

The Rohingya Crisis: Suu Kyi's False Flag and Ethnic Cleansing in Arakan

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An estimated 400,000 to 600,000 Rohingyas have fled to Bangladesh to escape ethnic cleansing in Myanmar.

Introduction

The mountainous strip of Arakan or Rakhine State bordering with Bangladesh in the northwest is a western province of what is now the Union of Myanmar. It is geographically separated from the rest of the country by the long, near-impassable mountain range of Arakan Yoma. There have been 'longstanding social tensions'¹ between its two major ethnic-religious groups, Rohingya Muslims and Rakhine Buddhists (also known as Maghs). During the 1942 massacre on Muslims, they were pushed to the north and the Buddhist Maghs occupied the southern half of Arakan 'where they now form majority.'² Hence the largest concentration of Muslims is in the northern areas such as Maungdaw and Buthidaung.

The dominant ethnic group Bamar (also known as Burmese or Burman) comprises about 60% of Myanmar's population and has long been controlling the country's politics and economy since independence in 1948. Needless to say, the former name of the country, Burma, is an inflection of Bamar or Burman. In post-independence Burma, the Burmese ruling elite expelled the non-Burmese from military and government posts and pursued a strategy of repression to contain opposition. From 1962 to 1988 when General Ne Win (1911 - 2002) dominated the government, repression on non-Burmese people exacerbated.

After the fall of Ne Win, subsequent rulers adopted new strategies to perpetuate Burmese dominance. They started identifying the population in terms of religion not ethnicity. The religion card gave the rulers a big dividend, as Buddhism is the main religion among all ethnic groups except the Rohingya. Now the rulers present themselves - especially to rebellious ethnic groups such as Rakhaings, Kachins and Shans - as belonging to 89.8% Buddhist majority as opposed to 60% Burmese majority,³ whereas Christians make '6.3 percent, and Muslims 2.3 percent.'⁴

Like other ethnic minorities in Myanmar, the Buddhist Rakhaings are politically disaffected and their 'struggle for

¹Engy Abdelkader, 'Myanmar's Democracy Struggle: The Impact of Communal Violence upon Rohingya Women and Youth', *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal*, 23.3(2014): 511-42, p. 513.

²Mohammed Yunus, *A history of Arakan: Past and Present*, Chittagong: University of Chittagong, 1994, p. 11.

³Gautam Das, 'Why No Muslims Got Nomination in Burma's Elections', *The Daily Nayadiganta*, 8 October 2017. Retrieved on 3 November 2017 from dailynayadiganta.com/detail/news/258246

⁴Imtiyaz Yusuf, 'Nationalist Ethnicities as Religious Identities: Islam, Buddhism and Citizenship in Myanmar', *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 34.4(2017): 100-119, p. 105.

recognition within the new Myanmar is marked by anxiety about ethnic identity and national belonging ... when political reforms at the center of the state produce ambiguities about their own position.⁵ However, both the centre and the Rakhaings regard the ‘presence of a majority Muslim population in Arakan ... as a real problem’ and seemed to have reached ‘a secret agreement’ that the former would give more rights to the latter only when ‘the Muslim problem is fully tackled.’⁶ Hence, both the ruling elite at the centre and local Rakhaings have joined together to purge Rohingya Muslims from Arakan. Moreover, if the Rakhaings can be kept busy ‘tacking’ Rohingyas in ‘a proxy war,’⁷ they would not have time to complain about their economic deprivations, Arakan being the poorest among all provinces in Myanmar. Hence, the state has stoked the Rakhaing Buddhists to re-start anti-Muslim acts of vengeance and ethnic cleansing even though, previously, except for some turbulent times, Arakanese Buddhists and Muslims had co-existed peacefully especially during Mrauk-U (1430-1785) and British (1826-1948) periods.

As part of this state-sponsored hatred for Rohingya Muslims, in 1989, as the official name of the country was changed from Burma to the Union of Myanmar, the name of the state of Arakan was changed to Rakhine and its capital city Akyab, to Sittwe. Since etymologically the terms ‘Arakan’ and ‘Akyab’ have Arabic-Islamic associations, this name-change is considered part of cultural oppression on Rohingyas and is slanted in favour of the Buddhist Rakhaings.

