Introduction

Islamophobia is one of the most significant forms of intolerance that has manifested itself in the contemporary context. The academic literature on this phenomenon is extensive and has been well documented in the Western context. Despite the worst manifestations of Islamophobia within the Asian contexts – exemplified by the genocide of the Rohingya community in Myanmar, the widespread persecution of Muslims in India and the rise of anti-Muslim online expressions resulting from the conservative turn in Muslim societies in Malaysia, there has been little written on Islamophobia in Asia. This chapter seeks to narrow this gap in the literature on Islamophobia by analysing two cases of Islamophobia, namely in Thailand and the Philippines. These two cases represent a diverse range of contexts. Thailand is a mainly Buddhist majority state whereas Philippines is a Christian majority state. Both countries have seen long-standing Muslim insurgencies in the restive provinces of Pattani (Thailand) and Mindanao (Philippines). This chapter argues that Islamophobia in Thailand and Philippines is rooted in Muslim insurgencies which could be traced to an early colonial policy that now has taken its own forms due to the increasingly religious nature of these conflicts and violence perpetrated against non-Muslims by Muslim insurgency movements. There are three parts to this chapter. First, the chapter will examine the current literature on Islamophobia and propose a conceptual framework from which Islamophobia in the Asian contexts can be understood. Second, the chapter will analyse the historical factors for the rise of Islamophobia and the contemporary manifestations of Islamophobia in these societies. Last, the chapter will examine the impact of this study as a framework in understanding Islamophobia in conflictual areas. While the Muslim populace in both Philippines and Thailand are diverse and not limited to the Muslims in the south of both countries, for the purposes of this paper, the analysis of Islamophobia will focus on the Moro Muslims (Philippines) and Malay Muslims (Thailand).

Understanding Islamophobia in Asia

The word ‘Islamophobia’ first appeared first in 1910 when Alain Quellien published his seminary work titled La politique musulman dans l’Afrique Occidentale (‘The Muslim politics in Western Africa’).
The French word *islamophobie* was translated in English as ‘inimical feelings to Islam’. Edward Said in 1985 briefly mentioned the connection between Islamophobia and anti-Semitism in what was perhaps the first use of the term in the English language. The Runnymede Trust report in 1997 defined the term in the way it is understood today as the ‘unfounded hostility towards Muslims, and therefore fear or dislike of all or most Muslims’.

An important criticism of the Runnymede Trust report is by Andrew Shryock (2010), who noted that, simultaneous to the acknowledgement of Islamophobia is the rise of a new phenomenon which he described as Islamophilia took on considerable proportions in the Western world. Shryock himself defines Islamophobia as a generalised fear of Islam and Muslims which, as a social and political problem, is almost always associated with the US and Europe, although related strains of it are well developed in India and China, in several African states with sizable Muslim minorities, and even in Muslim-majority countries where prominent political parties and opposition groups are Islamist in orientation. This definition is important for it acknowledged for the first time that Islamophobia is not limited to only Western societies and within Muslim minority context but that such conceptions ignore the possibility of Islamophobia being present in Muslim majority context. A second important contribution of Shryock’s work is his description of Islamophilia, which he explains as a generalised affection for Islam and Muslims that presented traits of Muslims that are lacking in millions of real Muslims as well. Ramon Grosfoguel and Eric Mielants (2012) argue that Islamophobia is most fundamentally and generatively present in the foundations of ‘Western epistemic architecture’, since it is from Western hegemonic identity politics and epistemic privilege that the ‘rest’ of the epistemologies and cosmologies in the world are subalternised as myth, religion and folklore, and that the downgrading of any form of non-Western knowledge occurs. It is from this hegemonic epistemic location that Western thinkers produce Orientalism about Islam (ibid.).

