

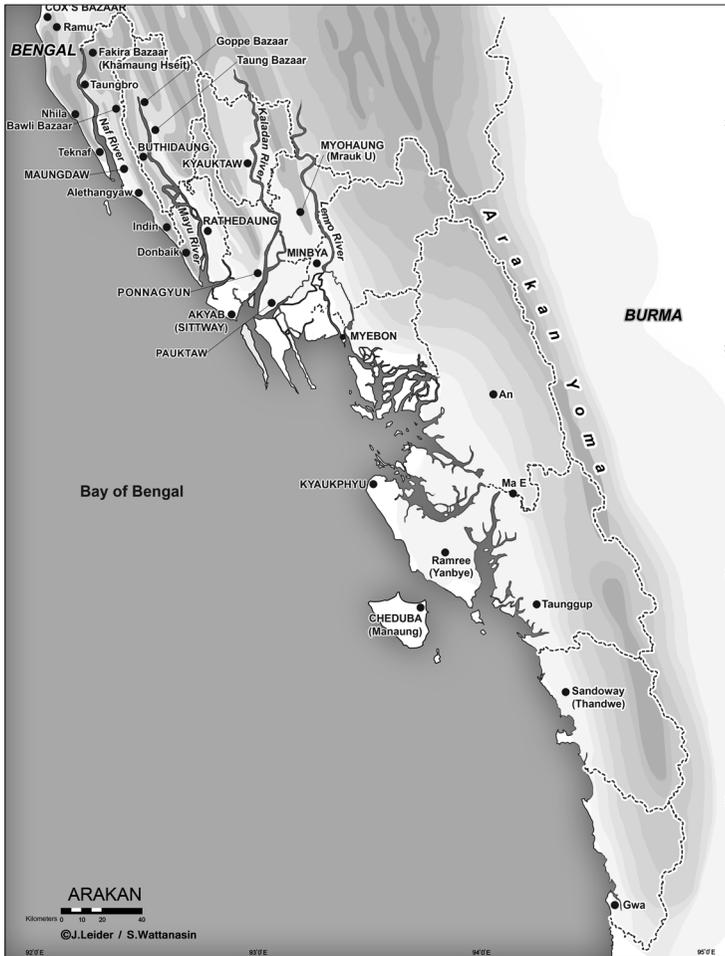
Violence and Belonging: Conflict, War, and Insecurity in Arakan, 1942–1952

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The decade from 1942 to 1952 was a period of abrupt political and social change in Burma's province of Arakan (Rakhine since 1982).¹ Power and political agency shifted and were redistributed in a context of warfare, transition from colonization to independence, and struggles for autonomy. Devastation, bloodshed, and rampant poverty were features of this troubled period where regionally dominant Buddhist and Muslim populations went through a process of increased self-awareness and a reshaping of ethnohistorical identification. The present chapter, a contribution to this volume on identity formation in Southeast Asia, looks at the interaction of multiple forms of violence with the consolidation of belonging.² Violence and belonging were underpinned by the politics of community formation which persisted and hardened during the following decades, engendering new intercommunal strife.

The significance of investing in research on Burma's pre-1962 period of early independence calls for a word of explanation. While anthropological research on the borderlands, often generated by development studies, has been flourishing, the history of Myanmar's territorial periphery is still poorly understood (Sadan 2018). The neglect is linked to the unequal development of ethnohistorical studies on and in Myanmar due to recent political conditions and habits of state-centric framing of political history. Knowledge-production on ethnically denominated states remains mostly organized within constitutional, legal, developmental, and transnational approaches highlighting issues of state-minority discontent.

This chapter aims to fill a gap in our current knowledge on the conflict etiology in late colonial and early postcolonial Arakan. It demonstrates a hierarchy of interacting levels of violence, including communal riots, civil violence involving political groups, warfare, and coercive as well as oppressive state policies. It is organized in three parts.



caption please

The first part presents the thematic, methodological, and conceptual framework. The second part describes three arenas of conflict: the Buddhist-Muslim riots and ethnic cleansing during Britain's war with Japan (1942–44), the anticolonial struggle of the Rakhine and the Nationalist-Communist revolt led by U Seinda (1942–49), and, finally, the early phase of the insurgency of the Mujahids and the struggle for an autonomous Muslim state (1946–52). The rather better-known regional theater of war between Japan and the Allied Forces is not part of the investigation but forms the background, contextualizing the situation of the people within the region. These empirical data do not aggregate as a comprehensive narrative of the period but prioritize those elements which

sustain the chapter's main argument. This is discussed in part three, where I contend that the experience of war and ongoing violence and insecurity after the war hastened a process of self-identification and belonging because they entrenched a hostile set-up between competing parties—Buddhists, Muslim communities, and the state—that was grounded in conflicting territorial stakes, rival elite interests, and an emotional regime of lingering fear and resentment. The most recent cycle of violence, which followed the outbreak of communal riots in Rakhine State in 2012, culminated in the mass exodus of several hundred thousand Muslim Rohingyas in 2017 and led to accusations of genocide. It generated an avalanche of humanitarian and human rights reports sidelining the complexity of the historical background. The present chapter aims at filling a gap by detailing some of the historical roots of contemporary developments. It also throws light on domestic actors and their profile some eight decades ago. On the one hand, there were the majority Arakanese (or Rakhine) Buddhists who acted politically in line with regional differentiations and traditional interests. On the other hand, there were the Muslims who were a historically stratified community with roots in Bengal and who were differentiated by the level of their social integration in the majority society. In 1942, 80 percent of the Muslims descended from the successive waves of colonial migrants who had settled in North Arakan since the 1850s, known as Chittagonians. The political endeavor of the Chittagonian elite to reidentify and merge with the older local Muslim identities was at the heart of the dynamics which propelled the Rohingya movement in the 1950s.

Exploring a Distressing Decade and the Impact of Violence

The multiple stories of Arakan from 1942 to 1952 have largely remained untold. The colonial order collapsed with the Japanese invasion, uncertainty took over and endured, while threats and coercion did not fade away when the tide of war ebbed. Radically new opportunities emerged for the people of Burma with the prospect of liberation from foreign rule. The birth of two nation-states, Pakistan (1947) and the Union of Burma (1948), meant a “tectonic shift” for people in Arakan as it neatly divided an area of fluid transitions across the Naf River into a borderland of ethnicized domestic conflict.³

Violence, as is often signified in introductions to the subject, is loathed by mankind. Yet, when it is in the right cause, namely when it is perceived as justified in the name of principles, can obtain collective approval.⁴ During the ten years under examination, violence in Arakan became normalized and spread

as a mode of political action, an “action resource” available in various forms and accessible to nearly everyone (Baberowski 2015, 17). What violence does to the bodies and can do to the hearts and minds of people has been extensively studied. Jörg Baberowski has invoked this transformative power of violence: “One enters a space of violence and experiences that nothing is like it was.... Violence changes everything and someone who has been exposed to violence will be a different person. The experience of violence is like a trip into a new world where other rules are valid and other people live” (ibid., my translation).

