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Ethnic Cleansing of the Rohingyas: a Historical Analysis

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Abstract: The ethnic Rohingyas have been living in the Rakhine State of Myanmar for centuries. Significant human rights problems persisted throughout the 2010s, including rape, sexual violence, politically motivated arrests, and an overall lack of the rule of law. Myanmar's citizenship law of 1982 made the ethnic Rohingyas stateless. They were displaced from their homes by systematic violence. Government security forces were allegedly responsible for extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, torture, mistreatment in detention, and systematic denial of due process of fair trials. The paper argues that the Rohingya genocide has been created in the Rakhine state with the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingyas since 2012. Ethnic cleansing of the Rohingyas has become a regional and international concern, not just an internal affair of Myanmar. This study attempts to explain the atrocity committed against the Rohingyas in terms of ethnic cleansing In the Rakhine State. The study is conducted based on multiple sources combining primary and closely related secondary materials, archival documents, newspapers, policy reports and pamphlets and leaflets published by different government and non-government agents and civil societies followed by the qualitative method. A balanced approach of data gathering and analysis will be used and maintained, including an analysis of both official and unofficial documents. Structured observations of the time to time will be very critically analyzed. The study finally suggests ways to improve Rohingya lives and secure regional peace.

Abstrak: Etnis Rohingya telah tinggal di Negara Bagian Rakhine, Myanmar selama berabad-abad. Masalah hak asasi manusia yang signifikan masih terjadi sepanjang tahun 2010an, termasuk pemerkosaan, kekerasan seksual, penangkapan bermotif politik, dan lemahnya supremasi hukum. Undang-undang kewarganegaraan Myanmar tahun 1982 membuat etnis Rohingya tidak memiliki kewarganegaraan. Mereka terusir dari rumah mereka karena kekerasan sistematis. Pasukan keamanan pemerintah diduga bertanggung jawab atas pembunuhan di luar proses hukum, penahanan sewenang-wenang, penyiksaan, penganiayaan dalam penahanan, dan penolakan sistematis terhadap proses peradilan yang adil. Makalah ini berargumen bahwa genosida Rohingya terjadi di negara bagian Rakhine melalui pembersihan etnis Rohingya sejak tahun 2012. Pembersihan etnis Rohingya telah menjadi perhatian regional dan internasional, bukan hanya urusan internal Myanmar. Penelitian ini mencoba menjelaskan kekejaman yang dilakukan terhadap etnis Rohingya dalam kaitannya dengan pembersihan etnis di Negara Bagian Rakhine. Studi ini dilakukan berdasarkan berbagai sumber yang menggabungkan bahan-bahan primer dan sekunder, dokumen arsip, surat kabar, laporan kebijakan dan pamflet serta selebaran yang diterbitkan oleh berbagai lembaga pemerintah dan non-pemerintah serta masyarakat sipil yang diikuti dengan metode kualitatif. Pendekatan yang seimbang dalam pengumpulan dan analisis data akan digunakan dan dipertahankan, termasuk analisis terhadap dokumen resmi dan tidak resmi. Pengamatan terstruktur dari waktu ke waktu akan dianalisis dengan sangat kritis. Studi ini pada akhirnya menyarankan cara-cara untuk meningkatkan kehidupan Rohingya dan menjamin perdamaian regional.

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INTRODUCTION

The ethnic Rohingyas have been living in the Arakan region of Myanmar, now renamed Rakhine State, for centuries. It became a Burmese province after the Burmese invasion and occupation of Arakanin 1784. The Rakhine State,located at the Northeast part of a coastal zone of the Bay of Bengal, is strategically and geographically at the crossroads of South, Southeast, and East Asia. Besides, the offshore of the Rakhine State and its neighboring maritime zones remains rich in natural resources. Its record natural gas, oil, jade, rubies, gems, gold, copper, tin, nickel, marbles,diamonds, and other precious stone reserves, and an extended coastal area with important harbors have made the region more focused. Most of Myanmar's wealth is tied up in extractive industries, from oil and gas to timber, gems, gold, and hydropower, disproportionately concentrated in ethnic regions, including the Arakan or Rakhine State. The United States and other countries are now competing with one another to help develop Myanmar's state-owned Oil and Gas Enterprise by providing capacity-building support, thus reinforcing better governance in Myanmar.

