

# Reworking the Colonial-Era Indian Peril: Myanmar's State-Directed Persecution of Rohingyas and Other Muslims<sup>1</sup>

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MAUNG ZARNI AND NATALIE BRINHAM

*“It would be best if they were not here. I do not want to see them in this country. Since the dawn of history Indians have been the leaders of attacks against the Burmans on behalf of the white faces.”*

—Saithan (a Burmese writer), *New Light of Burma*, 6 June 1937<sup>2</sup>

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*“[Buddhist] Brother, you might already have heard of the news about the Buddhist mob in Rakhine lynching a group of Rohingyas in broad daylight... Out of fear and despair, I have looked at different possibilities of going to work in Malaysia or trying the visa lottery to the United States. But the truth is I don't really have any prospect for leaving my birthplace. I am stuck here.”*

—a Burmese Muslim resident, 7 July 2017<sup>3</sup>

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MAUNG ZARNI, a longtime Burmese human rights activist, is a non-resident research fellow with the Documentation Center of Cambodia. He has organized numerous international conferences on the plight of Rohingyas, and he initiated the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal on Myanmar in 2013. As a PhD student, he founded the pioneering internet-based Free Burma Coalition in 1995.

NATALIE BRINHAM is an Economic and Social Research Council PhD student in law at Queen Mary University of London. She has worked for many years in NGOs in the UK and Southeast Asia on forced migration, trafficking, and statelessness. Her work has been published (with Maung Zarni) in *Forced Migration Review*, *Pacific Rim Policy and Law Journal*, and elsewhere.

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## INTRODUCTION

MYANMAR'S WIDELY HAILED TRANSITION FROM military dictatorship to a Chinese model of great commercial opening and calibrated political liberalization—"discipline flourishing democracy," as the generals call it—has had one unintended consequence for the country's military-controlled government: ugly things have been exposed.<sup>4</sup> Suddenly, the dark secrets of this predominantly Buddhist nation of 51 million people with diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds have been laid bare. The world now has access to hitherto-closed-off sites of religious and ethnic persecution via international media such as CNN, BBC, wire news agencies, and so on. First, the world witnessed the eruption of two large bouts of violence in 2012 between Rohingya Muslims and Buddhist Rakhine communities in the western coastal region of the country.<sup>5</sup> Within a year, there were incidents of organized violence against Muslims in about one dozen towns and neighborhoods across the country.<sup>6</sup> Burmese social media sites were littered with various hues of genocidal comments, articles, analyses, and updates, and remain so to date. Many openly call for the slaughter of all Muslims (or *Kular*, in Burmese), while others are more specific about the type of Muslims that should be killed: the phrase "kill all illegal Bengalis," a popular racist reference to Rohingyas, indicates that they belong in former East Bengal (Bangladesh) and not in Buddhist Myanmar.<sup>7</sup>

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Led by Buddhist monks, protests sprang up in the Rakhine state and in other major urban centers such as Mandalay and Yangon; they called on the quasi-civilian, military-backed government of ex-General Thein Sein to crack down on Muslims and expel all Bengalis to any country, Muslim or Western liberal, that would take them. In fact, in President Thein Sein's meeting with António Guterres—the then visiting head of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)—in Naypyidaw in August 2012, Thein Sein stated that "the only solution" to the troubles in Rakhine was either to send unwanted Rohingyas to countries that may be prepared to accept them as refugees or to contain them in UNHCR-administered camps.<sup>8</sup> Burmese media outlets, including those run by former Burmese political exiles, echoed the official and popular view that Rohingyas were illegal Bengali migrants with no organic ties to the country.

In the eyes of experts on democratic transitions, these voices from the mushrooming private media outlets are a sign of Myanmar's civil society relishing its newfound press freedoms in a liberalizing political system. Freedom to protest, freedom of speech, and freedom of press have finally arrived, or so it is felt. Oblivious to background histories, or simply uninterested in the relevant

past, many Burma-watchers and journalists view the organized violence against Rohingyas as simply an inevitable, if painful, byproduct of multiethnic societies in political transition, à la the Balkans.<sup>9</sup>

In this piece, we argue that the two unfolding parallel phenomena—namely a sharp rise in fear, loathing, and organized violence against Muslims across Myanmar and the official persecution of and mass violence against Rohingyas—are in fact part of a continuum of racist strategic choices made by both the country's most powerful military leaders and the democratically elected government controlled by Aung San Suu Kyi and her party, the National League for Democracy. This conclusion is based on five consecutive years of our research, including archival works in Burmese and English, bilingual discourse analyses, and hundreds of interviews and in-depth conversations with members of the Muslim and Rohingya communities, as well as interfaith activists from inside Myanmar, such as Buddhist monks and Christian leaders.

Those who frame several large-scale bouts of violence in Rakhine since 2012 and the violence against Muslim communities across the country as sectarian disputes between the country's Buddhists and Muslims overlook the crucial history of the region and the peoples concerned. Both phenomena predate, by several decades, the country's military-led democratic transition, which began in 2011. We argue, however, that it is not the process of opening up that has catalyzed simmering and latent religious and communal tensions to boil over. Rather, the violence is a direct outcome of the central, military-controlled state playing the race and faith card for its own evolving strategic ends in a country rich in religious and ethnic diversity.

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#### **THE REVIVAL OF THE POPULAR NOTION OF “THE INDIAN PERIL” AND ITS “TRANSFERENCE”**

The issue of the identity and presence of Rohingyas in the Rakhine region of Myanmar has been much debated. Aung San Suu Kyi herself weighed in on the debate, citing their historical presence as a “non-factual” but “emotive” proposition.<sup>10</sup> The presence and identity of Rohingyas as an ethnic community of Islamic faith belonging to Arakan, or Rakhine, were irrefutably established in the primary historical sources published soon after the Burmese annexation of Rakhine, a fact that effectively undermines today's official and popular narrative that Rohingyas were colonial-era seasonal farm “coolies” who settled in Northern Rakhine only after the British conquest of the Western region of the Burmese kingdom in 1825.<sup>11</sup>

To better understand how the well-documented, popular anti-Muslim fear among the majority non-Muslim public has been mobilized and how the systematic persecution of Rohingyas in Western Myanmar is enabled, it is helpful to take a glance at the past. Myanmar's pre-colonial expansionist kingdom of Buddhist Burmese from the Dry Zone plains centered around Pagan, Ava, Amarapura, Mingun, Sagaing, and Mandalay. The Upcountry Myanmar Court took the Western coastal kingdom of Buddhist Rakhine as its final colonial possession through a bloody military campaign in 1785.

As the result of the Upcountry Myanmar Court's successful, if bloody, annexation of this multiethnic Rakhine Kingdom in 1785, hundreds of thousands of Rakhine war refugees—both Muslim and Buddhist subjects of the fallen Rakhine Buddhist kingdom—fled into the British protectorate of East Bengal (called East Pakistan after the Indian-Pakistan partition in 1947 and renamed Bangladesh in 1971, after the war of independence). It was this new interface between the recently Burmese-controlled territories—Rakhine—and East Bengal westward of Rakhine that finally led to the first Anglo-Burmese War in 1824. After two more successive wars between the two empire-building powers, the Burmese met the same eventual fate as their previously conquered people to the West: the Burmese Empire collapsed and was swallowed up into British India by 1886.