The present chapter argues that the traumatic experience of violence and turmoil strengthened existing and emerging *patterns of political and ethnic self-identification* among Buddhists and Muslims of Arakan and contributed to the rise of competing subnationalisms in the 1950s. It puts forward this argument by a description of connected arenas of violent action and the presentation of the dynamics of violence. New forms of organizational mobilization conditioned by the outbreak of war were prolonged by latent insecurity after World War II. Arms and ammunition were easily available. When independence loomed, “centrifugal ideologization” by ethnocentrism, nationalism or/and communism soon took apart what the anticolonial struggle had, to a certain extent, temporarily united (Malešević 2010, 8–15). However, the national or universal claim of ideological garb alone cannot account for the links between violence and belonging. By drawing on two analytical frames—territory and emotion—two important elements in the formation of political communities, I contend that the local dynamics of violence led to an increased sense of belonging among the people living in Arakan. Belonging marks both a claim of ownership, such as the possession of the land, and an expression of emotional attachment. It can be evoked with reference to textual and material evidence and is grounded in ideational claims of historical and cultural embedding. By choosing “belonging,” an admittedly soft expression when investigating the roots of violence-prone nationalism, this chapter heeds Frederick Cooper’s call for “more differentiated analytical language” when dealing with identity, this “hopelessly ambiguous” and “all-purpose” term (2005, 62, 76). By doing so, I also try to go beyond the terminology swirling around ethnic identities, such as “Rakhine” or “Rohingya,” reified in the contemporary activist jargon in an ahistorical use. “Belonging” appears also as a sufficiently broad term to hew as close as possible to what the fuzziness of the archive reveals or hides.

In the section on conflict arenas, I deal with three distinct “micro-theaters” of violence. The first one includes both the Rakhine Buddhist attacks driving Muslims out of Central Arakan in early 1942 and the ethnic cleansing of Buddhists by Muslims in North Arakan. In the second one, which concerns

Central and South Arakan from 1945 to 1948, I describe the simmering conflict and outbreaks of confrontation between the British administrators and Rakhine nationalists. The third one features the early phase of a Muslim insurrection which roiled North Arakan for over a decade and began when Burma's independence loomed and British oversight waned.

Ethnic Cleansing and Territorial Division

Starting on March 28, 1942, as sources seem to agree, Rakhine Buddhist villagers violently attacked their Muslim neighbors, set their houses on fire, destroyed their mosques, seized their cattle, and forced them to leave their villages in Minbya and Myebon townships in Central Arakan (Murray 1942; Merrells 1943). Many died and thousands fled North to Muslim-majority areas and into Bengal. What circumstances released this wave of communal violence which spilled over into surrounding townships (Pauktaw, Myohaung, Kyauktaw) during the next months? Making firm statements is hampered by a lack of primary accounts and the hegemony of ethnoracial interpretations hovering over the reconstruction of events (Leider 2017).

Violence also broke out in April 1942 in the townships of Maungdaw and Buthidaung in North Arakan, where Muslims dominated. But here the violence was directed against members of the Rakhine Buddhist minority who fled south and took a more organized character in May after several thousand Rakhine had already been evacuated by British troops from Maungdaw town. Buddhists remaining in the countryside were ejected by the local Muslim leaders who took possession of the land abandoned by the evacuees and divided up administrative control over the township: "In the area nearest the Indian border, the Maungdaw Township down to near Foul Point and the Buthidaung Township to about 20 miles south of Buthidaung, the Maghs [Rakhine] were killed or driven out (except for small groups in Maungdaw and Buthidaung towns, which had always been predominantly Magh); all Buddhist buildings, pagodas and monasteries, were razed or burnt, all Magh villages burnt and all Magh property (mainly cattle) seized" (Murray 1942; Merrell 1943; Mole 2001, 169).⁵

Writing nearly thirty years later, Moshe Yegar combined the two outbreaks of violence: "[T]he refugees reaching Maungdaw incensed the local Muslim majority with their stories, and the latter began to mete out similar punishment upon the Buddhist minority in their midst. These acts of mutual murder soon

caused the Buddhist population in northern Arakan to flee, even as the Muslims had fled from the south” (Yegar 1972, 95).

Nonetheless, the rationalization of anti-Buddhist violence as a retaliatory campaign, however arguable, cannot be traced to contemporary observers. Peter Murray, commissioned with the Military Administration of North Arakan in 1943, wrote that “the area of mixed population was the scene of repeated large-scale massacres in which many thousands of people perished or died subsequently of starvation and exposure” (Murray 1949). Bertie Pearn noted that “in April 1942, Akyab district was the scene of civil war, in which unknown numbers were slaughtered and many perished of starvation and exposure in attempting to find refuge elsewhere” (Pearn 1952).⁶ While some correlation between the brutal events is undeniable, communal tensions surely existed *previously* in *both* areas. Still, how can we make sense of the outbreak of atrocities without following colonial explanations of tribalism or treating actors just in ethnoreligious terms? I look at Randall Collins’ theory of violence as particularly apt to provide a point of departure for an alternative enquiry. He characterizes violence as a “situational process ... shaped by an emotional field of tension and fear” and invites us to reflect on situational dynamics at the micro-level (Collins, 2008, 19). This approach allows us to look at situational processes which were simultaneously determined by the same macro-circumstances: the socioeconomic conditions of the colonial regime and the outbreak of war.

After aerial attacks in December 1941, Burma was invaded by Japan in January 1942. The rapid progress of Japan’s military forces led to the evacuation of Rangoon on March 7, the retreat of the British army, the mass flight of the Indian urban population (estimated at over 400,000 of the more than one million Indians in Burma) and the collapse of the colonial administration (see Tinker 1975, 1–15; Leider 2017, 207–8). These events affected Arakan, a region geographically isolated from Burma’s central Irrawaddy valley, with immediate effect. Following the bombing of Akyab, the provincial capital on March 23–27, the British Commissioner Abigail left on March 30, leaving the administration to local officers. The progress of the Japanese was supported by an initially small troop of nationalist Burmese who had undergone military training, the Burma Independence Army (BIA). Many Burmese and Rakhine alike wished for freedom from colonial rule.