Edward Curtis (see Ernst 2013) focused on the case study of the United States in which he noted that Islamophobia shifted from racial paradigms to the cultural ones. The immigrant Muslims from the Middle East were classified as whites, while the Black Muslims were discredited on racial lines. He notices that, in the post-9/11 era, the focus of American anxiety has shifted from Black American Muslims to brown foreigners, but regular procedures continue to include the suppression of critiques of US policies and the rewarding of Muslim groups that remain apolitical and uncritical. There are a number of key problems associated with these conceptions of Islamophobia that I argue could not satisfactorily analyse the phenomenon within Asian contexts. First, the case studies ignore the presence of Islamophobia in non-Western contexts which takes a different form altogether. In many of these societies, Islamophobia emerges due to the colonial experience of each of these societies. Second, hegemonic identity politics is not limited to Western ones; Islamophobia can be an outcome of non-Western hegemonic identity politics. In India, Hindu nationalist movements have long categorised Muslims as foreigners who sought to undermine the Hindu character of the Indian nation. Likewise, in Myanmar, Muslims have also been referred to as foreigners and are not seen to be part of the Buddhist nature of the Burmese nation. It is thus crucial that an analysis of the phenomenon takes into consideration the unique nature of Islamophobia in Asia.

**Conceptualising Islamophobia in Asia**

Islamophobia in Asia has had a long history. Much of the cases of Islamophobia in the Asian contexts can be traced to the colonial period, which saw the colonial powers within the region transporting the biases against Muslims in the Middle East and Europe to their Muslim colonial subject. The Spaniards and Portuguese fought Muslims in different parts of Southeast Asia...
such as Melaka in the Malay Archipelago and the Philippines with the aims of converting these largely Muslim societies to Christianity. The colonial powers also adopted a divide-and-rule approach in its management of ethnicity so as to consolidate power in the colonised states. This could be seen in the example of India where problems between the Muslims and Hindus occurred largely due to the British policy of dividing different communities along religious lines. Second, the rise of religious nationalism in many parts of the region can also explain the rising anti-Muslim feelings as seen from the cases of India and Myanmar which has seen a recent rise in anti-Muslim violence. These religious nationalisms are often pushed for by extremist religious civil society actors. In Sri Lanka, the Bodu Bala Sena movement has sought for the marginalisation of Muslims in the country accusing the Muslims of attempting to convert the Buddhist population to Islam. Third, there has been a spillover effect of Islamophobia from the West into Asia. This could be seen primarily in news reporting on Islam. Fourth, Islamophobia in Asia can happen within Muslim majority contexts such as Malaysia, where a state-driven Islamisation process has led to the hardening of non-Muslims’ attitude toward Islam. In Indonesia, conflict centring around religious issues has led to some Christian politicians employing Islamophobic language to galvanise political support. Last and the most relevant dimension of Islamophobia for the purposes of this paper is how long-term insurgencies have taken an increasingly religious tone and in turn have led to a counter-reaction that is strongly Islamophobic as will be demonstrated in the next section of the paper.

Islamophobia in the Philippines

Islamophobia in the Philippines can be traced to the colonial period but has in recent times been more close to the struggle of the Muslim minority in southern Philippines for independence. This was expressed in government policies aimed at quelling the ‘rebellious Muslims of the south of the Philippines’, which often translates into policies such as transmigration aimed at decimating the influence of the Muslims in the south, violence against Muslims, land-grabbing and excluding Muslims from the monolithic definition of the Filipino Catholic identity. Beyond government policies, public expressions of Islamophobia have particularly targeted Muslim dressings and the construction of the violent, intolerant and savage image of Muslims in the country.