Before the opening up of Myanmar for foreign business enterprise, human rights in Rakhine State remained a severely troubling counterpoint to the broader trend of progress, especially since 2011. Significant human rights problems persisted throughout the 2010s, including rape, sexual violence, politically motivated arrests, and an overall lack of the rule of law. Myanmar's citizenship law of 1982 made the ethnic Rohingyas stateless. They were displaced from their homes by systematic violence. Authorities in the Rakhine State made no meaningful efforts to help them return to their homes but continued to enforce "draconian" restrictions on their movement. More than ten lac Rohingyas remained interned in camps in Bangladesh, thereby segregating them from the Rakhine communities. Government security forces were allegedly responsible for extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, torture, mistreatment in captivity, and systematic denial of due process of fair trials (U.S. Department of State Archive, 2017). Demand for land became a significant factor in the anti-Rohingya campaign. As foreign farms moved in, Rohingya land grabs rose in volume, and the land market began to boom. Burning Rohingya homes made the land grab irreversible, as they were forced to flee to other countries, leaving their lands behind ("Is Rohingya persecution caused by business interests rather than religion?," 2017). Rohingya land grabbing and persecution, thus, became intertwined.

Once the purpose of Rohinga land grabbing had been set, it needed an excuse to begin the process. It was found in the roles of ethnic Rohingya and Rakhine communities during World War II, when the British retreated to India, and the Japanese and the Burmese Independence Army of General Aung San advanced into Burma. Rohingyas supported the British. The retreating British forces armed some Muslim Rohingyas to fight as guerillas against the Japanese and their local collaborators, the Rakhine Buddhists, who immigrated to the Rakhine State as late as the 10th century ("Ousted Myanmar leader Suu Kyi's verdict in junta court Tuesday," 282021). Communal violence between the Muslim Rohingyas and the Rakhine Buddhists in 1942 polarized the region along ethnic identities.

Consequently, after the end of the World War, race relations between the Rohingyas and the Rakhines became increasingly hostile. When Burma became independent in 1948, the separatist *Mujahidin* rebellion was a protest against discrimination by the Buddhist-dominated administration. It lingered into the 1960s, along with the Arakanese independence Movement of the Rakhine Buddhists. The *Mujahidin*rebellion created mistrust and hostilities between Rohingya Muslims and Rakhine Buddhists ("Rohingyas: A personal challenge for Suu Kyi," 2017).

Although the Rohingyas are the majority population of the northern Rakhine State, they are the minority in the Rakhine State. In the whole of Buddhist Myanmar, their strength is negligible. But recently, their position has been inflated, and they are considered a threat to the Rakhine or Buddhist majority, although the Rakhines immigrated to the region during the 10th century. With the advent of the Rohingyas, the question of grabbing the lion's share of the "loaf" or resources of the state made the Rakhines and Bamars jealous. Consequently, enterprises have been undertaken to squeeze the Rohingyas out of Myanmar. The measures include all sorts of persecution: government force's "clearance" or "mop up" operations, induced starvation of 160,000 Rohingyas by blocking the flow of all kinds of humanitarian assistance ("Sorry, Aung San Suu Kyi, the Rohingya crisis is no laughing matter," 2016), disenfranchisement, and ethnic cleansing of the Rohingyas, leading to their flight from homes in the Rakhine State. Myanmar's President Thein Sein claimed that the trouble in the Rakhine State is an internal affair of Myanmar and should not be internationalized ("Monks stage anti-Rohingya march in Myanmar," 2012).

A process of Rohingya genocide has been created in the Rakhine state with the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingyas in 2012 anti-Rohingya riots through stigmatization that has escalated to harassment, isolation of the Rohingyas into squalid IDP (Internally Displaced Peoples) camps, and weakening them systematically by denying these interned Rohingyas freedom of movement, right to jobs, food and water supply to the camps, and access of international aid agencies to those camps. Thus, a groundwork has been laid for genocide i.e., mass destruction of the Rohingyas, which according to the International State Crime Initiative (ISCI), as yet not inevitable, but possible. The UN Refugee Agency is convinced that the ultimate goal of rape, arson, slaughter of Rohingyas, burning of their villages, driving out of the country thousands of ethnic Rohingyas, stripping their citizenship and voting rights, and isolating the remaining Rohingyas into IDP camps is ethnic cleansing. The UN called on Suu Kyi to halt the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingyas(Broomfield, 2016).The UN dispatched a fact-finding mission to South-Asian countries over claims of murder, rape, and torture in the Rakhine State. But Suu Kyi rejected the UN Rohingya probe by asserting that Burma's security forces or their allies, the Rakhine perpetrators, are not involved in ethnic cleansing of the Rohingyas ("Burma's Aung San Suu Kyi rejects UN Rohingya investigation," 2017).