Burmese nationalism was strongly anti-Indian, and many Indians in Burma were terrified. They were despised as economic rivals and tools of imperial control. They were not only central actors in the colonial economy and urban society but also occupied many administrative and judicial positions. However,

in comparison with central Burma, the situation in rural Arakan was different. Between 1860 and the 1930s, Muslim cultivators from Chittagong district in East Bengal had settled in great numbers in North Arakan. At first reluctantly, but increasingly attracted by favorable conditions to transform wastelands into ricefields, they moved into the northern Mayu valley. As settlers moved further south, they entered Buddhist majority areas and mixed with ancient, yet smaller Muslim communities. This settlement migration was not systematically recorded by the colonial administration at the time it took place. Rather, annual reports mentioned the more visible seasonal migration of Chittagonians which sustained the yearly cycle of harvesting. Only in the 1921 and 1931 census reports did the colonial administration start to differentiate the two main resident Muslim groups by ethnohistorical criteria—Chittagonians and Arakanese Mahomedans (for a detailed analysis, see Leider 2020).

While seasonal migration was uncontroversial, the rapid growth of Chittagonian settlements created social tensions which impacted the situational dynamics in March 1942. The tensions were passed over in official documents before the war but explicitly mentioned afterwards. Noting that “it is not surprising that the Arakanese should feel that they were being driven out of their own homeland,” Pearn talks about “unavoidable” communal tensions which appeared to him like an innate quality of communal relations. He writes: “The tension found its expression in 1938” during the anti-Muslim rioting and “the collapse of authority in 1942 ... gave an opportunity for this friction to express itself once more” (Pearn 1952). An impression of unmanageable tribalism is also conveyed by Murray’s description of the Arakanese as the “hereditary enemies” of the North Arakan Muslims (Murray [1980]).

Myanmar historians have commonly blamed colonial rule for ethnic divisions and mistrust. So does Rakhine historian Than Than Oo, who links mistrust and the *outbreak* of violence to a mix of panic and uncertainty, with rumors about hordes of Indians fleeing from Burma, real and imagined threats linked to the move of armed troops, and a rush on both sides of the divide to obtain arms (Than Than Oo 1992, 46–48).

A pattern of antagonistic confrontation was undoubtedly in place and, to follow Collins’ theory, a sudden break in the solidarity of latent fear and tensions among the numerically dominant Buddhist community was very likely, allowing a splinter group to take the initiative, unleash a herd-like behavior, and do real harm (Collins, 2008, 8). The initial event, it seems, was the killing of the village headman of Rakchaung and his younger brothers in Minbya township (Aye Chan 2005; Yu Yu Aung 1999, 38).⁷ This was a township with a Buddhist majority of at least 85 percent, but its population increase since the 1920s and

the marked increase of the Chittagonian minority could have led to competition for agricultural land and explain rising frictions. Other elements, such as information circulating about earlier anti-Indian riots and gendered factors such as the temporary presence of mostly young male seasonal labor, may have had an impact.

Virulent anti-Muslim violence in 1942 took place in the townships of Minbya, Myebon, Pauktaw, Myohaung, and Kyauktaw. Except for the township of Kyauktaw where Muslims formed one-third of the total population since at least the late nineteenth century, Muslims formed an average of just 14 percent in the four other townships in the 1930s and probably numbered around 60,000 in 1942.⁸ Communal violence was highly contagious and easily reignited in the shadow of the war between British and Japanese troops from late 1942 to 1943.

In an internal note of November 10, 1942, Raibeart MacDougall, the Counsellor of the Governor of Burma in exile, noticed “expulsion of minorities in both cases now an accomplished fact.” The main impact of the explosive violence was the large-scale exodus from local populations rather than the number of killed, effectively dividing the territory into an exclusive northern Muslim zone mostly under British military control, and a southern Buddhist majority zone under the Japanese.⁹ Colonel Phelips, the military administrator of North Arakan, maintained that “massacres of Muslims by Buddhists [had been] exaggerated” [MacDougall 1942]. But anti-Muslim aggressions seem to have continued in Kyauktaw township until at least June 1942 (Merrells 1943). Many Muslims risked death from starvation, such as “30,000 ... refugees” who failed to cross into Maungdaw township in mid-June 1942 when the Japanese in Buthidaung blocked the road toward Bengal [MacDougall 1942]. Venerable Pinyathiha, a community leader, allegedly intervened in favor of a “conflict-free” departure of Chittagonian villagers. British authorities later put him on the list of people connected to the forceful expulsion of Muslims (Duckett 2019, 163).

In the north, the systematic expulsion of an estimated 40,000 Buddhists was organized by Peace Committees whose leaders confiscated and redistributed the agricultural lands of the evicted in order to generate tax income.¹⁰ The British condoned these frauds. It was seemingly the price paid for enlisting local Muslims for V-Force, a special troop formed to collect intelligence along the frontline.¹¹ During the war against Japan, the British saw the Rakhine Buddhists as traitors and praised the loyalty of the Muslims. During the Allied Forces’ First Arakan Campaign (December 1942–May 1943), “most of the villages on the West bank of the Mayu River [Rathedaung township] were burnt and destroyed” by Chittagonian V Force members and the population went into hiding in the jungle. Once the British had to leave, Buddhist Rakhine took

their revenge against the Muslims remaining in Central Arakan: “The Indians in the Kaladan have had a bad time and another lot of them around the mouth of the Pi Chaung were slaughtered.... They estimate that out of 40–50,000 about 5–8,000 are now left. Their cattle have been stolen and they have had to pay ransom” (Burnside 1944). The consequences of the mutual ethnic cleansing were buried by the sequence of immediate events of the war between the Allied Forces and the Japanese. But competing Buddhist and Muslim narratives of grief and victimhood formed a layer of constructed memories emerging in later decades. Their propagandistic use, alleging for example an attempted extermination, seems misguided, because violence was less nihilistic—about killing—than opportunistic—about reterritorializing economic and political interests, as I will argue below.

Social and Political Contestation in Central Arakan, 1945–48

The three-year period from Arakan’s reconquest by the Allied Forces in January 1945 to Burma’s independence on January 4, 1948, was a restless contest between Buddhist leftist actors and the British administration reestablished in Central and South Arakan. The Burmese community, the paramilitary, and party leaders eagerly wished for Burma’s independence but were divided over how to achieve it. Communist practices and ideas enjoying increasing popularity provoked ideological militancy and division.