With the formation of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) in June 2010, the military junta kept stirring up religious hatred and intensifying its agenda of presenting the Muslims as the common enemy in the run-up to the large-scale genocide that was launched in October 2016 onwards. Through using various propaganda machines, the establishment made the anti-Muslim agenda as the only way to do politics in Myanmar. It helped establish Ashin Wirathu’s racist Committee for the Protection of Nationality and Religion (Ma Ba Tha) that contributed to ethnic cleansing both by mobilizing populist sentiment and participating in mass killings and mayhem. Aung San Suu Kyi toed the line and became complicit with the anti-Muslim agenda and her National League for Democracy (NLD) did not choose a single Muslim candidate to stand for her party in the 2015, not even in the Muslim-majority Arakan region. Thus, as Myanmar’s de facto leader and part of the political elite, the Nobel laureate and once dubbed as symbol of democracy, Suu Kyi has condoned and virtually presided over the recent genocide in Arakan.

Major Waves of Genocides

The first time Rohingya Muslims had found themselves second-class citizens in their own land was in 1785 when the Burmese invaded and annexed Arakan. The conquerors committed massacres and used thousands of prisoners as slaves:

[A]s many as 6,000 Arakanese youth were sent to renovate the Meiktila Lake and none

⁵Juliane Schober, ‘Belonging in a New Myanmar: Identity, Law, and Gender in the Anthropology of Contemporary Buddhism’, *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 8.1(2017): 158-172, p. 162.

⁶Yunus, *A history of Arakan*, p. 64.

⁷Emanuel Stoakes, ‘A ‘proxy war’ between Myanmar’s Buddhists and Muslims’, *aljazeera.com*, 28 October 2017. Retrieved on 5 November 2017 from aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/10/proxy-war-myanmar-buddhists-muslims-151027110344281.html

of them returned. In addition, Arakanese forced labour was extracted to build the 500 feet tall pagoda in Mingun in Burma. In 1791, an unsuccessful attempt against the Burman rule in Arakan was followed by massive reprisal ... [and] 200,000 Arakanese were murdered. Another attempt in 1796 ended in failure and resulted in massive influx of Arakan refugees into the Cox's Bazar area [in Bangladesh].⁸

During those difficult years of mass execution and mass slavery, many Arakanese Muslims took shelter in the neighbouring areas of what is now Bangladesh. When, after the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26), British India annexed Arakan and much of Burma in 1826, many expatriate Rohingyas as well as Bengalis were brought to Arakan mainly to serve British interests. Muslims had a relatively peaceful time in Arakan until WWII when they found themselves in the line of fire between the British and Japanese forces. The Arakanese were thought to be on the side of the British who eventually abandoned them to the mercy of the Japanese and the Burmese mob during the Japanese occupation period (1942-45), which facilitated the 1942

massacre of the Rohingya Muslims that cost more than 100,000 lives.⁹

After Burma became independent in 1948, elements among the Arakanese sought autonomy. In 1962, General Ne Win (1911-2002) seized power in a military coup and began widespread persecution of Rohingyas and declared them foreigners (Bengalis) arguably for the first time in history.¹⁰ Then again in February 1978, Ne Win 'launched a large-scale program named 'Operation Dragon King' (Naga-Min)' that caused death of nearly 'tens of thousands of Rohingyas' and mass exodus to Bangladesh of more than 200,000 of them.¹¹ The next big blow on the Rohingyas came four years later in the form of the 1982 Citizenship Law. The recent violence and mass killings of 2012, 2014 and 2016-17 cost thousands of lives, a higher incidence of gang rape, burning down of hundreds of villages and mass migration of nearly a million genocide survivors.

Statelessness and Slavery

Although Rohingya Muslims have been living in Arakan since the eighth century,¹² with military rule in 1982 they suddenly became stateless through a process of 'arbitrary deprivation of citizenship'.¹³ The government adopted Citizenship Law which approved of a list of

⁸C.R. Abrar, 'Repatriation of Rohingya Refugees,' p. 5; retrieved on 2 November 2017 from burmalibrary.org/docs21/Abrar-NM-Repatriation_of_Rohingya_refugees-en.pdf

⁹Yunus, *A history of Arakan*, p. 38.