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Through Burmese eyes, the threat and introduction of colonial British rule was not simply seen as an economically-defined imperialist attempt to conquer new territory and its constitutive population and natural resources (for instance, teak, minerals, and precious stones). In his Royal Declaration of War against Britain, the last King, Thibaw, openly framed the British as anti-Dhamma Kala (or alien heretics) whose victory would be a menace to Buddhism.<sup>12</sup> As the king, he was the chief patron-protector of Buddhism.

Several decades later, in the 1870s and 1880s, the British colonial administration began the large-scale importation of Indians, both Muslims and Hindus in roughly equal numbers, into British Burma.<sup>13</sup> The colonial administration subsidized the inflow of Indian laborers and other agriculturalists, including Indian Chettiar moneylenders, to fill labor and financing needs of the fast-growing rice industry in sparsely populated, British-controlled Lower Burma following the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. This sharp increase in Indians and the resultant interface between the local communities and the newer arrivals caused major unease among the local Burmese population, especially the British-educated Burmese elite with their awakened nationalist consciousness. The general sentiment of the threat of "Indian penetration" and its impact on the

future of Burma as a predominantly Buddhist society spread among the Burmese political elites, including those who ran the Burmese press and participated in the limited parliamentary politics of the 1920s.<sup>14</sup>

This nationalist concern became more acute as the result of the worldwide Great Depression, which caused widespread economic hardships. Popular Burmese sentiments of fear and resentment toward other colonized peoples of Indo-Aryan features, be they Muslim, Hindu, or any other religious affiliation, sharply rose in this period.

The nationalist Burmese newspapers and their allies in the colonial parliament seized on this rising anti-Indian racism and dusted up a 10-year-old, little-known Burmese language publication entitled *Mawli and Yogi*, which contained anti-Buddhist views—thus inflaming the already tense racial atmosphere. Race riots between Muslims and Buddhists subsequently broke out in Rangoon, where the Indians made up 60 percent of the city's population.<sup>15</sup> The British Colonial Government's Riot Inquiry Committee, set up in 1938 to investigate both the immediate trigger and the underlying causes, published in its Interim Report: "We think it would be altogether misleading for us to suggest that the jealousy or suspicion or fear (whatever is the right expression) of the Burman towards the Indian in Burma as it exists today is a mere passing phase. There will always be found people who will exploit it for their own purposes."<sup>16</sup>

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This popular anti-Indian migration sentiment was based on the economic and cultural grievances and fears of the local majority Buddhist population. Popular economic grievances were rooted in the progressively disproportionate share of farm and land ownership in the hands of the Indian settlers, including moneylenders. Additionally, interracial marriages, particularly those between Buddhist women and Indian Muslim men, were seen as a threat to the predomi-

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nantly Buddhist national way of life. However, the situation only boiled over into violence when mobilized by the Burmese press, the radical nationalist Thakhins, and colonial era Burmese politicians working for their own agendas. The committee report picked up on this when it wrote:

In June 1938, the "Thiha," a Burmese owned weekly newspaper, warned Indians that by monopolizing all kinds of commercial enterprise they would incur the displeasure of the Burmese. The example of the Jews

in Germany was mentioned, and it was suggested that such a state of affairs might occur in Burma.<sup>17</sup>

Since the publication of this report, both the alien rulers and the large number of people of Indian origin had long since gone home. The Union Jack came down in January 1948, and the country saw two large exoduses—the first on the eve of Japanese invasion in 1942 and the second after crippling economic nationalization by the Burmese military in 1964. The majority of these Indians had indeed made Buddhist Burma their sole home and had come to love their adopted country. Myanmar's population from the Indian subcontinent with an Islamic background today is only 2.3 percent, compared to an overwhelming Buddhist majority.<sup>18</sup> The country's politics and economy are under the tight control of Burmese Buddhists, civilian and military—not Indians of any faith.

After the last sectarian riots of the 1930s, the popular fear of the “Indian Peril” was replaced by the pressing need to focus on gaining independence from the British colonial administration, which returned to Rangoon after the three-year interregnum of the Japanese Occupation during World War II. The Burmese political class—now led by the Marxist-inspired nationalists, most prominently Aung San, with their strictly secularist, non-racialist, inclusive view of “Burmeseness”—steered public discourse away from the pre-war racialist sentiment.<sup>19</sup> Within a year of independence, as the country plunged into a three-way civil war between Burmese communists, non-Burmese ethnic minorities, and the first ethnically Burmese-controlled government in Rangoon, the old fear and loathing of Indians faded into the background for the time being.

Still, collective memories of “the Indian penetration” or the Indian—both Hindu and Muslim—domination of the predominantly Buddhist Myanmar endured, though latently. Apparent in recent anti-Muslim violence are the fingerprints of the military-controlled state and state-backed societal actors, such as prominent Buddhist monks, in the opening up of this can of racial worms.<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, the visibly heavy presence of Yunnan Chinese—and their hold on the informal sector of the economy in the upper half of the country—has not given rise to organized violence despite pervasive anti-Chinese sentiments within all segments of Burmese society, including the leadership and the rank and file of the military.<sup>21</sup> Organized violence has exclusively been directed at Muslim communities, rather than at Chinese businesses or their wealthy residential quarters. The question, then, is who is directing public frustrations and discontent toward one community but not the other, even while they are both conceived of as “guests” or “non-indigenous.”<sup>22</sup> One must confront the elephant in the room, namely the military-controlled state and the societal actors that

enjoy blanket impunity for any acts of harm or words of bigotry against Muslims and Rohingyas, but not the Chinese.<sup>23</sup>

Crucially, the Myanmar military regime chooses to make sure that anti-Chinese sentiments do not boil over because the giant next door, China, is too powerful to anger and because Beijing served as the external protector of the Myanmar regime when it was treated as an international pariah, particularly during the period when Myanmar was under international sanctions from the 1990s until their gradual lifting from 2011 onwards.<sup>24</sup> State and non-state actors have instead reworked—in their official and popular discourses—the old fear of the Indian Peril to make it applicable in the contemporary context. Two significant developments came about during the two eras of military rule (1962–88 and 1988–2011), namely Islamophobia resulting from global perceptions of the rise of Muslim power and the state-manufactured perspective of Rohingyas as illegal and/or unwelcome “Bengali” immigrants who do not belong in the Buddhist Rakhine lands of western coastal Myanmar.

#### **THE REKINDLING OF ANTI-MUSLIM RACISM IN SOCIETY FOR POLITICAL USE**

The military coup of 1962, launched under the leadership of Ne Win as Chair of the newly formed Revolutionary Council, was met with protests from political monks and campus activists who had become political allies in their opposition against military authoritarianism. Military leaders and strategists identified political monks, students, and other segments of society as “above-ground threats to building a new socialist order,” with the generals as the order’s revolutionary managers.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the traditional alliance of monk-student-opposition-dissidents, with Aung San Suu Kyi as the rallying figure, remained a threat that the military sought to neutralize until very recently. Military leaders concluded that Western liberal democracy was ill-suited to their country and that civilian politicians were not strong and patriotic enough to bind the multi-ethnic society in which ethnic minority populations made up an estimated 30–40 percent of the total population. The generals were acutely aware of the need for an umbrella ideology to justify their grip on power.<sup>26</sup> They have tried hoisting different ideological banners over the years, including “the Burmese way to socialism,” “restoration of law and order,” “peace and development,” and more recently “discipline-flourishing democracy.”

