Article

Myanmar: Surveillance and the Turn from Authoritarianism?

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Abstract

In Myanmar, one of the longest ruling military regimes in the world (1962-2011), exerting unrestrained coercion and relying on a pervasive security apparatus, has accepted a constitution and competitive elections. The military directed concatenation of developments but especially the Constitution that legalizes a unique power-sharing arrangement between the military and the elected government, contribute to the exceptionalism but also continuing coercion of Myanmar's military, even under the democratically elected popular government of former democracy icons Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy. Holding that a key step in a democratic transition must involve the scaling down of state coercive apparatus, the article demonstrates how this has not been the case in Myanmar. The size, expenditure and revenues of the armed forces have been maintained, the surveillance for political and social control continues, while the spread of mobile communication devices, and particularly social media, has opened up more extensive and easier opportunities for monitoring. Subjugating the practices of surveillance to laws is not prioritized in the complex political context of multiple pressing issues.

Introduction

The current focus of Surveillance Studies is set by concerns over the clash between fast developing technologies, new governmental and commercial strategies and citizens' strive for privacy. While surveillance is seen as inseparable from information society and modern governmentality, paradoxically, its increase during recent decades has led to a degree of apprehension over its authoritarianist capability. The article will study the prospects for surveillance in the context of a regime change *from* extreme authoritarianism to one where the state is expected to become less of a perpetrator while gradually embarking on information society.

Myanmar exhibits a case of one the longest ruling military regimes in the world that during 1962-2011 exerted unrestrained coercion and relied on a pervasive security apparatus.¹ In 2010, the incumbent military government, after completing a new constitution, held elections that were won by a handpicked party that established a civilian government staffed predominantly by retired military officers. This new military backed civilian government implemented a number of reforms welcomed worldwide, including the release of thousands of political prisoners, legalization of opposition parties and entry into parliament of the long-time democracy icon and former prisoner of conscience, Aung San Suu Kyi, and her National League for

¹ The country's name was changed from Burma to Myanmar in 1989; the name Burma will be used in references to periods before 1989.

Democracy (NLD) through 2012 by-elections. It removed thousands of names from the official blacklist, thus opening the country for exiled compatriots. It abolished the 25-year-old ban on public gatherings of more than five people and the requirement for a prepublication approval. Myanmar became the chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 2014, the darling of international aid and investment, and hugely improved its relations with the West that abolished much of the earlier sanctions regardless the government's failure to stop ongoing civil wars and the alleged human rights violations in ethnic states. This government, headed by President Thein Sein, also organized new elections in 2015, deemed free and fair by international observers, and handed over power to the popularly elected NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi in 2016.

These developments have prompted the designation of Myanmar's political context as a transition in public discourses and academia alike. In line with the general "pronounced democratizing bias" in the study of post-Cold War hybrid regimes (Levitsky and Way 2010: 3), Myanmar's transition has widely been viewed in the context of democratization and described as fragile, emergent, nascent or as Myanmar's version of democracy. The democracy assumption has been expressly strong not only because an extreme authoritarian regime was procedurally abolished and a popular government elected—but also because *the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi have both epitomized Myanmar's struggle for democracy since 1990, internationally and domestically*, with Aung San Suu Kyi being compared to Nelson Mandela and awarded prizes for defending human rights and freedoms.² The idea that Aung San Suu Kyi and her NLD represent Myanmar's best chance for wider public participation in Myanmar's governance is usually taken for granted (Farrelly and Win 2016: 38), regardless of many serious structural and tangible impediments pointing to the institutionalization and impunity of Myanmar's military.

The article will focus on the coercive capacity of Myanmar's military in the context of the ongoing "regime change" in Myanmar. There are extensive theoretical discussions, beyond the scope of this article, on whether any systematic prerequisites for democratic transition exist. Importantly, however, Albertus and Menaldo (2012) argue that the robustness of state's coercive capacity is to be directly linked to the persistence of authoritarianism. Following their finding that "one crucial step in the transition process is the scaling down of the coercive apparatus" (ibid: 166-167), this article compares the state coercive capacity in Myanmar before and during the "transition." After discussing the context of "transition," the article explores surveillance as one form of coercion, establishing that low-intensity coercion more widely, and surveillance specifically, continues unabated. It demonstrates that the political context in Myanmar is conducive in two crucial ways to plying its powerful surveillance legacy to continuing the serving of authoritarian interests: by neither remarkably reducing the practices of surveillance nor prioritizing their subjugation to law.

