Rohingya Resistance

Utilizing Media to Combat Buddhist–Burman Nationalism

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Introduction

In the 2002 British romantic comedy, *About A Boy*, Hugh Grant's character volunteers at a London Amnesty International call center to rally support for an unspecified human rights crisis in Burma.[1] In 2019, Amnesty is now capable of a more global reach simply through the use of the internet. But as technology aids human rights organizations in broadening capabilities and impact, it has also been wielded by oppressive states to promote their own agendas. For this reason, the expansion and accessibility of the internet has fundamentally changed the nature of engagement between domestic and international human rights movements and the state.

This dynamic is evidently being played out in Burma, now known as the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, where the Muslim minority Rohingya in Rakhine State have endured what economist Amartya Sen terms a "slow genocide."[2] The military – formally known as the Tatmadaw – and government utilize transnational media to rationalize violence against Rohingya through a "War on Terror" narrative, stoking fears that they may be linked to pan-Islamic extremist groups.[3] Proliferation of access to technology, however, has enabled Rohingya to take control of their narratives and resist erasure from history. To fully appreciate how they have managed this feat, it is necessary to first comprehend the numerous forms of violence that the civilian government and the Tatmadaw have enacted in an attempt to render Rohingya a stateless people.

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[1] *About a Boy*, Directed by Christopher Weitz and Paul Weitz, Performed by Hugh Grant, United Kingdom: Universal Studios, 2002, DVD.

[2] Amartya Sen, "The Slow Genocide of the Rohingya," Presentation at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, November 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=13&v=ugHhAwARb98.

[3] Andrew Selth, "Burma's Muslims and the War on Terror," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27, no. 2 (June 24, 2010): 107-26, Accessed March 12, 2019.

The Illegal Status of Rohingya in Myanmar

Historically, Rohingya were often otherized for not practicing Buddhism, Burma's predominant religion. In the 11th century, King Anwrahata of the Pagan Dynasty attempted to unite the various kingdoms of modern-day Myanmar through the use of Theravada Buddhism as the national religion. Rohingya were also subjected to forced displacement because of the strategic port area they inhabit. In fact, Captain Hiram Cox served on a mission from 1796 to 1798 to resolve the predicament of Arakanese refugees, who were mostly Muslims from the Chittagong Frontier of British India (now Bangladesh) and could not return to 'Arakan' or nowadays Rakhine State.[4]

When Britain incorporated Burma into British India following three Anglo-Burmese Wars, the Crown attempted to categorize and historicize the origins of numerous ethnic groups in the country. The most egregious display of this arbitrary decision is recorded in the 1911 British census. Rohingya were categorized as "Mahomedean" (Muslim) Indian immigrants to the Arakan Kingdom in Burma, thought to have been brought over as laborers from India.[5] In the British census published a decade later, Rohingya were categorized as "Arkanese," meaning that they were found to be native to the Arakan Kingdom, now Rakhine State.[6] Additionally, the laxity in the establishment of official political borders between Burma and British India facilitated the rationalized misconception of Rohingya as migrants during the period of colonization.

Anti-Rohingya sentiment festered during World War II and the Burmese War of Independence. During World War II, many Burmese nationalists accused Rohingya of taking advantage of the British occupation of the region to flee Arakan to Bangladesh in numbers of approximately 22,000. When Burman nationalists asked the British for aid in expelling Japanese soldiers from the country, Rohingya were enlisted to join the British and Burmans with the promise that Muslims of the area would be given northern Arakan for their participation.[7] This promise remains unfulfilled.

Following Burma's independence in 1948, Rohingya, then known as "Arakanese Indians," lobbied for their official categorization to be changed to Rohingya, as well as for integration into East Pakistan (Bangladesh) or even sovereignty. The government, however, refused to repatriate any Rohingya who fled during the war in 1942 and

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[4] Hiram Cox, *Journal of a Residence in the Burmhan Empire, and more Particularly the Court of Amarpoorah* (London: John Warren, Old-Bond Street, 1821); and G. and W.B. Whittaker, Ave Maria-Lane. Accessed June 20, 2018, http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cox1821/0004.

[5] C. Webb Morgan, Census of Burma, 1911 Volume IX Burma Part I Report. Rangoon. Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing, Burma (1912): 82.

