serves to push readers to align with the "new". Hlaing Bwa is using an "old" and "new" dichotomy and contrasting the "old" missionary 19th century method with a claim that "time is changing", "we live a pluralistic world" and "our response should be in accordance with the need and reality of our context" (Bwa p. 396).

#### **7.2.2.4 Images of "Baptism" and "Opening Up" in the Christian Church**

The importance of not having fixed identities is developed as an argument by Hlaing Bwa. He claims this can lead to "self-alienation, estrangement, and finally self-destruction" and with the reference to natural history creatures isolating themselves from the environment immunizes them against change leading to their death. Thus, Hlaing Bwa argues that we should have open identities not just to survive, but to "live meaningfully, abundantly, and with dignity" (Bwa p. 411). Drawing on Jürgen Moltmann, he finds that the creation is an open system with possibilities and potentials for change and future behaviour is not fully determined by the present. The closed system he compares with that of the military regime experience in Myanmar. Interestingly, he then talks to the process of opening closed systems "and the overcoming of their separation and isolation (i.e, salvation) can only take place through the acceptance of suffering that has come through change. The theology of religions related to this he finds that a Buddhist-Christian or Christian-Buddhist community "signifies this kind of open system" that takes on suffering from each other and interacts in the spirit of freedom that brings life for each other (...) that the suffering and hope of God's salvific transformative work manifests" (Bwa p. 412). To take part in this is to participate in "the dialogical mission of God in Myanmar", which he compares with a "triple baptism" which is a baptism "in the context" with a focus on knowing God's salvific transformative work: 1) Baptism in faith, religiosity and spirituality of the people through which God is working. Here he finds a rediscovery of "the face of Christ and the voice of the Spirit" which speaks afresh in the faith of others "as the Way, the Truth and the Life who is active in the faith and the religiosity of other people different from ours". 2) Baptism in "the cry, the struggle, the pain, the suffering, the aspiration and the hope of the poor, the oppressed..." and the struggle "for a new creation" in the political/socio-cultural-economic field seeking advocacy and the prophetic role for values related to the Kingdom of God (peace, justice, forgiveness, reconciliation). 3) Baptism in the life and death struggle related of the climate and eco-system

and the engagement for eco-justice with people of other faiths "as the co-workers with God" (Bwa p. 414).

#### **7.2.2.4 The Existential Christian-Buddhist Question**

Hlaing Bwa also contrasts the "theological heritage" from missionaries and Western theologians and readily gives his account of which "new" theology he suggests for this time and for the Myanmar context "in order to develop our own contribution of theologies out for our present pluralistic context which could be at the service of the society moving towards the direction of democracy" (Bwa p. 398). This will be dealt with at some length as it relates to "theology of religions" of a Christian theologian of the Baptist Myanmar Institute of Theology, which is of interest to this paper.

Hlaing Bwa makes use, as analyzed above, of the legitimacy and what he calls "provocative" words of Khin Maun Din, which allows him to be frank, but at the same time "hide" behind the words of Khin Maun Din to some extent. What Hlaing Bwa highlights is building on an "acceptance model" related to "theology of religions" by Paul Knitter (Bwa p. 399) in which he brings in non-dualistic understanding and both-and thinking. Khin Maung Din is represented to challenge the "traditional" understanding of "mission-evangelism" which e.g. replaces a Buddhist faith with a Christian faith. Instead, Khin Maung Din is quoted to ask why a Buddhist should give up his faith - and why a faith in Buddha should "stand in irreconcilable opposition to his faith in Christ and Christianity? The answers, according to Khin Maung Din, can only be metaphysical, i.e. that a Buddhist "must give up their atheist faith and adopt the metaphysical doctrines such as grace and the doctrine of Trinity" (Bwa p. 400).

Khin Maung Din, however, suggests that the issue is existential rather than metaphysical and that this is "more biblical and practical" than the metaphysically formulated beliefs (Bwa p. 401). I.e. Jesus demands - also from Buddhist - to take a practical decision in response to the teachings of Jesus and "enter the Kingdom of God", as it is expressed by Bwa. This rather than confessing Christian metaphysical doctrines (Bwa p. 400). The "existential" decision is to "renounce oneself, ego" (Bwa p. 401), which interestingly related to intertextuality resembles language of Buddhist philosophy. He backs the view with the claim that Jesus furiously rejected Jewish proselytism and did not convert Jews to Christianity for them to be able to be part of "the Kingdom of God". Thus he finds that Jesus is not seen to be someone