U Pinyathiha, a leader who had joined the anti-Japanese struggle early on, rallied the unity call of General Aung San and the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League (AFPEL) for ethnic cooperation launched at the Panglong Meeting in February 1947. Aung San had built his anti-fascist alliance into the dominant political force and successfully pushed for negotiating independence, thus paving the political transition toward Burma’s freedom (Tinker 1986, 473–74). But he was unable to convince Arakan’s entire political class. A nationalist minority among tradition-minded urban and leftist rural Rakhine fancied Arakan’s independence, although the region suffered from dismal destitution and widespread insecurity. A faction led by U Seinda, another respected monastic leader within the anti-Japanese front, combined a call for independence arms in hand with radical political dissent. The monk’s efforts to unseat the British authorities in Arakan together with the outlawed Red Flag Communists met ruthless British repression. I highlight U Seinda’s revolt because it was significant for the political community formation in Rakhine,

turning its population against colonial rule as much as the prospect of a centrist Burmese state ruling over Arakan.¹²

In the war against the Japanese, after the failure of the First Arakan Campaign, British troops regained control over North Arakan only in January 1944. Their next attempt to take foot further south started in late 1944, after beating back the Japanese at Kohima in what is today Nagaland (Northeast India). The attack against Akyab was launched on November 8 and the invasion made good progress in December 1944 and January 1945, thanks to the cooperation with Rakhine rebels trained in India by British special forces called Operation Billet of Force 136 (Duckett 2019, 151–64). Parachuted with wireless telegraphs into Japanese-held territory to guide aerial attacks, they helped in building a communications network from July 1944. Yet, these men were often former members of the village-based Arakanese Defence Force, which had been recognized by the Japanese as a paramilitary formation called Rakhine Youth Home Guard.¹³ The British might, therefore, doubt their loyalty and, indeed, the Rakhine mix of opportunism and calculation to navigate shifting interests made the Civil Affairs Service (Burma), widely known as CAS(B), suspicious. Things were complicated by the very different approach of the *army*. CAS(B) administrators were former members of the Indian Civil Service (ICS), Burma Civil Service (BCS), or the police, keen to arrest suspects known for anti-British activities. Their view ran across the hands-on approach of Force 136 officers, who pushed for temporarily arming the anti-fascist resistance which it saw as an asset against the Japanese in Burma. After the end of the war, when Governor Dorman-Smith returned from exile in October 1945 to restore civil government, a wave of arrests of Rakhine rebels antagonized the population.

U Seinda, blacklisted as anti-British, went into hiding when CAS(B) administrators clamped down on underground leaders in February 1945. His role became more significant when other leaders, among them U Pinyathiha, U Kra Hla Aung, and U Kyaw Mya, were lured to Calcutta under the pretense of political discussions (Kyaw Mya 1946, 14–15) and prevented from returning to Arakan for two months. Another monk, U Narada, was thrown into prison until December 1945 without clear reasons, while the search for hidden weapons often led to excessive repression (Than Than Oo 1992, 93–97). U Kyaw Mya, then General Secretary of the AFPFL in Arakan, writes that the village of Kra In Daung, U Seinda's place of residence, was encircled in May 1945, and although no weapons were found 84 men between the ages of 18 and 70 were herded like cattle to the police station in Myebon where they were kept under duress and barely fed for seventeen days (Kyaw Mya 1946, 93–97). The leaders who returned from Calcutta in late April 1945 immediately tried to calm the

explosive situation and negotiated the liberation of the imprisoned rebels. U Seinda, on the other hand, sent a delegation to Aung San in Rangoon, arguing that the rebels had to stay underground with their arms to face the British if needed. The monk himself stayed in hiding because CAS(B) refused to soften its strict position on his case.

Developments in Arakan took place in conjunction with Aung San's struggle for the creation of a Burmese army and his party's representation at the government level. In 1946, steps were taken to integrate members of the Patriotic Burmese Forces (the renamed Burma National Army raised under Japanese rule) into the newly founded Burma Army (December 1945). But as all the men, including anti-Japanese rebels in Arakan, could not be recruited, a paramilitary formation was created, the People's Volunteer Organization (PVO, often referred to as PYT, the Pyithu Yebaw Tat) to prevent them from losing their military skills and to have them assist in the suppression of crime. The PYT units were also supposed to stand by the AFPFL buttressing law and order policies.¹⁴ While many did, others were instrumentalized by local political entrepreneurs or joined the illegal Communist Party of Burma. In September 1946, Aung San joined the Governor's Executive Council. With the negotiation of the Attlee-Aung San agreement in January 1947, independence came in close sight, but still, in Arakan, hardcore opponents mistrusting the British called for *immediate* independence.

U Seinda's ideological credentials are uncertain. In a leftist revolutionary tradition, he definitely saw armed struggle as the only road to freedom from colonial rule, putting him in opposition to those influential Rakhine who supported the AFPFL and national unity. Therefore, he brought the Arakan People's Freedom League he had founded in December 1945 in close alliance with the Red Flag communists under Thakin Soe. In sum, from 1945 U Seinda was a controversial albeit popular figure, commanding a "large armed following" and described as "a thorn in the Arakanese administration flesh."¹⁵

When the administration proved unable to suppress banditry or respond to the risk of people starving because markets were not provided with goods, U Seinda exhorted farmers to refuse tax payment and to defer land rents and the repayment of loans. Setting up a parallel administration, including courts in Myebon and other townships, demonstrated the government's effective loss of authority. U Seinda's Arakan Youth League was accused of paramilitary activities and judged illegal. When strikes destabilized the whole country in September 1946, it was accused of attacking police stations.¹⁶ In reaction to U Seinda's threats, Arakan's civil authorities called for a clearance operation which lasted from October 19 to November 5. Thirty villages were raided by the army

in an area covering 3000 square kilometers; eleven were burnt to the ground. Arms and ammunition were seized, but only 34 rebels were arrested, including the monk himself. The Under-Secretary of State for India and Burma, Arthur Henderson, judged the operations “pretty drastic treatment and on the face of it very difficult to justify” and called for explanations (Tinker 1983, 38–39). But Governor Hubert Rance opined that “the military operations were justified” and the “burning of villages ... legal” (Tinker 1986, 44–45). For the Rakhine, the excessive repression was outrageous, and the entire Rakhine political class advocated for the liberation of U Seinda. Those who mistrusted the AFPFL felt confirmed in their earlier suspicion because the clearance operations took place barely a month after Aung San had entered the Governor’s Executive Council. Aung Zan Wai, the Rakhine AFPFL member of the Council, took U Seinda’s defense, arguing that he was not “anti-social” but “forced into his anti-government position by indiscriminate arrests and by issue of warrants for arrest of guerillas of Force 136 and leaders arising out of misunderstanding between V Force and U Sein Da who had supported guerillas and co-operated with OSS unit of US forces” (ibid.).

Rance’s personal view was that “U Sein Da’s rising was part of an over-all scheme organized by AFPFL cum Communists against the Government.”¹⁷ These explanations only partially caught the complexity of the rebellion. On December 17, 1946, an amnesty set the monk free with the hope that he would cooperate “in the maintenance of peace and tranquility.”¹⁸ In 1947, however, the situation further deteriorated. Entire village tracts were shut off in isolation, communications were disrupted for lack of water transport, and Akyab, the regional capital, lay in ruins until its reconstruction in the early 1950s. With ubiquitous poverty, the threat of famine was endemic and made state welfare not just a matter of urgency but also legitimacy. Relief measures in September 1947, when 30,000 Rakhine were facing starvation, were caught up in lengthy negotiations about deliveries with authorities in Yangon.