[6] S.G. Grantham, Census of India, 1921 Volume X Burma Report Part I Report. Rangoon. Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing, Burma (1923): 19.

[7] Human Rights Watch, "II. Historical Background," *Human Rights Watch,* 2000, Accessed June 17, 2018. https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/burma/burm005-01.htm.

those who did return were considered "illegal Pakistani (Bangladeshi) immigrants."[8] Accordingly, Rohingya civil servants were removed from government posts and groups of armed Rohingya men, the "Mujahids," have called for independence from Burma. The dissolution of the central government was an outcome of the 1962 coup d'état that transformed Burma from a civilian government to a military dictatorship.

During the era of the military junta, General Ne Win implemented policies of Burmanization, which aimed to unite the country's various ethnic groups under a singular ethnic identity. Under the 1974 Constitution, the junta claimed that all national races would enjoy various freedoms so long as "…the enjoyment of any such freedom does not offend the laws or the public interest."[9] In 1977, Operation Nagamin (Dragon King) was initiated in northern Rakhine State, an area with a high concentration of Rohingya, to register members of the "national races" and remove foreigners from the area. Rohingya who were made refugees as a consequence of this policy reported forced eviction, rape, and murder by the Tatmadaw, and by May 1978 nearly 200,000 Rohingya had fled to Bangladesh. Although 180,000 of such Rohingya were repatriated under the United Nations' support, they were denied citizenship in Burma.

The 1982 Citizenship Law saw a further institutionalization of Rohingya's illegal status in the country. It officially recognizes 135 ethnic groups, also termed "national races," that the government claims occupied the area of Burma before the British colonization.[10] The manufacturing of this number, aside from excluding several indigenous groups, was also purposefully utilized to label Rohingya as "illegal Bangladeshi immigrants" brought over from Bangladesh during the colonial period.[11][12] Various academic and news outlets both in and outside of Burma at the time recognized the 135 designated ethnic groups, perpetuating a misconception that Rohingya and other minorities were accurately represented in this number. In reality, the law barred them from obtaining

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[8] Hugh Tinker, *The Union of Burma: A Study of the First Year of Independence* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1957): 357. At the time of this book's publication, the War of Independence in Bangladesh had not occurred. It was still considered Western Pakistan ergo usage of "Pakistani" versus "Bangladeshi", which is currently used.

[9] Union of Burma, *THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNION OF BURMA (1974)*, By Union of Burma, Rangoon (1974): 1-37, Accessed March 28, 2019, http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs07/1974Constitution.pdf.

[10] Martin Smith and Annie Allsebrook, *Ethnic Groups in Burma: Development, Democracy and Human Rights* (London: Anti-Slavery International, 1994): p. 17

[11] Micah F. Morton, "Indigenous Peoples Work to Raise Their Status in a Reforming Myanmar," *Perspectives*, 33rd ser., no. 2017 (May 22, 2017): 1-10. Accessed March 4, 2019. https://www.think-asia.org/bitstream/handle/11540/7021/ISEAS_Perspective_2017_33.pdf?sequence=1.

[12] Thar Nu Won, "How Illegal Chinese and Bangladeshi Immigrants (Rohingyas) Flooded Myanmar?," February 23, 2013, Accessed March 5, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/notes/won-thar-nu/how-illegal-chinese-and-bangladeshi-immigrantsrohingyas-flooded-myanmar/438750709541317/. Rohingya are often termed "illegal Bangladeshi immigrants" as a means to delegitimize their claims of ancestry in the Rakhine State. This article is an example of the proliferation of non-peer reviewed information taken from chat forums online and circulated on social media. As demonstrated by the use of "Mujahid" in place of "Rohingya", there is obvious Islamophobia attached to these sentiments.

citizenship.[13] This illegal status has since served to rationalize episodes of Rohingya ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the Tatmadaw and Buddhist-Burman nationalist groups in Rakhine State.

