Chapter 2
Myanmar's Unwanted Ethnic Minority: A History and Analysis of the Rohingya Crisis

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2.1 Introduction

At the time this chapter was submitted for publication, some 700,000 Muslims from Myanmar's western state of Rakhine (known as Arakan until 1989[1]), who refer to themselves as Rohingya, had been driven from the country and were existing in squalid refugee camps along the Bangladesh side of the border.[2] This mass exodus is mainly the result of the Myanmar army's disproportionate use of military force in response to attacks in 2016 and 2017 by the recently established militant group Harakah Al-Yaqin (Faith Movement), known in English as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). While not the first military-driven exodus of Rohingya from Rakhine, the current humanitarian crisis is linked to violence that broke out in 2012 between the Rohingya community and another Myanmar minority, the Rakhine Buddhists, the largest ethnic group in Rakhine state. The violence of 2012 was the latest chapter in a long running conflict between these two communities that first erupted during World War II (WWII) and was largely a consequence of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British colonial policies, including large-scale movements of South Asians into Myanmar. When Myanmar became independent after WWII, the conflict became triangular in nature as the two minorities felt disaffected by the new Burman-dominated government.[3] Members of both communities launched separate and mutually incompatible rebellions against the

[1] I use both Arakan and Rakhine in this chapter to refer to the geographic area of the current conflict, generally using Arakan in historical contexts.

[2] Recent data from the Bangladesh government suggests the number of Rohingya in refugee camps could be as high as one million (The Straits Times 2018).

[3] The term Burman, or Bamar, refers to Myanmar's dominant ethnic group who make up about two-thirds of the population and control the military and the government.

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central government with the Rakhine demanding an autonomous Arakan state within Myanmar and some Rohingya fighting for a separate Muslim state after failing to have the Muslim-dominated areas of Arakan included in the newly created East Pakistan.

In the parliamentary era, there were attempts to manage and resolve the conflict in Arakan and the conflict between the two ethnic groups and the central government. However, following General Ne Win's 1962 coup, management of these conflicts changed dramatically. The new military government began a "Burmanization" programme that aimed to create a politically centralized and homogeneous nation in which they attempted to assimilate Buddhist minorities, such as the Rakhine, into a Burman nationalism while striving to erode their independent histories and undermining ethnic languages. Non-Buddhist minorities were less favoured in this assimilation process, in particular the Rohingya, who because of their distinct language, ethnic and religious "otherness", and large population concentration in northern Arakan were considered a potential threat to the nation and incompatible with the military vision of the country. Over time, management of the Rakhine conflict changed in favour of the Rakhine Buddhists with the Rohingya community increasingly portrayed as foreign intruders who had no loyalty and no place in Myanmar. In order to manage the perceived Rohingya problem, the government increasingly introduced numerous discriminatory policies against them, most notably the 1982 Citizenship Law that left most of them stateless. In addition, there were periodic military actions that drove large numbers of Rohingya across the border to Bangladesh, although most later returned due to international pressure or pragmatic government policies. While the Rakhine were favoured in the conflict, its triangular nature nevertheless remained as the government continually played on Rakhine fears of a Muslim takeover in order to maintain control over both minorities and reduce the potential for Rakhine nationalism. This was evident as recently as 2010 when the military government attempted to recruit Rohingya support with false promises of citizenship in the 2010 elections in order to limit the success of Rakhine nationalist politicians. As the military became more concerned with the threat posed by Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), they came to see Rakhine nationalists as potential allies and in the build-up to the 2015 election afforded them political space to engage in political violence against the Rohingya community, which was evident from 2012. Further fuelling the ethnic conflict is Rakhine state's lack of economic development. Consistent government neglect has left the state as one of Myanmar's poorest regions, which has forced the two communities to compete for limited jobs and resources.

Much of the global media response to the violence of 2012 and the subsequent unfolding tragedy has tended to depict the conflict as one between a victimized Muslim minority and the state, often highlighting the rise of xenophobic Buddhist nationalist movements in Myanmar and denial of citizenship to the Rohingya. Other issues fundamental to understanding the conflict and its origins, incompatibilities, and complexities have often been ignored by non-specialists. These include the roles of history, ethnicity and identity, the effects of a long-standing "Burmanization"

agenda, and the triangular nature of the conflict. This chapter aims to present an understanding of the conflict in Rakhine, including the factors that have shaped it over time, its incompatibilities, and their management.

The chapter begins with an overview of the competing Buddhist-Muslim perceptions of Arakan history and identity, which form a core incompatibility in the conflict. This is followed by a historical overview of Arakan focusing specifically on Buddhist-Muslim relations from early times until its conquest by the Burmans in 1784 and the following British colonial period that was to have profound consequences for Buddhist-Muslim relations. I then turn to developments in the post-independence period, such as discriminatory actions by the government, the introduction of the 1982 Citizenship Law, the role of the "War on Terror", and the tenuous links of Rohingya militant groups to international terrorist organizations. The following section focuses on the build-up to the 2012 violence and the current crisis, including the role of international media and the international response.

2.2 History and Identity

Both Buddhists and Muslims have produced competing interpretations of Arakan history that share little common ground and simply serves to polarize the two communities by attempting to establish separate histories and identities. Most Buddhists portray Arakan and its inhabitants as having an unbroken history of Buddhism dating back about 2500 years, with some repeating myths found in Arakan chronicles that claim Gautama Buddha himself introduced the religion. Little or no attention is paid to the historical presence and influence of Muslims in Arakan's history, who are collectively portrayed as recent Bengali immigrants who arrived during the British colonial period and continued to migrate illegally to Arakan after Myanmar independence. Buddhists therefore reject the notion that the term Rohingya represents an ethnic group, which they view to be a conscious political construction created in the 1950s by Bengali immigrants in an attempt to claim legitimacy as an indigenous Myanmar ethnic group and take over their land.[4] Conversely, Muslim writers from Rakhine and some South Asian academics, mainly from Bangladesh, have set out to create a Rohingya history that denies, or at least limits, the Bengali connection.[5] This constructed history attempts to portray the Rohingya as Arakan's indigenous people and ignores the well-documented large-scale immigrations of mainly Bengalis into Arakan during the British colonial period. It further neglects the dominance of Theravada Buddhism in Arakan's history, often supplanting it with a narrative that presents Islam as the more important and influential religion, with some writers making the claim that Arakan was once a sultanate. A 2012 report

[4] See, for example, Aye Chan (2005) and Khin Maung Saw (2011).

[5] See Yunus (1994) and various short articles found on the Arakan Rohingya National Organization website, http://www.rohingya.org/~rohingya/portal/index.php/scholars.html

making the case for the Rohingya compiled by the National Democratic Party for Development (NDPD), a political party that represents Rakhine's Muslim population, states:

> Rohingya were descendants of Indo-Aryan converted to Islam in 8th century and the racial admixture of Arab (788AD–810AD) plus Persian (700AD–1500AD) plus Bengali (1400AD–1736AD) plus Mogul (1600AD). So Rohingyas is one of ethnic group of the union of Myanmar mostly living in Rakhine State and were not immigrants during the British rule.[6]

The Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP), which represents Buddhists, responded with a counter report of its own, stating that the NDPD had "fabricated history", and asserts that these "Bengalis" are "damaging Arakan people and national sovereignty" and as a solution suggests a "transfer of non-Burmese Bengali nationals to third countries".[7]

Neither of the Buddhist or Muslim narratives are objective, and both function to "define their acclaimed cultural, religious and ethnic identity" in an attempt to establish "their rights to claim the land as their own" (Leider 2015: 15). Given the importance of history and identity, the current conflict, as well as its origins and development, needs to be understood within the broader context of Arakan history and the historical experiences of both its Buddhist and Muslim communities.

2.3 Overview of Historical Buddhist-Muslim Relations in Arakan[8]

2.3.1 Arakan and Its People in the Pre-colonial Period

Although there is little known about early Arakan, archaeological data provides evidence for the existence of a kingdom dating from the early centuries of the first millennium whose rulers appear to have practised a form of Mahayana Buddhism that incorporated elements of Hinduism and ancestor cults. Located at Dhanyawadi from the fourth century before shifting to Vesali in the sixth, the kingdom appears to have been ruled by the Chandra kings with Indic influences arriving from both Bengal and parts of India (Gutman 2001; Gutman and Hudson 2004: 161–162).[9] It is possible that Arab and Persian traders came to Arakan from the eighth or ninth

[6] Cited in Leider (2015: 19).