Clearly U Seinda’s *resistance violence* to perceived injustice and the state’s law-sanctioned regime of *punishment* were locked in opposing logics of legitimacy. At a crucial conference in Myebon in early April 1947, U Seinda broke away from the AFPFL under the influence of a communist faction which rejected the Aung San-Attlee agreement—the agreed roadmap towards independence. When he incited another no-tax campaign, he was rearrested and imprisoned at Tharrawaddy.¹⁹ Efforts by his supporters to set him free failed.²⁰ His closest ally, Bonpauk Tha Gyaw, a famous communist rebel in his own right and only loosely connected to Burma’s communists, carried on nevertheless. Mass demonstrations were organized with revolutionary slogans, tax tickets were

burnt, police outposts went up in flames, money was collected or extorted to support the rebellion, military trucks were ambushed, village headmen threatened to stop cooperation with the authorities, and parallel courts were set up once again. In South Arakan, where the Red Guard communists dominated thanks to their presence in the delta region, public administration was brought entirely to a standstill. The lawlessness in the countryside was reinforced by strikes of village headmen and occasionally of police officer unions, too. The conclusion that the administration was rapidly becoming not just “powerless but also functionless” led the authorities to call for another military intervention.²¹ Battalions of the Chin Rifles and later the Burma Rifles, altogether 2,000 men, were sent to Arakan. The effect was limited. Larger groups of what the authorities termed “dacoits” were broken up into smaller groups. But the revolt was in no way extinguished and communist organizations affiliated with U Seinda kept a grip on the countryside until the late 1950s.

Crime was a serious problem. Statistics in 1946 and 1947 show that banditry was rampant in Arakan’s three districts. The Commissioner’s monthly reports restate, monotonously, that numbers did not represent the “true state of affairs” because many cases went unreported.²² Rebels and criminal gangs recruiting from the same pool of unemployed males were at odds with each other but sometimes indistinguishable. Acts of coercion were facilitated by the easy availability of arms and ammunition. To drive the Japanese out of Arakan, the British military had distributed arms to the Rakhine rebels, commonly known as *pyaukkya*. Guns of various sorts not returned to the authorities after the war were estimated at between 3,000 and 10,000 (Than Than Oo 1992, 93). Villages formed self-defense groups aggressively opposing the gangs but could themselves become the target of police reprisals.

The tensions and collective fear in the majority Buddhist areas of Arakan led to forms of violence which were different from those described in the preceding section. Both the state’s security forces and the rebels were structurally weak, and one may wonder why, after years of exhausting struggle, the violent chain was not broken. Collins suggests an interesting approach when he draws attention to the “audience before whom the fight is performed” becoming the “focus of emotional attention” (2008, 19). Arguably, the local administration had to prove itself to the central authorities by fulfilling its duty as a law-and-order agency as much as the leftist Rakhine organizations had to demonstrate their newly gained relevance to the rural population by their violent agitation.

Mention must be made of two types of often-violent coercion exerted by the rebels to strengthen their authority. Village headmen were targeted by the rebels as spies or as tools of the state to enforce tax payment. Venting their anger, they

went on strike, retreated to Akyab town, or went into hiding. Furthermore, young men were recruited by force to bolster rebel troops. This appears as a fuzzier form of coercion, but the enormous sympathy which U Seinda enjoyed in his home region suggests that such measures to enforce internal cohesion strengthened collective bonds rather than antagonizing the population. But our understanding of the period cannot stop at a superficial perception of U Seinda as a monastic warlord. U Seinda rose from a context of anticolonial militancy of the 1930s, and the fruits to be derived from a change of power after 1945 were not just threatened by the hegemony and the interventions of the central state. Guns were widely available, bandits roamed the countryside, and insecurity was rife, therefore creating the circumstances for perpetuating internal rivalries as well. To be sure, fighting violence with more violent means was not a recipe to increase his political capital. But U Seinda failed less because of his radicalism than his parochialism, unable to expand his struggle beyond the limits of a few townships.

Insurrection for a Muslim State in North Arakan, 1946–52

The anonymous mass of North Arakan's Muslim population, uniformly referred to as Chittagonians, entered political history with their role as auxiliaries loyally supporting the British return to Burma in late 1942–44. Their leaders distributed territory, taxed the land for income, stabilized control by swiftly ejecting the Buddhist minority, and met the needs of the military administration when prompted. After the war, they were determined to turn their political capital into state recognition and provisions for an autonomous Muslim zone. Betting on British support, they wanted North Arakan, with its Muslim majority, to be classified as a Frontier Area separated from the rest of Arakan. Yet, British wartime sympathies did not help and the civil administration turned down the request as there was no historical precedent.²³ Facing a rapidly changing situation with the imminent independence of India, Pakistan, and Burma, the imagination of North Arakan's political entrepreneurs was pulled into opposing directions: becoming part of a Muslim state under the inspiration of India's Muslim League, or investing into relations with the AFPFL, Burma's emerging powerhouse under Aung San.²⁴ The fast-track option of joining Pakistan was off the table when Pakistan's Jinnah refused to call into question the India-Burma border and raise territorial claims.²⁵ The long-term option of lobbying for an exclusive Muslim zone was ultimately successful with the creation of the Mayu Frontier Administration in 1961 by Prime Minister U Nu. The intervening

years, however, were a period of political contestation, with the rebellion of the Muslim Mujahids under their leader Jafar Kawal leading to military campaigns, brutal repression, and increased communal resentment.²⁶

Unlike Central and South Arakan, North Arakan had been rather stable between 1945 and 1948.²⁷ The region had suffered less material war damage. Some Muslim entrepreneurs prospered during and after the war and rice harvests were sufficient despite flooding. Land taxes were paid at a stunning rate of 100 percent. These favorable conditions attracted “substantial further immigration from Chittagong.”²⁸ Smuggling of rice and cattle to East Pakistan was rife and enriched the local elite. Displeasure arose only after Pakistan’s independence in mid-1947, when a regular Burmese administration and the creation of posts along a poorly checked border threatened vested interests.

An autonomous Muslim state was not a novel idea in early 1948, as it had found a charismatic voice in Jafar Kawal, the founder of a Muslim Freedom Party in North Maungdaw in 1946 and the leader of the Mujahid Party, as the rebels called themselves. His call for *jihad* and the articulation of grievances about land that had not been returned to the Muslims and arrogant Burmese officials humiliating the local population helped to mobilize troops under the Mujahid banner from April 1948 (Yu Yu Aung 1999, 83–94). Like elsewhere, the vagaries of an uncertain future and a lingering sense of injustice sustained tensions. The early Mujahids built on an extended network of sympathizing low-level Pakistani officers in the transborder area which supported the idea of a Muslim-controlled state of North Arakan.²⁹ The question if this state would still be part of Burma is nowhere clearly addressed. The Mujahids were likely raised among those who had gained military experience during the war.³⁰ They were estimated at 2,000 in August and 3,000 in December 1948 by Pakistani observers, but sources in Burma quoted their numbers merely in the hundreds.³¹ The Mujahids did not need to shed blood to get control over the Muslim villages because the state’s effective administrative infrastructure was limited to the towns. For a living, the Mujahids perceived taxes and depended on donations, extortions, and income from smuggling.