Direct Tatamadaw violence against Rohingya communities continued well into the 1990s. Nearly 250,000 Rohingya fled to Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh from 1991 to 1992. As a result, Bangladeshi authorities began to force Rohingya repatriation, an action condemned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees until a Memorandum of Understanding was reached in 1993 to alleviate the situation. Burmese hesitancy and reported cases of Rohingya's seizure of control over the refugee camps, however, led to more forced Rohingya repatriation to Rakhine State in 1998. By 2000, it was estimated that there were still 100,000 undocumented Rohingya in Bangladesh.[14]

In 2001, the government began to employ narratives primarily from the Global North's media and in particular the "War on Terror" to vindicate police searches of Muslims in larger cities as well as Rohingya in Rakhine State.[15] The most recent bout of violence spotlighted by transnational media began in 2012 when communal violence between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya broke out in relation to the alleged gang rape and murder of a Buddhist Rakhine woman, allegedly perpetrated by Rohingya men. Ko Ko Gyi, a Myanmar politician and former prisoner of conscience, outright claimed that Rohingya were not one of Myanmar's national races and their actions were infringing upon Myanmar's national sovereignty. Many continued to denounce Rohingya as "illegal Bengalis" or employ the word "kalar," a slur in Southeast Asia used against persons of Muslim South Asian ancestry.[16]

Tatmadaw and the Buddhist bin Laden

A strong supporter of Tatmadaw's framing of Rohingya is Ashin Wirathu, the self-proclaimed "Buddhist bin Laden." He was the head of the Patriotic Association of Myanmar or the Ma Ba Tha movement.[17] He regularly utilized Islamophobic rhetoric with the intent of stoking communal violence against Rohingya and other Muslims in Myanmar, allegedly with Tatmadaw assistance. In a February 2013 sermon, he stated:

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[13] "Who Are the Rohingya?," *Al Jazeera*, April 18, 2018. Accessed March 7, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/08/rohingya-muslims-170831065142812.html.

[14] Human Rights Watch, "II. Historical Background," *Human Rights Watch* (2000), Accessed June 17, 2018, https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/burma/burm005-01.htm.

[15] Tauseef Akbar, "Myanmar and the 'War on Terror'," *The Diplomat*, March 11, 2016, Accessed March 12, 2019, https://thediplomat.com/2016/03/myanmar-and-the-war-on-terror/.

[16] "Four Killed as Rohingya Muslims Riot in Myanmar: government," *Reuters*, June 8, 2012, Accessed July 13, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-violence-four-killed-as-rohingya-muslims-riot-in-myanmar-government-idUSBRE85714E20120608

[17] Kyaw Min Aung, "Nationalist Supporters Say They Will Protect Buddha Dhamma Parahita," *National News*, August 15, 2018, Accessed March 5, 2019, https://www.mmtimes.com/news/nationalist-supporters-say-they-will-protect-buddha-dhamma-parahita.html.

> If you buy a good from a Muslim shop, your money just doesn't stop there… money will eventually be used against you to destroy your race and religion. That money will be used to get a Buddhist-Burmese woman and she will very soon be coerced or even forced to convert to Islam… once [Muslims] become overly populous, they will overwhelm us and take over our country and make it an evil Islamic nation.[18]

The fear of Myanmar becoming an "evil Islamic nation" became semi-materialized with the creation of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) in 2013. Under the pretense that their operations were a matter of national security, Tatmadaw granted ARSA with control of the region outside of the purview of the government.[19]

In 2015, twelve Rohingya men were arrested for joining the "Myanmar Muslim Army," a group that defense lawyers and security experts could not verify existed, and five non-Rohingya men were arrested for publishing items that "… could damage national security," such as calendars with the word "Rohingya" on them.[20] In 2016, it was reported that jihadist insurgent groups attacked Tatmadaw outposts, leading to Tatmadaw's use of extrajudicial killings, gang rape, and arson against Rohingya.[21] After ARSA claimed responsibility for the attacks on the Tatmadaw, children as young as 10 were detained for complicity in ARSA violence.[22] Continued anti-Rohingya violence in Rakhine State and their forced displacement led former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein, to term these actions against Rohingya as "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing."[23]

Social Media as an Enabler of State Oppression and Ethnic Violence

The government, on the other hand, has attempted to take action against Buddhist-Burman nationalist violence. The State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee took action against Ashin Wirathu by legally disbanding Ma Ba Tha in 2017, but the group was later reformed as the Buddha Dhamma Paraphita Foundation in May 2018. Its regeneration also followed Facebook's ban of Wirathu from the social media platform, after Australian

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[18] Alex Bookbinder, "969: The Strange Numerological Basis for Burma's Religious Violence," *The Atlantic*, April 9, 2013, Accessed September 13, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/04/969-the-strange-numerological-basis-for-burmas-religious-violence/274816/.