[7] Human Rights Watch (2013a). Ardeth Maung Thawnghmung (2016) presents an analysis of the two reports.

[8] The following overview draws on objective studies.

[9] The earliest inhabitants of the Arakan region were probably various Chin groups, such as the Kam, Mro, and Sak (Daingnets) (Gutman 1976: 9), who are official Myanmar ethnic groups and continue to inhabit the region.

century but, as with other parts of Southeast Asia, there is no evidence to suggest they had any religious impact on local populations during this period.[10]

From about the ninth century, the Rakhine people arrived as part of the Tibeto-Burman migration into Myanmar and subsequently become the most numerous and dominant ethnic group in Arakan, probably mixing with earlier inhabitants. While related to the Burmans who migrated into the upper and central plains, the Rakhine developed a separate cultural identity that appears to have been a consequence of two main factors: the Indic culture they encountered upon moving into the area and importantly, Arakan's geography. Located in the western part of Myanmar, Arakan comprises of a long coastal strip that extends along the Bay of Bengal in the west. To the east, the state is bounded by the Arakan Yoma mountain range that historically served to restrict communication, movement, and contact by land with eastern parts of Myanmar. To the northwest is a historically porous land border with Bangladesh marked by the Naaf River. Through much of its history, this geography served to orientate Arakan's people to the west and facilitated a long history of interaction, competition, conflict, and people movements between Arakan and Bengal, particularly the Chittagong area. While the Bengal region largely converted to Islam in the early thirteenth century, Arakan remained Buddhist and became a crossroads where the Buddhist and Islamic worlds converged.

From the eleventh to thirteenth century, Arakan appears to have been a tributary of the Burman kingdom of Pagan, which brought increasing Theravada Buddhist influence, as reflected in its art from this period (Gutman 2001: 15). In the thirteenth century, Arakan expanded its influence into Bengal, which is where its ruler, Man Co Mwan (in some literature, Narameikhla), fled to in 1404 after his kingdom was invaded by Mons and Burmans. Stories in Arakan chronicles tell that he returned in 1430 with military assistance from the Gaur Sultan in Bengal and founded the kingdom of Mrak-U, which for a short time appears to have been nominally subject to the Bengal Sultanate.[11] Many writers attribute Man Co Mwan's return to mark the first notable permanent Muslim presence in Arakan, represented by some of the soldiers of diverse origins who are said to have settled in Arakan after aiding his return (Yegar 2002: 23; Charney 1999: 76).[12]

[10] In legendary accounts found in Arakan chronicles, the word *kala* is used in reference to rescued shipwrecked sailors who then settled in Arakan. While some (see Zaw Min Htut 2003: 11) writers have attempted to equate this with Arab settlers, the term *kala* appears problematic as it "denotes Indians in general and Muslims in particular, but more broadly foreigners from the West" (Leider 2015: 17).

[11] Van Galen (2008: 34) notes that the circumstances of Man Co Mwan's return are particularly vague and the Arakan chronicle stories are not corroborated by Bengali sources. Further, there is little evidence of any tributary status, which is unlikely to have extended beyond Man Co Mwan's short reign after his return.

[12] Some writers have attempted to estimate, or simply make up, the number of soldiers who settled in Arakan. As far as I am aware, there is no reliable data concerning numbers. It seems reasonable to suggest that a proportion of them would have been Man Co Mwan's own men who had fled to Bengal with him.

While Theravada Buddhism was the dominant religion in the Mrauk-U kingdom, Charney (1999) argues convincingly that the identity of an individual derived more from patron-client ties, kinship and ancestor cults rather than religious persuasion. This apparent indifference to religious identities can be seen in the adoption by some of Arakan's Buddhist rulers, after the reign of Man Co Mwan, of Muslim titles that were added to Buddhist ones, and the printing of coins in both Arakanese and Persian. Rather than representing any form of religious identity, these Muslim titles were used as sources of legitimacy that served to "enhance their image vis-à-vis indigenous elite families and foreign rulers" (Charney 1999: 8). There also appears to have been some fusing of Buddhist and Islamic court culture and dress styles during the Mrauk-U period and, as Lieberman (2003: 128) puts it, the Buddhist rulers had "an imaginative cultural policy that saw Mrauk-U rulers patronize Buddhist shrines while adopting trappings of Muslim sultanship".

The Buddhist kingdom of Mrak-U and the Bengali Sultanate were also rivals and came into increasing conflict as they vied for control of the flourishing Bengali port-town of Chittagong in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Arakan's development as an increasingly powerful and assertive maritime power was aided by alliances its rulers made with Portuguese mercenaries during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which were important in ensuring Arakan's influence over southeastern Bengal and control of Chittagong (Van Galen 2008: 38). Arakan's success also attracted increasing numbers of foreigners, some of whom were integrated into its military and administrative structures. In addition to Portuguese involvement, there was a small, diverse, and important Muslim population at the Arakan court made up mainly of "castaways, mercenaries, intermediary service elites" and "itinerant traders" (Charney 1999: 147), the latter of which had long been involved in Arakan's trade and competed with the Dutch and Portuguese (d'Hubert and Leider 2011: 86).

Despite the presence of Muslims since the founding of the Mrauk-U kingdom, it was not until the seventeenth century that large permanent Muslim communities appear to have developed in Arakan. These communities were comprised of Bengalis captured during slave raids by Portuguese mercenaries in collaboration with Arakan rulers (Charney 1999: 145–6). A selection process identified a small number of these slave captives who had education, status, and skills suitable for royal service in the court, where they supplemented the small number of influential Muslims already resident. Most of the captives, however, were unskilled and while the majority were sold to the Dutch East India Company or other traders, large numbers were settled in Arakan as agricultural labourers (Charney 1999: 165). Charney (1999: 165) estimates that in the course of the seventeenth century as many as 60,000 Bengali slave captives may have been settled in Arakan, and it is they who represent Arakan's first large and permanent Muslim community.

In addition to Bengali slave captives, small numbers of other Muslims settled in Arakan during the seventeenth century. These include the remnants of Shah Shuja's entourage, the Mughal prince who in 1660 sought asylum in Arakan after losing a succession conflict to his brother. Several hundreds of his men were incorporated into the Arakan royal guard as archers and became known as Kaman (Yegar 2002: 24). Unlike those who today identify as Rohingya, Kaman descendants were granted

Myanmar citizenship, although this has not spared them from recent violence.[13] Following the Mughal conquest of Chittagong in 1666, a number of Muslim mercenaries and soldiers of diverse origins who had been fighting the Mughals in Bengal found service in Arakan. The eventual loss of Chittagong to the Mughals may have been an important factor in Arakan's decline at the end of the seventeenth century and its lack of stability in the century that followed, with palace guards often installing puppet kings.

2.3.2 *Burman Conquest of Arakan*

The Burman conquest of Arakan in 1784 led to large-scale depopulation as tens of thousands of Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus were forcibly relocated to the Irrawaddy Valley region to work as labourers and agriculturalists. Many others were recruited to fight in Burma's wars against Ayuthaya and Chiang Mai. In the years that followed, there was further depopulation as thousands fled from Arakan to Chittagong in response to the manner of Burman rule. One English East India Company report written in 1800 estimates this number at about 35,000 (Charney 1999: 265). Leider (2014: 197), using other sources, estimates the number to have been as high as 80,000, both Buddhists and Muslims, perhaps representing about a third of the population. The Burmese also attempted to assimilate Arakan into Myanmar and reconstruct its history in order to legitimise Burman rule and facilitate the unification of Rakhine and Burmans (Charney 1999: 265–6). While Burman rule seems to have had limited success in terms of politics and administration, it does appear to have affected some religious change through determined attempts to impose a "Burman-defined Theravada Buddhism" (Charney 1999: 267). In order to achieve this, specially trained monks were sent to Arakan to re-ordain local monks and "standardise monastic behaviour" (Leider 2014: 192).