The colonial encounter

The Spanish conquest of the Philippines marked the beginning of anti-Muslim attitudes in the country. Fresh from their triumphant wars against Muslim rulers in Spain, the Spanish arrived in the archipelago, seeking to purge Islam from the region and unite it under the banner of Catholicism (Ahmed and Martin 2012). The Spanish used the term ‘Moro’ to describe Muslims because they falsely believed the Muslims to be Moors – Muslims whom they had developed vehemently negative images of in Spain (Banlaoi 2004; Gowing 1964). To the Spanish, ‘Moro’ meant a range of pejoratives – ‘cunning, ruthless, cruel, treacherous savage; a pirate; a raider; and salver’ (Gowing 1979). To eradicate what they believed were the ‘evil and false doctrines of Mahoma’ (Ahmed and Martin 2012), the Spanish fought a series of battles with Muslims, known as the Moro Wars, for 300 years until the 19th century (McAmis 1974; Quimpo 2008; Santos Jr. 2005). Additionally, the Spanish supplemented their violence with proselytising missions to convert people en masse in order to maintain the primacy of Catholicism over Islam (McKenna 1997). Indeed, the missionaries in the Spanish colonial apparatus studied, ‘gathered and disseminated’ information pertaining to Muslims (e.g. beliefs, practices, rituals, etc.) in
order to discover and develop the most ‘effective means to evangelise the Moslems and convert them into Catholicism’ (Majul 1966). The Spanish maintained a divide-and-conquer regime by keeping the Catholics and Muslims geographically separated in the North and South respectively (ibid.). Doing so, the catalysed mistrust between the two enabled the Spanish to socialise Catholics to know no loyalties apart from the Spanish Crown and the Catholic Church, and use them to fight the Moros – thus, symbolically continuing the Crusades (ibid.).

Following the defeat of the Spaniards, the colonial rule under the Americans implemented two major Islamophobic policies while running the Philippines. The Americans distrusted the Muslims in the south and maintained a dual system of rule, civilian in the north and military in the south, on the gorunds that Muslim dominated regions were insufficiently ‘civilised’ and thus needed firm military governorship to transit into ‘western civilisation’ (Abinales 1997). Second, though the US initially provided the Sultanate with certain governance roles through the 1899 Bates Treaty (e.g. stopping anti-American resistance), ‘it unilaterally abrogated the Bates Treaty March 2, 1904, claiming the Muslim Sultan of Sulu had failed to quell Moro resistance’ (Kho n.d.). Instead, the colonial administration installed Catholic leaders in Muslim regions (Domingo 1995). This move was perceived as a step to undermine Muslim leadership and Islamic ways of life (Mednick 1974).

Transmigration to decimate Muslim influence

Prior to receiving self-governance, president of the senate Manuel Quezon facilitated the mass migration of Catholics in the north to the Muslim-majority south. About 46,683 people migrated from the north and central regions to Mindanao between 1917 and 1939 (Magdalena 1995). After achieving independence, the central government intensified the immigration programme, facilitating the movement of ‘tens of thousands of’ Catholics into Mindanao (ibid.). The central government also imposed laws to confiscate land from the native Moros and handed them to Catholic settlers – a move which has till today intensified Muslim resentment of Catholics (Muslim 1994). The 1939 National Land Settlement Administration (NSLA) was initiated to give land in Mindanao to Catholic military trainees so they ran farms after completing their stints with the military (Rodil 1993). By 1950, just as the NSLA was abolished, 8,300 families moved from the north to Mindanao (Rodil 1993). As a result of these policies, the population in Mindanao shifted from being 76% Muslim in 1903 to 72.5% Catholic in 2000 (Ahmed and Martin 2012).

Muslim insurgency as trigger for Islamophobia in post-colonial Philippines

The armed conflict between the Muslim guerrillas and the Philippine state began with the declaration of martial law in 1972 by the then President Ferdinand Marcos. The turning point in the Moro–Filipino government relations occurred in 1972 following the Jabidah Massacre. Despite numerous attempts aimed at achieving peace, this intractable conflict has continued to claim more than one hundred thousand lives. The conflict has led to a strong sense of bias against Muslims in government policies. Elites from the Catholic community were permitted to maintain Catholic-based private militias, particularly after former Filipino president, Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law, to protect their ‘grabbed’ land – a move that Muslims read as designed to keep them out (McDougald 1987). In 1971, the Ilaga, a particularly infamous Christian militia, ‘killed 70 Moros in a mosque’ (Ahmed and Martin 2012). The 1972 declaration of martial law itself carried an Islamophobic dimension in that it stripped the right of Moros to bear arms and thus effectively resist against a regime that had outwardly behaved in a
neo-colonial fashion and maintain the marginality of Moros. It is arguable that this factor caused the civil war between Moros and the central government to erupt.

