

Relationality and radical democracy: The possibilities of postcolonial citizenship in Myanmar

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Western liberal conceptions of democratic citizenship require the state to be “neutral” by separating the political from the social. However, this is often at odds with the realities of socio-political organization in many former colonized countries. In this paper, I draw on empirical data from photo-elicitation interviews with eight Buddhist youth in Yangon to illustrate the socio-political realities of everyday citizenship and citizenship education in Myanmar. Findings show that, for Buddhist participants, their political identity as Myanmar citizens and their religious identity as Buddhists are deeply enmeshed. Rather than force-fit postcolonial states into the Western democratic model, I propose that the notions of relationality and radical democracy offer a means of indigenizing democracy and draws on Myanmar’s Buddhist democracy to illustrate the political potential of relationalism.

Keywords: Myanmar; postcolonial citizenship; radical democracy; relationality

INTRODUCTION

Western liberal political theorists seek to address the problem of establishing peaceful co-existence among people with different worldviews (Mouffe, 2009) though they have different conceptions of the tasks of government. A leading political liberal, John Rawls, (1990) contends that the classical conception of democracy, as a set of neutral procedures for public decision-making, is inadequate and advocates for a political conception of justice that can provide an adequate moral consensus on political. He conceives political liberalism as a neutral framework for the organization of a pluralistic society that can be accepted by all “reasonable” citizens despite their deep doctrinal differences. This political conception of justice may be part of or even derived from religion(s), but it cannot be presented as such if a consensus is to be reached by citizens (Rawls, 1990). This is because the separation between state and church, and between the public and the private, is central to the consensual politics of Western liberalism (Mouffe, 1993). Such a liberal conception of democratic citizenship is often at odds with the realities of socio-political organization in many former colonized countries where the political and the social are inseparable (Boege, Brown, & Clements, 2009).

Indeed, the political and the social are inseparable in Myanmar. Buddhism has been the cultural foundations and the framework for the state since pre-colonial times (Scott, 2009). British colonial occupation lasted from 1824 to 1948 and generated significant resistance, much of it formulated through Buddhist symbols and ideas (Walton, 2015).

These Buddhism-inspired nationalist struggles remain etched in the national psyche of Myanmar. Since 2010, Myanmar has been going through a period of transition, with a new multi-ethnic, multi-party political system offering its citizens some semblance of democracy. In their battle against the military junta that ruled Myanmar in an authoritarian manner for nearly 50 years, Myanmar's Bamar¹ Buddhist leaders have often invoked Buddhism to legitimate political freedoms and human rights, and frame democratic governance (Hayward, 2015; Schober, 2005; Walton, 2015). In other words, the Myanmar state endorses a Buddhist conception of the good life and thus challenges Western liberal conceptions of a neutral state.

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the socio-political realities of citizenship in Myanmar through the lived experiences and understandings of young urban Buddhists in Yangon, and to draw on relationality to imagine a workable form of democracy in such a postcolonial context. In doing so, this paper seeks to contribute to debates on postcolonial citizenship and indigenous democracy in former decolonized states, as well as the limited empirical literature on citizenship in Myanmar. First, I sketch my theoretical framework to highlight the broad notion of education that underpins this study. Then, I briefly outline the data collection and analysis process. My findings illustrate that participants' political identity as Myanmar citizens and religious identity as Buddhists are deeply enmeshed. Finally, I highlight the political potential of notions of relationalism and radical democracy in offering former decolonized countries a means of indigenizing democracy, by using the example of Myanmar's Buddhist democracy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: PUBLIC PEDAGOGY, CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND SUBJECT FORMATION

Although many educationalists maintain that public schools play and ought to play a critical role in nurturing citizens (Evans, 2008), recent work in citizenship studies points increasingly to the need to attend to the role of non-state actors in citizenship education (de Koning, Jaffe, & Koster, 2015). These authors argue that the meanings of citizenship are framed and negotiated differently in sites outside of schools, and such normative framings of citizenship are the outcomes of complex interplays between state and non-state actors (de Koning et al., 2015). However, few researchers have conducted empirical research on citizenship education outside of formal schooling. Lazar (2013) contends that an anthropological focus on the everyday lived experiences of citizens can reveal how both state and non-state actors are involved in the processes of subject construction. Indeed, a rare ethnographic study of everyday citizenship by Biesta, Lawy, and Kelly (2009) in England found that young people often learn about democracy and citizenship through participation in the communities and practices that make up their everyday life. They argue that citizenship learning is a situated process that is relational and uniquely linked to young people's life-trajectories. In other words, the wider social, cultural, political, and economic order within which young people live their lives is always implicated in citizenship learning.