2.3.3 *The British Colonial Period*

In 1826, Arakan was captured in the first Anglo-Burma War (1824–1836), which was to bring a rapid repopulation.[14] A large percentage of those who fled to Chittagong appear to have returned and the British further encouraged migration to the region from Bengal in order to exploit Arakan's agricultural potential and to

[13] The 1931 British census distinguishes the Kaman from Arakan Muslims and people from Chittagong and Bengalis, recording some 2686 of their descendants living on Ranree Island, who "follow Arakanese language and customs, though they practice the Islamic religion" (Bennison 1931).

[14] Two subsequent British campaigns of 1852–1853 and 1885 led to the complete annexation of Myanmar.

provide other labour.[15] Charney (1999) has argued that it was during the period of British rule that religious communalism began to manifest in Arakan as a consequence of administrative changes that helped erode traditional patron-client ties and structures. Communal religious identities then emerged to fill the vacuum left by the traditional ties and structures, which became centred on religious leaders. At the same time, rapid repopulation created competition for resources between those who had remained during Burman rule, the returning population and new Bengali immigrants. This competition became increasingly religious in orientation and served to strengthen religious "group solidarity" (Charney 1999: Chapter 10). The emergence of modern Arakan Buddhist and Muslim identities were thus simultaneous nineteenth-century developments.

During the course of British rule, the increasingly large-scale movements of Bengalis into Arakan was a major contributing factor in the development of separate identities and was to have an important impact on Buddhist-Muslim relations. British policy further contributed to this and later tensions by favouring Bengali immigrants, who they considered to be superior cultivators and more diligent than the Arakan Buddhists. Bengali migrants were further induced to settle areas where rice fields could be opened by offering them various incentives, such as reduced taxes or short tax-free periods that were not extended to Buddhists, which led to some areas being predominantly inhabited by Muslim migrants (Charney 1999: 284–5).[16]

This large-scale movement of Bengalis into Arakan, which accelerated after the 1880s when Myanmar became a district of British India, is well documented by British reports and censuses. As the deputy assistant commissioner of Akyab in Arakan, R.B. Smart, wrote in 1917:

> Since 1879, immigration has taken place on a much larger scale, and the descendants of the slaves are resident for the most part in the Kyauktaw and Myohaung (Mrauk-U) townships. Maungdaw Township has been overrun by Chittagonian immigrants. Buthidaung is not far behind and new arrivals will be found in almost every part of the district. (Smart 1917: 90)

Smart further notes that the culture of the Bengali Muslim migrants differed from Arakan's earlier Muslim inhabitants, who he considered culturally similar to the Arakan Buddhists despite having a different religion. Reflecting British perceptions of the time, Smart viewed these earlier Muslim inhabitants as "almost as indolent and extravagant as the Araknese [Buddhists]" while the recent Chittagong immigrants were more industrious and hard working.

By 1931, British census data appears to make a distinction between the earlier Arakan Muslims and later immigrants. Out of a total population of 1,008,535, the census identifies 52,615 as Arakan Muslims, 2686 as Kaman, while Chittagong and Bengali immigrants numbered 252,152 and 65,211, respectively (Bennison 1931:

[15] Various data and estimates regarding Arakan's population and its ethnic and religious make-up at the onset of British rule are problematic and often contradictory. The first reliable data appears in later British censuses (see below).

[16] Under British rule, acreage in rice production increased from 359,000 acres in 1867 to 916,000 by 1920 (Cheng 1968: 27).

227). According to Yegar (2002: 28), the new migrants were less inclined to integrate themselves into Arakan society, created their own religious networks and institutions, and over time influenced the religious practice and culture of earlier Muslim communities.

Burman rule had left its mark on Arakan in the religious sphere, and the following British period essentially laid the foundations for future conflict by fundamentally disrupting traditional Arakan society that unconsciously created distinct and separate religious communities and by encouraging large-scale immigration. The tensions that developed during the British period came to a head during World War II.

2.3.4 Intercommunal Conflict During WWII

Following the Japanese invasion of Myanmar, most of the Muslim community in Arakan sided with the British, with whom they had built trust and loyalty, while Buddhists sided with the Japanese. Initially, the British retained control of Arakan's predominantly Muslim northern areas, while the Japanese controlled the mainly Buddhist inhabited areas in the south. In the southern areas of Arakan, most Muslims were driven out and suffered atrocities at the hands of both Japanese and Arakan Buddhists. Most fled to British areas or across the border to Chittagong. Buddhists in the north experienced similar atrocities and fled southwards, leaving Arakan increasingly divided along religious lines (Yegar 2002: 33). In 1943, Muslims experienced further atrocities when the British abandoned northern Arakan after a failed counteroffensive that allowed the Japanese and their Buddhist allies to take northern Arakan and undertake retribution against the Muslim communities (Christie 1996: 165). The intercommunal violence of WWII that followed a build-up of tensions during the British period created a major ethnic incompatibility between the two communities and rendered the prospect of them sharing the state in harmony in the period that followed unlikely.

2.4 Buddhist-Muslims Relations, Identity, and the State in the Post-Independence Period

Both the prospect and eventual reality of Myanmar independence in the post-WWII period generated further incompatibilities between Arakan's Buddhist and Muslim communities and between these communities and the state. There was to be no separate zone for Arakan's Muslim-majority areas, which its inhabitants had hoped the British would grant, but a Burman-dominated Buddhist government would instead rule these areas. This prospect gave rise to irredentist aspirations among some in the Muslim community and the creation of the North Arakan Muslim League (NAML), which called for Arakan's Muslim-majority areas to be included

in the new East Pakistan, a strategy driven largely by British colonial period immigrants rather than Arakan's earlier Muslim inhabitants (Chrisite 1996: 167–168; Yegar 2002: 35). This request was rejected by Pakistan's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and later by the Myanmar parliament, for whom it was incompatible with their vision of Myanmar. This failure, and increasing communal tensions, led to the Mujahidin rebellion against the central government, which aimed to establish an independent Muslim state for Arakan's Muslim-dominated northern areas or at least establish a political status that would be separate from Buddhist-dominated areas of Arakan.[17] Further complicating the volatile situation in Arakan at this time was that Rakhine Buddhist nationalists, largely concentrated in the south, also rebelled against the central government and demanded a "separate autonomous unit" within Myanmar (Christie 1996: 169). Despite mutual opposition to the central government, there was little common ground between the two rebel groups. A semi-autonomous Arakan state was wholly incompatible with the Mujahidin rebellion, as this would leave Muslim areas under Rakhine Buddhist majority rule. For the Rakhine, a separate Muslim state or Muslim zone was unacceptable, as this would mean losing territory they had come to perceive as a Rakhine Buddhist historical and cultural homeland to foreign intruders with a different religion.

Faced with numerous other minority rebellions upon independence, it was not until 1951 that the government was able to give serious attention to Arakan. By 1954, the Mujahidin rebellion was largely defeated, although it dragged on until 1961, and most remaining rebels turned then to smuggling rice to Bengal and other illegal activities, which included encouraging further people movements from Chittagong to Arakan to cultivate land that had been abandoned during the rebellion (Yegar 2002: 45).[18] Most of the few remaining Mujahidin rebels, numbering about 290, finally surrendered in 1961. They were provided with monetary grants by the authorities and resettled in Maungdaw in northern Arakan. A few remaining rebels crossed the border to Chittagong and established camps from where they aimed to continue their struggle (Yegar 2002: 44–46).

During the post-independence period, there were also political efforts that focused on establishing a separate Muslim zone or attaining an autonomous area similar to that given to some other minorities, such as the Shan, Kachin, and Chin. To achieve this, Arakan's Muslims needed to obtain recognition as a legitimate ethnic group indigenous to Myanmar. However, the 1948 Union Citizenship Act had set out a deliberate division between indigenous and the non-indigenous based on the year 1823, the year that preceded the first Anglo-Burma war and subsequent large-scale movements of South Asians into Myanmar. The Act set out that the indigenous people of Myanmar are "the Arakanese, Burmese, Chin, Kachin, Karen, Kayah, Mon or Shan race and such racial groups as has settled in any of the territo-

[17] By no means did all of Arakan's Muslims support this rebellion, even if they did want the establishment of a separate Muslim zone (Yegar 2002: 39).