In 2000, authorities in Pasig City (east of Manila) implemented an identity card system for the 2000 Muslim residents there because of fears that Moro Islamic Liberation Front and Abu Sayyaf terror groups would use the city as a base (Alquitran 2000). This policy made it mandatory for Muslims to carry identification cards so that the police can determine if they have terrorist sympathies. Security forces fighting terrorists have been profiling Muslims living in the Marawi area which has seen an upsurge of violence because the ‘conflict, unfortunately, is being committed by Muslims’, so they believe they are compelled ‘to profile Muslim areas’ in order to ensure ‘there are no sympathisers with the terrorists’ (Cockburn 2017). Muslims who have left Marawi for Western Visayas have been subject to profiling that is apparently carried out by other Muslims under the instructions of local authorities because of fears that terrorists may have infiltrated these networks (Rendon 2017). Additionally, authorities in Luzon have been deliberating the idea of instituting an identification card system as mentioned earlier (Holmes 2017; Mawallil 2017).

Public expressions of Islamophobia

While the above government policies are targeted at Muslims in the south of the Philippines, the wider Filipino societies also held strong biases against Muslims, such as expressions against Muslim women dressings as well as anti-Muslim sentiments in social media and mainstream media outlets.

Constructing the image of the Muslim Other

For the Filipino government, Moro subjectivities is constructed in the Filipino national imaginary by: (1) using symbols, stories, and perspectives of the majority Catholics to shape and define Filipino history, (2) excluding the experiences of the Moros since they are the largest minority, to manufacture a monolithic Catholic-based Filipino national identity, and (3) assimilate Muslims into the ‘Catholic version’ of Filipino nationhood (Quimpo 2008). In Filipino grade school classes, Moros were presented as warrior peoples who were to be feared and could not be trusted because they refused to convert to Christianity (Angeles 2010). Christian Filipinos also used the term Moro and its connotations as they learned to include civilised/uncivilised, peaceful/violent, monogamist/polygamist, Christian/Moro; hence, multiple binaries with the Moros clustered in all the negatives and with the Christian majority placing themselves in the positive sides. This view of otherness based primarily on religious distinction was further complicated by various issues such as the settlement of Christians in Muslim ancestral lands (ibid.).

The headscarf and face veils have become targets of Islamophobic behaviour. For many Filipino Christians, the hijab and niqab represents backwardness of the Muslim culture which runs contrary to the more progressive image of Filipino Catholics. In 2012, Pilar College, a Catholic school in Zamboanga – a city in southern Philippines – became what is thought to be the first Filipino school to ban Muslim students from wearing the hijab (Agence France-Presse 2012). The college contested this accusation by stating that the ban was imposed a century ago, and that the resident community were working together to rid the ban (Emaquel II 2012). In 2013, the education ministry issued a directive stating Muslim teachers in the southern Philippines should remove the niqab when they are teaching in classrooms – though they can wear them in other parts of the campus – in order to improve student–teacher relations and the effectiveness of teaching language pronunciation (Dacany 2013; National 2013). There have
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Much has been written about the role of the media in perpetuating Islamophobia. The mass media shapes public understanding and the attitudes towards Islam and Muslims by encoding messages, which reflect the dynamics of power relations. Encoding, according to Stuart Hall, is a process of producing news, which is the result of the relations of production, frames of knowledge, and technical infrastructure at the site of a news organisation. The current dynamics of global power position Islam as the ‘enemy’ of the West, of capitalism, of secularism, of modernity, of Christianity, of Judaism, even of women and individualism. This could be seen from the example of an article written by Christian fundamentalist preacher, Dr Jose Dacudao in the aftermath of 9/11. The article published in the *Philippine Star*, a popular newspaper stated that ‘the Quran is a curse on humanity’ because it can even make ‘the most peaceful Muslim communities produce fundamentalist warriors’ (Noor 2001). More recently following the Mamasapano incident, Islamophobic discourses dominate both the mainstream media and social media. The deaths of 44 Special Action Force officers in the hands of Muslim rebels in the Mamasapano area in Mindanao led to a degree of mistrust between Christians and Muslims as reflected in social media. A video that found its way to the public showing one of the 44 being shot twice at close range ‘spread very quickly on social media’. Its release, coupled with gory photos that came out after the attack, led to a flurry of anti-Muslim remarks made in social media, playing up on stereotypes of Muslims as barbaric, violent and merciless (Tiglao 2018).