“Public pedagogy” provides a useful theoretical concept for understanding everyday life as a pedagogical project for citizen-subject formation. Historically, the term “public pedagogy” referred to educational activities producing a public aligned in terms of values

¹ Bamar refers to the dominant ethnic group in Myanmar who live primarily in the Irrawaddy River basin area and speaks the Burmese language.

and collective identity: the citizens (Sandlin, O'Malley, & Burdick, 2011). Later, public pedagogy scholarship shifted into an exploration of the different sites within which diverse subjectivities are constructed: from popular culture and everyday life, informal institutions and public spaces, dominant discourses, to public intellectualism and performative social activism (Sandlin et al., 2011). Regardless of the different domains of investigation, public pedagogy scholars are characterized by their multidimensional understanding of education and a common concern with democracy and social change. Drawing on the notion of public pedagogy, this study conceptualizes everyday life as a site of pedagogy and focuses on various “forms, processes and sites of education and learning occurring beyond formal schooling” (Sandlin et al., 2011, p. 338) for eight Buddhist youth in Yangon.

By focusing on the everyday citizenship of these Buddhist youth, this paper contributes to the limited empirical work on citizenship and citizenship education in Myanmar, most of which are large-scale nationwide quantitative surveys (The Asia Foundation, 2014; The International Republican Institute, 2017; Welsh & Huang, 2016). While helpful in highlighting some key tendencies in Myanmar citizenship, these extensive studies tell us little about how citizens in postcolonial Myanmar learn about citizenship or make sense of it in relation to their social experiences. Few qualitative studies on citizenship and citizenship education in Myanmar have looked at citizenship learning outside of formal schooling, even though the actual socio-political conditions of young people's everyday life are important for their learning of citizenship and democracy (Biesta et al., 2009). This paper contributes to research on democracy and citizenship in Myanmar, by employing the notion of citizenship education as public pedagogy to explore the role of everyday life in the construction of the young citizen-subject. In the next section, I briefly outline the ethnographic fieldwork undertaken to investigate participants' lived experiences and understandings of citizenship.

METHODS

This paper is based on data gathered in Yangon between November 2017 to April 2018 as part of a larger, ethnographic study on youth citizenship in Myanmar. Four foundational ethical principles—autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice—underpin the study. The study has ethical approval from The University of Auckland's Human Ethics Committee. Participants were recruited through a non-governmental organization and invited to join the study on a voluntary basis. Purposive sampling was employed, and care was taken to ensure that the sample comprised both Bamar and ethnic minority groups. Not all ethnic minority groups were represented because of the limited scope of this research project. Participants had to be Myanmar citizens between 16 and 30 years old. For this paper, I draw on data from the Buddhist participants to explore the intersection of Buddhism and citizenship in Myanmar. A summary of the participants' demographic characteristics is presented in Table 1.

Participants kept photo journals of their daily life for a week, which I reviewed with them individually over two photo-elicitation interview sessions. At the interview sessions, participants shared photographs that illustrated the meanings of good citizenship and being Myanmar, as well as their background and school experiences. Using the photographs as an “ice breaker” activity to create a comfortable space for discussion, and as a tool to invoke comments, memory, and discussion (Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, & Baruchel, 2006), I asked them further questions from my interview protocol. Each

interview session lasted around 1.5 hours. The interviews were conducted in English and/or Burmese, depending on the participants' preferences.