Rohingya persecution, thus, created a humanitarian and refugee crisis: the ethnic cleansing of ethnic Rohingya minorities, and their present situation, which has been gradually heading to genocide. Ethnic cleansing of the Rohingyas has, thus, become a regional and international concern, not just an internal affair of Myanmar. Chowdhury (2004), and Karim (2000) have figured out historical and cultural roots of the Rohingyas but failed to investigate the roots of their ethnic cleansing and genocides. The present study is an attempt to fill up the vacume. The world-famous dailies, magazines and periodicals extensively reported on Rohingya persecution, humanitarian and refugee crisis, ethnic cleansing of Rohingya minorities, and their present situation. The reports and editorials on Rohingya ethnic cleansing published in the last ten years in Reuters, The Guardian, The Economist, The New Age, The Press Journal, The Wire, Al Jazeera, Time, Independent (UK), Agence France Presse, The Telegraph (News), Global Issues, New Mandala, The New York Times, The World Post, CNBC, Radio Free Asia, Amnesty International, BBC News Asia, Voice of America, New York Times: Asia Pacific, Daily Star etc. have been critically analyzed to explain the atrocity committed against the Rohingyas in terms of ethnic cleansing in the Rakhine State. It suggests ways and means for improving Rohingya lives and securing regional peace.

ROHINGYA IDENTITY AND ROOTS OF PERSECUTION

The term "Rohingya", then spelled "Rooingya", first appeared in 1799 in an article about a language spoken by Muslims claiming to be natives of Arakan ("Why Suu Kyi is silent on the Rohingya issue," 2019). Francis Buchanon writes in 1799 in an article about the languages spoken in Burma that the Muslim inhabitants, "who have long settled in Arakan called themselves "Rooinga, or natives of Arakan". He further argues that "Rooinga (or Rohingya) derives from the land of Rohang, the word used in Bengal to refer to Arakan", which is thus just another way to say Arakanese, currently the inhabitants of the Northern Rakhine State (Archive ouverte HAL, n.d.)". Rohingya, therefore, means "inhabitants of Rohang" the early Muslim name for Arakan, modern Rakhine State.

One of the burning questions about the Rohinga crisis to date relates to the negation of the ethnic identity and nationality of the Rohingyas. There are dubious and prejudiced Burmese and Rakhine ultra-nationalist ("Rohingya still fleeing Myanmar for crowded camps", 2018) assertions, without any evidence, that Rohingyas of the Rakhine State (formerly Arakan) are "illegal immigrants from Bangladesh" (Shwe Yee Saw Myint, Antoni Slodkowski, 2016), who are not among the 135 ethnic groups recognized by Myanmar's law, as they have allegedly arrived in the Rakhine State as recently as a few years ago and have continued arriving up to the first wave of sectarian violence ("Rohingya and national identities in Burma," 2014) in 2012. Myanmar's religious affairs ministry claimed that the Rohingya are not indigenous to Myanmar. "The word Rohingya", thus goes an announcement of Myanmar's Ministry of Religion and Cultural Affairs", "was never used or existed as an ethnicity or race in Myanmar's history." The refusal to include the Rohingyas in the list of officially recognized 135 ethnic groups may be attributed to the fact that the community is neither of Buddhist or Mongoloid origin. They claim to be natives of Arakan, a diverse community of pre-colonial and colonial migrants who have intermarried with native Myanmaries, settled there for centuries, and became indigenous to the coastal Arakan or Rakhine State. The British censuses of 1872 and 1911 record-

ed an increase in the Muslim population of Akyab district (where SittwePort is located) from 58,255 to 178,647 (Lewis & Das, 2017).