A regime change: To what?

Studies conducted on regime change following the collapse of single-party or military dictatorships during the late 1980s and early 1990s show that the countries, while adopting the system of electoral competition, have followed diverse paths: some indeed have democratized, while others installed hybrid regimes that Levitsky and Way (2010) view as competitively authoritarian. Neither the breakdown of authoritarian regimes, nor the holding of multiparty elections has *necessarily* led to democratization, challenging an earlier assumption that a change from authoritarianism leads to democratization (Levitsky and Way 2010; Carothers 2002; Brownlee 2009; Ottaway 2003).

In the context of the general understanding of military regimes as the weakest form of authoritarianism with their average lifespan worldwide being just seven years, Myanmar's military regimes are exceptional as the most resilient and stable forms of such coercive governance in the contemporary era (Büntje 2011: 7; Geddes

² Aung San Suu Kyi's prizes include the Nobel Peace Prize (1991), Sakharov Prize (1990), Rafto Prize (1990), Jawaharlal Nehru Award (1993), Congressional Gold Medal (2008) and several others.

1999: 121).³ Regardless of the persistence of various organizations of political party-based and ethno-political armed opposition since the establishment of Burma in 1948, the military regimes have resolutely prevented any of them, or their coalitions, from challenging their power since 1962. Opposition groups “...neither forced the military into dialogue nor helped to ease repression. They have, however, seriously undermined the legitimacy (international, traditional) of the military government, which might have accelerated the ‘transition to disciplined democracy’” (Bünter 2011: 22). Croissant and Kamerling (2013) view the cohesiveness and high professionalism of Myanmar’s armed forces as the key determinant in the reorganization of the country’s political system that culminated in the new constitution and elections.

The Myanmar military itself uses the notion of “disciplined democracy” as the objective of its top-down orchestrated reforms, made public in 2003 as the “Roadmap to Discipline-flourishing Democracy.” This blueprint involved the reconvening of the National Convention to lay down principles for a new Constitution; its drafting and adoption through the national referendum; the holding of elections for legislative bodies; and the establishment of the government and other central organs. The constitution, elections, parliament and two consecutive civilian governments constitute tangible deliverables as spelled out in the blueprint that had faced opposition, boycott, criticism and derision, while the top-down political reorganization, restrictive conditions at the NC, the “undemocratic” constitution, the unfair and unfree referendum and 2011 elections were denounced both internationally and domestically. This military directed concatenation of developments, but especially the Constitution that emerged, further contribute to its exceptionalism.

The Constitution gives the military complete authority over the Ministries of Home Affairs, Defence and Border Affairs, with article 20(b) enabling it to appoint the corresponding ministers. Importantly, with the General Administrative Department housed in the Ministry of Home Affairs, much of the direct administration of the state is military-controlled by law. The Constitution leaves a return to direct military rule open as a legal possibility. The most often quoted manifestation of military’s continuing power are the articles that reserve 25 per cent of parliamentary seats for the appointees from the Defence Services nominated by its Commander-in-Chief. The amendment of the constitution has been made near impossible as more than 75 per cent of the members of parliament must agree to it first, while the amendment of *most sections* of the constitution requires further approval by more than half of the population eligible to vote, in a nationwide referendum. Patel et al. (2014: 12), after examining 189 constitutions world-wide, conclude that Myanmar’s constitution is considerably “more inflexible and difficult to amend than any constitution in the world.” In no other countries can the military veto proposals in parliament, thus the Myanmar military’s veto capacity over the constitutional changes proposed by the elected members of the parliament “singles out Myanmar’s Constitution from all others in the world and is out of step with international constitutional standards,” and the tenets of democracy as they are internationally understood (Patel et al. 2014: 10).⁴

Thus many scholars and analysts agree that Myanmar’s transition is rather a “regime maintenance,” that is, an attempt to sustain authoritarianism by creating institutions that facilitate elite power-sharing, opposition co-optation, the institutionalisation of military dominance (Prager Nyein 2009; Bünter 2011; Croissant and Kamerling 2013) or a “partially civilianized form of Myanmar’s long-established authoritarian regime” (Huang 2016: 3; see also Farrelly and Win 2016). Based on the studies of new institutionalism within authoritarian states that emphasize the stabilizing functions of political institutions such as elections,

³ The military first ruled Burma during 1958-1960 as a Caretaker Government when the politically weakened Prime Minister U Nu transferred power to General Ne Win, temporarily, to restore order. In 1960, elections were held and the civilian government was voted back. The military seized power in a *coup d’état* in 1962.