Military leaders have continued pursuing their vision of uniting the country under the aforementioned slogans and banners. Implementing the military’s unchallengeable version of a unified Burma in a country that is ethnically and



religiously diverse with differing class interests has typically been met with a natural resistance from different national communities. Problematically and increasingly, military leaders have looked to the old Buddhist kingdom of warrior-kings as a model for Burma, where the generals and their power base, namely the armed forces, serve as the guardians of the Buddhist nation, the dominant race, and Buddhism. When the non-Buddhist communities and minority ethnic groups have resisted the military's nation-building processes, the generals have opted to consolidate power through the tactic of divide and rule. Simultaneously, the leadership perseveres with its official call for national unity, national consolidation, and peace.<sup>27</sup>

The strategic and political uses of race and faith by those in power have been well-documented—not least in the previously cited Interim Report of the Riot Inquiry Commission of 1939. On the eve of Burma's independence in 1946, the slain national hero and former Thakhin nationalist leader, the late U Aung San, publicly accused the last colonial administration of attempting to destabilize the country's political situation by playing the race card.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Prime Minister U Nu, a close colleague of Aung San, was accused during his election campaign of exploiting the Buddhist majority's religious sentiment by offering to make Buddhism "the state's official religion" in 1960.<sup>29</sup> By this time, the Burmese military, through its public relations department (or "psychological warfare division"), had also begun to mobilize Buddhist identities by framing Burmese communist challengers as "the Enemy of Buddhism."<sup>30</sup>

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By the early 1990s, following the global advance of human rights, the most senior Burmese military leadership—Senior General Saw Maung, head of the ruling junta—had actively pursued the manufacturing and propagation of anti-Muslim racism through the government's Department of Religious Affairs, as documented by Reuters' journalists in their Pulitzer-winning series of investigative articles.<sup>31</sup> Before the advent of Facebook and other social media sites, the fear-mongering narrative relating to Muslims—which portrays Muslim men as rapists, abusers of Buddhist women, and economic exploiters of a poor Burmese public—was disseminated through short monographs and carefully planted moles among Buddhist monks, as well as through classic "whisper campaigns."<sup>32</sup> Twenty years after the deaths (under house arrest) of the Muslim cleanser of the armed forces and the initiator of this anti-Muslim propaganda campaign, ex-General Ne Win and his hand-picked successor Senior General Saw Maung, their legacy—a repackaging of the colonial-era Indian Peril as Muslim Peril—has taken root in the popular consciousness.

Reverend Wirathu, a young, charismatic monk who hails from the Buddhist



heartland of Mandalay, openly made the call for the liquidation of Myanmar's Muslims. He declared, as early as 2001 and to rousing cheers of his fellow Buddhist monks, his intention to "boycott, ostracize and eventually starve the Muslims of Myanmar."<sup>33</sup> This was ten years before the country's military-led "transition." In other words, the spread of anti-Muslim popular hate speech was already in wide circulation long before the military's media reforms and the arrival of social media on Burmese soil.

After the release of Aung San Suu Kyi from her last house arrest in November 2010, military leaders witnessed the continuing popularity of their nemesis, both at home and abroad. Meanwhile, the call for genuine democratization—which included changing the military's constitution of 2008 that puts the military above the law on all matters it deems to be of concern to "national security"—remained strident and popular throughout the country. At the same time, Rakhine nationalists had mobilized their communities into pressuring the central government of ex-General and President Thein Sein for a more equitable share of revenues from the sale of natural gas and for greater political and administrative autonomy for Rakhine people. Then came the collapse of the 17-year bilateral ceasefire—the only one in writing—between a powerful Kachin Independence Organization/Army and the Burmese military. Notably, the sharp rise in anti-Muslim racism—in the form of hate speech and organized violence against Muslim communities—and the fear-mongering of illegal Bengalis taking over the Western Burmese state of Rakhine took place alongside these parallel developments. Many of Myanmar's Western-educated professionals, intellectuals, and technocrats proactively spread the perception of Rohingyas as ignorant descendants of illegal Bengalis through both social media sites and Burmese-language services of the BBC, Voice of America, Radio Free Asia, and the Democratic Voice of Burma.<sup>34</sup>

Using the rhetoric of freedom of speech and press, the military-backed, semi-civilian government of Thein Sein in effect provided blanket impunity against any form of hate speech, however severe and genocidal, against Myanmar Muslims and Rohingyas.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, in direct violation of the country's existing law—which only allows one national Buddhist Order (or Sangha) to prevent discord among different circles of monks and keep the order under one national governing body of monks—Thein Sein's government allowed the establishment of a new parallel monk organization under the banner of "the Association for the Protection of Race and Faith."<sup>36</sup> In its final months in power, the military's proxy government passed four "national race and faith protection" laws and touted the passage of these laws as one of its major achievements as it

went into the election of 2015.<sup>37</sup>

The great majority of Buddhists in the Burmese press, human rights circles, intelligentsia, and creative communities were swayed by the revival of anti-Muslim sentiment.<sup>38</sup> Civil society circles bought into the official view of Rohingyas as “illegal” Bengalis who pose an imminent threat to the Buddhist Nation of indigenous peoples. These civil society groups spread the image of Muslims as

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a menace and Rohingyas as illegals who could in due course morph into “jihadists,” supposedly receiving funding and other forms of support from Saudi Arabia, Paki-

stan, and even the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). A case in point is the half-hour Burmese-language interview in July 2017 between Irrawaddy News Group chief editor Aung Zaw and former Information Minister ex-Colonel Ye Htut, where both amplified the official narrative of how Bengalis who do not belong in the Western Myanmar state of Rakhine are fast-becoming potential jihadists.<sup>39</sup>

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#### NATIONAL-SECURITIZATION OF MUSLIM LIVES

Today, the everyday activities of Myanmar’s Muslims, from Rakhine State to Mandalay, have been branded as threats to national security. This development has resulted in state intrusion into many aspects of Muslims’ lives, causing varying degrees of symbolic and physical harm. Food donations to Muslims—both in humanitarian and religious/cultural contexts—now come under the purview of Myanmar’s security forces. In the latter part of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan this year, Myanmar authorities in the central administrative office of the second-largest division—the Mandalay Division—issued a general directive ordering its township and ward administrative branches, including Myanmar Police Force units, to ensure that international philanthropic and humanitarian groups do not distribute any in-kind or food donations intended for consumption during the fasting month to Muslim communities under their local jurisdictions without prior official permit. Even those with official permits can only donate under close supervision by state authorities.<sup>40</sup> The message implied by the involvement of Myanmar security forces is that food stuff and other consumer goods for household use donated by groups outside Myanmar

are a national security concern.