From September to December 1948, Burmese troops led attacks in the area north of Maungdaw, Bawli Bazaar, and Taungbro, where the Mujahids held a fortified position on Maung Hnama Mountain.³² From 1949 onwards, communal violence intensified with looting and killing. The brutal interventions of the Burma Territorial Forces (*sitwundan*), a paramilitary unit of local Rakhine recruits raised to supplement regular troops, deepened the perception of a hostile state. So did air bombings and the scorching of villages during clearance operations (Yegar 1972, 98). Army offensives remained inconclusive as the

troops returned to Burma at the end of the dry season or found themselves locked up in defensive positions.³³

While this situation might have generated greater Muslim solidarity, factionalism soon took over. Mujahid activities in the Buthidaung area were run by Kassim, a warlord, who pushed against the northern leaders Abdul Hussein and Abdul Rashid after Jafar Kawal was killed in 1950 (see Yegar 2002, 83–94).³⁴ Kassim's men famously hoisted Pakistan's flag, wore green uniforms, and branded the slogan "Pakistan Zindabad." Mujahids moved at ease across the border with the collusion of local Pakistani officers, and maintained headquarters in East Pakistan despite the fact that their activities received no official encouragement from the government in Karachi.³⁵ The Burmese operations in late 1948 and 1949 led to a mass flight of several thousand people to East Pakistan, many finding refuge with relatives, others being hosted in camps.³⁶ Reports by diplomats, journalists, and military personnel present a state-centered perspective of the Mujahid rebellion with rebels, soldiers, and the governments as main actors. They say very little about the communal antagonism which thrived, with acts of looting and killing when one of the contending parties saw itself in a position of marginal superiority. In late 1949, a Central Arakanese Muslim Refugee Organization, which had been formed across the border, accused the "unruly forces of North Arakan" of disobeying their government and castigated an "extremist Arakanese Leadership" planning "to wipe out the Rawangyas (Arakan Muslims)."³⁷ The military balance changed only after 1952 when the Burmese army improved its grip on the security situation throughout Burma.

While it is difficult to disentangle political factions before 1960, what united Muslim rebels and Muslim parliamentarians was a set of core objectives. One was the recognition of a Muslim ethnicity, increasingly associated with the name "Rwangya/Rawangya" or "Roewhengya," precursors of "Rohingya."³⁸ The other objectives were Muslim autonomy to manage their religious, social, educational, and cultural affairs, the introduction of Islamic law, and the use of Urdu as the sole medium of instruction in schools.

To be sure, not every protester was a militant bending toward Pakistan. Still, culture and the colonial migrant past of many projected a uniform impression of North Arakan Muslims. The Jamiat ul-Ulama (Council of Religious Scholars) in Maungdaw, claiming to speak "on behalf of the people of North Arakan," had pleaded with the British for the "frontier state" status in 1947 while, a year later, it appealed to Prime Minister U Nu for the creation of an autonomous Muslim area.³⁹ Both politically and socially, the population and its leaders were engulfed in a process of rapid and contradictory change animated by opportunities,

ideologies, and collective moods. While the Jamiat was domestically perceived as the civil face of the separatists, it suffered internal divisions that are reflected in paths chosen by its members. Abdul Ghafar from Buthidaung, an elected member of the Constituent Assembly (1947), maintained that Muslims in Arakan were an indigenous population rather than a recent migrant community. He became one of the leading lights of the Rohingya movement in the 1950s fighting for the recognition of an indigenous Muslim ethnicity. On the other hand, Omra Meah, who had led the expulsion of the Buddhist population in 1942 as chief of the Maungdaw Central Peace Committee, became one of the underground Mujahid leaders.⁴⁰ Political versatility is salient in the life of the region's best-known politician, Sultan Ahmed. He became the Parliamentary private secretary of U Aung Zan Wai, the Minister of Minorities, a Rakhine Buddhist, but was also described in a secret report from East Pakistan as a Mujahid leader (Niblett 1948).

Like the rebellions further south, the organized violence of the early Mujahid insurrection remained territorially limited. Despite brief contacts between Kassim, the Muslim warlord, and U Seinda, the rebellious monk, cooperation between Buddhist leftists and Muslim rebels did not materialize. Until 1951 Mujahid attacks against Burmese infantry and naval craft dominated the timeline of events in North Arakan. The Burmese army led annual military campaigns deploying land, sea, and air forces, but gained ground only after 1951. Meanwhile, the organized robbery of Kassim's Mujahids hurt Muslim civil society (Yu Yu Aung 1999, 88; Yegar 1972, 96).

Territory, Emotion, and the Perpetuation of Conflict

Territoriality matters and it does so in various ways. Territorial stakes were at the center of the three conflict arenas. As a frame to review events of the 1942–52 decade, territory has a strong explanatory potential. From 1942 to 1945 Arakan was frontline in the confrontation between Japanese and British forces and a theater of military confrontation. After the British reoccupation in early 1945, the region turned into a troubled margin at Burma's western periphery. Even after independence on January 4, 1948, it remained out of government control due to local rebellions. The situation worsened and Arakan found itself further divided, first by the impact of nationwide rebellions against the central state and, second, by the communal conflict between a dominant Muslim population of migrant origins in the north not welcoming the Buddhists who had become a minority. While "Arakan" was validated as a geographically, administratively,

and historically meaningful spatial entity, and has remained so until today, the unity of the territory had imploded. With independence, Arakan was free of the British and Japanese but perceived by Buddhist Rakhine as territorially diminished due to the loss of North Arakan to the Chittagonian migrants. Before the British (1826), older acculturated Muslim communities who had lived along the rivers and the coast for centuries had never demographically dominated a *single* area.

The leadership of the North Arakan Muslims, not an entirely homogenous community due to the stratified pattern of migrant settlements mixed with older communities, did not want to lose the territory that Muslims farmed as landowners. The Buddhist areas were torn between opposing forces, those keeping Arakan within the Union, be it in cooperation with the AFPFL Union government or the Burmese communists' nationwide struggle, and a parochial drive to rebuild Arakan with the strength of its own people and a yet-to-be defined project of independence or autonomy entertained both by local leftists and conservative urbanites.