⁴ The only other constitution that specifies the appointment of military personnel to parliament is in Uganda, while the number of military appointees to Ugandan parliament in 2014 was ten and thus not sufficient enough to veto constitutional amendments (Patel et al. 2014: 8).

legislatures, and parties, and their importance to the reproduction of authoritarian rule, Croissant and Kamerling (2013) argue that the political institutions created in the 2008 constitution embody a survival strategy for the military.

The participation of the NLD in the elections, while legitimizing the “system ... agreed upon by the authoritarians” was intended to reform them “from within” (Büntje 2016: 379). The NLD 2015 election campaign slogan “Time for Change” was devised—and read by the electorate and the international community alike—as heralding attempts to achieve genuine democratization, given the party’s history of struggle for freedom and democracy by non-violent means. The NLD’s well-known legal adviser U Ko Ni, also instrumental in creating the position of “state counsellor” for Aung San Suu Kyi to effectively lead the government despite being barred from the presidency under the 2008 constitution, argued publicly that drafting a new constitution is the only way to overcome “the constitutional barrier” (Ei 2016).⁵ A constitutional law expert and a prominent critic of the military’s continued control of key security ministries and guaranteed seats in parliament, U Ko Ni in 2016 publicly proposed that the NLD accept a less conciliatory approach in the unique power-sharing arrangement with the military that it had so far (Ei 2016). Having been under surveillance for years, in 2017 he was assassinated in daylight at Yangon airport.

State coercive capacity: Not scaling down but changing pattern

Armed forces are generally considered “one of the most effective coercive devices” available for the incumbent elites (Albertus and Menaldo 2012: 153). The military has been *the* long-term office holder in Myanmar with a history of exercising unhindered coercion at will, over time consolidating into a disciplined, cohesive and robust regime, and creating extensive revenues to sustain it. Based on interviews with former members of Myanmar’s armed forces and archival work, Callahan (2004: 3) notes that “critical periods of state building and transformation in wartime situations created the particular coercion-intensive institutions that dominated relations between the Burmese state and society throughout the twentieth century.”

The most commonly used indicator of a state’s coercive capacity is the ratio of military personnel in the population or the workforce (Fortin-Rittberger 2014: 1251; see also Hendrix 2010). The gargantuan size of Myanmar’s armed forces—roughly half a million—has been highlighted by several observers (for numbers, see the Correlates of War Project 2017; SIPRI 2017; for an overview, see Selth 2015; Callahan 2012). Fortin-Rittberger (2014: 1251) who regards the size of the conventional military as a crude measurement since it may not always capture “the full gamut of repressive agencies,” adds the military expenditures per capita to analysis as it additionally measures sophistication and surveillance capacity. Gauging military expenditure in Myanmar can only be estimated in both the pre- and post-2011 eras, moreover because it has huge stakes in economy and revenues from natural resources. The new constitution allows the chief of staff of the armed forces to draw unlimited additional finances from a “special fund” without the consent of parliament, while it is not known if this facility has been used so far (SIPRI 2017). The military expenditure as percentage of GDP during 2012–2015 was 4.4 per cent on average, rising to 4.8 per cent in 2015 according to official state budget available for the first time—this ranks Myanmar officially 11th in the world after Azerbaijan, Algeria, Russia, Iraq, Israel, South Sudan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Syria (ibid.). All analysts note that both the size of the military and its expenditure are notably high for a country with neither external enemy, external wars nor potential external threats. The threats for the military governments have been internal, embodied in the ethnic armed political organizations demanding federal autonomy or in the persons (or groups) expressing political, social or economic dissent, involved in relevant activities or