Table 1: Summary of participants' demographic characteristics

Alias	Ethnicity	Gender	Age
Kyaw Win	Bamar	Male	19
Yin Nandar	Pa-Oh	Female	21
Myint Myat	Bamar	Female	24
Le Khaing	Bamar	Female	17
Aung Zin	Bamar	Male	19
Htet Ei	Bamar	Female	17
Ye Khant	Bamar	Male	18
Myat Ye	Bamar	Male	20

I used thematic analysis to make sense of collective or shared meanings and the experiences of everyday citizenship (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The photo journals were analysed as part of the interview transcripts since participants elaborated upon them during the interview. I approached the data using inductive coding and theme development as the primary mode of engagement, working “bottom up” from the data, and developing codes (and ultimately themes) to summarize the interpretations of the persons involved and their way of describing the current situation using “everyday concepts” (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

BUDDHISM, CITIZENSHIP, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

In this section, I present three key themes from my Yangon participants that highlighted how they understood their everyday experiences with Buddhist ideas, practices, institutions, and communities as opportunities for acting and being citizens. These are: 1) Buddhism and the traits of Myanmar citizens; 2) Buddhism and national identity; and 3) Buddhism and the duties and rights of citizenship.

Buddhism and the traits of Myanmar citizens

Most participants perceived Buddhism as providing the underlying values that make Myanmar citizens “friendly”, “hospitable”, “helpful”, “generous”, and “kind” to others. Le Khaing noted that “[m]any people think donation is following the Burmese way” and offerings and donations are regarded as a “core concept” within Burmese Buddhism. This idea is so ingrained amongst Buddhists in Myanmar that one participant claimed that even the poorest Buddhists would donate one-third of what little money they have to “monks, monastery, pagoda or this kind of thing” (Myint Myat). Kyaw Win and Myat Ye were more critical of the cultural traits that constitute Myanmar citizens. Kyaw Win felt that Buddhism made Myanmar “traditional” and conservative, especially for women, who “have to act according to tradition, stay covered and not provoke, like not wear stuff that is too provoking”. Myat Ye lamented that the older generation of Myanmar’s Buddhist citizens “believe in Buddhism, so it’s like blind faith. They do not think and just pray. They just listen to whatever the Buddhist monks say.”

Regardless of their attitudes towards Buddhism, all my Buddhist participants attributed what they perceived to be defining characteristics of Myanmar citizens to Buddhism. Their characterization of Myanmar citizens as Buddhist is in line with the significant role played by Buddhism in Myanmar's political history. During the colonial period, nationalists used Buddhism as an indigenous ideology to rally mass support, halt Western influence and to regain respect for Burmese culture and Buddhism, vis-à-vis the British colonizers (Aung-Thwin, 2012). In fact, the slogan of the nationalist organization Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) founded in 1906 was "to be Burmese is to be Buddhist". It is no wonder that participants saw members belonging to the political community of Burmese as necessarily encompassing culturally Buddhist characteristics.

Buddhism and national identity

Other than associating the traits of Myanmar citizens with Buddhism, such fusion of national identity and Buddhism in participants' understandings of citizenship is also reflected in their insistence on wearing national dress at Buddhist sites. Aung Zin saw *longyi* (a skirt-like garment worn by Burmese) as a "religious dress" and marker of his Myanmar identity. He insisted on abiding by "Myanmar" dress code when he visits the pagodas, even though "*almost everyone wears their trousers or jeans these days*".

I am very proud [to be from Myanmar] when I go to the pagoda. I think I am the only one who does as in Myanmar. Myanmar dress, Myanmar longyi. I am very proud. Whether others are judging me or not, I don't care. (Aung Zin)

Underlying his insistence on complying with customary dress code at Buddhist sites is the historical memory of colonization and British humiliation of the Burmese social order. During the colonial period, Burmese had resisted such humiliation through cultural means: the "no footwear in the pagodas" campaign, where nationalist monks and YMBA lobbied for British to strictly observe the ban on footwear in sacred Buddhist pagodas (Aung-Thwin, 2012). For nationalistic youth such as Aung Zin, the cultural and the political was indivisible: wearing the national dress at Buddhist sacred sites was an expression of his patriotism and commitment to the Burmese nation. Yet, in their current pursuit for modernity, many young people of his age have abandoned the customary dress code for Western jeans and trousers. Aung Zin felt indignant that he was now the odd one out.