[19] Andrew Selth, *MYANMAR'S ARMED FORCES AND THE ROHINGYA CRISIS,* Report, August 2018: 28, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/pw140-myanmars-armed-forces-and-the-rohingya-crisis.pdf.

[20] Akbar, "Myanmar and the 'War on Terror.'"

[21] Mereana Hond, "Raped Rohingya Women Due to Give Birth in Refugee Camps," *Al Jazeera,* May 30, 2018, Accessed July 12, 2018, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/05/raped-rohingya-women-due-give-birth-refugee-camps-180530175429033.html.

[22] Lone Wa, Simon Lewis, and Krishna N. Das, "Exclusive: Children among Hundreds of Rohingya Detained in Myanmar Crackdown," *Al Jazeera*, March 16, 2017, Accessed July 12, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-rohingya-detainees-exclusive/exclusive-children-among-hundreds-of-rohingya-detained-in-myanmar-crackdown-idUSKBN16N342.

[23] "UN Human Rights Chief Points to 'textbook Example of Ethnic Cleansing' in Myanmar," *UN News*, September 11, 2017, Accessed March 14, 2019, https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/09/564622-un-human-rights-chief-points-textbook-example-ethnic-cleansing-myanmar.

academics accused the company of being complicit in Rohingya genocide by providing Wirathu a platform to promote "hate-speech" via video and written sermons without consequence.[24]

This example of action from transnational human rights activists to de-platform promoters of hate speech is useful in putting international pressure on Naypyidaw. However, as Burmese activist Maung Zarni pointed out:

Burmese-language social media sites, which thrive out of the purview of international media watchdogs, are littered with hate speech. Postings of graphic images of Muslim victims, including Rohingyas, on Facebook—easily the most popular social media website in the newly opened Burma—have been greeted with approving responses from the country's Buddhist netizens, both within the country and throughout the diaspora.[25]

Parallel to Wirathu's ban from Facebook, pro-Rohingya content from Facebook was systematically deleted or disabled. Although the government and the Tatmadaw did not interact with these accounts and content in any official capacity, these cases have brought into question Facebook's complicity in restricting freedom of expression and perpetuating state-sponsored violence against minorities.

Two examples of Facebook pages that were removed in 2017, Rohingya Community and Rohingya Today, substantiate this concern. Activist Shah Hossein from Saudi Arabia, who ran Rohingya Community, was forcibly logged out of Facebook and saw his content removed from the platform. Arakan News Agency, his YouTube news page that had nearly 60,000 subscribers, was also deleted.[26] Mohammed Anwar, a Rohingya activist who ran Rohingya Today (formerly Rohingya Blogger), also met the same fate for allegedly violating Facebook's community standards. Anwar reported the incident to the Director General of the Myanmar President's Office, Zaw Htay, claiming that Facebook was collaborating with terrorists and terrorist sympathizers. Director of Burma Campaign UK Mark Farmaner concluded, however, that this was indeed a systematic effort by "racists in Burma" to "flag" Rohingya content, which automatically triggered Facebook's user-reporting mechanism to remove posts and suspend associated accounts.[27]

The Tatmadaw then took a further step to instruct its "True News Information Unit" to publish *Myanmar Politics and the Tatmadaw: Part I* in August 2018, a book

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[24] Laignee Barron, "Nationalist Monk Known as the 'Burmese bin Laden' Has Been Stopped From Spreading Hate on Facebook," *Time Magazine*, February 28, 2018, Accessed October 20, 2018, http://time.com/5178790/facebook-removes-wirathu/.

[25] Zarni Maung, "Buddhist Nationalism in Burma," Rohingya Blogger (Rohingya Today), March 2013, Accessed October 20, 2018, http://www.rohingyablogger.com/2013/03/buddhist-nationalism-in-burma.html

[26] BBC Trending, "Why Are Posts by Rohingya Activists Getting Deleted?," *BBC News*, September 23, 2017, Accessed March 23, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-41364633.