¹⁰Ramzy Baroud believes that the 'false notion that the Rohingya are outsiders' started in 1785 when Arakan was conquered and hundreds of thousands were forced to flee ('Big oil, failed democracy and the world's shame in Myanmar', *Arab News*, 11 September 2017).

¹¹ Syeda Naushin Parnini, Mohammad Redzuan Othman and Amer Saifude Ghazali, 'The Rohingya Refugee Crisis and Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations', *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 22.1 (2013): 133-46, p. 136.

¹²Syed Zain Al-Mahmood, 'Timeline: A Short History of Myanmar's Rohingya Minority', *The Wall Street Journal*, 23 December 2016. Retrieved on 4 November 2017 from blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2016/12/23/timeline-a-short-history-of-myanmars-rohingya-minority/

¹³*International Migration Policy Report*, New York: Center for Migration Studies (CMS), June 2017, p. 7.

135 recognized ethnic groups in the country; it derecognized and delisted the Rohingya.¹⁴

Muslims are recorded to have participated in the administration of Arakan as early as the fifteenth century beginning with the historic Mrauk-U dynasty (1430-1785), the golden era in terms of Muslim-Buddhist coexistence. In pre-1962 Burma, 'there had been several Rohingya members of parliament and ministers in the cabinet.'¹⁵ More specifically, in 1951 and 1956 elections, 'at least eleven Rohingyas, including women, returned to Burmese Parliament as MPs.'¹⁶ However, during the military regime from 1962 to 1995, not a single Muslim was given any ministerial post.¹⁷ Then in pre-2015 parliament, Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party had a number Muslim MPs.

On the basis of the 1982 citizenship law, in 1989 the state divided the people in Arakan into three categories: 'native' or 'indigenous' citizens who are issued pink (full citizenship) cards; non-indigenous citizens who are given blue (associate citizenship) cards; and naturalized citizens who are issued green cards.¹⁸ Rohingya Muslims were stripped of citizenship and were given none of these cards. Later in 1995, partly because of UNHCR's intervention, they were given white cards known as Temporary Registration Card (TRC). However, later they were ordered to return them by 31 May 2015 only to be subject to a complex

process of citizenship verification which was designed in such a way that very few would be able to qualify, as they were required to show evidence that their ancestors had lived in Myanmar before 1823¹⁹ and speak fluently one of the 'national' languages and the Rohingya language is not considered one. That means Rohingya Muslims lost citizenship completely after 31 May 2015, hence could not participate in the November 2015 general elections.

Since the 2015 general elections heralded the end of 50-year direct military rule, it was widely dubbed as a victory of democracy in Myanmar. Little did the media highlight the fact that a significant portion of the people of Myanmar were denied the right to vote. What has been paraded as reform is not much beyond accommodating Suu Kyi and giving her political space. Suu Kyi's personal gain was interpreted as great reforms in Myanmar and facilitated the regime's legitimacy in the west, which indirectly gave the Myanmar government free license to further caricature and marginalize Muslims.

With white cards, Rohingya Muslims cannot travel and, since their movement is restricted, cannot work outside their villages and towns. If they want to travel even within the country, they are required to make payment to the authority and the amount is determined by the length of time one wants to stay outside their village. Moreover, Rohingya Muslims have been subjected to invol-

¹⁴For a complete list of the 135 ethnic groups, please go to: embassyofmyanmar.be/ABOUT/ethnicgroups.htm

¹⁵Parnini, Othman and Ghazali, 'The Rohingya Refugee Crisis', p. 136.

¹⁶Iftekhhar Iqbal, 'Locating the Rohingya in time and space', *Al-Jazeera.com*, 27 Sept 2017. Retrieved on 3 November 2017 from aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/locating-rohingya-time-space-170927100542729.html

¹⁷Parnini, Othman and Ghazali, 'The Rohingya Refugee Crisis', p. 136.

¹⁸Donald M. Seekins, *Historical Dictionary of Burma (Myanmar)*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017, p. 567.