Meanwhile, in the western Myanmar state of Northern Rakhine, the World Food Program has reportedly discovered alarming levels of food deprivation among Rohingya Muslims, severely affecting upwards of 80,500 children. Human Rights Watch identifies the emergence of extreme malnutrition as the intended outcome of Myanmar authorities, who have locked down large areas where Rohingya reside in response to a few isolated incidents of armed attacks on Myanmar border security posts since October 2016.<sup>41</sup> The population has long been forced to exist in abysmal conditions where malnutrition levels have been compared to famine-like situations in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>42</sup> This situation amounts to what Amartya Sen, a leading scholar on famines, calls acts of “institutionalized killings” of the Rohingya on the sole basis of their ethnic and religious identity, as well as their physical presence on the Rakhine Buddhists’ land to which Myanmar officially and popularly claims Rohingya Muslims do not belong.<sup>43</sup> The deliberate policies and administrative orders that have blocked humanitarian aid over sustained periods restrict “nutritional opportunities”—in Amartya Sen’s words—for Myanmar Muslims and Rohingya.<sup>44</sup>

Between the two communities, Myanmar Muslims and Rohingya, the latter are incomparably worse off as the victims of what many believe to be ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, and slow genocide. Because these communities are subjected to monitoring, control, and restrictions on life-sustaining food, coupled with denial of access to adequate or even basic medical services, Myanmar may be using food as “a weapon of persecution.” In his article entitled “The Nazis Used It, We Use It: The Return of Famine as a Weapon of War,” Alex de Waal discusses the use of (man-made) famines as a weapon of war to target a specific population, illustrated by the Nazis as well as other Western powers.<sup>45</sup> As Gregory Stanton, founding president of Genocide Watch and former president of the International Association of Genocide Scholars notes, “Since the beginning of genocide studies with Lemkin, Hilberg, Kuper, Charny, Fein, Hovannissian and many others, ‘genocide by attrition,’ including starvation, has been a major concern of genocide scholars.”<sup>46</sup>

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## **RELIGIOUSLY MOTIVATED DEMOGRAPHIC ENGINEERING**

The Myanmar military has held a 50-year firm grip on what Louis Althusser called “Ideological State Apparatuses” (e.g., education systems, religious institutions, community groups, and information ministries). They have consistently and falsely told the domestic public that there is no such ethnic group as the Rohingya

and that they are Muslim interlopers from neighboring Bangladesh who only came to Rakhine as colonial era farm laborers after the First Anglo-Burmese War of 1824. Typically, when confronted with the irrefutable primary historical evidence dating back to 1799 and official documentation from the Ministry of Defense validating the Rohingyas' claim of historical and official belonging to both pre-colonial and post-colonial Myanmar, even the educated class of Burmese—Buddhist clergy, technocrats, journalists, writers, human rights activists, not to mention diplomats and pro-democracy ex-military officers—refuse to accept the truth.<sup>47</sup>

In the public's eyes, the growth and presumably continuing inflow of these "illegal" Muslim migrants threatens to replace the dwindling Rakhine Buddhist majority of this western region of the country. Therefore, they need to be shipped out of the country. Neither the public nor the political and military leaders are keen to restore their full citizenship rights. This state-manufactured myth about Rohingyas as unwanted Bengali migrants, both from the colonial era and contemporaneously, has taken root in the popular Burmese mind. However, the military leaders who have long maintained a tight military and administrative grip on the predominantly Rohingya region of Northern Rakhine know for a fact that there is no inflow of migrants, legal or illegal, from Bangladesh—as clearly stated by the ex-Brigadier Khin Yi, who served as the Minister of Immigration under President Thein Sein (2011–15).<sup>48</sup>

In his book *Our Country's 'Western Gate Problem,'* ex-military intelligence chief Khin Nyunt—considered Myanmar's most powerful military leader while in office—opened his introduction to the book with the patently false assertion that "the pre-colonial Rakhine State of Myanmar had never had any Muslim presence." He then went on to explicitly link Islam with the wars, violence, and terrorism in the Middle East, insinuating that the presence of Muslim Rohingyas—Bengali in his racist reference—spells deep trouble for Myanmar.<sup>49</sup>

What is little known beyond the well-publicized periodic waves of violence—both vertical (state-directed acts of violence) and horizontal (locally organized communal violence)—against Rohingyas as members of an ethno-religious group is the demographic engineering in which the military governments have been engaged over decades since Operation Crow (*Kyi Gan Sit Hsin Yay*) in 1966.<sup>50</sup> Since the country's independence, the Burmese military has viewed western Burma's Muslim population through a national security lens, as they were the borderlands Muslim community with bicultural ties to both the adjacent East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and the western Burmese region of Arakan, or Rakhine. Further, Rohingyas also waged a short-lived armed secession-

ist movement, thereby accentuating the military's security concerns. However, this secessionist revolt was not unique to the Rohingyas. Virtually all ethnic borderlands peoples, including Arakanese Buddhists (now popularly referred to as Rakhine), saddling long and porous borders of Burma—with China, India, Thailand, Laos, and East Pakistan—staged armed revolts against the majority Burmese rule from the center at various points in the post-independence period. But because Rohingyas are the only Muslim community in Burma with their own geographic pocket next to Bangladesh, their record of secessionist attempts continues to inform the military's policies towards the Rohingya population.

According to ex-General Khin Nyunt, the former head of the Directorate of Defense Intelligence Services (military intelligence), the military has two major demographic objectives: first, to double the country's total population (up to 100 million) because of the country's geographic position sandwiched between India and China, and second, to radically (read: *unnaturally*) change the Muslim (Rohingya, ethnic) character of the Northern Rakhine State.<sup>51</sup> In pursuit of this twofold goal, the military has done three things. Firstly, they have turned a blind eye to the fact that ethnic Han Chinese from the neighboring Yunnan state of Southern China have entered and settled throughout upper regions of Myanmar. Secondly, they have subjected the population to a “campaign of terror” under the disguise of “immigration checks,” the direct result of which is the drastic reduction of the number of Rohingyas from Rakhine as hundreds of thousands periodically flee western Myanmar for Bangladesh and other refugee-receiving countries amid the instant illegalization of the great majority who choose to remain inside Myanmar. Thirdly, they have established Buddhist settlements where the military and local authorities implement the scheme of state-directed transmigration of Buddhists.

The government facilitates the transporting and resettling of different Buddhist populations composed of retired Myanmar civil servant families, Myanmar criminal convicts with Buddhist backgrounds, Bangladeshi-born Buddhist Rakhines, and other non-Muslim groups who were settled in the region when the two adjacent regions of East Bengal and Western Burma were joined under the rule of a single monarch.<sup>52</sup>

Obviously, increasing Myanmar's population (specifically of non-Muslims) was a strategic goal of the military leaders as early as the 1990s. Several years ago, ex-General Thein Sein's government granted blanket citizenship status to about 80,000 Han Chinese living in the Eastern Shan state pocket near the Yunnan Chinese border. The government even created a new ethnic category, “Mon Yang Myanmar,” and announced to the public that the newly minted citizens

were to be referred to as such while the military—and now the administration of Aung San Suu Kyi—continued to maintain the official stance that Rohingyas did not belong in Myanmar. It is the religious identity of Rohingyas that ultimately accounts for this sharp contrast in Myanmar's official treatment of non-Muslim migrants from China or of those from the Sino-Burmese borderlands, and of Rohingyas from the Burmese-Bangladesh borderlands.