[27] Gianluca Mezzofiore, "Activists Say Ethnic Cleansing in Myanmar Is Being Removed from Facebook," *Mashable*, September 19, 2017, Accessed March 25, 2019, https://mashable.com/2017/09/19/facebook-rohingya-activists-myanmar-burma/#Fq4qvszizaq7.

primarily built upon the illegal Bengali Muslim/War on Terror narratives. However, a Reuters investigation discovered that a photograph captioned "Bengalis intruded into the country after British Colonists occupied the lower part of Myanmar" was actually that of Rwandan Hutus fleeing Rwanda for Tanzania. The book also misused a photograph of bodies in Dhaka, Bangladesh retrieved after a massacre in 1971 to supposedly portray "Bengali" (Rohingya) killing "local ethnics brutally."[28] The Tatmadaw has valued this form of narrative control as a means of delegitimizing international scrutiny into Myanmar affairs, affirming misinformation spread by Buddhist-Burman nationalists, and countering the influence of Rohingya civil society.

Their clever dependence upon third parties, like the Buddhist Bin Laden, lack of evidence of direct orders[29] in regards to online activities, and simple promotion of anti-Rohingya information has enabled the government and the military to evade punishment by international bodies thus far. Current laws are lagging behind in regulations regarding the use of social media. This not only creates a significant predicament regarding hate speech and human rights, but a broader legal issue of regulating social media norms across borders.

Civil Society's Battle for "True News"

Although the government and the Tatmadaw have not taken direct actions against Rohingya civil society online, their influence on the broader Buddhist-Burman nationalist community has served to silence Rohingya advocates while promoting hate speech and genocidal rhetoric on social media platforms.

Rohingya civil society has confronted this reality by creating transnational spaces outside of social media in which these groups can proliferate pro-Rohingya messages. Among websites dedicated to providing historical documents, news, peer-reviewed reports, and various forms of pro-Rohingya advocacy are Online Burma/Myanmar Library, Arakan Rohingya National Organization (ARNO), Kaladan Press Network (KPN), Free Rohingya Coalition (FRC), and Rohingya Today. Although it may seem redundant to operate multiple sites, each of these sites serves a different purpose in engaging local and global civil society.

The Online Burma/Myanmar Library was founded in 2001 to document the human rights situation in Myanmar and states that it is "… dedicated to the people of Burma, who have been the last to know what has been written about their country." It serves as a database that hyperlinks and houses full text documents related to Myanmar. To date, it has more than 100,000 documents sourced from books from the time of the British

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[28] Poppy McPherson,, "Exclusive: Fake Photos in Myanmar Army's 'True News' Book on The...," *Reuters*, December 28, 2018, Accessed March 7, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-rohingya-photos-exclusive/exclusive-fake-photos-in-myanmar-armys-true-news-book-on-the-rohingya-crisis-idUSKCN1LF2LB.

[29] John Jay Douglass, "High Command Case: A Study in Staff and Command Responsibility," *The International Lawyer* 6, no. 4 (1972): 686-705, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40704795.

colonization, and also includes publications from the United Nations, the Myanmar government, and an assortment of non-governmental organizations.[30] The library provides invaluable first-hand documents that discuss numerous iterations of how Rohingya were labeled, beginning with the "Mahamodean Indian" categorization when Burma was part of British India, to "Arakanese" that reflects their indigeneity to Arakan (Rakhine State), and to Rohingya in the 1960s.[31] Publishing this information in an accessible format effectively challenges measures by the state to limit such knowledge within Myanmar, such as banning the study of political science from 1988-2014.[32] More importantly, it provides evidence that directly counters the common narrative of Rohingya illegality.