⁵ In 2014, the NLD, in partnership with other democracy activists (Generation 88), gathered over 5 million signatures to a petition calling for changes to Constitution’s section that gives the military a veto over constitutional change, and the section 59(f) barring Aung San Suu Kyi from the presidency (because some of her family members are foreign nationals), and submitted these to parliament. In 2015, it proposed changes through a constitutional amendment committee. Both bills for amendment were blocked by the military (Ei 2016).

supporting such activists or ethnic minority organizations. While the ethnic armed organizations have been engaged with militarily, the rest has been subject to surveillance, harassment and repression, involving also high intensity coercive measures such as firing on crowds, violence against high profile targets or direct assaults on democratic institutions (see Levitsky and Way 2010: 47-50).⁶ Avoiding any potential threat perceived as emerging from wider cross-sections of the society, the military created a state that aligned somewhere between the Orwellian totalitarian state and Bentham's penitentiary 'Panopticon' (Lyon 2001: 7) during its rule.⁷

The new Constitution attends to some of the basic challenges to military power that the persistent social or political opposition has posed—by securing military control over the three ministries and its veto power at parliament, and by legalizing a takeover of the government. This eliminates a need for high intensity coercion which international visibility may pose some risks for the regime (see Levitsky and Way 2010: 47-50). There is "no longer a blanket clampdown against all challenges to the state," Huang (2016: 7-8) quotes an activist, and describes "a different pattern" emerging where particular individuals of certain ethnicities or religions are most vulnerable to being subjected to a politically motivated detentions and arrests. Huang (ibid) has observed the following three types of political offences as the least tolerable during 2011-2015: public protests on an agenda that is contrary to the policy of the state; activities that are deemed a threat to the image, security, and reputation of the military; and offences that are contrary to the populist Buddhist-nationalist narrative. Journalists are particularly vulnerable by reason of their job, followed by netizens operating in cyberspace conducive to speech norms, where "people appear to be more vocal, hyper-critical and less diffident in expressing their views ... as compared to how they would act off-line" (Tang 2009: 22). A person with professional experience in Myanmar's military intelligence describes the situation since 2011 as follows: "...surveillance has significantly increased for ethnic people, opposition, different business organizations, different networks like non-profit ... for foreigners. One thing different is that they don't really take action yet. It's not like before. Taking action is not like before. Now they just let you go because of the NLD administration... But there is more surveillance than before" (Interview, 25.04.2017).

The "transition" period has not led to a decrease in the size of the armed forces, while it has opened up space for involving its leadership and troops in training "on the 'role of the military in a democracy'" (e.g. see Stevens 2017). The military engagement with the ethnic armed organizations at the country's border areas has significantly intensified since 2011. The intelligence agencies within the new civilian dominated administrative structure continue to respond to the military or its autonomous ministries, and monitor "any matter that affects the state's security and stability, including non-disintegration of the military, and take necessary measures" (Irrawaddy 2011).

Focus on surveillance

Phone tapping, bugs and other devices, agents and informant networks have all reportedly been a part of the extensive surveillance during the military era that, together with adeptness and knowhow, entrenched routines, habitude and predilection establish a lingering legacy. The pervasiveness of surveillance in the

⁶ The most violent repressive events in Myanmar have been the 1988 massacres of demonstrators in Rangoon, the attack on Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD convoy in 2003 known as the Depayin massacre, and the suppression of the 2007 monk-led demonstrations. Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest of 17 years in total is violence against a high profile target. The direct assault on democratic institutions was the cancellation of the 1990 election results where the NLD won 392 of the 492 seats, and the arrest of its leaders. Violence at Myanmar's ethnic borders is related to the protracted civil wars since the inception of the country, and has a different pattern and strategies (see Smith 1999; Grundy-Warr and Dean 2011).

⁷ Coincidentally or not, it was George Orwell's early experience with authority and imperialism in the colonial Burma of the 1920s that influenced his work, from *Shooting an Elephant* (1936) set in Burma up to the novel *1984*. The names of Myanmar's last military governments, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC 1988-97) reconstituted into the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC 1997-2011) are meaningful in the Orwellian sense.

past—and likely to represent a tip of the iceberg—is well exemplified by the high profile allegations or proven cases of phone-tapping, with diplomats including the UN Special Envoy Mr Paulo Sergio Pinheiro having found listening devices (Aung 2004).