¹⁹Yusuf, 'Nationalist Ethnicities as Religious Identities', p. 110.

untary servitude. The rest of the world did not know about, or did not do anything to stop, this modern-day slavery. Forced labour without any payment (in cash or kind) is exacted from Rohingyas in various forms. Three types of forced labour are more common: One is 'sentry duty' which means that every able bodied Rohingya man has to work for the army from sunset to dawn 3 to 4 times a month. The only way to avoid this forced labour is to give money to the military. If anyone is found resting or sleeping while on sentry duty, he has to pay a fine in the form of chicken. Another form of forced labour is daytime drudgery (from dawn to dusk) and involves agricultural work, construction, maintenance or cleaning of houses belonging to the military. Again every able bodied Rohingya has to do this duty 3 to 4 times a month or has to pay a fine if they want to avoid this. One account of forced labour goes as follows:

My father was a day laborer.... [T]he army came and took him and some other people for forced labor—they forced the people to build embankments on a shrimp farm north of our village. The army kept my father for three days—during that time my family thought about him a lot, and we cried.²⁰

The third form of forced labour is portering in which Rohingyas including chil-

dren are forced to go with the army to different places including jungles and carry loads for them.²¹ As Tyler R. Giannini states:

One particularly notorious method of forced labor is portering in which villagers are forced to carry the ammunition and supplies of the military. In addition to maltreatment by the soldiers, porters often have to act as human minesweepers, and many are killed or injured. Porters who are sick, injured, or cannot carry their heavy loads are often beaten and left behind in the jungle to die. Women porters often have to serve 'double duty,' carrying the loads during the day and being raped by the soldiers at night.²²

Since able-bodied family members especially men have to go on a regular basis for sentry duty, forced labour and portering without any remuneration whatsoever, Rohingya families have no one left to work full time to earn a livelihood.²³ Eventually, they are forced to leave Myanmar and, once they have taken this path to avoid exploitation and abuse, they can never come back because they have no papers to claim that they are citizens of the country.

²⁰Maggie Lemere and Zoë West, *Nowhere to Be Home: Narratives from Survivors of Burma's Military Regime*, San Francisco: McSweeney's, 2011, p. 291.

²¹ Why Burma's Rohingya Muslims are among the world's most persecuted people', *CBS News*, 25 May 2015. Retrieved on 3 November 2017 from cbc.ca/news/world/why-burma-s-rohingya-muslims-are-among-the-world-s-most-persecuted-people-1.3086261

²²Tyler R. Giannini, 'Destructive Engagement: A Decade of Foreign Investment in Burma', Washington, DC/Seattle/Bangkok: Selbstverlag, 1999, p. 8. Retrieved on 31 October 2017 from earthrights.org/sites/default/files/publications/destructive-engagement.pdf

²³Needless to say, since Arakan is least developed as the government has neglected this region, the only livelihood they have is working in the agricultural field or doing menial jobs.

NaSaKa and Extortions

The NaSaKa or border security force was formed in 1992 mainly to contain Rohingya Muslims and its recruits were from all ethnic-religious groups except the Rohingya. Once NaSaKa's notoriety reached a sickening height, in July 2013 the government replaced it with the Border Security Police (BGP). Since the BGP is manned mostly by the people who were once part of NaSaKa, it is simply the same old wine in a new bottle. On 1 July 2014, the BGP chief Major Tin Ko Ko convened a meeting with the local administrators of Maungdaw to inform them that he would be re-implementing NaSaKa-style raids and census operation soon, which obviously frightened the Rohingya people as they knew very well that what he actually meant was torture and extortion.²⁴

One of NaSaKa's oppressive measures was gradual depopulation of Rohingya people through 'Swe Tin Sit' or census operation. The army and NaSaKa members make annual (and sometimes surprise) visits to Rohingya families to take photos for which they have to pay. Names of family members absent during photo sessions are erased from the family census. Rohingyas have to pay security forces for both having the names of the absentees deleted and those of the newborns, added. Apart from these methodical exorbitant charges, financial exploitation takes a myriad of forms varying from random extortion to bribery. For example:

On 20 March [2009] in

Maungdaw Township, a 45-year old Rohingya man was arrested for possession of a mobile phone charger, and released on payment of a 500,000 kyat (USD\$500) bribe. Four Mosque committee members were arrested for extending the veranda of a religious building. They were released on 9 March 2009 after paying a 3,000,000 Kyat (USD\$3,000) bribe, which is a phenomenal amount of money in Myanmar.²⁵