During the civil war of 1971 between West and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), Pakistani General Tikka Khan (known as the “Butcher of Bengal”) ordered his troops: “I want the land, not the people.”<sup>53</sup> What befell “the people,” unwanted on that wanted land of East Pakistan, was left to the local commanders. In the midst of the two bouts of horizontally organized violence in June and October 2012 during which Rohingya communities bore the overwhelming human costs, a decorated Burmese brigadier general who was stationed in Rakhine asked a Burmese author pointedly: “What can we do, brother, they [Rohingyas] are too many? We can't kill them all.”<sup>54</sup> Indeed, Myanmar military leaders, the architects and implementers of this religion-based demographic engineering, know they cannot kill all Rohingyas. But they have resorted to various strategies of destruction of Rohingya communities on an ethnoreligious level. The most deplorable human conditions, where life essentials such as food and access to basic medicine are deprived or restricted, are the direct outcome of central policies regarding Rohingyas.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Myanmar's exceptionally hostile treatment of Rohingyas as a group oscillates between acts of ethnic cleansing and slow genocide.<sup>56</sup> How can it be otherwise when Rohingyas have been kept like “chickens in a vast cage” awaiting their time of death and destruction, on land or high sea, as a young Rohingya put it in a personal Facebook message to us, after he and a group of Rohingya Internally Displaced People (IDPs) met with the visiting UN Special Rapporteur Yanghee Lee on 12 July?<sup>57</sup> Alas, a century after the perceived Indian threat to colonial Burma's future—the “Indian Penetration” or “Indian Peril”—stirred the Buddhists' imagination, post-independence Myanmar is engaged in the act of transference, this time targeting Rohingyas as caged chickens, potential agents of foreign jihadists.

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#### **A NEW MUSLIM-FREE MYANMAR UNDER THE MILITARY-NLD PARTNERSHIP OF ISLAMOPHOBES**

The perceptions of threats—real or imagined—to a nation are the *raison d'être* for military institutions the world over. Based on popular, historical, and official discourses about people of Indian ancestry, Myanmar's most powerful institution,



the military, has framed Rohingyas as “a new threat to national security” since 1966.<sup>58</sup> The colonial-era nationalist calls to pass laws protecting Buddhist women from Indian men, who are presumed to be abusive and predatory, have also come to fruition: ex-General Thein Sein’s quasi-civilian government enacted four “National Race” laws, strictly controlling proposals for interfaith marriages between Buddhist women and Muslim men.

With communist threats fading into a non-concern at home with the collapse of the longest-existing political party, the Communist Party of Burma, in 1989—the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall—and ethnic groups having jettisoned their original aim of independence from the Union of Myanmar, the military indeed needed a common enemy of the Buddhist nation. While the first persecution of Rohingyas began as a state-organized project of national security, leading to a large-scale campaign—which drove out upwards of 270,000 Rohingyas into neighboring Bangladesh in February 1978—the military found it in its strategic interest to involve both the nationalist Rakhines in the region and the Buddhist public at large.

This has enabled the military to steer the growing popular discourses of, and demand for, speedy and genuine democratization among the traditionally religious and anti-Muslim electorate. It has forced the NLD party to move away from its push for a constitutional amendment to make Aung San Suu Kyi president and phase out the military’s hold on the parliaments at all levels. The increasingly Islamophobic Buddhist electorate is more concerned about the supposedly imminent threat from potential jihadists than about democracy and human rights: none of which they have ever really tasted in their lives. It has effectively nipped the Rakhine nationalist demand for greater revenue sharing from the central government, the offshore lucrative gas and oil industry of the Rakhine coast line, and other multi-billion dollar projects in the Rakhine state. The Rakhine population has become consumed by fear and loathing of Rohingyas, who in their view take Rakhine land and threaten the Rakhine Buddhist way of life.

What we call the “double-persecution” of Myanmar’s Muslims and Rohingyas has become a powerful unifying issue among the traditionally distrustful social forces in Burmese society: the ruling military, Aung San Suu Kyi’s NLD, the culturally revered Buddhist Order, and the Burmese intelligentsia and culture industry of movie-makers, artists, and others. They share this “global perception of the rise of Muslim power”—as Aung San Suu Kyi put it in her BBC interview in October 2013—and the attendant fear and loathing of Muslims in and outside Myanmar.<sup>59</sup>



## AUNG SAN SUU KYI, FROM GLOBAL ICON OF LIBERAL FREEDOMS TO GENOCIDE DENIER?

At the time of this writing, Aung San Suu Kyi's spectacular fall from grace has been repeatedly headlined in major news outlets around the world. As 500,000 Rohingyas fled Myanmar into the neighboring Bangladesh in a span of a mere five

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**Aung San Suu Kyi's spectacular fall from grace has been repeatedly headlined in major news outlets around the world.**

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weeks, her moral and intellectual leadership has crumbled in the eyes of the world community. Following the removal of the Burmese Nobel

Laureate's portrait in the main hall at her old college at Oxford (St. Hugh's), Oxford City Council and Glasgow City Council have stripped her of the honors they had conferred on her. Though these moves by English and Scottish city councils are symbolic, as BBC World Affairs Editor John Simpson put it, "I think it is perfectly natural to look around for ways of saying 'we disapprove utterly of what you (the past honoree) are doing.'"<sup>60</sup> Simpson called "extraordinary" Aung San Suu Kyi's refusal to denounce or even acknowledge "the crimes against humanity" and "ethnic cleansing" which her government and the military are credibly accused of committing.<sup>61</sup>

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Aung San Suu Kyi typically sprinkles her essays and speeches with canonical Buddhist concepts and passages—such as loving kindness—in her attempt to both explain her political views to the outside world and communicate with her domestic Buddhist electorate.

To the dismay of many of her supporters around the world, Aung San Suu Kyi attempted to explain the violence against both Myanmar Muslims and Rohingyas on Britain's national flagship radio program by excusing her "generally peaceful" fellow Buddhists. She said, "Fear is not just on the side of the Muslims, but the fear is on the side of the Buddhists as well."<sup>62</sup> The Myanmar armed forces today, unlike in the past, can boast of being Muslim-free. As a matter of fact, last year the serving Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the commander-in-chief, added the protection of Buddhism and "Buddhist race" to the existing list of the military's bounden national duties, besides prevention of the "disintegration of the Union of Myanmar," the maintenance of "territorial integrity," and "peace and stability" at home.<sup>63</sup>

With different yet parallel reasons, both Aung San Suu Kyi's National

League for Democracy party and the army-backed USDP, its rival, have effectively emptied all political institutions of any Muslim citizens—regardless of how many centuries of lineage they have in the country.

### THE FICTION OF “IMMIGRANT RACE” OR “GUEST” AS A WEAPON AGAINST ROHINGYA MUSLIMS

What makes the persecution of Rohingyas—as opposed to the persecution of Myanmar Muslims—stand out as a case of potential state-sponsored genocide is not simply the acts as defined in the Genocide Convention of 1948 (and subsequently Article 6 of the Rome Statute), but also the original conception of a genocide put forth persuasively by Raphael Lemkin. As the noted genocide scholar Daniel Feierstein argues, genocide essentially involves both the destruction of the group’s identity by the perpetrators and the imposition of a new group identity on the victims. In the words of Feierstein, “They [victims] don’t exist. They never existed. They will never exist as who they say they are.”<sup>64</sup>

Elsewhere we have detailed how the initial concerns of cross-boundary fluid migration of Rohingyas have evolved regressively into a case where the Myanmar government can be credibly accused of “crimes against humanity,” “ethnic cleansing,” and even a “slow genocide.”<sup>65</sup> Against this long post-independence history of the state’s direct involvement with Rohingya affairs, it is misleading to frame the plight of Rohingyas as primarily the outcome of sectarian conflict between them and local Buddhist Rakhines. Rohingyas exist—not live—under human (or inhuman) conditions in the western coastal region, which is ripe with chronic violence; “intentional deprivation” of food and basic medical services; all forms of freedom, including physical movements; forced labor; sexual violence with state impunity; execution; extortions; and false blanket accusations of “terrorism”—and all this is induced by policies made centrally by the successive Burmese military regimes in Rangoon and, since 2006, in Naypyidaw.<sup>66</sup> These deplorable conditions on land, coupled with chronic and large scale violence—mostly military-organized and at times communal—have forced hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas to flee their birthplace and homeland, both on foot across the land border into Bangladesh and by boats to not only Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, but also to places as far-flung as Canada and Australia.