who would ask Christian to use proselytism as a method (Bwa p. 401). Hlaing Bwa claims that praxis "matters most over the confessional metaphysical doctrines and dogmas" and refers to Biblical parables of sheep and goats where the ones recognized by God are only those who *do* the will of the Father - and highlighting another story with a pious and religious man who knew all dogmas and doctrines, but in response to asking Jesus what he should do to have eternal life, was asked for *praxis* - in this case to sell all he had and give it to the poor and go and follow Jesus (Luke 18:18-24 in the Holy Bible, New International Version). He concludes that "identity" is not a question of "orthodoxy of confession" of those "who call Lord, Lord" (a reference to the parable on sheep and goats) but orthopraxis of those "who do the will of the Father" (again a reference to the parable on sheep and goats) (Bwa p. 411).

A key question in "theology of religions" is as previously discussed, on salvation. Khin Maung Din is building on Rahner's idea of "anonymous Christians", which, however, were not seen as being in a salvific position. Din develops this, but finds that there is salvation. I.e. Din propagates a pluralist theology of religions (Kärkkäinen p. 25; Bwa p. 401-402), which Bwa's position is also assessed to be. The Buddhist-Christian and Christian Buddhist community of Khin Maung Din also builds on an understanding of love, which is said to transcend knowledge, reason, faith and hope. Thus the community is not based on knowledge, truth, metaphysical formulations of faith or similar - but "true love", the only thing that can transcend human barriers dividing communities, like "faith, creed, colour, class and gender". It is an "actional" community in the "mission" for peace and justice, harmony and reconciliation, liberation and development (Bwa p. 404 with reference to First Corinthians 13 in the Holy Bible, New International Version). This resembles Ariarajah's 5th position with "other" as "partner and co-pilgrim" (see p. 16) with a focus on a common quest and common action. The representation is replacing "old" content of the terms mission and evangelism for this common quest. Hlaing Bwa states it this way: "It is the humanisation mission rather than the proselytising mission". And: "dialogical evangelism" is the only relevant evangelism due to the crisis in Myanmar and in searching for "new days of democracy" (Bwa p. 404-405).

#### **7.2.2.5 An Existential Christian Buddhist Kingdom Community**

Hlaing Bwa builds on this to develop a Trinitarian theology. He draws on the example of interfaith marriage. A love relationship with a person of another faith can also bring maturity of one's own faith through the faith of one's partner. This he finds to be a theological insight, which is not "impossible" at other levels related to "formation of the inter-spirituality and

inter-communal partnership based on the bond of love, in order to create the Kingdom community" (Bwa p. 408). The Kingdom community he sees to be an existential community. Related to Ariarajah's 4th and 5th position on the "other" to be "part of one's own reality" or seeing the "other" as "partner and co-pilgrim", Hlaing Bwa uses the strong relational verb related to the religious "other". He finds that the Kingdom community is based on love relationships with "the other". Bwa brings in the notion of a philosophy claiming that "To be is to be in relationship" and that "One cannot simply exist; one must *exist with*" (Bwa p. 409). Hlaing Bwa states that "personhood and relationship define who we are and who God is" and here he affirms the Trinitarian nature of God to be "a community of differences in the relationship of perichoresis" and that this affirms that we must draw our existence and life from differences. This nurtures healthy, creative and transformative relationships (Bwa p. 409). In this way the Trinitarian theology on the personhood and relational dimensions of God is used to argue for dialogical and cooperative human relationships.

Hlaing Bwa is assessed to have a pluralist position, but in analyzing how he represents the religious "other" and the soteriological question he takes a somewhat different angle on the often central question of "salvation" in "theology of religions". Bwa brings in the teaching of Jesus in: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:43 in the Holy Bible, New International Version). This he uses to focus on how "love relationship" in this teaching expands to taking the risk "to loving the differences in order to live with the differences" and this he relates to a Buddhist-Christian and Christian-Buddhist community (Bwa p. 409). Hlaing Bwa claims: "In this community, the question is not which religion processes the greatest truth, whether other religions can also be "paths to salvation", whether in other religions other than Christianity people are also searching for God, and perhaps find God; whether they are "anonymous Christians" among members of religions communities, too (...) or however, the questions about the theological significance of other religions may be formulated" (Bwa p. 410). He thus either dismantles and makes the question of salvation less central in his theology of religions - or rather, perhaps he goes beyond it: Instead he says the "question" is about the force of *life* "which is at work in and through the different" - including with an emphasis on the "religious poor and oppressed struggling for life". Building on Jürgen Moltmann, Hlaing Bwa finds that it is an invitation to all religious and non-religious to life, affirmation, protection and sharing of life - and eternal life (Bwa p. 410). His perception of mission is a version of *missio Dei* where he finds that the "evangel" of the Buddhist-Christian and Christian-Buddhist community not to be a Christian mission, nor a mission of the church.