Rohingyas face both travel and marriage restrictions. They are barred from marrying Buddhists and have to pay to get permission to get married, as marriage without permission or payment involves imprisonment and torture. It takes about one month to get permission. Once married, they cannot have more than two children, and this law is exclusive for the Muslims. According to Majumder:

A Rohingya family has to pay 50000 kyat for marriage (as informed by respondents). Parents of both the couples have to deposit the fee. The amount of money is not [the] same for all. It varies from one place to another. Parents of good looking daughters are demanded more money for marriage so that the girls can't get married [and be available for rape by the military].²⁶

²⁴ Sindhi Khan, 'Myanmar Border Police to Resume Nasaka's Oppressive Mechanism against Rohingya', *Rohingya Vision*, 2 June 2014. Retrieved on 2 Nov 2017 from rvisiontv.com/myanmar-border-police-resume-nasakas-oppressive-mechanism-rohingya/

²⁵ Dylan Grey, 'The crisis in Northern Rakhine State', *New Mandala*, 30 April 2009; retrieved on 31 October 2017 from newmandala.org/the-crisis-in-northern-rakhine-state/

²⁶ Suchismita Majumder, 'Rohingyas languishing behind the bar' pp. 8-9. Retrieved on 31 October 2017 from mcrgr.ac.in/Rohingyas/Draft_Papers/Suchismita.pdf

Such financial exploitation has added intensity given that Arakan is the 'least developed state, with a poverty rate of 78 percent, compared to the 37.5 percent national average.'²⁷ Thus, apart from systematic daily humiliations, in the pre-2015 (precursor-to-genocide) period, security forces used four methods to compel Rohingya people to leave the country: Forced labour or slavery; financial exploitation in the forms of fees, fines and bribes; arson; and rape.

Rohingya women are doubly victimized for being Rohingya and female. Even in 'normal' circumstances of exploitation, rape by security forces has been a persistent reality for them for decades. Sometimes security forces raid a house, order the men of the family out, rape the women and leave. Or, they storm into the house and make off with the women some of whom are released after being raped for days and come back home, and some others are raped and killed, and never return. Heavily pregnant women are not spared, as they are forced delivered and their newborns, thrown away. One narrative of rape goes as follows:

[Some women] were attacked by the NaSaKa—they were arrested and raped in detention. When the families came to know of this, they had to go to the NaSaKa base and give some money for the woman to be released. If a family was not able to give enough money, the NaSaKa would keep the woman, and the family had to beg the people in the village for help. Once they raised the money, they could return to the NaSaKa

and pay for the woman to be released.²⁸

The predicament of raped women does not end there. Rape victims face the risk of receiving social stigma and negative social attitudes which in some cases ruin their family life if they are married, and render them inferior as marriage candidates if unmarried. Because of reduced self-esteem and social isolation that accompany rape, victims are generally reticent to admit to being sexually violated, as men are also unwilling to admit that their wives or daughters have been helpless victims of lustful brutes. Therefore, the full extent of sexual victimhood of Rohingya women may not be known.

2012-2014

In the recent past, ethnic-cleansing restarted with the reported rape and murder of a Rakhine woman on 28 May 2012. Through a questionable judiciary process, three Muslim men were accused, arrested and charged. The matter could resolve judicially and end there. However, that was not the case. After the men were charged, racial tension was stirred up through the mass media. As a result, a bus carrying ten Muslim men was stopped by a mob of few hundred Buddhists. The Muslim men were forced off the bus and beaten to death, which was followed by further outbreaks of mayhem and widespread violence against Muslims in the region and beyond. The government banned Muslims' Friday prayers but Muslims in Muslim-majority areas ignored the ban and became subject to brutality and punitive responses by the police, NaSaKa and the army. In the following months, nearly a thousand of Muslims

²⁷'The Rohingya Crisis', *Council on Foreign Relations*, 4 October 2017. Retrieved on 3 November 2017 from cfr.org/background/rohingya-crisis

²⁸Lemere and West, *Nowhere to Be Home*, pp. 290-91.

were killed. A climate of fear, emotional unrest and uncertainty gripped the Muslim community around the country.