Buddhist Rakhine and Muslim Rohingyas have long been economically interdependent in eking out a living in one of the poorest states among Myanmar’s administrative regions. Cross-border trade, retail businesses, transport of goods, fishing, and other trades necessitate the cooperation between these two

communities—with Rakhine Buddhists controlling state bureaucracies and Rohingya Muslims engaging in primary production, financing, and more.<sup>67</sup>


Myanmar's persecution of Rohingyas in the state of Rakhine and the sharp rise, again with the state's blanket impunity, of hate speech and bouts of organized violence against the general Muslim population throughout Myanmar need to be seen on a continuum of strategic choices pursued by the military leaders out of their own institutional agendas and informed by their personal fear and loathing of Muslims. Aung San Suu Kyi—who was, until recently, seen worldwide as an icon of freedom and human rights in the same league as Gandhi, Mandela, and King—proved capable of cleansing her parliament and government of her fellow country people whose only sin is being Muslim. Since then, Myanmar's most powerful institution, the *Tatmadaw*, and Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government have both been arguably playing the race-and-faith card at the expense of the country's Muslims and committing systematic and sustained persecution against Rohingyas.

70 Heavily swayed by the military's manufactured propaganda regarding both scapegoated Muslim communities, the public has come to view the latter as two integral components of a single common threat to the nation. If indeed Buddhist Myanmar is united in this twofold crime against these populations because of their religious and ethnic identity, then the prospects of Myanmar seeking or finding homegrown solutions—without external interventions—are nonexistent. Given that there is little political will, coherence, or even capacity within the global governing institutions to protect these communities, the future of these two religious and minority groups looks incredibly bleak.

Nearly 30 years since the Great Uprisings of 8 August 1988, the majority Buddhist population of Myanmar has not enjoyed genuine freedoms, democracy, or human rights, despite Aung San Suu Kyi playing the respectable façade of the current transition. When the oppressed majority falls prey to the military's systematic mobilization and partakes in everyday acts of injustice and systemic repression of their fellow countrymen and women such as Muslims and Rohingyas, they end up undermining their own ultimate struggle for freedom and their collective humanity. This may well prove to be the greatest act of self-harm that the patriotic Burmese are committing against the future of their beloved country.

## CONCLUSION

As we were completing the final draft of this essay, Myanmar's Rakhine

Commission, chaired by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, delivered its Final Report entitled “Towards a Peaceful, Fair and Prosperous Future for the People of Rakhine State” to Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, who established the commission.<sup>68</sup> Even before the report’s ink dried, the Myanmar military launched a scorched-earth campaign against a large segment of the Rohingya population of Northern Rakhine—those who have not been displaced and caged in the IDP camps.<sup>69</sup> The Burmese military has justified this violence by citing the emergence of a group of young Rohingyas who began to fight back against the Burmese military. The military has launched periodic waves of direct killings and destruction of entire village tracts and neighborhoods while portraying the target community of Rohingyas as infested with jihadist ideals and agendas along the lines of the Islamic State.<sup>70</sup> In its new public relations campaign, the hybrid Myanmar government—that is, Aung San Suu Kyi’s civilian party in partnership with the powerful military—publicly accused the World Food Programme (WFP) and other humanitarian NGOs of supporting Rohingya “terrorists.”<sup>71</sup> As proof of their claim, Myanmar offered two pictures of a box of high energy biscuits with WFP packaging, which the military said it found in an abandoned camp reportedly used by young Rohingya militants.<sup>72</sup> In fact, the WFP and NGOs have been the ones that have long kept alive a large population of Rohingya, particularly thousands of children, who would otherwise have died of extreme malnutrition. For a government with provable genocidal intent toward Rohingyas, any entity, foreign or local, that attempts to keep the target population alive stands in the way—hence the labels of supporter of terrorism and extremism. All major media networks are reporting that, over a six-day period, the Burmese military slaughtered hundreds of Rohingyas—by Myanmar’s official count 400, although the death toll is expected to be at least four or five times higher than that figure.<sup>73</sup> Meanwhile, the Myanmar government has recently announced its national plan to develop the Northern Rakhine border town of Maung Daw as a multi-billion dollar Special Economic Zone.<sup>74</sup> In the Maung Daw township, the military is currently engaged in the genocidal killings of Rohingyas, including the infants, with navy gunboats, ground troops, and gunship helicopters. There have also been reports of titanium and other mineral exploration concessions that Myanmar has made to Chinese companies.<sup>75</sup> Alas, today’s killing fields will be turned not into national museums of the slow genocide but into ethnically cleansed sites where only Buddhist generals and local Rakhines will enjoy peace and prosperity as envisaged by Kofi Annan’s Commission. 

NOTES

1. This essay draws on our five consecutive years of research (June 2012–June 2017), including archival works in Burmese and English language discourse analyses; daily-monitoring of hate speech in Burmese language social media sites including Facebook and Twitter; hundreds of interviews and in-depth conversations conducted with members of the Muslim and Rohingya communities from within Myanmar and diaspora in countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, Bangladesh, India, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden; and numerous in-depth conversations with interfaith activists from within Myanmar, including Buddhist monks, Christian leaders, Hindu leaders, Muslim elders, and community organizers concerned about the rise of mass violence and hatred towards Muslims in general and Rohingyas in particular.

2. Riot Inquiry Committee, *Interim Report of the Riot Inquiry Committee* (Rangoon, Burma: Government Printing and Stationery, 1939).

3. Personal communications with a young Muslim resident via Facebook Messenger.

4. “US President Obama hails Myanmar’s ‘remarkable journey,’” *BBC*, November 19, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-20386066>. For the official military’s view of democracy, see: Tommy Pauk, “Democracy vs. Discipline,” *The Global New Light of Myanmar*, January 31, 2016, <http://www.globalnewlightofmyanmar.com/discipline-vs-democracy/>.

5. See: “Burma: End ‘Ethnic Cleansing’ of Rohingya Muslims,” Human Rights Watch, April 22, 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/04/22/burma-end-ethnic-cleansing-rohingya-muslims>; “Burma authorities accused of ‘ethnic cleansing,’” *Channel 4 News*, April 22, 2013, <https://www.channel4.com/news/burma-ethnic-cleansing-myanmar-rohingya>.

6. For a detailed case study of one of the incidents, see: “Hidden Hands Behind Communal Violence in Myanmar: Case Study of the Mandalay Riots,” Justice Trust, Policy Report, March 2015, [http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/Justice\\_Trust-2015-03-Hidden\\_Hands-en-to-rev1-red.pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/Justice_Trust-2015-03-Hidden_Hands-en-to-rev1-red.pdf).