In post-2011 Myanmar, the fast developing field of telecommunications taps this legacy to combine it with new technological opportunities for monitoring. The telecommunications market was opened when Norway's Telenor and Qatar's Ooredoo, after having won the bid from among 91 international companies, started their operations in 2014, liberalizing the communications network previously monopolized by the Myanma Posts and Telecommunications (MPT) and tightly controlled by the state. Mobile smartphones have become the most popular communication devices in Myanmar. The growth in social media users, and notably of Facebook, presents one of the highest growth rates in the world. Facebook in Myanmar has been equated with internet, its penetration being about 86 per cent in internet user pool (Aung 2017). The government has chosen not to block internet content but monitor its use. This is evidenced in the increasing prosecution rate of users over Facebook or other social media posts, enabled by the 2013 Telecommunications Law—a showcase of how relevant legal framework but also the political context conducive to using legislation for prosecution, becomes crucial.

According to the report by the mobile operator Telenor (2015), the Telecommunications Law gives the government “broad powers of interception on a number of broadly stated grounds, including when it is in the public interest, and when the security of the State or the rule of law is adversely affected. The Law also appears to provide for acquisition of communications data powers, though these are less clearly stated. There is no judicial approval or oversight of the use of these powers. There is a form of government approval required, but the Law does not state what this entails.” The Law’s much criticized Article 66(d), setting penalties for “(e)xtorting, coercing, restraining wrongfully, defaming, disturbing, causing undue influence or threatening to any person by using any Telecommunications Network” seems to have been written with the end users in mind, and not the telecommunication companies and the government, although created with the intention of regulating the fledgling telecommunications industry (Freeman 2017; Lun Min Mang 2016). Additionally, the Law’s Articles 40, 76, and 77 provide “powers of warrantless entry and emergency interception under broad circumstances not subject to prior judicial review,” with courts or other independent authorities prevented from reviewing surveillance of, or access to, subscriber information and communications (Article 19: 2017).

Other laws most frequently used to arrest, detain, and incarcerate people include the Unlawful Associations Act, often applied to prosecute people with contacts to ethnic armed groups (that many people have); criminal defamation laws; the Electronic Transactions Law, which has been used to criminalize political activism on the internet with punishments for “any act detrimental to” state security, law and order, community peace and tranquillity, national solidarity, the national economy, or national culture, including “receiving or sending” related information (Freedom House 2017); the Peaceful Procession Act with extremely vague wording open to interpretation, such as, for example, the prohibition of “...spreading rumours or incorrect information”; or sections in Penal Code where “committing mischief” is an offence, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (2017). The Committee to Protect Journalists (2016) listed Myanmar as the ninth most censored country for 2015, just ahead of Cuba, with the monitoring of journalists by authorities being one of its measurements to gauge censorship.

In short, the restrictions and political control still imposed on society, reinforced in many laws, provide ample scope for surveillance. According to Freedom House (2014), state surveillance abated after the political opening but intensified somewhat in 2013 due to religious unrest and the opposition-led constitutional reform movement, while the Telecommunications Law introduced further scope for abuse. “Activists are subjected to many forms of surveillance—including being followed; having their photo taken when attending events and meetings; midnight inspections in their offices and homes; and harassment of their family members, colleagues or friends” (Amnesty International 2015: 12-13). Midnight inspections

were “legal” under the 2012-revised Ward and Village Tract Administration Law requiring the registration of overnight guests in household with local officials. Under the pretence of checking for unregistered guests, private homes were searched in the middle of the night in order to harass and detain activists (Aung 2016). The law was abolished in 2016 following “a protracted arm-wrestle” in the parliament between the military MPs and the members of the NLD, many of who had been political prisoners themselves (Thant 2016).

In 2017, possibility of arrest remains real for activists or reporters working on interfaith promotion, on sensitive border areas particularly in Arakan State but also in Kachin and Shan states, or for those criticizing extremist Buddhism or members of the government or army. During the first year of the NLD government, Freedom House (2017) observed “a notable increase in the number of defamation cases brought against journalists and social media users, some of which were initiated in response to criticism of the government or military authorities.” The cases under the Telecommunications Law’s Clause 66d, while sporadically enforced during the previous government, have increased since the NLD rule, some of the defendants charged for insulting or defaming senior members of the party, including Aung San Suu Kyi, with Pen Myanmar having recorded 38 cases in 2016, compared to seven during 2013-2015 (Lun Min Mang 2016). Some high profile cases of surveillance have been publicized, for example, the official with military security affairs in the area of Yangon where the assassinated U Ko Ni lived, told Reuters he was charged with watching U Ko Ni, which he characterized as “*routine surveillance* of a prominent local figure;” while also two of U Ko Ni’s associates admitted to having been directly approached by agents to provide information about his activities (Wa Lone and Lewis 2017, emphasis added). More numerous are cases that go unreported or are collected as evidence by the various human rights organizations.