Yet, an official census taken in 2015 purposefully excluded the Rohingyas from the community of Myanmar citizens, denying them voting rights in the country's general election. The political organizations which once represented the Rohingyas were disallowed from contesting in the election, and so were the former elected Rohingya MPs. This was a calculated move to eliminate the Rohingas politically, socially and economically ("Annan commission needs to be successful," 2016). Like other Bamar and Rakhine Buddhists, Aung San Suu Kyi decided to call the Rohingyas "Bengalee" after her landslide election victory, not Rohingyas or Myanmar's citizens. The Rohingyas deny that they are Bengalees, or their language is Bengali, as Chittagonian dialect and Bengali are entirely different. The Rohingyas "insist on their richer, more ancient heritage in the old Arakan kingdom. On this rests their claim to citizenship and as an indigenous ethnic group of Myanmar" ("most persecuted people on earth?," 2015). Bangladesh does not recognize the Rohingyas as its citizens and does not allow them citizenship, either; instead, it treats the Rohingya refugees as Myanmar's citizens. In the mid-1990s, 200,000 of them were repatriated to Myanmar under UN supervision.

Suu Kyi did not allow Rohingya representation in her subsequent Kofi Annon Commission, formed to investigate human rights abuses in the Rakhine State. She even asked foreign diplomats and leaders not to use the term "Rohingya" because, in her view, it is inflammatory. In the interim report published on 16 March 2017, the Rakhine Commission did not refer to the Rohingya by name, adhering to the Myanmar government policy that describes the Rohingyas as "Muslim community of Arakan State."However, SuuKyi was reminded by the then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon that the Rohingyas have the right to self-identity and the Rohingyas had lived in the country for generations. For over four years, he conveyed the international community's concern about tens of thousands of Rohingyas in poor conditions in IDP camps. Ban called for improving the living conditions of the Rohingyas (Shwe Yee Saw Myint, Antoni Slodkowski, 2016). Nobel Laureate Professor AmartaSen and Professor Gregory Stanton, President of the Genocide Watch, view the Rohingya persecution as "genocide". Pope Francis, the Dalailama, George Soros, and Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi identified the conditions of 150,000 Rohingyas as "calculated to bring about their destruction", ("No Rohingya on commission to address their fate," 2017) and "ethnic cleansing" by Myanmar's Government (Chandran, 2016).

ORIGIN OF THE CRISIS

Burmese invasion and occupation of independent Arakan (1784-85), the refugee exodus in British Indian territory, and consequent British military campaigns in Burma created grounds for the Rohingya humanitarian crisis in Arakan, present Rakhine State. Looking back to history, Muslims kings ruled Arakan in the 15th century. Burma invaded and annexed Independent Arakan in 1784/1785, about forty years before the British took it. With its neglect and misrule of the conquered territory, Burmese occupation of Arakan turned it into an abackward province.Arakan became almost depopulated due to the merciless massacre of the Arakanese. Some, including GaThandi, the defeated king of Arakan and his followers, became fugitives in neighboring British Bengal (Bandarban, Chittagong). The Burmese king demanded them back, which the British did not comply with.Burmese control over Arakan resulted in protracted wrangles with the British, who were firmly ensconced in Bengal by then.

In their respective historical research, at least two historians of Bangladesh have successfully challenged the Burmese and Rakhine historiography: Abdul Karim and Mohammad Ali Choudhury. Ali argues that the visits and settlements of the Arabs, at least from the 8th century and restoration of the ousted Arakanese king Min Sawmun (Narameikhla) by Bengal Sultan Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah and the consequent prolonged friendly relations between Bengal and Arakan contributed to the huge Muslim influx into Arakan in the form of soldiers, civil servants, administrators, mint officers, judicial officers (*qazis)*, professionals, artisans, and the like, forming a sizable Muslim community in Arakan (Chowdhury, 2004, p. 199). Abdul Karim refuted the Burmese and Rakhine assertion that about 1. 8 million Rohingyas of Arakan suddenly and illegally entered Arakan from Bangladesh, and the Government of Myanmar has the right to disfranchise and uproot them from their homes, torture, maim, rape, kill, and expel the remaining Rohingya population from the Rakhine State of Myanmar. He has demonstrated that although the first Muslim settlers in Arakan were shipwrecked (occurred off the coast of Ramree island), Arab traders, who settled in the North-west Arakan during the 8th century (Karim, 2000, p. 40)

and became the nucleus of the Muslim population of Arakan, many other Muslims came to Arakan in different phases; some came as traders, Arabia and Persia; others came as conquerors and in the train of conquering army, some as victims of European, mainly Portuguese, and their local collaborators, i.e., the Maughs, pirates, and others, who came in peaceful pursuits.