Territoriality, however, is more than a physical expression.⁴¹ Territorial brokenness was not commensurate with the way that territories and their nexus with the resident population were imagined both culturally and politically. The kingdom of Arakan was twice the size of the eponymous colonial division, including parts of southeast Bengal, and since its decline in the late seventeenth century its history had been a story of territorial diminishing. Arakan imagined by Buddhist Rakhine was both significant as a site of historical belonging and ambiguous in its geographical and cultural configuration, alluring yet with borders undefined. Was Arakan the land that the Rakhine could possibly control because they formed a majority? Was it a land to be reconquered? Or was it a wider cultural space where people who identified as Rakhine lived? Remember that pockets of Rakhine people lived far away in Tripura and Bengal's Cox' Bazaar, Sunderbunds, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts. They had migrated there in the late eighteenth century due to the political anarchy in their homeland and after the Burmese conquest in 1784. A similar disparity existed regarding centers of political mobilization. There was an unequivocal Buddhist focus on the former royal capital of Mrauk U (colonial Myohaung), which had seen a restoration of several of its ancient temples since the 1920s. But the headquarters of U Seinda was not the venerated Myohaung but the rural outback of Minbya. Nor did Rakhine nationalists gain access to or even voice their claims from Akyab (Sittway), the commercial and administrative center, evenly populated by Buddhists and Muslims. South Arakan, as shown above, was drawn politically toward Lower Burma.

In North Arakan similar incongruence existed. Its Muslim masses developed into a community of purpose, united by the minimal goal of cultural autonomy but divided on the means of gaining political autonomy. History became an important reference point, but the territory where North Arakan Muslims lived was different from the territory conjured in the political imagination of the emerging Rohingya movement. Like the Rakhine Buddhists, Muslim historical references pointed to the memory of the old royal capital and the ruins of a single mosque associated with an early presence of Muslims. It is important to be aware of the discontinuities of imagined communities of the past and the way they mapped their identities on the territory to understand the later confrontational discussions about historical legitimacy between Rohingya and Rakhine elites in the 1990s. It is because territory was divided, contested, redistributed, and reimagined that territoriality was driving longing and belonging.

Emotion matters, too. It is a political factor and not an accoutrement (Jasper 2006). Fear and collective tension have been named as conditions in the outbreak of violence. The enthusiasm among Buddhist and Muslim leaders is a transversal theme pervading rival causes. Shame may have prevented much talk about the mutual ethnic cleansing in 1942, but traumatic experiences surely impacted identifications (see Leider 2017). The territorial differentials were inescapably linked to emotional regimes of frustration. Frustration, resulting from the gap between expectation and full-blown anger, was also the dominant mood in the years following the violent decade. Differences and their perception were strengthened as political, territorial, and cultural aspirations of communal and state leaders clashed. The Rakhine in the center fought for an autonomous, ethnically denominated state; southern Rakhine was reluctant about such a project and in North Arakan, the emerging Rohingya movement, dreading Rakhine oversight, lobbied for an autonomous Muslim area at all costs and ethnic state recognition.

Seeds of discord having jumped during the violent decade came to fruition when a semblance of order settled in the 1950s. It was poisonous resentment, bitterness, pain, regret, and nostalgia that were driving the increasing bonding of Rakhine on the one hand and North Arakan Muslims on the other. The emotional call for North Arakan Muslims to self-identify as Rohingyas mobilized the younger generation long before the movement became ideologized. The melting of intraethnic differences among Rakhine from various regions happened during the shared experience of resistance to the Japanese and the British. Yet, if solidarity did not entirely survive the ideological conflicts after 1946, ethnic belonging became more deeply entrenched.

Conclusion

The politics of the decade 1942–52 were extremely confusing as the description of the three conflict arenas has shown. Individual and communal belongings newly emerged or were reshaped by a myriad of pressures, challenges, and shifting loyalties. With kinds and causes of violence often lacking clear-cut lines of conflict, we must step back and refrain from adjudicating blame and reduce complexity to a simple frame of victims and perpetrators. The overlapping waves of ethnic cleansing in 1942 had likely resulted from years of frustration and competing elite ambitions which were ignored by the colonial state. In Central Arakan, Rakhine who had fought for freedom from any subjugation, though divided by factions, soon grew desperate after 1945 when they sensed the risk of losing their triumph to a hostile yet overstretched government. Similarly, the Mujahids saw themselves as rightful in laying claims for autonomy in a land where migrant Muslims had settled for decades, and their struggle would then deepen existing communal divisions. In all these conflict arenas, the fateful mix of violence and a sense of righteousness promoted by leading elites invariably strengthened communal links and grounded collective cohesion in emotional response and territorial claims.

Investigating Rakhine Buddhist or Rohingya Muslim nationalism and their ethnic armed organizations since the 1960s and today needs, therefore, an understanding of the violent decade. Increasing ethnic solidarity and emotion-driven mobilization outpaced the conflictual binary of pro-British Muslim versus anticolonial Rakhine of the war period. Still, the nexus of ethnicity, territorial belonging, and nationalist struggle did not lead to social homogeneity. In the twenty-first century, social and political differences persist between North and South Rakhine (as elections show) and between Muslims who alternately identify as Rakhine Muslims or Rohingyas.

Writing about contemporary Rakhine State, one is “condemned” to provide explanations for a long track record of armed rebellions, mass flights, communal riots, poverty and state dereliction, oppression, and the disenfranchisement of the Rohingyas. Global appeals behind the 2012 and 2017 mass violence in Rakhine State have grounded Rakhine’s ethnopolitical issues in Myanmar’s hyper-ethnicized politics, Islamophobia, and alleged systematic state-engineered persecution of the Muslim minority. They have favored an interpretation of the past seen in retrospect as a tragedy rather than a demonstration of their political strength, and a predication of their victimization under the military regime. This is admittedly wrong. This study shows the power and agency of multiple elite actors before the military coup of 1962, and their consequential

political choices. By looking at the events through the prisms of territoriality and emotion, a more humane understanding of the process of newly forming patterns of belonging and embedded conflicts becomes possible.

Endnotes: Violence and Belonging

1. The vernacular term *rakhuin*, transcribed as Rakhine or Rakhaing, can be traced in epigraphic witnesses since the early modern period. It is related to Pali forms such as Rakkha or Rakkhaṅga, referring to the lord of successive city-states which flourished in the Kaladan and Lemro valleys as well as its Buddhist population. Mrauk U, the capital of a kingdom which lasted from 1430 to 1784, was generally denoted as “city of Arakan” on early Western maps. Arakan, a term which has appeared in a vast array of spellings in various Western languages since the late fifteenth century, has remained a widely used name of the coastal region in English, even after its official renaming as “Rakhine State” in 1982.

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3. The Naf River forms the border between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

4. As Collins notes, “... ‘good’ violence—which is not seen as violence at all ... is not subject to analysis since it is part of normal social order” (2008, 2).

5. Mole writes that in 1943 “the entire population of this area was now Muslim” (2001, 191). According to Hayden, “Acts made to remove an ethnic or religious community from a specific territory, especially one of strategic importance,” are now commonly referred to as ethnic cleansing (2008, 504).