[18] Muslim leaders claim the authorities invented this in order to stop Muslims displaced by the rebellion returning. Yegar (2002: 45) notes that Myanmar authorities tended not to discriminate between displaced returnees and new immigrants, simply sending all Muslims back regardless.

ries included within the Union as their permanent home from a period anterior to 1823 A.D".[19] What represented the "such racial groups" category was not defined. It included the Muslim Kaman but not those who in the 1950s and 1960s increasingly came to refer to themselves as Rohingya. Leider (2015: 4) argues that it was during these decades that the term Rohingya was constructed as part of "a political crusade for the justification and creation of an autonomous Muslim area".

Certainly, the term started to become widely used during this period, but it does have a longer history that dates to at least the eighteenth century. In his work on comparative vocabulary in Burma in 1799, Francis Buchanan (2003) states that the first of the dialects he looks at in his study "is that spoken by the Mohammedans, who have long settled in Arakan, and who call themselves Rooinga, or natives of Arakan".[20] This term may not appear in British records, censuses, or any other documents in the pre-independence period, as Tonkin (2015) has pointed out, but we know that there was a large established Muslim community in Arakan before Burman and British rule, and Buchanan's information is evidence that the term was in use by Arakan Muslims, or a variant of such (Rooinga), before British rule. At the same time, it seems the term was co-opted in the post-independence period by British period migrants who came to absorb most of the earlier Muslim community.

While today most Arakan Muslims identify themselves as Rohingya, with the exception of the Kaman, the term represents a core incompatibility in the conflict as it carries much deeper connotations than ethnic self-identification for the Rakhine and other Myanmar peoples and for the Rohingya themselves. Namely, the term is inextricably linked to Rohingya indigeneity and legitimacy in Myanmar, backed up and supported by a constructed history. For Arakan's Muslims, national acceptance of the term is fundamental to their claim for recognition as an indigenous Myanmar ethnic group that could lead to citizenship and the potential establishment of a separate Muslim region in Arakan. It is for this reason the term has and continues to be vigorously opposed by the Rakhine and most of the Myanmar population.

Despite the 1948 Union Citizenship Act's "indigenous" vs. "non-indigenous" division, "any person descended from ancestors who for two generations at least have all made any of the territories included within the Union their permanent home and whose parents and himself were born in any of such territories shall be deemed to be a citizen of the Union". In theory, this allowed for equal rights and many Rohingya were able to apply for identity cards and citizenship, even if some may not have been aware of this at the time. In the first Myanmar elections of 1951, several Muslims from Arakan were elected as members of parliament and for a time, the term Rohingya was used semi-officially in the parliamentary era (Smith 1994: 57).

[19] Union Citizenship Act, 1948 at Art. 3(1), http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs/UNION_CITIZENSHIP_ACT-1948.htm.

[20] Buchanan's article was in 2003 reprinted by the *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research*.

2.4.1 *The Mayu Frontier Administration*

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the different political aims of Arkan's Buddhists and Muslims continued to represent a major incompatibility in the conflict. The Arakan Party, representing Buddhists, continued to push for a separate state within the Union of Myanmar, which was opposed by most Muslims who believed it would leave them vulnerable to domination by the Rakhine Buddhist majority. Instead, they campaigned for a separate autonomous Muslim area directly under the Myanmar government. In response to Prime Minister U Nu's stated intention to make Arakan a separate state within the union, various Muslim groups presented alternative options, which ranged from outright rejection to compromise (Yegar 2002: 50–51). Eventually, in May 1961, the government announced a separate Mayu Frontier Administration (MFA) be established, formed from the Muslim majority areas of Muangdow, Buthidaung, and western Rathedaung, and be outside of the jurisdiction of the planned Arakan state. This was not, however, strictly autonomous as the MFA would be administered by the military. Nevertheless, for many in the Muslim community, the arrangement was preferable to incorporation into the planned Arakan state and represented a partial "realization of their political hopes" (Leider 2015: 8). The MFA and planned Arakan state were attempts by U Nu and his government to manage the communal tensions and conflict in Arakan and the conflicts the two ethnic groups had with the central government. How successful this move might have been in avoiding future conflict is purely academic. In March 1962, General Ne Win staged a coup and his military government adopted different policies towards Myanmar ethnic problems. Immediately following the coup there was a major crackdown on minority groups calling for greater autonomy, which served to exasperate Myanmar's ethnic conflicts, including those of Arakan. The new government also began a major campaign against foreigners, or perceived foreigners, and implemented a number of discriminatory measures, which included the nationalization of all foreign and larger domestic businesses, resulting in over 100,000 people of Indian and Pakistan descent losing livelihoods and leaving the country (Owen 2005: 498).

2.5 Ne Win's Burmanization Policy

Ne Win discarded the plans for an Arakan state and in 1964 dissolved the MFA. Over time, the Buddhist-Muslim problem in Arakan came to be perceived differently as the government increasingly recognised the Rakhine Buddhists as the rightful people of the region, largely on account of their religion, culture, and ethnicity, and "joined with the local Rakhine population in claiming that the Rohingya are recent illegal immigrants from Bangladesh" (Fink 2001: 127). From then on, management of the Arakan problem was through state-sponsored discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion of Arakan's Rohingya population. There were also various military actions and abuses directed against the Rohingya that led to a

number of documented large-scale exoduses as many fled across the border to escape military persecution. The new military government essentially co-opted Buddhism and combined it with a Burman-centric mindset as part of its ruling ideology. As Wade (2015) argues, Ne Win:

> bore a strong xenophobic streak that fed his vision of a racially and religiously homogenous society ruled by Bamar. The notion that peace could only be achieved in Burma when all the country's disparate ethnic groups were assimilated into the majority constituted a significant component of the rationale of military rule—in particular the regime's violent hostility towards non-Bamar groups.

There was little room in this new world for Arakan's Rohingya population, who were particularly singled out and viewed as incompatible with the government's vision of the country. In addition to having a different religion and physical appearance to the majority, the Rohingya were a large and growing minority in Arakan, where they made up about 40% of the population[21] and regarded as a potential threat to the state. Furthermore, they were seen as having no loyalty to the country because of the alliance with the British during WWII, former irredentist attempts and rebellion.

There was to be no attempt to assimilate Arakan's Rohingya population, who increasingly were portrayed as ungrateful and troublesome foreigners who did not belong in Myanmar and were incompatible with the nation's culture, history, and traditions. Management of this perceived Rohingya problem was the progressive introduction of various repressive measures, which included policies of exclusion, discrimination, and periodic attempts to drive some of them from the country, the latter of which can be interpreted as attempts to manage the perceived incompatibility by reducing the potential for opposition. In these repressive actions, the military government also exploited Rakhine "fears of a Muslim takeover" (Fink 2001: 127), in order to maintain control over the two communities (Leider 2017: 201). Like the Rohingya, the Rakhine are a minority who have long been economically exploited and culturally and politically discriminated against by the Burman-dominated government. As such, like the Rohingya, the Rakhine perceive their identity and culture at threat from both the Burman majority and the ethnic group with whom they share Arakan.

2.6 Repressive Measures and Military Pogroms Against the Rohingya

In the years that followed the military coup, increasing discriminatory and exclusionary measures were introduced in an attempt to manage the perceived Rohingya problem. These measures became increasingly draconian after the 1982 Citizenship

[21] There are numerous estimates of the Rohingya population in Arakan, ranging from 750,000 to 1.2 million (Lewa 2009: 11; Dapice 2015).

Law (see below) that effectively rendered most Rohingya stateless and in doing so provided legal justification for their exclusion and the introduction of further restrictive measures against them as they were non-citizens. Preceding the 1982 Law was the Emergency Immigration Act (EIA) of 1974, which followed a new constitution of the same year in which Arakan became a state, although in name only.[22] The EIA was intended to address immigration from India, China, and Bangladesh, particularly as there had been some illegal immigration into Arakan following Bangladesh's war of liberation against Pakistan and the ensuing famine that followed (Yegar 2002: 54). The EIA set out that all citizens had to carry National Registration Certificates but most Rohingya were offered only Foreign Registration Cards (Human Rights Watch 2000a). The following 1982 Citizenship Law set out that full citizenship could be granted only to people born of two parents from one of Myanmar's 135 identified ethnic groups, which did not include Rohingya, and those who could prove their ancestors were resident in the country before the first Anglo-Burmese war. For those who did not qualify, there were two further categories: associate citizenship and naturalized citizenship. Associate citizenship applied to those not eligible for full citizenship but had applied for citizenship under the 1948 Act and resided in the country before that date. Naturalized citizenship was available for those who had not applied under the 1948 law but could provide conclusive evidence that they or their ancestors lived in the country before independence and had fluency in one of the national languages (Human Rights Watch 2000a). Most of those who identified as Rohingya faced several issues in attaining any form of citizenship as most lacked even the basic documentation required, even for the naturalized status, and those who possessed the documentation found the new law applied in an arbitrary and discriminatory manner. Consequently, most Rohingya became stateless, which served to strengthen the official narrative of illegal Bengali immigrants.