Rohingya-operated organizations have also played a key role in providing both documentation of their livelihood in Rakhine State and the means by which they seek self-determination. ARNO, for instance, was found as a merger between the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front and the Rohingya Solidarity Organization in 1998 to tackle the "… rapidly deteriorating situation of the Rohingyas threatening their very existence and daunting challenges thrown upon them by the military junta." The unification of these two organizations granted ARNO sufficient standing to assert 21 core tenets to Rohingya and the international community about the goals of its institution, which include the right to Rohingya self-determination, solidarity with non-Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, and the boycott of all companies in business with the "military regime."[33]

Thus, ARNO combats false narratives by publishing press releases to demonstrate its approval of actions and/or statements by transnational human rights groups, and by compiling reports from secondary sources that are in line with ARNO's tenets. The two most recent press releases on their website affirm solidarity with a number of Myanmar minority organizations to support European Union sanctions against military business in the country[34] and the Jewish Rohingya Justice Network's statement "against the genocide of the Rohingya people and the persecution of all ethnic minorities in Burma."[35] The latter statement particularly has important implications and impact for two reasons. First,

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[30] David Arnott, "Introduction to the Online Burma/Myanmar Library," May 2003, Accessed September 8, 2017, http://www.burmalibrary.org/introduction.html.

[31] United Kingdom, Government of Burma, *Report of the Frontier Areas Committee of Enquiry, 1947,* (Rangoon: Supdt., Govt. Print. and Stationery, Burma, 1947): 65, http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/Frontier_Areas_Committee_of_Enquiry-1947-full.pdf.

[32] Lone Wa, "School's In: Hundreds Apply for Politics Classes" *National News-Myanmar Times*, November 28, 2014, Accessed March 9, 2019, https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/12394-hundreds-apply-for-place-in-new-politics-course.html.

[33] Arakan Rohingya National Organisation, "About ARNO," ARNO, October 5, 2006, Accessed March 1, 2019, https://www.rohingya.org/about-arno/.

[34] Arakan Rohingya National Organisation, "ROHINGYA AND BURMESE MINORITY GROUPS CALL FOR NEW EU SANCTIONS AGAINST MILITARY BUSINESS IN MYANMAR," News release, February 27, 2019, Accessed March 3, 2019, https://www.rohingya.org/rohingya-and-burmese-minority-groups-call-for-new-eu-sanctions-against-military-businesses-in-myanmar/.

[35] Arakan Rohingya National Organisation, "JEWISH ROHINGYA JUSTICE NETWORK STATEMENT ON THE GENOCIDE OF THE ROHINGYA," News release, March 3, 2019, Press Release, Accessed March 3, 2019, https://www.rohingya.org/jewish-rohingya-justice-network-statement-on-the-genocide-of-the-rohingya/.

it links the human sufferings of the Holocaust to the current predicament of Rohingya and other ethnic minorities in Myanmar. This reference denounces the human abuses perpetrated by Tatmadaw and state narratives and can be regarded as a victory in alliance across ethno-religious boundaries. Secondly, although the statement does not directly address this issue, official recognition of Rohingya as victims of abuse directly counters joint efforts by Israel and Myanmar to portray a different story in history books, especially regarding the states' poor treatment of Palestinians and Rohingya, respectively.[36]

KPN, alternatively, does not serve to espouse any particular group agenda. It was founded as the first Rohingya news agency in 2001, but to term the organization as such would be inadequate. KPN's founder Razia Sultana uses the site to publish editorials, Rohingya scholarship, histories of Rohingya and Arakan (Rakhine State), transcripts from conferences related to Rohingya, and videos, the majority of which can be accessed in English, Burmese, and Bangla.[37] Sultana has also made accessible on the website in English and Burmese her published research, *Witness to Horror: Rohingya Women Speak Out About Myanmar Army Rape in Maungdaw* (2017) and *Rape by Command: Sexual Violence as a Weapon Against the Rohingya* (2018). This scholarship has illuminated the extent to which rape was utilized as a form of intimidation and ethnic cleansing, even though the Tatmadaw has repeatedly denied its credibility[38] Sultana's documentation of Rohingya women who spoke out makes it more difficult for Myanmar to restrict access to information or obstruct the entry of human rights observers into Rakhine State.[39] Additionally, the recognition of Sultana as an International Woman of Courage by the U.S. Department of State has constituted another triumph for Rohingya by validating her efforts to uncover hidden atrocities, which could be used as evidence for international investigation and prosecution of perpetrators, including members of the Myanmar government and military.