Buddhism and the duties and rights of citizenship

Buddhism is not only constitutive of national identity in Myanmar, it is also constitutive of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. For example, Ye Khant saw religious piety as the very expression of his citizenship. He believed that it is a citizenry duty for Myanmar citizens to preserve the longevity of Buddhism, given the global minority status of Buddhists. A recurring theme in Myanmar political discourse in recent years has been the notion that Buddhism is under threat and it is widely believed that Buddhism will disappear five thousand years after the Buddha's passing (Walton, 2015).

This is an alms-giving ceremony. The monks have to draw lots and these are the numbers. [This is good citizenship because] You know, this is a Buddhist country and it's something related to the religion, and the Burmese people. By doing this, Buddhism can last long and also, this is a kind of doing good deeds. (Ye Khant)

For Ye Khant, his political obligation to the Myanmar state and his religious commitment to Buddhism are inseparable. He envisioned Myanmar as the last line of defence

preventing the total disappearance of the religion and believed that supporting Buddhist practices was a critical citizenry duty (Walton, 2015). In other words, for Ye Khant, acting as a citizen meant living out his commitment to Buddhism. Similar to Aung Zin, Ye Khant's cultural and political identities are fused.

Such entanglement between the political and the cultural is not surprising, given how Buddhist institutions and practices have complemented if not substituted the state apparatus in realising the citizenship rights of Myanmar subjects. The fragile Myanmar state dedicates a very minute part of GDP, less than 3% in 2014–2015 on health, education and welfare. It was everyday Buddhist institutions, communities, and practices that provided the quotidian coping mechanisms that filled the social welfare gap (McCarthy, 2018). Many of my Yangon participants highlighted popular Buddhist practices of donation and offering as common phenomena in their neighbourhoods, especially during full moon days.² Myint Myat spoke of her family preparing food to donate to people in her neighbourhood. Le Khaing and Ye Khant highlighted the regular offering of free food in their communities during various Buddhist festivals.

This is free food. We call it the Sai-Yi-Tan-May-Byah. It is a kind of donating to the monks and after donating to the monks, we treat the people and also if you want to, you can donate the food to the people. (Ye Khant)

More importantly, participants often emphasized that these Buddhist practices benefitted the destitute. Buddhist conceptions of the good require believers to provide assistance to those in need or suffering, thus many Buddhists often intentionally organize religious giving. Democracy activists have also advanced the idea that religious giving in the form of charitable giving and volunteering is key to national development. In fact, all of my Yangon participants were avid volunteers and saw their different volunteering experiences with Buddhist and non-religious organizations as part of their citizenry contribution to society. Htet Ei believed that a willingness to help those in need through donations is “the role of a citizen” and “the job of a good citizen”. Ye Khant felt that “[t]his is good citizenship because you know, there are many poor people. It is a kind of helping each other”. Le Khaing believed that

[O]nly we can shape the future, I think. If we try to perfect ourselves, it's doing the job of a good citizen. Everybody should participate in improving society and government, because society is the place where they are living in. If they don't try to shape it, who will? If they don't try for their own society, nobody will try. (Le Khaing)

Many of these Buddhist participants participated in these non-state welfare provision through Buddhist social welfare groups and networks, which functioned as informal political institutions that constructed their notions of citizenship. Having come from a poor family who could not afford to pay for extra tuition and other classes when he was in high school, Aung Zin was thankful he had access to free education from monastic schools.

We can learn everything from monastic schools, about techniques or skills, about traditional relationships, or something like mathematics. Even about matriculation exams, lectures or lessons, we can study there . . . We can volunteer [to teach there] too. (Aung Zin)

² In Myanmar, Full Moon Days in the traditional lunar calendar are celebrated every month. Many major Buddhist holidays are linked to these full moon days.

Grateful that monastic schools have supported his right to education, Aung Zin volunteered as an English teacher in a monastic school after he completed high school to serve his community. In other words, for many of the participants, Buddhist institutions, practices, and communities provided the context for their acting and being citizens, as well as their learning about citizenship.