Instead Bwa finds it to be what he calls a theocentric *missio Dei* "in the partnership of Christians and Buddhists" (Bwa p. 410).

Relating this to "theology of religions" this is as mentioned to be seen to be a version of pluralism. Related to Ariarajah's positions regarding the "religious other" this is as mentioned to be seen as the 4th and/or 5th position of the "other" to be "part of one's own reality" or seeing the "other" as "partner and co-pilgrim" (see p. 16). Hlaing Bwa clearly focuses on the partnership and co-pilgrimage in the social representation of the "religious other" - e.g. with his focus on taking part in *missio Dei* together and in the formation of "inter-spirituality and inter-communal partnership based on the bond of love, in order to create the Kingdom community" (Bwa p. 408). If relating this further to Ariarajah's theory on the "other", Ariarajah finds that removing alienation between communities related to the 'other' can happen in two ways: Either a model which seeks a "fusion of horizons" in which one sees the "other" "not as a distinct reality but a part of oneself". This entails a spirituality of inclusion elevated to be more important than distinctions and differences. The goal, e.g. of interfaith dialogue, is to journey from an "us" and "them" distinction into a common "we", which sees the "other" as part of ourselves. The other alternative model finds this unrealistic and uncalled for. Instead a spirituality, which respects the "otherness" of the "other" is to be developed (Ariarajah p. 34). The position of Hlaing Bwa may be propagating what would be similar to the first position - reaching a "common we". Bwa's imagery of baptism in the spirituality of the people through which God is working (meaning people across faiths, i.e. encompassing the "religious other") and being submerged by water suggests fusion rather than "otherness".

#### **7.4 Intra-Christian Exclusion of "False Teachers" and "Spies" in Kachin**

The material included, as mentioned in Chapter 6, a sermon from the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), which served as an encyclical/pastoral letter for more than 300 churches on<sup>17</sup>. The sermon for the local Sunday worship service in local KBC churches was prepared by the central office of KBC and distributed to all Kachin Baptist Churches - of which most are located in Northern Myanmar, but local Kachin Baptists have congregations in other locations as well.

---

<sup>17</sup> This takes place every second Sunday of the year. Sunday of March 17, 2019 was the 64th "Special Sunday" of KBC (Kachin Baptist Convention)

The Sunday March 17, 2019, sermon was prepared by the general secretary of KBC<sup>18</sup>. When focusing on implicit "theology of religions" and the representations of social actors it is noteworthy that KBC's general secretary wrote that some individual evangelical preachers and teachers "are trying to steal church members from KBC churches"<sup>19</sup>. KBC made a decision to take action due to this. The general secretary referred to a meeting with representatives from all Kachin Baptist churches held at Mukchit Kachin Baptist Church when representatives of these churches "unanimously made decision to declare that those individual evangelical preachers are false teachers"<sup>20</sup>. The following individual evangelical preachers were "out-grouped" in this way:

1. David Lar
2. Brang Mai
3. Punk Sung Uk
4. Sai Aye
5. San Toe
6. Ngun Man
7. Htun Htun<sup>21</sup>

Clearly, the action to identify someone as a "false teacher" is an action to "out-group" (Philips and Jørgensen p. 101) and deligitimize that person and their teachings and to encourage listeners to get antipathy towards them (Machin and Mayr p. 12).