72 7. In the old Burmese, Kular was a highly respectable reference to people of the Indian sub-continent from which the old feudal Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms of Burma got the model of kingship and legitimation rites. It has, however, come to be used as a racist slur with a connotation similar to that of the n-word in the United States. See: “Facebook in Myanmar: Amplifying Hate Speech?,” *Al Jazeera English*, June 14, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/06/facebook-myanmar-rohingya-amplifying-hate-speech-2014612112834290144.html>.

8. See: Natalie Brinham, “The conveniently forgotten human rights of the Rohingya,” *Forced Migration Review* 1, no. 41 (2012): 40–41.

9. The International Crisis Group’s experts typically advance the view that “it is not unusual for countries emerging from authoritarianism to experience inter-communal strife” while dismissing the instrumental role of the Burmese military behind these “communal” conflicts in Myanmar’s case. See: “A Dangerous Resurgence of Communal Violence in Myanmar,” ICG, March 28, 2013, <http://blog.crisisgroup.org/asia/2013/03/28/a-dangerous-resurgence-of-communal-violence-in-myanmar/>.

10. “Aung San Suu Kyi tells UN that the term ‘Rohingya’ will be avoided,” *Guardian*, June 21, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/21/aung-san-suu-kyi-tells-un-that-the-term-rohingya-will-be-avoided>. Also see: Richard C. Paddock, “Aung San Suu Kyi asks U.S. not to use the term ‘Rohingya,’” *New York Times*, May 6, 2016.

11. See: Gregory Poling, “Separating Fact from Fiction about Myanmar’s Rohingya,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2014, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/separating-fact-fiction-about-myanmar%E2%80%99s-rohingya>.

12. Royal Declaration of War signed by King Thibaw and His Ministers (original in Burmese), Mandalay, November 7, 1885; English translation in Yebaw Hla Myo, *Pyidaungsu Myanmar Naing Ngan Thamai Wun Sar Choke Sar Tan Mya* (Yangon: Official Historical Records of Myanmar State, 1968), 74.

13. For a concise discussion of the Indian migration to the colonial Burma, see: Riot Inquiry Committee, *Interim Report of the Riot Inquiry Committee*, 14–20.

14. *Ibid.* In particular, see: Chapter VI, “The Press and Other Political Influences,” 33–48.

15. Maung Shwe Hphi, *Malwi and Yogi*, (Mandalay: Tha Tun Aung Press, 1931).

16. *Ibid.*, 22.

17. *Ibid.*, 36.

18. This census data does not include over one million Muslim Rohingyas. See: “Myanmar census data on Muslim population raises doubts,” *AA News Agency*, July 23, 2016, <http://aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/myanmar-census-data-on-muslim-population-raises-doubts/614078>.

19. For the most comprehensive, secularist, and inclusive national vision ever articulated by a Burmese political leader—in Burmese—see: “Aung San’s address (20 January 1946) to Shwedagon Middle Terrace Conference, Rangoon,” in *The Collected Speeches of Bogyoke Aung San* (Rangoon: Literary House, The Union of Burma Government Press, 1971), 50–51.

20. See: Maung Zarni, “Myanmar’s neo-Nazi Buddhists get free rein,” *Asia Times*, April 9, 2013, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/SEA-01-090413.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/SEA-01-090413.html); “Military Roots of Racism,” *Asia Times*, September 3, 2013, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/SEA-01-030913.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/SEA-01-030913.html). Also see: “Hidden Hands Behind Communal Violence.”

21. Beth Walker, “Anti-Chinese sentiment on rise in Myanmar,” *China Dialogue*, May 13, 2014, <https://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/6969-Anti-Chinese-sentiment-on-rise-in-Myanmar>.

22. In his remarks to the 1982 Citizenship Act Drafting Committee held at his Presidential Residence in Rangoon on October 8, 1982, Chairman of the Burma Socialist Programme Party and ex-General Ne Win spelled out the three categories of citizenship. Here he introduced to the country who is a “guest” and who is a “host” in terms of the country’s inhabitants. See: “Translation of the speech by General Ne Win provided in *The Working People’s Daily* (the official English language newspaper of Burma),” October 9, 1982, [http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs6/Ne\\_Win%27s\\_speech\\_Oct-1982-Citizenship\\_Law.pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs6/Ne_Win%27s_speech_Oct-1982-Citizenship_Law.pdf). Echoing the old racist sentiment propagated by the late despot General Ne Win, Myanmar’s best known racist hate-preachers, such as Sitagu Abbot and Wirathu, continue to promote this ‘guest-host’ view of citizens, portraying all non-Buddhists as “guests.”

23. Andrew R.C. Marshall, “Special Report: Myanmar gives official blessing to anti-Muslim monks,” *Reuters*, June 27, 2013, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-969-specialreport-idUSBRE95Q04720130627>.

24. Edith M. Lederer, “China, Russia Veto Myanmar Resolution,” *Washington Post*, January 14, 2007.

25. Report of the General Secretary, Brig-Gen. San Yu, to the Burma Socialist Program Party, Rangoon, November 1968 (Burmese language).

26. The articulation of this view dominated the state-controlled media outlets following the bloody crackdown of 1988 popular uprisings nationwide. Personal communications and interviews with serving and ex-military personnel from the Myanmar armed forces conducted in Thailand, Philippines, and in the United States between 2004 and 2009.

27. For an in-depth discussion on the Burmese armed forces in terms of their ideological orientation, mode of operations, self-perception, class position in society, etc., see: Maung Zarni, “Myanmar’s Black Hole: Evolution of a Mafia State in Myanmar,” *Asia Times*, October 16, 2013, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/SEA-03-161013.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/SEA-03-161013.html).

28. “Aung San’s address (20 January 1946) to Shwedagon Middle Terrace Conference, Rangoon,” in *The Collected Speeches of Bogyoke Aung San*.

29. Donald Eugene Smith, *Religion and Politics in Burma* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), 237.

30. The Burmese author grew up and lived under the military rule for 25 years. This “communist as anti-Buddhist, Dhamma-less heretics” was part of our everyday vocabulary.

31. Andrew R.C. Marshall, “Special Report: Myanmar gives official blessing to anti-Muslim monks,” *Reuters*, June 26, 2013, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-969-specialreport-idUSBRE95Q04720130627>; Jason Szep, “Apartheid tactics separate Myanmar’s minority Muslims from majority Buddhists,” *Reuters*, May 16, 2013, <http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2013/05/16/apartheid-tactics-separate-myanmars-minority-muslims-from-majority-buddhists/>.

32. “Whisper campaigns” is the term that the late Colonel San Tha, a former Central Executive Committee member with General Ne Win’s Burma Socialist Programme Party regime in 1970s, used to describe how the military intelligence (MI) disseminated misinformation among the Burmese public. The



MI continued to rely on the same misinformation campaign in the 1990s before there was any Internet and social media penetration in Myanmar. See Kyaw Yin Hlaing, “Challenging the Authoritarian State Buddhist Monks and Peaceful Protests In Burma,” *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 32, no. 1 (2008): 125–44, specifically 138.