Muslims were dispossessed and their houses were burnt to varying extents or occupied by the Buddhists and their lands, confiscated. As many as 140,000 Rohingyas were put in the squalid IDP (internally displaced person) camps and are branded as refugees from Bangladesh, while the Rakhaings were relocated in the occupied houses. Many Rohingyas came to the camps after they failed to flee the country through 'deadly journeys' through dark jungles or in 'floating coffins' in choppy waters. In some other cases, the original Rohingya owners are allowed to stay in their houses but are required to pay rent to live in their own houses.

Those who made risky and life-threatening ventures to flee the country fell in the hands of 'agents' (human traffickers) and became victims of the torture and exploitation of the Thai police beyond the borders on their efforts to go to Malaysia. Many of them were killed en route by security forces or by torture, hunger, exhaustion or disease and buried in the jungles in the border region between Thailand and Malaysia.²⁹ The IDP camp inmates receive no support from the Myanmar government. They have rather become a source of its foreign currency, as their relatives who have managed to flee to other countries and humanitarian bodies regularly send money for their upkeep. The ethnic cleansing that started in 2012 continued until 2014 when in early July communal riots broke out in Myanmar's second largest city Mandalay after

unfounded rumours circulated online that a Buddhist woman had been raped by her Muslim employers.

2016-2017: Full-scale Genocide

The current wave of genocide started in October 2016 on the pretext of avenging alleged 9 October 2016 pre-dawn attacks on military outposts by Rohingya insurgents. This is the final phase and is designed to exterminate Rohingya people completely. In two weeks from 9 October 2016, hundreds were killed, innumerable women were raped and thousands of houses were razed to the ground and 75,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh, and that was in addition to hundreds of thousands of them who had migrated there over time to escape earlier ethnic cleaning.

Then the genocide that started on 25 August 2017 has literally spared nothing, as the current commander-in-chief of the Myanmar Armed Forces, Sr. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing regards this as the 'unfinished business' of 'clearing the Rohingya.'³⁰ Jeffrey Gettleman's account of one Rajuma's predicament may give a hint what has been happening during this recent genocide:

She told me (and everything she said was consistent with dozens of other witness accounts) that Myanmar government soldiers stormed into her village in August and burned down each house. They separated the men from

²⁹For more details, please see 'Thailand: Mass Graves of Rohingya Found in Trafficking Camp', *Human Rights Watch*, 1 May 2015. Retrieved on 5 November 2017 from hrw.org/news/2015/05/01/thailand-mass-graves-rohingya-found-trafficking-camp

³⁰James Hookway, 'Myanmar Says Clearing of Rohingya Is Unfinished Business From WWII', *Wall Street Journal*, 2 September 2017. Retrieved on 5 November 2017 from wsj.com/articles/myanmar-army-chief-defends-clearing-rohingya-villages-1504410530

the women and summarily executed the men. Then they raped the women. But before raping her, Rajuma said, the soldiers snatched her baby boy from her arms and threw him into a fire. The baby was screaming for her as he burned to death.³¹

Along with many others, she was forced to stand chest-high in a river. She was holding her 18-month baby boy tight and was gripped by a distressing fear of imminent death, as ‘two soldiers then pulled her into a house, tore off her veil and dress and raped her. She said that her two sisters were raped and killed in the same room, and that in the next room, her mother and 10-year-old brother were shot.’³² Eventually she managed to flee to Bangladesh. Rajuma’s story has been widely circulated, but hers is not an isolated case. Thousands of Rohingya women have faced comparable ordeals.

The ‘ARSA Attack’

The current full-blown genocide started after the so-called Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) allegedly attacked police and army posts in Arakan on 25 August 2017. Even though the whole world seems to have been credulous to believe the ARSA attack, the narrative

of the Rohingyas who fled to Bangladesh suggests that the genocide was well-orchestrated and the alleged attack was part of a bigger plot. According to them, ten days before this supposed ARSA attack happened, the Myanmar army came to all Rohingya houses and seized household tools such as kitchen knives and other sharp objects so that they would not have to face even minimum resistance during their pre-planned genocide and cleansing operations.³³