BUDDHIST DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP AS A RADICAL DEMOCRATIC PROJECT

These data demonstrate that for Bamar Buddhist youth, political identity as Myanmar citizens and religious identity as Buddhists are deeply enmeshed. Participants conceptualized and understood their obligations as citizen-members of the Myanmar state from their subject-position as Buddhists. They not only defined their national identity and citizenship duties in relation to Buddhism, participants also perceived Buddhist practices and institutions as crucial to the realization of citizenship rights. Buddhism was clearly ubiquitous in Yangon, if not the entire Myanmar. Participants' everyday life in Yangon was permeated by Buddhist practices, communities, and institutions, which provided the contexts for their acting and being citizens. Participants learnt about the norms, values, and behaviour appropriate for those claiming membership of the Myanmar political community from monastic schools, neighbourhood Buddhist rituals, and festivals, even monasteries. In other words, everyday Buddhist practices, communities, and institutions are just as involved in the construction of the Myanmar youth citizen-subject as that of schools. Such is the socio-political reality of citizenship in Myanmar. Against Western liberal conceptions of democracy where religion is "the culture of the social, not of the political" (Rawls, 1990, p. 14) and thus has no place in the public sphere, there is no such separation in my participants' lived experiences and understandings of citizenship. In fact, the political and the social are intertwined. Participants viewed citizenship as more than a mere legal status: it was a realm where they recognized themselves as participants in a political community, albeit one that is indistinguishable from the cultural community of Buddhists.

Participants' understandings of citizenship related to the nature of political authority in Myanmar. Historically, there have been persistent efforts by Myanmar political leaders to link Buddhism with past political rule and to ground legitimate governance in Buddhist ideas of righteous rule (Hayward, 2015). Since 1988, democracy activists have also drawn on Buddhist philosophical, moral, and religious doctrine to inform the vision of a good life in Myanmar's democracy and to exhort Buddhist citizens to contribute to national development. It is no wonder, then, that participants viewed Myanmar as a Buddhist state, with Buddhism informing the traits of Myanmar citizens, national identity, as well as the duties and rights of citizenship. Taking the liberal stance that the state should be neutral and not privilege a particular conception of the good life, Hayward (2015) expressed concerns about the ways democracy has been indigenized by Buddhists in Myanmar and what it meant for religious minorities. Indeed, her concerns are not unfounded. Since the democratization and opening up of Myanmar in 2010, Buddhist nationalists and extremists have been stirring racial and religious hatred amongst Myanmar citizens (Walton & Hayward, 2014). Buddhist nationalism has facilitated military-led persecution of the stateless Rohingyas, described by UN human rights chief as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing" (Kipgen, 2019, p. 69). Buddhist nationalist groups, such as the Organisation for the Protection of Race and Religion (MaBaTha), have also leveraged the

argument that democratic rule would support proper Buddhist practice, spiritual progress and liberation to compel the democratizing state to fulfil its religious obligation of protecting and propagating Buddhist teachings.

Similarly, the Western liberal state has never been neutral. Feminist and Marxist scholars, as well as advocates of multicultural citizenship have long challenged the claimed neutrality of the Western liberal state (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006; Jessop, 2016; Yuval-Davis, 2001). They point out the hypocrisy and impracticalities of the liberal ideal of a politically and culturally neutral state (Yuval-Davis, 2001). Indeed, the separation of social relations and the private from the public in liberalism is an analytic and artificial one (Gandhi, 1998). It follows from the teleological narrative of Enlightenment, where rationalist secularism supposedly destroyed the “old systems of belief and sociality embedded in the chimeral mysteries of divine kingship, religious community, sacred languages and cosmological consciousness” (Gandhi, 1998, p. 105) to bring about the progression of humankind. However, instead of progress, during the period of colonialism, this rationality had sanctioned the colonial civilizing mission by setting up a “pedagogic and imperialist hierarchy between European adulthood and its childish, colonised Other” (Gandhi, 1998, p. 32). What this discussion means is that while Hayward’s concerns are not unfounded, these problems have less to do with the ways in which democracy has been indigenized in Myanmar than the ways in which democracy can be understood because a neutral liberal democratic state has never existed.