Restrictions on the Rohingya community introduced over the years included the need for a permit to leave their village, which limited employment opportunities; arbitrary taxation; excessive registration demands and fees; limited access to education for their children; permission from the authorities to marry that generally required a bribe; and from 2005, a two-child regulation for all married couples that was an apparent attempt to manage Rohingya demographic growth (see below) (Amnesty International 2004; Human Rights Watch 2013b). Members of the Rohingya community also became excluded from employment in the civil service and those who held civil service jobs faced continual harassment in a bid to force them out (Human Rights Watch 2000b).

Major military operations against the Rohingya began in the 1970s. Officially, these operations targeted illegal immigrants and insurgency activity but the general Muslim population in Arakan appear to have been the main target. In 1975, some 15,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh to escape military persecution (Selth 2004:

[22] While this can be seen as an attempt to appease Arakan nationalists, in terms of any autonomy it was meaningless as the one-party system enshrined in the new constitution, and in existence since 1962, meant there would be no separate governments within the union.

111) and 2 years later the government launched Operation Naga Min (Dragon King), which aimed to check identity papers and weed out foreigners living in Myanmar. This operation came to Arakan in 1978, and while there had been some illegal immigration from Bangladesh in the preceding years, the operation appears more of a deliberate and brutal campaign to expel Muslims from Arakan as there was little distinction made between residents and recent immigrants. By May 1978, some 200,000 Rohingya had fled across the Bangladesh border to escape military oppression (Human Rights Watch 2000a). Following international pressure and negotiations with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), most were reluctantly repatriated by 1979 (Human Rights Watch 2000a).

Further military actions against the Rohingya took place in 1991 and 1992 in the Pyi Thaya (Clean and Beautiful Nation) operations, supposedly launched in response to insurgent activities. Pyi Thaya appears in part linked to the aftermath of the 1988 Myanmar democracy movement and the 1990 annulled election result, which saw large-scale military offensives against minority insurgent groups throughout Myanmar. The Rohingya Solidarity Organization, based in Bangladesh, received increasing media attention in Bangladesh at this time but does not appear to have posed a significant threat in Myanmar, certainly nothing remotely comparable to other insurgent groups, such as the Karen.[23] However, the scale and intensity of this military operation and the ensuing persecution was far greater than experienced by other minorities (Human Rights Watch 1995: 107). Rather, Pyi Thaya appears to have been a continuation of earlier actions to manage the Rohingya problem and seems to have been directly related to the almost simultaneous Na Ta La resettlement scheme that was implemented in a number of minority areas in Myanmar. In Arakan, the aim of Na Ta La was to dilute Arakan's Muslim majority areas by driving out some inhabitants and replacing them with Buddhists. During the Pyi Thaya operation and Na Ta La scheme, there was arbitrary violence, killings, rape, the destruction of Muslim villages and mosques, and lands confiscated that were given to Rakhine or Burman Buddhists who the military brought in from other areas. Many Rohingya were also forced to undertake unpaid labour that often included building housing for the Buddhist migrants (Loescher and Milner 2008: 312; Wade 2015). By 1992, the Pyi Thaya operation had succeeded in driving some 260,000 Rohingya into Bangladesh. As with the earlier military-driven exodus, international pressure and the involvement of the UNHCR played a role in facilitating the repatriation of most, which did not begin until 1996, although some 20,000 remained in refugee camps in Bangladesh. In the repatriation of the refugees, Myanmar authorities showed no desire to take any back, and their eventual acceptance appears to have been "a pragmatic move" that was unwillingly undertaken in order "to secure membership of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)" (Human Rights Watch 1996). During the repatriation process in 1996, a

[23] The Bangladesh media attention focused on what initially appeared to be an expansion in RSO activities along the border linked to training camps. It later became evident that such training camps were not only used by a small number of Rohingyas but by various other Islamist groups and that the RSO were not then engaged in fighting inside Myanmar (Lintner 2003: 11).

further 15,000 Rohingya attempted to cross the border to escape military persecution but the Bangladesh authorities refused to provide the UNHRC access and attempted to force them back over the border (Human Rights Watch 1996). In the following years, further but smaller exoduses of Rohingya continued, such as in 2006, when some 6000 from both Arakan and those still in refugee camps in Bangladesh attempted to reach Malaysia by boat (Loescher and Milner 2008, 315).

2.7 Economic Neglect and Demography

Consistent government neglect of Rakhine and its economic development over the years has served to fuel tensions between Rakhine Buddhists and the Rohingya community and contributed to the conflict between them. Rakhine has been one of Myanmar's poorest regions since independence, which has fuelled competition between the two communities for limited economic opportunities and resources, as well as territory. Government neglect is in part responsible for an apparent demographic shift over the years in Rakhine in favour of the Rohingya population. A lack of economic opportunities has led to an increasing numbers of younger Rakhine leaving the region to seek opportunities in other parts of the country (International Crisis Group 2014; Dapice 2015). Another factor in this demographic shift has been the higher birth rate among the Muslim community (Dapice 2015: 5). Most Rakhine also believe that Rohingya demographic growth is a consequence of continuous large-scale illegal immigration from Bangladesh in the years after independence. However, as Dapice (2015: 7) shows, there is little evidence of any illegal immigration from Bangladesh to Arakan after the 1970s, and the growth of the Rohingya population since that time is certainly lower than the Rakhine perception. Still, the Rakhine perceive this demographic growth a major problem and threat, arguing that because of it their culture, religion, and traditions are vulnerable and must be kept in check to avoid being overrun by Muslims. While this perceived growth of the Rohingya community forms an important incompatibility in the conflict, the limited population data on Arakan's Muslim population makes it difficult to assess the significance of this demographic change over the years.

2.8 Islam, the "War on Terror", and Tenuous Rohingya Links to International Islamic Terrorist Groups

During the early 2000s, there was increased anti-Muslim feeling throughout Myanmar, which appears to have been linked firstly to the Taliban's destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan in March 2001 and, secondly, to the destruction of the World Trade Center in September of the same year. Anti-Muslim pamphlets appeared with the title "Myo Pyauk Hmar Soe Kyauk Hla Tai" (The Fear of

Losing One's Race), warning of Muslim plans for domination of the country through a deliberate policy of intermarriage with Buddhists who were made to convert to Islam (Human Rights Watch 2002: 4–5). The pamphlets were distributed by Buddhist monks and linked to government-sponsored organizations and the military. There were also increased attacks against Muslims throughout Burma and a number of anti-Muslim riots. In Rakhine, riots broke out following an altercation between a Muslim stall holder and a Buddhist monk that left about 30 predominantly Muslim homes destroyed (Human Rights Watch 2002: 10–11).

After initial hesitation, the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) decided to give their support to the US global campaign against terrorism.[24] Selth (2004: 117–118) has set out the main reasons for this support. First, the SPDC were genuinely concerned that global terrorism by Islamic extremists was a new, real, and dangerous threat, especially as the country had a "large and alienated" Muslim minority in Arakan who had previously rebelled against the government and had possible links to international terrorist organizations. In addition, the SPDC perhaps considered their support would negate the possibility of direct US intervention in Myanmar if any terrorist organizations were suspected of operating in the country. This concern appears linked to the United Wa State Army's narcotics trade, believed to be connected to international terrorism through "unofficial financial flows" (Selth 2004: 117). The SPDC also hoped that cooperation with the United States on the "War on Terror" would lead to reduced criticism of the Myanmar government and the lifting of some of the US sanctions against the country.