Some of the reasons stated by KBC's general secretary as to why KBC had to make such declaration and decision included that the evangelical preachers "always tries to attack KBC by negatively pointing out the weak points of KBC and its leaders". But also that they "intentionally always preach and teach false teachings and doctrines which directly opposite against theological stand of KBC".<sup>22</sup>

What is interesting regarding the social representation of the "other" is that it did not relate to the "religious other", e.g. following a Buddhist-Christian faultline. Instead the "othering" and "out-group discrimination" is related to an intra-religious conflict. The "evangelical preachers" are represented as someone who "attack", which is a strong "quoting verb" in

---

<sup>18</sup> 2019-05-22: Reference to sermon on Facebook:

[https://m.facebook.com/story/graphql\\_permalink/?graphql\\_id=UzpfSTE1NDYwMzk3MzkwNDQxNzk6MjE5MDYyODEyMTI1MjAwMQ%3D%3D](https://m.facebook.com/story/graphql_permalink/?graphql_id=UzpfSTE1NDYwMzk3MzkwNDQxNzk6MjE5MDYyODEyMTI1MjAwMQ%3D%3D)

<sup>19</sup> 2019-05-22: "Resource Person A": Sermon on Sunday of March 17, 2019

<sup>20</sup> 2019-05-22: Resource Person A: Mukchit Church, Waimaw Association, Kachin State. Meeting minutes: JHZ/K-7-2018.

<sup>21</sup> 2019-05-22: Resource Person A: Mukchit Church, Waimaw Association, Kachin State. Meeting minutes: JHZ/K-7-2018.

<sup>22</sup> 2019-05-22: "Resource Person A": Sermon on Sunday of March 17, 2019

discourse analysis (Machin and Mayr p. 58), which indicates that the "evangelical leaders" are hostile. In addition, to claim that someone "intentionally" and "always" preach and teach "false" is to interpret the intentions and actions to be "intentional". "False" and "false teacher" is of course extremely negative, not least in a Christian discourse with the intertextuality included that in the Bible there are warnings of "false teachers" and Jesus warns against "false prophets". E.g: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (Matthew 7:15 in The Holy Bible, New International Version). Intra-Christian tensions are most often not referred to related to "theology or religions" - this as strictly speaking Christian groups/denominations are not separate religious groups, but sub-groups. However, the dynamic of "ruling out" the teachings is the same. There is no mentioning of the soteriological or salvific elements. I.e. application of doctrines on salvation often present in "theology of religions". Neither on whether this - salvation - is thought to include or exclude the "denominational other" (instead of "religious other"), but only the more general accusation of "false teachings" without elaboration on what this entails.

The argumentation in the sermon also holds that "KBC believes" that those "false teachers" are "the spies of Burmese military". This because their preachings and sermons "mainly target destroying the unity of Kachin people under the title of KBC". And that this is similar to what "the Burmese military" uses as a strategy related to ethnic people in Myanmar with a reference to "divide and rule" tactics.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly here is that there is a reference to the "Burmese military". The military is not represented as a "government military", "Myanmar military" or in other ways more neutrally just using its name "Tatmadaw". Instead there is a suggestion that the military actions are linked to what is "Burmese", i.e. an ethnic category. And that this is linked to divide and rule tactics and destruction of the unity of Kachin people. "False" Christian evangelical teachers are linked with another enemy picture. It is a combination of a representation of an oppressive military force and a majority religious group.

The social representation is deeply polarizing and it may be relevant to include that so were the effects. Conflicts can arise from in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination (Philips and Jørgensen p. 101). While the "excommunication" of religious leaders is not out-group discrimination, but exclusion of individuals, the sermon nevertheless resulted in

---

<sup>23</sup> 2019-05-22: "Resource Person A": Sermon on Sunday of March 17, 2019

conflicts between groups and individuals who felt discriminated. The results of the sermon and declaration had, among other things, caused heated social media discussions (in Myanmar this especially means Facebook) between followers of the concerned evangelical preachers and some who defended KBC. Since those defending the evangelical preachers were from different ethnic groups and not only belonging to the Kachin ethnic groups, the arguments happened among different ethnic groups. The argumentation is assessed to at times be aggressive shift from the issue of "false religious teachings" to issues of "racial intolerance and racial discriminations" (2019-05-21 According to "Resource person A"; a Kachin Baptist Convention pastor).

## **8. Discussion and Conclusion**

Reading across the analyzed material it is striking how different the creation of "us" and "them" discourses are applied. In the ATEM "Declaration of Myanmar Theologians" the "we" concerns Christians in an ecumenical understanding and the "them" a religio-culturally pluralistic society. The "them" or religio-cultural "others" are represented to be "neighbours" with its strong Christian intertextual links to Biblical scriptures related to "love your neighbour" - and the "others" are also represented to have equal rights, i.e. a more judicial language. Here the language of "rights" is, however, collective and does not cater for human rights of the individual, which is highly problematic.