However, all the Muslim settlers did not enter Arakan in their interests; rather, they were invited by the rulers of Arakan. For instance, when the Arakanese king Narameikhla (Minsawmun) took asylum in Bengal, he requested Sultan Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah to restore him to the throne of Arakan. The Sultan complied with the request in 1430. After this campaign, several thousand Muslims stayed back there. The subsequent large influx of Muslims from Bengal happened during the middle of the 17th century when Shah Shuja, the second son of Emperor Shah Jahan, lost the War of Succession and fled to Arakan with his entourage and retinue. About one thousand Muslims entered Arakan during this time (Karim, 2000, p. 40). All these Arakanese rulers asked the Muslims to help exploit Arakan's economic resources because their people could not do it alone or did not know how to do it. These Arakanese kings were Buddhists, but they took Muslim and Buddhist names (Karim, 2000, p. 23) as a mark of solidarity with Bengali Muslim rulers and people.

The British Government also brought Bengalees into Burma to engage them in the development of agriculture, particularly rice, as Arakan had a huge quantity of fallow and forest lands to clear and grow agriculture. So long, these lands remained unutilized because the local Burmese and Rakhines were unwilling to do the hard work of farming and clearing forests. Their society was also matriarchal, in which females did the outdoor work. On the contrary, the Burmans and Rakhines recognized the Bengalee, particularly Chittagonian, farmers as the most capable of clearing forests and developing agriculture. Because of their skills in clearing forests and cultivating land, Robertson, the first civil ruler of Arakan, and Paton, who succeeded Robertson, recommended to the British Government to bring into Arakan the Bengaleesto cultivate lands and grow rice and other agricultural commodities (Karim, 2000, p. 110).

Thus, according to estimates of Robertson and Paton, 30,000 Muslims, who called themselves Rohingyas, had already been living in Arakan even before the British import of Bengalees into Arakan (Karim, 2000, p. 113). Another estimate done in 1992 testifies that about 1.4 million Rohingyas (Karim, 2000, p. 112) lived in Arakan, now called the Rakhine State.

The James Baxter Committee Report of 1940 noted that 77% of the Indian residents in Arakan in 1931 were born in Arakan. Arakanese Muslims generally became indigenized, while migration of others continued elsewhere, mainly in Upper and Lower Burma. The Report also shows that 82.5% of the female immigrants were born in Arakan, signifying a highly settled indigenized Rohingya community in the Rakhine State by 1931. The Report stated- "There was an Arakanese Muslim Community settled so long in Akyab district that it had for all intent purposes to be regarded as an indigenous race" (NetIPR - Network for International Protection of Refugees and Burma Action Group (South Australia), 1940)

The Report suggests a continuous increase of the birth of Indian Arakanese from 33.4 percent in 1881 to 77% in 1931. Settlement to Arakan almost stopped by 1931. Baxter concluded that Indians in Arakan were a long-settled community. The right to citizenship for settled communities was recognized in various documents of Britain and Burma from 1935 to 1947, guaranteed in Myanmar's Constitution of 1948. But this was later discarded by the Myanmar authority. The Rohingyas use Burmese language and also adopt the local customs. They stuck to their religion of Islam and the Islamic social tradition and language of their ancestors with a mixture of local words in dealing with themselves. The Rohingyas are, thus, one of the different ethnic minorities of the Rakhine State of Myanmar, not recent immigrants of Bangladesh. In the past, Myanmar never complained about illegal immigration from Bangladesh.

The Burmese and the Rakhine historians are, thus, deliberately catering to the interested quarters of Myanmar's Burmese population and Government who are unnecessarily suffering from Rohingya Muslim xenophobia and Islam phobia. They have undertaken a policy of ethnic cleansing to grab Rohingya land. Muslims are not only a minority in the Rakhine State but a microscopic ethnic minority in Myanmar. As such, they can never be a threat to Myanmar. Despite their untold sufferings, the Rohingyas do not have a known armed faction fighting for them. The so-called terrorist organization *Aqamul Mujahidin* allegedly operated in the Maungdaw region in conjunction with the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO), which operated in Arakan during the 1980s and 1990s, is believed to be defunct ("Myanmar commission begins a sec-

ond trip to troubled northern Rakhine state," 2017).