The events of 2001 served to intensify anti-Muslim feeling and fear in Rakhine and Myanmar in general and allow the SPDC to play on this threat. As Schissler et al. (2015) have recently shown, fears of a Muslim takeover and the threat Islam poses to Buddhism, whether real or not, are perceptions held by many in Myanmar. Reinforcing these perceptions are rare and exaggerated rumour-led examples of Muslim violence against Buddhists and by the actions of al-Qaeda and more recently ISIS, used by past military governments and Buddhist nationalists as evidence of Islam's international threat. This perceived international threat is linked to the domestic threat with Rakhine portrayed as the gateway to Myanmar's Islamization, a threat that began in the British colonial period with the influx of Bengali immigrants. The perception that the Rohingya represent a threat to Rakhine and the country as a whole because they are Muslim appears to have emerged as an increasingly important factor in the conflict during this period but does not appear to have been a major concern in earlier periods.

Whatever the perceptions of the Myanmar government and population, until the 2016 and 2017 attacks by ARSA, there is little evidence to suggest any of the Rohingya in Myanmar have represented a significant political threat since the early 1960s. Various small and factionalized armed Rohingya insurgent groups have been based on the Bangladesh side of the border since the 1960s but the only significant operation of note in Myanmar was a 1994 attack by the Rohingya Solidarity

[24] See Selth (2004) for details of various international anti-terrorist commitments made by the SPDC.

Organisation (RSO), which had little local support and was easily defeated by the military (International Crisis Group 2016: 4). There is, however, evidence that some Bangladesh-based Rohingya groups did develop links with international terrorist organizations, which became increasingly broadcast in the early 2000s and fed the perception of the Islamic threat. For example, in September 2001, Osama bin Laden stated in an interview with a Karachi-based newspaper that there were "areas in all parts of the world where strong jihadi forces are present, from Bosnia to Sudan, and from Burma to Kashmir" (Lintner 2003: 13). The Burma reference was probably linked to the RSO who operated several small training camps on the Bangladesh side of the border (Lintner 2003: 13), which sometime before the 2000s appear to have been taken over by Harkat-ul-Jihad-i-Islami (HuJI), one of Bangladesh's most militant organizations that was set up in 1992 with funds provided by Osama bin Laden (Rahman 2010: 235). However, Myanmar was not the focus of these camps as the militant groups running them were concerned with other conflict areas in Asia, such as Kashmir, Afghanistan, and Chechnya. The Rohingya living in squalid refugee camps along the border were exploited and recruited by these groups for small sums of money and sent as "cannon fodder" to Afghanistan and other places (Lintner 2003: 13). Another link was the discovery of a video tape titled "Burma" among the material seized by the United States-led coalition in Afghanistan, which showed footage of insurgents training, which later became clear was filmed in Bangladesh, not in Myanmar as originally thought (Lintner 2003: 11–12; Selth 2004: 115).

Despite evidence of RSO links to international terrorist organizations before 2001, the only insurgency activity of note that took place in Myanmar was the failed 1994 RSO attack, which those Rohingya living in Myanmar did not support. Nor is there any evidence of connections between members of the Rohingya community in Rakhine and the RSO camps and external militant groups. While these links do not appear to have posed a threat to Myanmar, they did play a role in entrenching a growing fear of Islam and the need for repressive measures against the Rohingya community to address this threat. This was further fuelled by international media coverage of these links, which were reported in Myanmar, and initially exaggerated claims by some international academics and media that overplayed the role of "Muslims from Burma" in organizations such as al-Qaeda.[25] These international links and the United States-led War on Terror provided the SPDC with further motivation for a crackdown on the country's Muslim population while simultaneously playing on the perceived threat of Islamic extremism to Buddhism and the nation with little distinction made between the Rohingya community and international terrorist organizations. From 2001 until the present, this perceived Islamic threat has become increasingly prominent in the conflict.

[25] Selth (2004: 115) presents several examples of exaggerated and sometimes erroneous reporting, notably Zachary Abuza's 2002 paper, "Tentacles of Terror: Al Qaeda's Southeast Asian Network", in which he stated, "the largest Al Qaeda cell in Southeast Asia is said to be in Myanmar".

2.9 The Current Crisis

2.9.1 The 2012 Violence: Transition and Political Opportunities

The well-recounted riots in Rakhine of June 2012, with which the latest crisis began, were allegedly sparked by the rape and murder of a Rakhine Buddhist woman by Rohingya men. In response, Rakhine Buddhists indiscriminately attacked and killed Muslims and the situation quickly escalated into mass violence with deaths among members of both communities. Reports suggest that Rakhine security forces did little to stop the violence, with some even participating on the Rakhine side. In October of the same year, further violence broke out, which, according to Human Rights Watch reports (2013a, b), was "organized and planned" by political and religious leaders in Rakhine and members of the public that aimed to drive Rohingya from the state or at least force them to relocate from areas they shared with the Buddhist majority. Before and during the violence, leaflets were also distributed warning of the threat of global Islam and its plans to establish itself in non-Muslim countries, such as Myanmar, with one tactic being to gain ethnic minority status for the Rohingya (McDonald 2012). The reports further indicate that security forces colluded in what appears to have been a forced displacement. By the end of October, some 150,000 people, predominantly Rohingya, were residing in internally displaced people (IDP) camps in Rakhine. According to a UN report, by 2014 some 94,000 Rohingya had left Myanmar following the violence, most across the border to Bangladesh and about 5000 by boat to Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia where they were denied official entry.

2.9.2 Political Opportunities and Myanmar's Democratic Transition

The violence of 2012 took place within the context of Myanmar's democratic transition that included the partially rigged 2010 election that the National League for Democracy (NLD) boycotted. The election was a sweeping victory for the military's Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) who established a "new" quasi-civilian government with former general, Thein Sein, as president. In Rakhine, the 2010 elections generated increased inter-communal tensions as the USDP attempted to gain the support of the Rohingya community by pledging to grant them citizenship in an attempt to limit the electoral success of the Rakhine National Development Party (RNDP) (International Crisis Group 2014: 6; Leider 2017: 202–203). While this tactic did perhaps reduce the RNDP's percentage of the Rakhine state vote, it was nevertheless the only regional party to win over 50% of seats in any regional parliament and came a distant second to the USDP in the national

parliament (van Klinken and Su Mon Thazin Aung 2017: 7). RNDP leaders were determined not to allow the Rohingya to vote in the important and more decisive elections scheduled for 2015.

By the time of the 2012 violence in Rakhine, it was evident that the USDP had moved away from its 2010 strategy in relation to the RNDP. Thein Sein's initial response to the first wave of violence was to state that the government will take responsibility for its ethnic nationalities but it would not be "possible to recognize the illegal border-crossing Rohingyas who are not our ethnicity" (ReliefWeb 2012). As a solution, he suggested the Rohingya in Rakhine be handed over to the UNHCR and resettled in any third country "that are willing to take them", a proposal the UNHCR rejected. Nor did the USDP's initial response and management of the conflict reflect past government policy in relation to outbreaks of communal violence not orchestrated by the government itself, previously not tolerated as it was considered a threat to government control and security.[26] The 2012 violence was locally, not nationally, orchestrated, with the Rakhine National Development Party (RNDP) playing a major role. While a state of emergency in Rakhine was declared after the June violence, this did not prevent the clearly orchestrated violence of October that followed Thein Sein's provocative remarks, which brought little condemnation from the government. Furthermore, while the government's own investigation noted Rakhine's lack of economic development as a cause and the RNDP's role, blame for the violence fell predominantly on the Rohingya community. Particularly highlighted was Rohingya population growth and "extremism", which came from "prevailing teachings in religious schools that encourage narrow-minded views and incite hatred against the Rakhine" (Republic of the Union of Myanmar 2013: 44, 66). Essentially, the USDP allowed the RNDP "room to engage in political violence" against the Rohingya, and the reason they did so was linked to the forthcoming 2015 election as the RNDP were increasingly seen as potential allies against Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD (van Klinken and Aung 2017: 8–9). Aware of their strategic position, the RNDP had orchestrated the 2012 violence for "a national audience and demanded" to be taken seriously by "the central state authorities" (van Klinken and Aung 2017: 9). In addition, the RNDP demanded more autonomy for Rakhine and a greater share of the state's natural resource.