According to Rohingya Muslim Syed Hossain, the allegation of ARSA attacks on police and army camps is based on a total lie. Shahidul Islam of Maungdaw says that the army came on 13 August 2017 and snatched away all sharp objects from the houses and said that all would be returned after Eidul Adha. Little he and other villagers knew that, that was part of the army’s plan of cunningly-constructed massive genocide and outright exterminations of Rohingyas.³⁴

The first time Suu Kyi broke her long silence on this round of genocide in Arakan on Tuesday 19 September 2017, her inordinate focus on ARSA was most staggering, as if this group ‘is the only identity that Rohingya will be attached to, from her perspective and she hopes from the international perspective.’³⁵ In the eyes of the Myanmar establishment,

³¹‘My Interview With a Rohingya Refugee: What Do You Say to a Woman Whose Baby Was Thrown Into a Fire?’, *The New York Times*, 19 October 2017. Retrieved on 4 November 2017 from [nytimes.com/2017/10/19/insider/my-interview-with-a-rohingya-refugee-what-do-you-say-to-a-woman-whose-baby-was-thrown-into-a-fire.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/19/insider/my-interview-with-a-rohingya-refugee-what-do-you-say-to-a-woman-whose-baby-was-thrown-into-a-fire.html)

³²Jeffrey Gettleman, ‘Rohingya Recount Atrocities: ‘They Threw My Baby into a Fire’,’ *The New York Times*, 19 October 2017. Retrieved on 4 November 2017 from [nytimes.com/2017/10/11/world/asia/rohingya-myanmar-atrocities.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/11/world/asia/rohingya-myanmar-atrocities.html)

³³Abu Saleh Akon, ‘Ethnic Cleaning Pre-Planned’, *The Daily Nayadiganta*, 28 September 2017. Retrieved on 3 November 2017 from dailynayadiganta.com/detail/news/255618

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵James Griffiths, ‘5 dubious claims Myanmar’s Aung San Suu Kyi made in her speech’, *CNN*, 20 September 2017. Retrieved on 5 November 2017 from cnn.com/2017/09/18/asia/aung-san-suu-kyi-speech-rohingya/index.html

the existence of the few dozen³⁶ ARSA members is all that matters and the sufferings of over 1.5 million Rohingya people, and the killings of thousands of them, at the hands of the security forces and the Buddhist mob do not.

Some video images presumably circulated by a string of anti-Muslim propaganda also arouse questions of credibility and reliability. One video clip where some presumably Muslim men are walking - some of them armed with archaic weapons - does not suggest that they are professional fighters or fighters by choice. They seem to have been given arms, herded together and paraded by forces beyond their comprehension or control in order for the state to portray them as 'terrorists' in the media and thus 'justify' the coordinated ethnic cleansing and large-scale massacres, rapes, arson and forced mass migration.³⁷

Corporate greed and the silence over Rohingya genocide

Suu Kyi has been dismissive and in denial concerning the ongoing genocide. Her flagrant and defiant statement that she 'does not fear international scrutiny'³⁸ may not be a manifestation of childish audacity visited on a mature head. Perhaps, it has wider implication that she has on

her side big powers who have strategic and transnational corporate interests in Myanmar and who aim to get their greedy hands on the country's untapped mineral and other resources especially in the Arakan region. As the journalist Ramzy Baroud puts it: 'Massive deposits untapped because of the Western boycott of Myanmar's junta are now available to the highest bidder. It is a bonanza, and all are invited.'³⁹

Therefore, while western powers are largely silent over Myanmar's massive human rights violations, China and India have long been protecting it from any meaningful international retribution by regarding the various forms of oppression in the Arakan region as internal issues, as for both the countries 'Myanmar's geostrategic location at the tri-junction of East Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia is of critical significance.'⁴⁰ As Zarni and Cowley state:

Despite growing evidence of genocide, the international community has so far avoided calling this large scale human suffering genocide because no powerful member states of the UN Security Council have any appetite to forego their commercial and strategic interests in Burma to address the slow-

³⁶Faisal Edroos, 'ARSA: Who are the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army?' *Al-Jazeera.com*, 13 Sept 2017. Retrieved on 3 November 2017 from aljazeera.com/news/2017/09/myanmar-arakan-rohingya-salvation-army-170912060700394.html

³⁷Please see: [youtube.com/watch?v=CCFp4mV6Xxc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CCFp4mV6Xxc) (retrieved on 5 November 2017).