In comparison to the Online Burma/Myanmar Library, ARNO, and KPN, FRC focuses more resources on information sharing and global outreach. FRC, a transnational network of both Rohingya activists and allies, seeks to promote a Rohingya leadership that can broker a peaceful resolution on matters of contention in Myanmar.[40] Different from

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[36] Noa Landau, "Israel, Myanmar Sign Education Pact for Programs About 'Holocaust and Its Lessons' and Xenophobia," *Israel News- Haaretz*, May 29, 2018, Accessed February 28, 2019, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-myanmar-sign-pact-for-programs-about-holocaust-and-its-lesson-1.6132770?v=59DD055205E56B6790D172F222678E83.

[37] Sultana is also a coordinator of the Free Rohingya Coalition and ARNO's women's section.

[38] Skye Wheeler, "Sexual Violence by the Burmese Military Against Ethnic Minorities," In *Sexual Violence by the Burmese Military Against Ethnic Minorities*, Proceedings of Sexual Violence by the Burmese Military Against Ethnic Minorities, Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, Washington, D.C., July 25, 2018, Accessed March 10, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/25/sexual-violence-burmese-military-against-ethnic-minorities.

[39] United States of America, Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *Burma 2018 Human Rights Report,* By 2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, Washington, DC: Department of State, 2019: 1.

[40] Free Rohingya Coalition, "Who We Are," Free Rohingya Coalition (FRC), May 22, 2018, Accessed March 8, 2019, https://freerohingyacoalition.org/en/?page_id=53.

other organizations, FRC's representatives regularly attend and engage in international conferences for the purpose of building transnational support for the Rohingya cause and centering Rohingya voices within it. This coalition has enabled the creation of a more transnational Rohingya-focused civil society as its coordinators, which encompasses a broad scope of prominent human rights activists. It also understands the importance of creating accessible means for advocacy, such as social media campaigns, in order to inform and mobilize the general public about Rohingya issues.[41] Additionally, its focus on generating international pressure from governments and multilateral organizations to take action against the state and military diverges from 20th century actions where organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch would be the only organized groups with the capacity to advocate internationally. The FRC's consistent engagement with the international human rights community on this issue ensures that the Rohingya crisis remains in the spotlight; otherwise it would be incredibly challenging to hold individuals or groups accountable for the suffering that Rohingya have endured.

Lastly, Rohingya Today, which has been a target of attack by Buddhist-Burman nationalists online, focuses its attention on integrating news relating to Rohingya onto one platform.[42] What is both notable and impressive about the site is its social media reach, which boasts approximately 61,000 and 65,000 "likes" on its Facebook pages in Burmese and English, respectively.[43][44] Its Twitter, @rohingyablogger, has roughly 16,200 followers and averages dozens of retweets per post.[45] The demonstrated popularity of the site in both English and Burmese is hard evidence of the widespread global interest in Rohingya crisis in spite of the state's counter-efforts. Rohingya Today stands on the frontline of proliferating the most timely Rohingya-centered information to domestic and international audiences. If this platform ceased operations, Rohingya civil society stands to lose a significant amount of sustained social capital both domestically and internationally from one of the most prominent news organizations. Consequently, anti-Rohingya news sites may fill this void.

Conclusion

In the effort to resist erasure from the global consciousness, Rohingya civil society has invented multiple mechanisms through which local and transnational organizations can engage with their cause more effectively. This is partly in response to, and inspired by, the political reality on the ground where Buddhist-Burman nationalists still occupy the highest offices of the Myanmar government. For example, Islamophobic and anti-Rohingya sentiments remain prevalent among members of the National League for Democracy.

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[41] Free Rohingya Coalition, "Free Rohingya Initiatives," Free Rohingya Coalition (FRC), 2018, Accessed March 8, 2019, https://freerohingyacoalition.org/en/?page_id=52.

[42] "Rohingya Today," Rohingya Today, Accessed March 9, 2019, https://www.rohingyatoday.com/.

[43] "Rohingya Today - Burmese Edition," Facebook, Accessed March 10, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/RohingyaToday.MM/.

[44] "Rohingya Today- English Edition," Facebook, Accessed March 10, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/RohingyaToday.EN/.

[45] "Rohingya Today (@rohingyablogger)," Twitter, December 31, 2018, Accessed March 12, 2019, https://twitter.com/rohingyablogger?lang=en.