Government inaction following the violence allowed the RNDP to become more assertive and together with nationalist monks stage anti-Rohingya rallies, successfully forcing the government to cancel an agreement for an Organization of Islamic Cooperation humanitarian team to aid Rohingya refugees in Rakhine (International Crisis Group 2013: 8). Increasingly, the Rohingya issue became a national issue and the 2012 violence served to strengthen anti-Muslim feeling in the country as xenophobic Buddhist nationalist groups, such as the MaBaTha (the Association to Protect Race and Religion), who were not involved in the Rakhine state violence, latched on to and exploited the situation in Rakhine, which facilitated their rising

[26] For example, MaBaTha leader, U Wirathu, was jailed in 2003 for inciting anti-Muslim violence in his hometown that led to ten Muslims being killed (Marshall 2013).

popularity. In contrast to international media reports, the notion that the Rohingya were the problem and not the victims of violence was widely shared in Myanmar, where they were seen as the perpetrators of the violence and the Rakhine Buddhist response a "justified backlash against Bengali land-grabbers" (Clifford 2013). MaBaTha called for boycotts of Muslim businesses throughout the country, the introduction of discriminatory interfaith marriage laws, and incited violence against Muslims in other parts of the country through hate speech, such as in Meikhtila in the Mandalay region where violence between Buddhists and Muslims left 43 dead and 13,000 people, mostly Muslims, displaced (Szep 2013). Meanwhile, those Rohingya placed in IDP camps had little access to medical facilities and in some cases staff and medical supplies from nearby hospitals that serviced the camps were withdrawn.

In the years after 2012, the Rohingya were increasingly excluded from Myanmar's democratic transition. As the country prepared for the 2014 UN-backed census, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) indicated those not identified as one of the 135 official ethnicities would be able to describe themselves as "other" and verbally report their ethnicity for record and later sub-coding, which opened the door for Rohingya inclusion (Lawi Weng 2014). Believing this could lead to Rohingya legitimation, the RNDP and Rakhine Buddhist groups protested and threatened to boycott the census. Subsequently, the government announced no household be allowed to identify as Rohingya in the census but the term Bengali could be used (SBS News 2014). Rakhine political groups were also determined to stop Rohingya participation in the 2015 election and organized demonstrations that gained support from Buddhist groups in other parts of the country. Now more concerned with the threat posed by Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD than Rakhine nationalism, eventually the USDP cancelled the temporary registration certificates that had allowed Rohingya participation in 2010, leaving the community wholly disenfranchised.

While not active participants in the election, the Rohingya and other Muslims in Myanmar featured prominently in the campaign. Thein Sein's ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) appear to have worked with groups such as MaBaTha to play on fears of a Muslim takeover in order to make political gain against NLD, which was consistently accused of being soft on Muslims and soft on the threat Muslims posed to the country. In particular, NLD was criticized and attacked for their opposition to the new Protection of Race and Religion Laws, which outlawed polygamy, required people to gain government approval before converting to another religion, and restricted interfaith marriage (Ei Ei Toe Lwin 2015). Because of the increasing criticism over Myanmar's Muslim issue, the NLD decided against naming any Muslim candidates in the election to appease hard-line Buddhists. Increasing anti-Rohingya and anti-Muslim feeling in the country also meant Aung San Suu Kyi had to tread carefully when addressing the inter-communal violence during her campaign in Rakhine.

The NLD won a resounding victory in the 2015 national election, gaining the majority of parliament seats in most states except in Rakhine, where the Arakan National Party (ANP), formed from a merger between the RNDP and the Arakan

League for Democracy, won 10 of the 12 seats contested (Mathieson 2016).[27] The election, however, did not bring an end to military rule in Myanmar and the reality was that the NLD had won the right to enter into an uneasy power-sharing arrangement with the army. Under the terms of the 2008 Constitution drawn up by Myanmar's military leaders, it was set out that 25% of parliamentary seats are reserved exclusively for the military and not contested. This ensured there could be no constitutional change without military approval as any constitutional amendment required the approval of over 75% of parliament. The 2008 Constitution also provided the military with full control of the following key ministries and their budgets without recourse to the government: Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Home Affairs, and Ministry of Border Affairs. Essentially, the military remained outside the control of the government regardless of the election result, which was to have serious implications for the Rohingya community.

The NLD election victory brought no improvement to the situation of the Rohingya community, as some in the international community had hoped. Those Rohingya placed in IDP camps remained in them and continued to have little access to jobs, education for their children or medical care, except that provided by foreign aid agencies.

2.9.3 Media Internationalization of the Conflict

Before 2012, the conflict in Rakhine had been largely reported and documented by various human rights groups, particularly since the 1990s, but had received little attention from the international community and media. This changed in 2012 when the violence in Rakhine attracted increasing international attention, partly because of Myanmar's transition and growing openness, which brought greater media spotlight. Another factor in the increasing international media reporting was that the Rohingya refugee crisis became a regional issue beyond the Myanmar-Bangladesh border as increasing numbers of Rohingya attempted to reach neighbouring Muslim-majority countries by boat, leading to increasing reports of their horrific treatment by people smugglers including mass Rohingya graves uncovered in Thailand (Human Rights Watch 2015).

As Leider (2017: 209) has shown, the Rakhine Buddhist community were woefully unprepared for this media internationalization, while Rohingya groups outside Myanmar, formed from earlier international diaspora, had organized to utilize the increased media attention and play influential roles in forming international perceptions of the conflict.[28] The most prominent of these groups, the Arakan Rohingya Union (ARU), the Burma Task Force (BTF), and the European Rohingya Council

[27] The ANP also won 12 out of 17 seats in the national lower house but fell just short of an outright majority at state level (Mathieson 2016).

[28] See Leider (2017) for an in-depth analysis.

(ERC),[29] proved highly successful in gaining sympathy from Muslim nations, who previously showed little interest in the Rohingya issue, lobbying Western governments for support and producing press releases with broad appeal to a global audience that focused on "humanitarian and legal issues". These groups also consciously shifted their position away from more traditional Rohingya groups, such as the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO), who call for self-determination and played on the Rohingya historical narrative to claim rights and legitimacy in Rakhine.[30] The new groups focused less on the historical and cultural claims and projected and portrayed the conflict as one solely between an oppressive government that victimized a legitimate Muslim minority. This portrayal of the conflict removed the Rakhine from the equation and divorced the conflict from its origins, decades of historical tensions and its triangular nature. In contrast to the ANRO, the new groups demanded that the Rohingya enjoy "peaceful co-existence" in an "indivisible" Rakhine State "within the territorial integrity of the Union of Myanmar", which was more internationally acceptable and achievable than the ANRO'S continued call for self-determination.[31] These new external Rohingya groups also focused their attention exclusively on the international community in order to raise awareness of the Rohingya issue and to bring increased external pressure to bear on the Myanmar government in order to force a change of policy and grant citizenship to the Rohingya.

While these groups have brought greater global awareness of the Rohingya plight, which should be welcomed, they also brought negative domestic effects in Myanmar. The increased international media reporting, accompanied by opinions and campaigns on social media sites, served to entrench anti-Rohingya feeling throughout the country, aiding the development of "a national pro-Rakhine Buddhist consensus" in Myanmar against "an international block of pro-Rohingya voices" (Leider 2017: 208). The Rakhine and much of the Myanmar population perceived the international media and much of the Western and Muslim world had taken sides in a conflict they did not fully understand in which the Rohingya are portrayed wrongly as innocent victims of Buddhist aggression. The consistent use of the term Rohingya in international media, instead of Bengali, further enraged domestic feelings and was seen as international support for the Rohingya historical narrative and legitimacy in Rakhine. Partly because of international media reporting, foreign aid agencies and workers in Rakhine were accused of favouring the Rohingya and from 2013 faced periodic protests and minor attacks on their offices and residences.

[29] The ARU was formed with strong support from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in 2011 in Jeddah as an umbrella organization for various international Rohingya following a series of meeting that took place over the preceding years and is led by Wakar Uddin, an American-based academic originally from Arakan (the http://rohingyaunion.org). The BTF is a campaign of Justice for All, a Muslim NGO based in Illinois set up in 2010 (https://www.burmataskforce.org/). The ERC, launched in Denmark in 2012, brought together various Rohingya activists in Europe under a single organization to "strive for the Rohingya cause" (http://www.theerc.net/).