THE POLITICAL POTENTIAL OF RELATIONALITY AND RADICAL DEMOCRACY FOR INDIGENIZING DEMOCRACY IN FORMER DECOLONIZED STATES: BUDDHIST DEMOCRACY IN MYANMAR

Postcolonial scholars advocate for other ways of being human, besides the Enlightenment ideal of a rational adult and argue that a space for dialogue between the two can open up spaces for other forms of democracies (Gandhi, 1998). In this section, I highlight the political potential of relationalism in indigenizing democracy for former decolonized countries by arguing that Myanmar’s Buddhist democracy is a workable one when it is reconceptualized as a project of radical democracy.

In order to overcome the ontological de-relationality embedded in liberalism, I draw on relationalism, “a mode of thought within social theory that is both an ontology of the social and a related way of looking at it” (Go, 2016). Relationalism starts with interactions and sees those relations as constitutive. In other words, individuals’ actions and behaviours do not only flow from innate qualities but also from the relations in which they are inseparably embedded (Donati, 2016). Donati’s notion of the relational subject, where individual and social subjects are relationally constituted, is useful here. In the context of citizenship, we can understand the citizen as a relational subject who emerges from the relations between different agents in a structural context and acquires qualities and powers through different internal and external social relations (Donati, 2016).

In the context of a radical democratic project, the citizen—as a stable partnership between an individual and the state, and with other members of the political community—is a relational subject if and to the extent to which members act in reference to their relation (to its structure, needs and conditions). The basis for the common political identity as radical democratic citizens is their recognition of a set of ethico-political values—liberty and equality—and their willingness to submit to the prescribed rules of conduct when

struggling for an extension and radicalization of democracy (Mouffe, 1993). The radical democratic citizen, as such, is a relational social subject, if and to the extent to which the partnership relation emerges as a distinct reality from the individual, and in turn constitutes the personal identities of those involved in the partnership (Donati, 2016; Mouffe, 1993). For radical democratic citizens, every situation is an encounter between the private and the public because they interpret liberty and equality according to the relevant social relations and subject positions, whether gender, class, race, ethnicity, age or sexual orientation. Since the social agent is not a unitary subject, it is inevitable that there will be conflicting interpretations of those principles. Personal identities are defined and redefined reflexively in the process through relations with other fellow citizens engaged in the democratic struggle.

Rather than describe an end-state, a project of radical and plural democracy recognizes that the complete realization of democracy is impossible. Democracy is conceived as an ideal type political form of society that citizens constantly struggle for. The aim of politics, then, is to “use the symbolic resources of the liberal democratic tradition to struggle for the deepening of the democratic revolution, knowing that it is a never-ending process” (Mouffe, 1993, p. 72). What this means is that a Buddhist democracy can be a democratic one as long as citizens identify with the democratic principles of liberty and equality and are committed to defending its institutions (Mouffe, 2006). Religious groups can intervene in the political arena to argue in favour of or against certain causes, just as MaBaTha has done, as long as they abide by the rules of democratic institutions. This is not to say the consequences of religious participation in the public sphere are necessarily always positive. For example, Buddhist organisations such as the MaBaTha proposed legal initiatives in 2014 to “protect race and religion”. Through the laws, they sought to control mixed marriages and “forced conversion” of Buddhist women who marry non-Buddhist men, criminalize polygamy and extra-marital affairs, and enforce family planning in certain regions of the country. Despite the controversy surrounding the race and religion laws, these interventions were at least made within constitutional limits and fought within the realm of democratic politics.

If we accept that conflicting interpretations of the ethics-political principles of equality and liberty will always exist, and that this is what democratic politics is truly about, then religion can be given a place in democratic politics. These constitutional limits will differ according to the different ways various societies interpret the ethico-political principles that are constitutive of modern democracy and the particular interpretations that have obtained a hegemonic status at that conjuncture (Mouffe, 2006). Problematic as it might be, a Buddhist democracy opens up a space for citizens to engage with the political, described by Cheesman (2016) as “concerned with rivalry among collectivities recognizing one another as substantive equals who communicate hostility dialogically through fundamentally nonviolent means” (p. 354). This space is important, not only because it provides an alternative to the non-political (i.e. violent conflict as the means of relating to differences), but also because it opens the space for constructing new political identities as radical democratic citizens. In sum, the notion of relationality, combined with a re-conceptualization of Myanmar’s Buddhist democracy as a project of radical and pluralist democracy, have given rise to the plausibility of an indigenized democracy that can further the social justice agenda of citizenship.