Also contributing to the overall expansion of surveillance are the practices of collecting intelligence on the different fractions amongst the military and power elites themselves that have increased, on the MPs for asserting pressure as a part of the power struggle, on powerful ethnic organizations, but also of collecting business intelligence in the fierce competition for market shares in one of the remaining untapped countries. Intelligence collection and deployment to purge the military’s own members has, alongside patronage, been one of the strategies for its long-time cohesion (Callahan 2001; Min 2008; Kyaw 2009).

The relationship between surveillance and the rule of law, related to the balance of power between the state and its citizens, is a central concern within democratic legal systems (Cohen 2015). The laws in Myanmar remain far from being “a neutral concept permitting and encouraging trust to impartially resolve disputes,” as put by Houtmann in 1999 describing the law then as something that had “become an instrument for territorialising and entrenching the army within what it considers its very own domain...” (Houtmann 1999: 89). In 2017—the second year of the NLD-led government—the laws continue to be used to stifle dissent, criticism and free expression. Reversing the institutionalization of discrimination and the vested interest of deploying draconian laws for maintenance and practice of elite power has not been prioritized. The top policy priority of both the former President Thein Sein and the incumbent government, as declared, has been the ending of the protracted civil wars at ethnic states’ border areas, pursued at the expense of “other pressing matters such as bureaucratic, economic and legal reforms” (Lintner 2017). The NLD reaction to the mounting calls to “fix problematic laws” by using its overwhelming parliamentary majority, following the arrest in June 2017 of three journalists working for the internationally renowned media outlets (Democratic Voice of Burma and The Irrawaddy) and their charge under the Unlawful Association Act for reporting from the territory of an armed ethnic organization, will test the government’s potential to provide its people protection and rights. “The NLD politicians cannot do anything about surveillance. They don’t even care about surveillance. They don’t even care about who is doing surveillance on them... U Ko Ni got shot at the airport. It is very, very disappointing. I worry that maybe more will be assassinated... The NLD have a lot of stuff to do. Or they don’t understand about technology or they do not have money” (Interview, a person with experience in Myanmar’s military intelligence 25.04.2017).

Conclusion

The decrease of authoritarianism does not necessarily lead to a decline in surveillance for political and social control, and Myanmar is an exemplary case. Its transition has been described as dynamic by all analysts, swayed by the particularly strong democracy assumption, in part due to the abolishment of the direct military rule and the rise to power by the former democracy icons, the NLD and the Nobel Peace Prize recipient Aung San Suu Kyi. This article has followed the call by Albertus and Menaldo (2012) to include the examination of the state coercive apparatus when analysing (democratic) transitions, as the role of armed forces is particularly relevant to Myanmar. Owing to the legacy of one of the most resilient military regimes of the contemporary era, the country is locked in a unique power-sharing arrangement between the military and elected politicians. The article has demonstrated how, alongside the maintenance of the military control, including during the democratically elected Aung San Suu Kyi's government, surveillance remains comparable to that in the past or is even wider, while its pattern has changed.

The change of pattern involves the shift from high intensity force to low intensity coercion of lesser visibility, with shifting targets and modes of performance. State coercive capacity, including the size, expenditure and revenues of the armed forces have been maintained and surveillance for political and social control is further enhanced by the fast developing telecommunications opening up more extensive and easier opportunities for monitoring. Many relevant laws enable neither checks nor balances, nor is their "fixing" prioritized, or even possible, given the prevailing political configurations, interests or priorities.

More widely, thus, the struggle against surveillance in Myanmar is not related to struggle over the idea of privacy construed as something that we "own" (Lyon 2007: 174) in the Global North—it is still related to the struggle over basic rights to be free from harassment and persecution based on political, social and religious convictions.

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