[30] See http://www.rohingya.org/portal/index.php/who-we-are.html for a list of the ARNO's aims and objectives.

[31] See the ARU's mission statement: http://rohingyaunion.org/about-us/.

Reflecting the gulf between domestic and international opinion on the Rohingya issue, an Arakan National Party spokesperson stated in January 2015: "When the international community give them [Rohingya] a lot of food and a lot of donations, they will grow fat and become stronger, and they will become more violent" (International Detention Coalition 2015).

2.9.4 The NLD Government's Attempted Management of the Conflict and the International Commission

In an attempt to manage the conflict and respond to international pressure, in September 2016 Aung San Suu Kyi's government established a nine-member International Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, led by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. The other eight members of the commission included two foreign experts and six Myanmar nationals: two Yangon-based Muslims, two Rakhine Buddhists, and two government officials. The commission's mandate was not to investigate human rights violations but "to examine the complex challenges facing Rakhine State and to propose answers to those challenges" (Advisory Commission on Rakhine State 2017: 6). While the international community was generally positive regarding the commission, partly because of Kofi Annan's leadership, it was less popular domestically. One area of contention was that the commission would use neutral terminology in relation to Rakhine's Muslim population, referring to them as "Muslims of Arakan" rather than Rohingya or Bengali. The inclusion of three foreigners on the commission also proved unpopular and the Arakan National Party called for them to be removed and in parliament worked with military appointed lawmakers, the USDP and smaller parties to try and get the commission dissolved, claiming it was illegitimate (Sithu Aung Myint 2016).

The commission's recommendations were set out almost a year later on the 24 August 2017. In regards to the controversial and sensitive matter of citizenship, the recommendation was that a clear and fair strategy should firstly be set out to verify rights to citizenship in line with the 1982 Citizenship Law, and then the law itself be reviewed and become more aligned to international standards. A further recommendation was that the government consider allowing citizenship through naturalization, emphasising the importance of this for those designated as stateless. The report also set out the need to foster inter-communal dialogue in Rakhine and that the government take the initiative by developing a conducive environment for this dialogue. In addition, all ethnic minority groups in Rakhine, including the stateless, should have communal representation. As many Rohingya were still in IDP camps, the commission urged the government to begin their closure in cooperation with the international community. Another recommendation was that there should be greater freedom of movement for all people in Rakhine, regardless of "religion, ethnicity, or citizenship status". Recognising Rakhine's lack of economic development as an

issue in the conflict, the commission called for greater government investment, more local participation in development matters, and greater local benefit from natural resource exploitation in the state.

Shortly after the commission had begun its work, ARSA carried out attacks against Myanmar security forces in October and November 2016, which provoked a brutal response from the Myanmar military that according to a UN report (UNOHCHR 2017) "very likely" involved "crimes against humanity". The military operations from October 2016 to March 2017, in which many Rohingya homes were burned, led to some 87,000 fleeing to Bangladesh (Human Rights Watch 2017). The commission's report considered that such a "highly militarised response" was "unlikely to bring peace to the area" and that a security approach alone would not tackle potential radicalization. Instead, the report suggested an integrated approach that included politics, development, security, and human rights and that people would be less "vulnerable to recruitment by extremists" if legitimate grievances were not ignored. Lastly, the commission recommended stronger bilateral ties with Bangladesh in order to secure the border and tackle mutual challenges, such as drug smuggling, which the report highlighted was used to fund the activities of ARSA and the Arakan Army (AA)[32] (Advisory Commission on Rakhine State 2017).

The NLD government welcomed the commission's report and indicated some intention to implement the recommendations by announcing a 15-member implementation committee, led by U Win Myat Aye, Minister of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement with Rakhine State Chief Minister, U Nyi Pu as co-chair. Myanmar's Army Chief, General Min Aung Hlaing, had a less favourable view of the report, questioning its impartiality and accuracy (AsiaNews.it 2017). Despite the government's stated intentions and support from the international community, attempting to implement any of the recommendations, especially those relating to citizenship, would face opposition from both the military and Rakhine political and religious leaders. However, events outside government control brought any possible process to a standstill before it had even begun.

2.9.5 The Military Seize the Initiative

Several hours after Kofi Annan had publically delivered the commission's report, ARSA staged well-planned and coordinated attacks on 30 police posts and an army base in the Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung townships in northern Rakhine, killing some 12 security personnel. These attacks appear to have been deliberately timed to coincide with the release of the commission's report, and ARSA's leaders

[32] The Arakan Army is an ethnic Rakhine military organization established in 2009 and based in Laiza in Kachin State. Its stated intention is "to return the motherland to the Arakan people" (Lawi Weng 2017).

were surely aware that they would bring another swift and brutal response from the Myanmar military. The ARSA attacks not only made it politically difficult for the NLD government to go ahead with any planned implementation of the commission's recommendations but also served to shift the initiative away from an NLD-led political solution to a military-led solution. As Derek Mitchell (a former US ambassador to Myanmar during the Obama administration) noted, to some extent the attacks "empowered the military to assert themselves as saviors of the country" (Kyaw Zwa Moe 2017). In the so-called military "clearance operations" that followed, the army made no clear distinction between insurgents and ordinary people, systematically burning thousands of Rohingya homes and driving unprecedented numbers across the border to Bangladesh. As Lintner remarked, on this occasion "the brutality the army unleashed was to ensure they would not come back" (Scroll.in 2017). The army have also ensured that many Rohingya will have nothing to return to by bulldozing entire villages and in some areas replacing the villages with military infrastructure and military housing (Amnesty International 2018). While the Myanmar government announced on 31 May 2018 an initial agreement with the UN as "a first step toward the possible return of the Rohingya", as the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees noted, "conditions are not conducive for voluntary return yet" (Beech 2018). Indeed, as long as the Myanmar military continues to be able to exercise power independent of the government, it is difficult to foresee when conditions will be conducive.

2.10 Concluding Remarks

The roots of the conflict between the Muslims and Buddhists of Rakhine appears to lie in nineteenth- and twentieth-century British colonial policies as the erosion of traditional patron-client relationships led to the emergence of identities based on religion. Compounding this was large-scale immigration from Bangladesh that dramatically increased Rakhine's large Muslim population, which had developed in the seventeenth century, and British favouritism of the immigrants. Tensions came to ahead in World War II as Muslim and Buddhist communities chose different sides and intercommunal violence erupted, with tensions and conflict continuing to the present between both Muslims and Buddhists in Rakhine and with the central government. While there was some attempt to address incompatibilities between Muslims and Buddhists communities, and their contentions with the central government in the pre-1962 era, management of the conflict and its incompatibilities following Ne Win's military coup increasingly favoured the Rakhine. The government imposed its position on the conflict by introducing various coercive measures against the Rohingya, such as the 1982 Citizenship Law and implementing various restrictive measures backed up by new laws and the threat and use of violence. Successive Myanmar governments also attempted to eliminate the perceived carriers of incompatibilities in the conflict through periodic attempts to drive large

numbers of Rohingya from the country and by attempts to dilute the Muslim population by settling Buddhists in Muslim areas and on Muslim lands. Following previously military actions resulting in large numbers of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, most were later able to return due to international pressure. However, following the ferocious 2017 military action that drove unprecedented numbers of Rohingya across the border, it remains uncertain whether or how many Rohingya can or are willing to return given that there is currently no indication that conditions will change, despite international pressure.

Consequently, little can be said about good governance in relation to the conflict in Rakhine as the authorities have consistently dominated its management with no significant reference to the conflict's two ethnic stakeholders or attempted to find a resolution beyond coercion and forced migration of the Rohingya. Arguably, Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD government, under international pressure, was attempting good governance and moving towards resolving the conflict with the establishment of the Advisory Commission under Kofi Annan, which included a review of the 1982 Citizenship Law. While the government accepted the commission's recommendations, external and internal forces, ARSA and the Myanmar military, undermined their position and the incipient process. While Myanmar has made significant progress with reforms in recent years, until there are changes to the military drawn-up constitution good governance will remain dependent upon military approval.

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