³⁸Caroline Mortimer, 'Aung San Suu Kyi 'burying her head in the sand' over Burma's 'ethnic cleansing' of Rohingya, says Amnesty International', *Independent*, 19 September 2017. Retrieved on 5 November 2017 from independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/aung-san-suu-kyi-burma-myanmar-rohingya-horror-state-persecution-refugee-crisis-a7954561.html

³⁹'Big oil, failed democracy and the world's shame in Myanmar', *Arab News*, 11 September 2017. Retrieved on 3 November 2017 from arabnews.com/node/1159486

⁴⁰Zhao Hong, 'China and India Courting Myanmar for Good Relations'. In Emile Kok-Kheng Yeoh (Ed), *Facets of a Transforming China: Resource, Trade and Equity* (pp. 64-78). Kuala Lumpur: Institute of China Studies, 2008, p. 64.

⁴¹Maung Zarni and Alice Cowley, 'The slow-burning genocide of Myanmar's Rohingya', *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal*, 23.3 (2014): 683-754, p.683.

burning Rohingya genocide.⁴¹

Conversely, many heads of states would be unwilling to miss a photo opportunity with Suu Kyi because of her media-choreographed global celebrity status even though she has virtually been presiding over a series of genocide and dispossession since October 2016.

Conclusions

Mass killings in Cambodia during the Pol Pot regime (1975-79) and the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda (April-July 1994) were matters of one long wave of violence in each case. However, 'the centrally planned large-scale death and destruction of the Rohingya people has been achieved over a long-term time frame of several decades.'⁴² Both in terms of temporal length and the scale of oppression, the Rohingyas are no better off than their counterparts in places like Palestine or Kashmir. However, unlike in other cases, adequate advocacy and lobby activism has not developed internationally to force the Myanmar government to stop this long-standing genocide.

What is more, any discussion on the Rohingya crisis without using the term 'genocide' would amount to an affront to the human dignity of the Rohingya people - both the genocide casualties and survivors. Any remedy effort will remain elusive or inconclusive if the full extent of the crimes is not comprehended or recognized.

Given the dynamics of Myanmar politics and ethnic relations, it will be naïve and counterproductive to understand 'contemporary Muslim-Buddhist

tensions ... simply through the lenses of religion.'⁴³ By giving it a religious colouring, the anti-Muslim racists in Myanmar seek to mobilize majority support for their ethnic cleansing and to benefit from the global Islamophobic climate as their counterparts in Israel and other places have done.

It is very hard to see any immediate solution to the Rohingya crisis, as the Myanmar judicial system is completely biased against Rohingyas and the media inside Myanmar 'are either lying or self-censoring.'⁴⁴ Despite violence and mass killings of genocidal proportion for decades, not a single person is known to have been punished by the Myanmar judicial system. Moreover, the intermittent cessation of genocidal mass killings and destruction of houses and properties does not mean the ending of other forms of oppression, systematic discrimination and humiliation of the Rohingyas.

On a final note, like the consortium and coalition of right-wing populism in the West, there has been alarming 'media reports of the formation of a transnational Buddhist-Hindu anti-Muslim alliance comprised of Myanmar's Ma Ba Tha, Sri Lanka's Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), and India's Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).'⁴⁵ Moreover, India's RSS-leaning Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Myanmar on 5 September 2017 in the midst of genocide in the country and his plan to expel 40,000 Rohingyas from India do not augur well. All these point to the need for greater activism and international solidarity in support of truth and justice for Rohingyas.

⁴²Zarni and Cowley, 'The slow-burning genocide of Myanmar's Rohingyas', p.687.

⁴³Yusuf, 'Nationalist Ethnicities as Religious Identities', p. 101.

⁴⁴For more details, see Tom Townend, 'Recognise the Rohingya - End the Genocide! (Part Two)', *Wessex Scene*, 9 February 2016. Retrieved on 3 November 2017 from wessexscene.co.uk/international/2016/02/09/recognise-the-rohingya-end-the-genocide-part-two/

⁴⁵Yusuf, 'Nationalist Ethnicities as Religious Identities', p. 11