33. Kate Hodal, “Buddhist monk uses racism and rumours to spread hatred in Burma,” *Guardian*, April 18, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/18/buddhist-monk-spreads-hatred-burma>. Also on file with the authors is Reverend Wirathu’s full audiotaped sermon during which he publicly called for “starving all Muslims” in Mandalay in 2001.

34. For a typical Burmese language interview on “Rohingyas as illegal Bengali descendants,” see: “Interview with Dr Yin Yin Nwe of Myanmar Presidential Rakhine Commission,” *Voice of American Burmese Service*, May 12, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6tDdlb1YmI>. [Dr Yin Yin Nwe is the former Head of UNICEF China and a Cambridge-educated geologist. She is also the former daughter-in-law of the late General Ne Win.]

35. Marshall, “Myanmar gives official blessing to anti-Muslim monks.” Also see: “Hidden Hands Behind Communal Violence.”

36. Tin Maung Maung Than, “Sangha Reforms and Renewal of Sasana in Myanmar: Historical Trends and Contemporary Practice,” in *Buddhist Trends in Southeast Asia* (Social Issues in Southeast Asia), ed. Trevor Ling (Singapore: ISEAS, 1993), 6–63.

37. “Hyper-nationalists celebrate four ‘race and religion’ laws,” *Myanmar Times*, September 15, 2015, <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/16477-hyper-nationalists-celebrate-four-race-and-religion-laws.html>. Thein Sein’s Government released a three-minute Burmese language YouTube clip as part of its election campaigning against Aung San Suu Kyi’s then flagship opposition party of NLD as the 2015 general election approached.

38. The renowned former student leaders caused deep dismay among their international supporters, including human rights organizations, when they began talking about the primacy of “national security” over basic human rights of Rohingyas. Even Aung San Suu Kyi’s NLD government was defending the anti-Muslim national race and faith laws at the UN. See: “New govt to defend ‘race and religion’ laws at UN meeting,” *Myanmar Times*, July 6, 2016, <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/21218-new-govt-to-defend-race-and-religion-laws-at-un-meeting.html>.

39. See: “Interview with Ye Htut,” *Irrawaddy Burmese Edition*, July 12, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/theirrawaddyburmese/videos/1683383938372418/>.

40. Maung Zarni, “Myanmar to Humanitarian Groups: THOU SHALL NOT FEED THE MUSLIMS—without Gov. Knowledge & Monitor,” *Transcend*, July 4, 2017, <https://www.transcend.org/tms/2017/07/myanmar-to-humanitarian-groups-thou-shall-not-feed-the-muslims-without-gov-knowledge-monitor/>.

41. “Starvation hits Burma’s Rakhine state as food supplies dwindle,” *Asia Correspondent*, July 9, 2017, <https://asiancorrespondent.com/2017/07/starvation-hits-burmas-rakhine-state-food-supplies-dwindle/#Y3sfb6ZHRjG36uH6.99>.

42. Personal communications with a former UN senior official previously based in Yangon, 2005.

43. “The Slow Genocide of the Rohingya by Amartya Sen,” YouTube, Harvard University, November 4, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugHhAwARb98>.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Alex de Waal, “The Nazis Used It, We Use It: The Return of Famine as a Weapon of War,” *The London Review of Books*, June 26, 2017, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v39/n12/alex-de-waal/the-nazis-used-it-we-use-it>.

46. Email communications with the authors, July 13, 2017.

47. For the most learned discussion on the issue of respective claims for “indigeneity” made by both Rohingyas and Rakhine Buddhists, see: Michael Charney, “Arakan or Rakhine in Myanmar since the 14th Century: From Inclusion to Polarisation and Exclusion,” remarks delivered at the Conference on Myanmar’s Democratic Transition and the Persecuted Rohingyas, Oxford University, May 11, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZNe8WysEqM>. Also see: Gregory B. Polling, “Separating Fact from Fiction about Myanmar’s Rohingya,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 13, 2014, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/separating-fact-fiction-about-myanmar%E2%80%99s-rohingya>.



48. Interview with ex-Immigration Minister U Khin Yi, Part I, “The Problem of Myanmar’s Western Gate,” Voice of America Burmese Language Service, August 31, 2017, <https://burmese.voanews.com/weekly-news-analysis-rakhine-arakan-affairs/4006422.html>.

49. Khin Nyunt, *Our Country’s Western Gate Problem* (Yangon: One Hundred Flowers Literary House, 2016), Introduction.

50. *Ibid.*, 15–19.

51. General Khin Nyunt’s Burmese Language Lecture (marked Top Secret) delivered at the National Defense University Management Course In-take 3/93, on 30 November 1993, in Myat Khaing, *Interview with ex-General Khin Nyunt* (Yangon: Quality Publishing House, 2013), 158. Nyunt, *Western Gate Problem*, Introduction.

52. *Ibid.*, 38–40.

53. Sonu Patel, “The Indo-Pakistani War of 1971,” Prezi Presentation, March 5, 2012, <https://prezi.com/gwtaxlpkhfda/the-indo-pakistani-war-of-1971/>.

54. See: Maung Zarni & Alice Cowley, “The Slow Burning Genocide of Myanmar’s Rohingya,” *Pacific Rim Law and Policy Journal*, 23, no. 3 (2014): 684.

55. *Ibid.*

56. For a brief legal analysis on the subject presented by former staffer with the U.S. State Department’s Office of the Legal Adviser who also clerked in the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), see: Katherine Southwich, “Confronting Genocide in Myanmar,” Policy Forum (of the Asia and Pacific Policy Society), December 2, 2016, <https://www.policyforum.net/confronting-genocide-myanmar>.

57. Personal communications, July 12, 2017.

58. General Khin Nyunt’s National Defense Lecture, 1993; Nyunt, *Our Country’s Western Gate Problem*, Introduction.

59. “AUNG SAN SUU KYI ‘ATTACKS ON MUSLIMS NOT ETHNIC CLEANSING,’” *BBC*, October 24, 2013, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNVE\\_Ch\\_Q18](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNVE_Ch_Q18).

60. “Aung San Suu Kyi stripped off Freedom of Oxford,” *BBC*, October 3, 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-41481521>; Alan Simpson, “Glasgow moves to strip Aung San Suu Kyi of honours,” *Herald*, October 5, 2017, [http://www.heraldsotland.com/news/15579765.Glasgow\\_moves\\_to\\_strip\\_Aung\\_San\\_Suu\\_Kyi\\_of\\_honours/](http://www.heraldsotland.com/news/15579765.Glasgow_moves_to_strip_Aung_San_Suu_Kyi_of_honours/).

61. For the detailed analysis of why Aung San Suu Kyi has come to be widely viewed as a genocide denier, see: Mehdi Hasan, “Burmese Nobel Prize Winner Aung San Suu Kyi Has Turned Into an Apologist for Genocide Against Muslims,” *The Intercept*, April 13, 2017, <https://theintercept.com/2017/04/13/burmese-nobel-prize-winner-aung-san-suu-kyi-has-turned-into-an-apologist-for-genocide-against-muslims/>.

62. *Ibid.*

63. “Snr Gen Min Aung Hlaing pledges to help safeguard Buddhism,” *Myanmar Times*, June 24, 2016 <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/21035-snr-gen-min-aung-hlaing-pledges-to-help-safeguard-buddhism.html>.

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