Islamophobia in Thailand

Like the Philippines, Islamophobia in the country is very much shaped by the conflict in the restive southern provinces of Thailand where Muslims have sought to establish an independent state. Unlike the Philippines, there was no long history of anti-Muslim attitude in Thailand. In fact for much of its history, the Malay-Muslim sultanates and the Siamese empire enjoyed peaceful, amicable, and mutually beneficial trade relations (Liow 2009). The Siamese empire and the Sultanates were located in a tributary system – the Sultanates paid the Siamese King a ‘fee’ to do business, and avoid violence and conquest (Gilquin 2005).

Centralised Buddhist nation

Though Thailand was never colonised, it nonetheless had to manage relations with the British Malaya. In 1909, the British and Thai signed an agreement that saw the division of the current Thai deep south and northern Malaysia between the Siamese and British empires (Dorairajoo 2009). Under this agreement, Kelantan, Terengganu, Perlis and Kedah fell under British control, while Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Songkhla became absorbed into the increasingly centralised Siamese government (Gilquin 2005). This agreement marginalised the traditional positions of the Sultan authority (Dorairajoo 2009). This was further compounded by the Thai state attempts to centralise power and define the state as Thai in substance and essence. In 1921, a policy was enacted which made it compulsory for Malay-Muslim children to attend Thai-medium primary schools (Primary Education Act) with the intention to push the Malay language into extinction (Che Man 1985). In 1938, Phibun Songkhram became Thailand’s prime minister and began catalysing the spread of Thai nationalism, with membership into the Thai national imaginary becoming based on Thai superiority, the centrality of Buddhism to governance, and the desire to reclaim the ‘glorious’ history of the Siamese empire (Gilquin 2005). As such, Songkhram sought to manufacture a nation-state – despite the obvious heterogeneity of
the population – by implementing policies that would eliminate ethno-religious traditions dear to the Malay-Muslims (Che Man 1985).

Songkhram also implemented policies which made it illegal to wear Malay-Muslim outfits, speak Jawi (old Malay language), celebrate Muslim festivals publicly, and pressured employers to hire people with Thai-sounding names – thus excluding Malay-Muslims from employment opportunities (Braam 2010). Furthermore, there were also cases in which over-zealous soldiers or police forced Muslims to prostrate themselves before or salute sacred Buddhist objects (ibid.). Provisions for sharia law in marriage, divorce, and inheritance were also set aside in favour of Buddhist laws (Forbes 1982).

In reaction to the repression of the state, various Muslim rebel groups (e.g. Barisan Revolusi Nasional, founded in 1960) emerged to demand for an independent Muslim state. Some of these groups also utilised military means to achieve their goals. Armed separatism in southern Thailand peaked in the late 1970s and early 1980s, endorsed and supported both by leaders and governments in the Middle East who provided financial aid, training and, ultimately refuge, as well as a mushrooming of Thai Malay-Muslims living abroad from which sympathy and support were drawn (Liow and Pathan 2009). Despite the emergence in the 1990s of other groups such as the GMIP (Gerakan Mujahideen Islam Patani or Patani Islamic Mujahideen Movement), the military wings of these separatist groups began to crumble in the face of the Thai government’s anti-insurgency approach.