This however has led younger members of the party, including interfaith activists, to splinter off in hopes of forming new coalitions that will accommodate the needs and desires of all people in the country.[46] Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have also actively pushed back against anti-Rohingya content by banning military officials who have a history of promoting anti-Rohingya propaganda.[47]

Regardless of these actions, as Maung Zarni stated, the majority of anti-Rohingya content online remains outside of the purview of non-Burmese speaking persons. Whereas the majority of the international community believes that past actions taken against Rohingya constitute ethnic cleansing or genocide, the domestic Myanmar population remains divided. While some sympathize with the Burmese journalists who were detained for reporting on the Rohingya crisis, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, others believe that their arrest was justified.[48] In fact, Rohingya supporters in metropolitan cities like Yangon tend to avoid discussions surrounding Rakhine State due to the sensitive political climate that has successfully framed Rohingya as illegal Bengali terrorists.[49]

While international civil society cares about Rohingya issues, it cannot address the problem at its root if it fails to acknowledge the context for more nuanced anti-Rohingya sentiments and political views, especially those expressed in Burmese and in non-traditional spaces like social media. While it is a critical task to identify and prosecute state officials who are responsible for human rights violations, advocates must continue working to combat false, deceptive, and hurtful narratives that negate the humanity of the Rohingya. These are often tied to the broader Global North Islamophobic rhetoric seen around the world.

Means of accomplishing the aforementioned goals and establishing a broader base of support include Rohingya domestic and international civil society allying with other ethnic minority groups in Myanmar and the global Muslim community. Groups like the U.S. Campaign for Burma, Burma Link, and others coalesce information regarding the structural and physical violence facing ethnic minorities in Myanmar. Coordinating with these groups, alongside organizations dedicated to advancing the rights of ethnic minorities in Myanmar, Rohingya civil society would more effectively wield the cultural capital of human rights-focused international organizations and international governing bodies to place pressure on Myanmar's government, foreign governments, and companies

[46] Ben Dunant, "Myanmar Democracy Activists Break Ranks With NLD Party," Voice of America- East Asia, Accessed March 12, 2019, https://www.voanews.com/a/myanmar-democracy-activists-break-ranks-with-nld-party/4460354.html.
[47] Paul Mozur, "A Genocide Incited on Facebook, With Posts From Myanmar's Military," The New York Times, Accessed March 31, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/15/technology/myanmar-facebook-genocide.html.
[48] Aye Min Thant and Naing Shoon, "Myanmar Court Jails Reuters Reporters for Seven Years in Landmark Secrets Case," Reuters, September 3, 2018, Accessed March 12, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-journalists/myanmar-court-jails-reuters-reporters-for-seven-years-in-landmark-secrets-case-idUSKCN1LJ09E.
[49] Than Toe Aung, "Neo-Colonialism and Anti-Rohingya Sentiments in Burma," E-mail interview by author, October 25, 2018.

that engage in practices that violate global human rights standards.

Tapping into the global Muslim community is an additional means for Rohingya civil society to coalition-build especially regarding information sharing and demonstrating spiritual and financial solidarity, like the act of giving Zakat.[50] Additionally, a significant Rohingya diaspora is forming as refugees are forced to flee to Muslim-majority areas in the Gulf, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. It is plausible that Rohingya civil society could leverage influence in their new countries of residence to take action against Naypyidaw. More likely, Islam could be used as means of enculturating Rohingya into their new communities as they wait for governing bodies to take action against the state for its human rights abuses. Until then, Rohingya civil society continues to command social media as a weapon to combat Rohingya's erasure from Myanmar and global history.

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[50] "Zakat," Islamic Relief USA, Accessed May 20, 2019, http://irusa.org/zakat/?gclid=EAIaIQob-ChMI1Z7t4KSq4gIVhkGGCh1YzwyFEAAYASAAEgLDgPD_BwE; "The Rohingya Need Our Help," Zakat Foundation of America, Accessed May 20, 2019, https://www.zakat.org/en/rohing-ya-need-help/. Islamic Relief USA and Zakat Foundation for America have provided resources for Muslims to give Zakat, an obligatory alms-giving during Ramadan, to support Rohingya living in refugee camps.