6. Pearn was researcher at the Foreign Office and former history lecturer at Rangoon University.

7. Than Than Oo also mentions confrontations of Rajput troops with Buddhists villagers in Myebon, and attacks by Indian Muslims against Rakhine at Sittway in March 1942 (1992, 48).

8. Muslims in these five townships numbered about 50,000 at the census of 1931 (see Bennison 1933).

9. Pockets of the Muslim population remained in the south. Merrells notes that “This division, however, was not absolute; numbers of Chittagonians, chiefly those of families settled in the Akyab District for a fairly long time, remained in Buddhist areas and were not further molested” (Merrells 1943). An Australian weekly, *The Age*, quoted Omra Meah, the Muslim chief in Maungdaw stating that 1,000 Muslims had been killed by the Buddhists (July 24, 1942). This is a low figure compared with the 100,000 routinely cited by Rohingya propaganda today (<https://www.thestateless.com/2016/09/the-muslim-massacre-of-arakan-in-1942>. Accessed November 28, 2020).

10. This is an admittedly low estimate derived from the data of the 1931 census. It presumes a population of 270,000 in Buthidaung and Maungdaw, with Buddhists forming 34 percent of the total (93,000). For descriptions of the Peace Committees, see Merrells (1943) and Murray (1942).

11. Merrells, an officer with the Military Administration, writes: “We allowed the various Peace Committees to continue their schemes of realizing rents in kind from occupants of land left vacant by refugee Arakanese cultivators” (Merrells 1943).

12. An interpretation of U Seinda’s revolt either as an expression of anti-colonialism, Rakhine nationalism, or communist insurrection is not a central concern of the present study.

13. Like the Chittagonian Muslims of V Force, the duty of Force 136 men was to collect intelligence along the front. Under Japanese rule, a training course for guerrilla warfare had been organized and a school for officer cadets was set up in Laung Gadu near Paletwa in 1943. See Than Than Oo (1992, 63–64); also Thompson and Adloff (1955, 152).

14. See, for example, intelligence report, no. 1036 from May 1946: “The ex-guerrilla Association of Akyab has been converted into a PYT with Kra Hla Aung as Deputy District Leader. He has offered his assistance in the suppression of crime to the District Superintendent of Police” (British Library, IOR M/4/2537).

15. Intelligence report, August 1946. British Library, IOR M/4/2537.

16. British Library, IOR M/4/2635.

17. Thakin Soe’s Red Flag Communists was not an illegal organization before January 1947.

18. Monthly report June 1947. British Library, IOR, M/4/2503.

19. Monthly report April 1947. National Archives, FO643-74.

20. “U Hla Tun Pru’s letter to Secretary of State for Burma presenting a memorandum on U Seinda,” June 30, 1947. British Library, IOR, M/4/2503.

21. Monthly report April 1947. National Archives, FO643-74.

22. British Library, IOR M/4/2503; M/4/2635; M/4/2655; NA, FO643/74.

23. “Submission by Jamiat ul-Ulama North Arakan to Arthur Bottomley, the under-secretary of state for Dominion Affairs, 24 February 1947,” with comments by E. N. Larmour. <http://www.networkmyanmar.org/ESW/Files/1947-Jamiat.pdf>; Yu Yu Aung (1999, 81–87).

24. A section of the Muslim League in Maungdaw became affiliated with the Muslim League of India on May 5, 1946. Contacts were probably first established in the wake of the preparations for the Constitutional Assembly whose elections took place on April 9–10, 1947.

25. Aung San met Md Ali Jinnah during a stop in Karachi on January 7, 1947, on his way to London for negotiating the path to Burma’s independence. See also Bayly and Harper (2008, 253, 293).

26. The 1950s saw also the rise of the Rohingya movement. See Leider (2018, DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.115).

27. Bengal, stricken by famine and communal riots after the war, was described as “a subcontinental version of Hell” by Bayly and Harper (2008, 243–51).

28. See Peter Murray’s comment “there has been substantial further immigration from Chittagong.” National Archives, FO371/69489; Thompson and Adloff mention “postwar illegal immigration of Chittagonians ... on a vast scale” (1955, 154). Yegar notes “The mujahideen interest in the illegal immigrants from East Pakistan was as workers who would cultivate abandoned land and grow rice on it” (2002, 45); in a message of 8 February 1947 to the Governor of Bengal, Burma’s Governor Rance mentioned “63,000 illegal entries to Buthidaung and Maungdaw.” National Archives, FO643/61/4.

29. The name Mujahid implies a religious motivation but the recurrent expression Mujahid party points to their political character.

30. National Archives, FO371/69489 6; National Archives, DO142/453.

31. Major L. H. Niblett’s report (1948) mentions “3000 volunteers.” National Archives, DO142/453. Britain’s Ambassador Bowker informed the Foreign Office that “there are perhaps 500 Muslims under arms” in his dispatch of 12 February 1949. National Archives, FO371/75660. Yu Yu Aung (1999, 44) indicates “2700” based on Myanmar army archives.

32. Yu Yu Aung provides a somewhat disparate overview of military actions (1999, 83–94).

33. A report of the British Services Mission talks about “marauding expeditions,” 15 July 1949. National Archives, FO371/75661.

34. On Kassim’s fame as a “national hero” in Pakistan, see Yegar (1972, 101).

35. Details are provided in a 1949 report by Major L. H. Niblett. National Archives, DO142/453.

36. British Embassy, Rangoon to UK High Commissioner, Karachi, 28 February 1949. National Archives, FO371/75660.

37. Central Arakanese Muslim Refugee Organisation, “Resolution No. 5 of Meeting No. 12/49.” National Archives, DO142/453.

38. There was no standard written form of the name in English until approximately 1963. Since the mid-1960s, the use of “Rohingya” in the names of eponymous armed groups has established the spelling globally in the twenty-first century. The use of various spellings between 1947 and 1963 reflects the existence of different Muslim groups claiming the term, mainly, as sources would suggest, the descendants of the precolonial Muslims on the one hand, and the descendants of the colonial migrant communities on the other.

39. “Address Presented by Jamiat Ul Ulema North Arakan on Behalf of the People of North Arakan to the Hon’ble Prime Minister of the Union of Burma ... on the 25th October 1948.” GUB, Foreign Office. <http://www.networkmyanmar.org/ESW/Files/J-U-25-October-1948.pdf>.

40. On Omra Meah as a leader of the Peace Committees and later as a member of the Jamiat ul-Ulema, see Merrells (1943, 57); Niblett (1949); Murray (1942); and “Address Presented by Jamiat Ul Ulema” (fn 39).

41. For reasons of space, the Burmese state-centric perspective cannot be treated in detail. Creating a sense of belonging to the Union by improving the commonwealth of the people in Arakan did not emerge as a state priority. More “care” meant essentially more law and order. Arakan was an administrative unit with a majority of Buddhist people culturally akin to the Burmese. The security forces played an important role after independence, the army’s main goal being the control of the border and a law-abiding obedient population.

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