In the 2000s, under the government of Thaksin Shinawatara, a harsh war on drugs was initiated, which ignored extra-judicial killings. The drug war, by design, inevitably targeted the deep south due to a higher rate of drug abuse in the South (Croissant 2005, 2007). As a result of such historical shifts, which contained policies that had actual anti-Muslim dimensions, the Thai state has been fighting against a complex insurgency from the deep south. The Thai governments have attempted to implement more accommodative policies towards Malay-Muslims (Forbes 1982). However, deep-seated mistrust on both the side of Thai Muslims and Buddhists has contributed to the continuous mistrust between both sides. While the reasons for the Southern Thailand conflict are rooted in the historical and political grievances particular to the region’s relationships with the various central governments, the Thai government has framed the conflict as a battle against Islamist terrorism (McCargo 2008). This narrative of the state has led to an overestimation of the influence of Islam in the conflict. In particular, the Thai state has viewed the pondoks (Islamic boarding schools) as important sites for recruitment and mobilisation of the Muslim insurgents. By association, the Thai state also targeted the ustaz (religious scholars) running the pondoks as supporters of the insurgents. As a result, the Thai state has attempted to co-opt religious scholars, influence Islamic education, and thus govern Islam – measures which contain an anti-Muslim dimension (ibid.). Joseph Liow (2009) noted that the harsh approach of the Thai state in dealing with these religious institutions has further exacerbated hatred for the state and in fact has become a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby some of the religious scholars who previously had no militant links have become a lot more sympathetic to these groups.

**Indiscriminate violence against Muslims**

The Thai state has also used indiscriminate violence in dealing with the Malay-Muslim leaders (e.g. Haji Sulong in 1958; Somchai Neelapaijit in 2004) who have fought for, campaigned, or defended the rights of the marginalised people from the deep south. Many have been subjected to kidnapping with such stunning regularity by the central government (or its affiliates) that these occurrences have been called the state’s de facto policy to discourage Malay-Muslim activism (Suaedy 2010). One of the most notorious acts of violence against Thai Muslims occurred in...
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2004, in what became known as the Tak Bai massacre (Cumming-Bruce 2012). A demonstration of 1,500 people to protest the detention of six men led to violence and subsequent detention of the protesters by the Thai military. During the arrests, the detainees were then stacked atop one another in trucks, which led to the death of 78 protesters. The Thai government defended the action of the military and an inquiry in 2009 into the incident found no wrongdoings on the part of the Thai military (Bangkok Post 2012).

The Thai state also implemented a policy of issuing national identification cards which indicate one’s religion; thus ‘categorised individuals, fixed them in their religious belief, and labelled them once and for all’ (Gilquin 2005). In theory, one can abstain from having his religion included on the ID card (US Department of State 2005). Given that the Thai state defines itself in terms of Buddhism, it is probable that this policy was designed to make it easier for police to identify and locate Muslims. This is largely stemmed from the trust deficit between Malay Muslims and the Thai state (Engvall 2011). Indeed, the trust deficit is likely to be exasperated by the fact that in the post-9/11 environment, international actors have viewed Southeast Asia (particularly Thailand and the Philippines) as an environment ripe for terrorism (Acharya and Acharya 2007).

Public expressions of Islamophobia in Thailand

Othering of Thai Muslims

The expression of Islamophobia is similar to the Philippines. Thai Buddhists tend to stereotype Malay Muslims as having violent predispositions (Dorairajoo 2009). The ideological impact of Thai-Buddhist nationalism has necessarily excluded Malay Muslims who, according to dominant national ideology, possess the two ‘non-Thai’ qualities of speaking Jawi and being Muslim (Keyes 2009). As a result, up till today Thai Buddhists tend to view and refer to Malay Muslims in the deep south as guests (khaek) – a pejorative term that discursively cements their exclusion from the Thai national imaginary (ibid.). One of the most important expressions of Islamophobia in Thailand is the antipathy expressed by some Thai Buddhists over the building of mosques within their communities. In the north-eastern Thai city of Khon Kaen, the registration of a converted home as a mosque riled up local Buddhist groups which cited terrorism as a key reason for why this mosque should not be registered. In the letter addressed to the governor, the community noted that:

> Buddhists in the locale and its vicinity are of the opinion that waves of terrorism are spreading all over . . . so people don’t want the mosque built because they fear unrest in the area like what’s happening in the southern border provinces.  