The "we" concerns the signatories of the Declaration and their communities - Christian churches in Myanmar. There is a call for ecumenical cooperation to be agents of transformation in God's holistic mission. The emphasis is on root causes of injustice and environmental and climate action and there is a positive representation of historical and present "mission enterprises" - but the Declaration is rather silent on what this "mission" entails (which "mission theology" and which "theology of religions" related this). Regarding "them" the representation of the "religious other" related to the "holistic mission" is not clear - including whether the religious "other" is seen as a co-worker and/or if the "other" is an object regarding proselytisation or not. The silence may reflect the nature of an ecumenical document to be broad in its nature to encompass the views of several Christian denominations and "theologies of religions".

Edmund Za Bik's article "Universal Salvation in the Context of Interfaith Dialogue in Myanmar" he rejects a Christian "in-group" and a non-Christian "out-group". He is clear and



explicit regarding his "theology of religions" and creates a soteriological "we" related to "Universal salvation". Bik says that "salvation is more universal in character and scope than we usually tend to think it to be". Bik is inspired by the "theology of religions" of Panikkar and Rahner and embraces the idea of "religious others" to be "anonymous Christians". Thus, he has a focus on the normativity of Christ and his "theology of religions" position seems to be a variation of an inclusivist position.

In Hlaing Bwa's article "Doing Theology in Myanmar on the Way to Democracy" he creates a "they" in a historical account of the British and their "divide and rule" colonial legacy and two other groups: The Buddhist Burmans and the ethnic peoples (or sometimes "Christians") in Myanmar. The negative representation is in essence of the colonial powers. Bwa has a vision of cooperation among religious and ethnic groups for a democratic transition in Myanmar - and a role for a Christian "gospel that unites and reconciles the people". Hlaing Bwa is clear on this "theology of religions" to be pluralistic. He argues for the benefit of not having fixed identities and of "opening closed systems" with reference both to Myanmar under military dictatorship and the individual level - and of a Buddhist-Christian or Christian-Buddhist community. Related to the positions of Ariarajah this resembles seeing the "other" as part of my own reality and/or seeing the "other" as partner and co-pilgrim. Bwa propagates non-dualistic understanding as well as both-and thinking. Bwa argues for not relating "theology of religions" to a metaphysical level: E.g. so that a Buddhist must give up his/her atheist faith and adopt Christian doctrines. Here he rejects a view on the other to be "an alternative" and rejects the need for conversion. Rather, to Bwa this is "existential": Jesus demands - from Christians and from Buddhist - to respond to Jesus and "enter the Kingdom of God" in an "existential" sense to "renounce oneself" and one's ego. The broad understanding of Gods' mission *missio Dei* is that it is an "actional" community with people from different faiths in "mission" related to peace, justice, harmony, reconciliation, liberation and development.

In some material a key focus is on inter-group position, i.e. inter-Christian "in-grouping" and "out-grouping" and representation of views of sub-groups and people within the same religion (Christianity) to be unhelpful, outdated, wrong or "false" - sometimes almost to the extent to "other" these people. Some noteworthy findings from the analyses are:

The ATEM "Declaration of Myanmar Theologians" positions and linguistically represents common Christian Myanmar spirituality to be "exclusive and other-worldly" and thus failing

to respond to the unjust systems and on this background calls for leaving this spirituality and instead take up a more engaged spirituality regarding societal and environmental issues.

The Sunday of March 17, 2019 sermon by the general secretary of Kachin Baptist Convention has such “in-“ and “out-grouping” by declaring seven individual evangelical preachers to be “false teachers”. This representation clearly deligitimized them and what was KBC's general secretary called “false teachings and doctrines which directly opposite against theological stand of KBC”

Hlaing Bwa begroans that a majority of Christians in Myanmar still subscribe to a mission theology from the times of missionaries and that this is unhelpful and outdated to be "expressions of the resentful Old Testament God”.

Edmund Za Bik harshly argues against “Christians' unhealthy self-righteous holier-than-thou pietism and attitude toward non-Christians” and creates a new “us” and “them” discourse where he categorises Christians with an exclusivist “theology of religions” to be "un-Christian" not to be "true" Christians.