As for the plight of the stateless Rohingya refugees, it is a problem that neither a “neutral state” in a liberal democracy nor a Buddhist state in a radical democracy can resolve

within the framework of national citizenship. National citizenship has both universalist and exclusionary commitments (Bosniak, 2006). The universalism of citizenship is only applicable *within* the national political community. While the problem for oppressed insiders, such as Myanmar's Muslim *citizens*, is the *substance* of citizenship (i.e. equality and liberty), the problem for the stateless Rohingya Muslims is more basic: it is the problem of entry into a national membership community, Myanmar or otherwise. Without this membership, they will always be excluded in the universe of those entitled to consideration in matters of distribution, recognition, and political representation (Fraser, 2005). Such is the nature of national citizenship, which takes the modern territorial state as the frame within which justice is sought and applied. If we accept that members of a political community have the right to shape their membership community according to their own criteria, then it is vital to work for the interests of Rohingya Muslims within limits acceptable to Myanmar citizens. Rights are "social relationships rooted in an alliance of public power, political membership, and social practices of equal moral recognition" (Somers & Roberts, 2008, p. 414). What Arendt (2013) calls "right to have rights" (p. 39) only make sense for people who already enjoy membership of a political community. Without the rights of citizenship, there is no political authority capable of protecting people as human beings (Isin & Turner, 2007). As inadequate as it might be, "associate" or "naturalized" citizenship under Myanmar's *1982 Citizenship Law* offers Rohingya Muslims more rights than what they are currently entitled to and a higher possibility of full citizenship than what the international human rights regime can put forward.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper makes several contributions to knowledge. First, it extends our limited knowledge of youth citizenship and citizenship education in Myanmar, by employing the notion of citizenship education as public pedagogy to explore the role of everyday life in the construction of the young Buddhist citizen-subject. The study found that for these young Buddhist citizens, learning, being, and acting as citizens often took place within the context of Buddhist communities, practices, and institutions, which complemented and, at other times, substituted the state in social welfare provision. Further research might explore the everyday sites by which non-Buddhist citizens experience being and acting as a citizen, and whether everyday life in Yangon constructs the young non-Buddhist citizen-subjects differently.

In addition, this paper contributes to debates on postcolonial citizenship and indigenous democracy in former decolonized states. Through eight Myanmar citizens' lived experiences and understandings of citizenship, this paper has sought to illustrate the socio-political realities of citizenship in a postcolonial context, where the social and political are intertwined. Indeed, this study found that participants saw Myanmar citizens as necessarily encompassing culturally Buddhist characteristics and expressed their political commitment to the state through cultural practices at Buddhist sites. Participants also understood their duties and rights as Myanmar citizens through the lens of a Buddhist adherent. The findings from this study challenge Western liberal conceptions of democratic citizenship, which require the separation of the political and the social. Rather than force-fit postcolonial states into the Western democratic model, I have proposed that the notions of relationality and radical democracy offers a means of indigenizing democracy and I drew on Myanmar's Buddhist democracy to illustrate the political

potential of relationalism. Further studies might employ similar notions of relationality and radical democracy to explore their political potential in indigenizing democracy in other former colonized states, and thus advance the social justice agenda of postcolonial citizenship.

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BIOGRAPHY

Liyun Wendy Choo is a doctoral candidate at the University of Auckland. She holds a Master of Education (Curriculum and Teaching) and a Master of International Studies, both of which proved to be fundamental to her current PhD work on citizenship in Myanmar. Her PhD seeks to understand young Myanmar citizens' citizenship and investigates how Myanmar citizenship is produced. It takes a broad view of education and examines the educative process of citizens beyond formal schooling. Her research interests are in the areas of postcolonial citizenship, critical realism, Southeast Asia and comparative education.

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