(Ahmad 2017)

The campaign against the building of mosques has been taken to the social media with the setting up of a Facebook page titled ‘I’saan Says No to Mosque’. Members of the page called on the local authorities to first conduct a referendum before allowing a mosque to be built (Rojanaphruk 2017).

Extremist monks and transnational Buddhist nationalism

Finally, there appears to be a proliferation of anti-Muslim Buddhist fundamentalist movement in Thailand. While the numbers are not clear, prominent monks – such as Phra Maha Apichat
Punnajanto, a fiery preacher at the Marble Temple in Bangkok – have called for mosques to be burnt down in retaliation for monks being killed in the deep south (Wongcha-um 2016). The anti-Muslim monks have drawn on the example of extremist Buddhist nationalist organisations in Myanmar. The infamous Burmese monk U Wirathu and the extremist Buddhist group the Ma Ba Tha (Protection of Nationality and Religion), whose anti-Muslim rhetoric helped stoke deadly riots in 2012 and 2013 in Myanmar, were cited as a source of inspiration for monks such as Maha Apichat (Seiff and Jirenuwat 2016) and the monks in the 969 Movement, which has played a vital role in the spread of Islamophobia in Burma and inciting violence against Muslims. The monks from the 969 movement have encouraged violent actions against 15,000 Facebook posts sounding the alarm for an alleged threat coming from the Rohingyas. Government leaders have been ambivalent toward the activities of the 969 Movement. On the one hand, prominent state politicians have defended leaders of the movement while governmental religious authorities have rejected some of the 969 initiatives (Ferrie and Oo 2013). Due to the revered position of the monks, the state could be perceived to be anti-Buddhist or anti-monk if they are to take a harsher stance against the monks (Mohamed Osman 2017).

The transnational dimension of the Buddhist nationalism can be seen in a conference organised by a group of Thai Buddhist nationalists. In February, 2016, the Alliance of Buddhist Leaders organised a conference on ‘Crisis in the Buddhist World’. A leader of the Sri Lankan Bodu Bala Sena cited earlier in the paper spoke at the conference citing the Islamic faith as a future ‘threat’ to Buddhism, while the president of Ma Ba Tha, Sayadaw Ashin Daywaindarbhivamsa, was bestowed the World Buddhist Outstanding Leader Award (Aung 2016). Like in Myanmar, the Thai Buddhist fundamentalist movement perceives Thailand to be under siege and at risk of being taken over by Islam despite the fact that over 90% of Thailand is Buddhist (Wongcha-um 2016). Unlike in Myanmar and Sri Lanka where Buddhist nationalist movements received support from elements within the government, the Thai authorities have taken a hard stance against Maha Apichat who was arrested in September 2017 because of anti-Islamic statements he posted online (Nation 2017). He was forcibly defrocked of his monk status and detained. Thai government has labelled him as a threat to national security (Reuters 2017). However, this hard stance against extremism might not be contained as the influence of Buddhist nationalist movement grows and anti-Muslim sentiment follows.

Conclusion

Islamophobia in Thailand and Philippines have been largely shaped by the dynamics of separatism in the southern parts of both countries. In Philippines, Islamophobia is deep-seated and harked back to the modern history of both countries. The repressive policies of both the Filipino and Thai state against the cultural and religious rights of their Muslim minority populace led to an ongoing armed rebellion seeking the establishment of an independent Muslim state. These armed rebellion lead to the assumption that the Islamic religion is the primary factor that led to the violence. This association made between Islam and violence led to various policies enacted aimed at the destruction of Muslim religious institutions, further curtailment of Muslim religious rights, as well as the political and the economic marginalisation of Muslims. At the public level, the association of Islam with violence perpetuated by the media and extremist religious elements has led to the negative perception of Muslims that are viewed to be violent and problematic. Ultimately, the challenge of Islamophobia in both countries is not likely to dissipate and will continue to grow especially in light of the growth of Islamophobia internationally.
Note

1 For an examination of the impact of Islamophobia in encouraging Islamist violence in India, see Aida Arosoaie (2018) Understanding the Creation and Radicalisation of the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and the Indian Mujahideen (IM), South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies

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