The material taken together shows no *one* way in which Christian Baptists in Myanmar (and related Kachin State) portray and relate to the religious "other". Also, there is no *one* way in which "theology of religions" is applied - and the findings show a more diverse application (related to the anticipated schematic overview of "theology of religions" positions and Ariarajah's five positions - see p. 16). However: An important finding is that in these Christians sources an obvious concern is with the Buddhist majority when applying "theologies of religions". This to the extent that other religions and religious groups are in fact almost ignored. This is - to some extent perhaps - natural in a Buddhist majority culture, but it is quite telling that it does not seem like religious or ethnic minorities are necessarily finding a *common* identity as minorities, but the analysis suggests that the Christians Baptist, concerned here, instead relate more to the majority group. If it is a general pattern among minority groups for them to relate bilaterally to the majority group (instead of vertically relate to one another) the extent this hypothesis holds true and the reasons behind it it could be interesting to explore at in future studies. Another important finding is how great concern and how much focus there was to find ways forward in the inter-Christian theological debate, including regarding "theologies of religions" and related to the real-life in-group matters and conflicts - and how to cooperate as Christians.

Some motivated, with explicit use of their "theology of religions", to peace-seeking engagement with the religious "other". The analysis suggested that when focusing on a peace-seeking relationship this related to *working together* for societal and environmental issues and for dialogue, peaceful coexistence - and also for democratic transition in Myanmar. The social representation of the religious other which implied a conflict-seeking nature in particular concerned other Christians - i.e. not the "religious other", but the othering of another Christian sub-group - or a "denominational other", if you like.

In parallel to the "working together" with the "religious other" there was a focus on injustices and discrimination on ethnic people and Christians by the "other". This was dealt with, but usually more implicitly. In the texts concerned there are but few explicit representation of the Burmese/Burman Buddhist majority to be associated with this, but also not singling out ethno-nationalist forces or the government or military. This makes it a hidden, implicit and impersonalized matter who are responsible for the discrimination. This could be an interesting avenue for further research - how unjust and discriminatory structures and forces are represented.

## 9. Bibliography

*Ariarajah, S. Wesley* (2017) *Strangers or Co-Pilgrims? The Impact of Interfaith Dialogue on Christian Faith and Practice*. Augsburg Fortress Publishers (Minneapolis, USA)

*Bik, Edmund Za* (2014) *Universal Salvation in the Context of Interfaith Dialogue in Myanmar*, in K Zau Nan (ed.) "Theology Under the Bo Tree: Contextual Theologies in Myanmar". Myanmar Insistitute of Theology (Yangon, Myanmar)

*Blomquist, Rachel* (2015) *Ethno-Demographic Dyanmics of the Rohingya-Buddhist Conflict*, Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Georgetown University (Thesis), USA.

*Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb and Joseph M. Williams* (2008) *The Craft of Research* (3rd Edition). The University of Chicago Press (Chicago, USA)

*Brekke, Torkel* (2012) *Fundamentalism: Prophecy and Protest in the Age of Globalization*. Cambridge University Press (Cambridge)

*Fink, Christina* (2018) *Myanmar: Religious Minorities and Constitutional Questions*, *Asian Affairs*, 49:2, 259-27

*Freemann, Michael* (1995) *Are the Collective Human Rights? The Problem of Collective Rights in Political Theory*. *Political Studies* (1999), XLIII, pp. 25-40

*Jørgensen, Marianne W. and Louise Phillips* (2002): *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. SAGE Publications (London, UK).

*Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti* (2003) *Theology of Religions*. InterVarsity Press (Downers Grove, IL, USA)

*Lee, Yanghee* (2019) *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*. The UN Human Rights Council. Fortieth Session. 5 March 2019

*Machin, David and Andrea Mayr* (2012) *How to do critical discourse analysis: A multimodal introduction*. SAGE Publications (London, UK)

*Schalk, Peter* (2007): *Operationalizing Buddhism for Political Ends in a martial context in Sri Lanka: The case of Simhalatva*; in Hinnells, John R. and Richard King (eds.) (2007): "Religion and Violence in South Asia: Theory and Practice". Routledge, New York, USA

*Stott, John* (1996). *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement 1974–1989*. Paternoster Press (Carlisle, UK)

*Thwanghaiung, Ardeth Maung* (2012) *The "Other" Karen in Myanmar: Ethnic Minorities and the Struggle without Arms*. Lexington Books, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers (Plymouth, UK)

*Wade, Francis* (2017) *Myanmar's Enemy Within: Buddhist Violence and the Making of a Muslim "Other"*. Zed Books (London, UK)

*Zin, Min* (2015) Anti-Muslim Violence in Burma: Why Now? In: *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, Volume 82, Number 2, Summer 2015, pp. 375-397

The Holy Bible, New International Version (1984) by International Bible Society, Zondervan Publishing House, USA.