Myanmar's army-led government policies have rendered the Rohingyas stateless human beings without human rights. However, they were issued citizenship or ID cards and granted the right to vote by Burma's first post-independence Prime Minister, U Nu. Even before independence and after the separation of Burma from India in 1935, two Rohingyas were elected in the Burmese national categories in the elections held 1936. The Rohingyas then represented Burmese nationals and not the Indian or other groups. In the election of 1939, the Rohingyaleader Mr. Tanavy Markan was elected from the Maungdaw + Buthidaung constituency. In the first General election for Constituent Assembly in 1947, just before the Burmese independence, Buthidaung and Maungdaw had two separate constituencies, and two Rohingya MPs were elected. Since 1951, Buthidaung and Maungdaw have had two constituencies, and 4 Rohingya MPs were elected. In addition, Mr. Abdul Gafur was elected MP for the Upper House. In the election of 1956, 6 Rohingyas were elected MPs, including one for the Upper House. In the election in 1961, Rohingyas were involved more actively in politics, and 5 Rohingya MPs were elected. Mr Sultan Mahmood MP of Buthidaung became Minister of Education and Health under U Nu's Government. During the time of Ne Win, the Rohingyas exercised the right of franchise and voted in the 1974 election, Rohingya representatives were elected to the Peoples Parliament and different levels of People's Council. Likewise, lots of Rohingya leaders were admitted to the Burma Socialist Programme Party, and some of them held higher positions. These Rohingya MPs, representatives, and traditional leaders were then recognized as national leaders of Burma or Myanmar and, until recent anti-Rohingya campaigns beginning from the military administration of General Ne Win in 1975, none questioned their loyalty or called them Bengalee or Bangladeshi illegal immigrants.

In 1975, Ne Win renamed Arakan as the Rakhine State. The Buddhist Rakhines progressively operated all the State and local administrations. Muslim Rohingyas were marginalized and increasingly excluded. The Rohingyas were systematically persecuted and discriminated. They were deprived of fundamental rights and freedoms, including the right to elect representatives. Rohingyas were excluded from participating in the People's Council elections of 1982 and 1986. The military State Law and Order Restoration Council held a nationwide referendum in 2008 to adopt a constitution for the Union of Burma. Rohingyas were allowed to participate in the referendum. In the multiparty Democratic Election of 1990, Rohingyas were allowed to form their own political parties. They won 4 Parliamentary seats, two at Maungdaw and two at Buthidaung. In the multi-party democratic election of 2010, Rohingyas won 4 seats. The elected Rohingya MPs were Abdur Razzak, Zakir Ahmed, Zaidur Rahman, and Jahangir (Ibrahim, 2018, pp.29-38). But this ray of hope for the Rohingya with the gradual democratization process in the face of the movement initiated by the National League for Democracy (NLD) party under the leadership of Myanmar's democracy and human rights leader Aung San SuuKyi soon vanished with the beginning of ethnic cleansing of Rohingyas since 2012.

THE PROCESS OF DEPRIVING THE ETHNIC ROHINGYAS OF CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS

From 1962, Myanmar's successive military governments tilted to anti-Rohingya racism by refusing to accept them as historically bi-cultural and pre-independent people of North-western Myanmar. They even insist that "Rohingya" is a fake term, although "Rohingya" was used long before the British colonized Burma, and Muslims lived in Arakan since the 8th century (Ibrahim, 2018, p. 10). Rohingyas are, thus, branded as aliens in their own country where they were born. By the 1982 Citizenship Rights Act the Rohingyas were stripped of citizenship of Myanmar and made stateless. In 1995, the Burmese authorities started issuing the Rohingyas Temporary Registration Cards (TRCs), white cards which did not specify nationality. Although the temporary cards held no legal value, they did represent some minimal recognition of brief stay for the Rohingya in Myanmar. The TRCs, however, did not mention the bearer's places of birth and could not be used to claim citizenship.

The Rohingyas, who always considered themselves Burmese, are now suddenly treated as foreigners, alienated, disenfranchised, and rejected in their own homeland on the basis of their ethnic identity and Islamic faith. On 31 March 2015 the Myanmar government declared the white card invalid, abrogating thus the voting rights of the white card-holding Rohingyas and making them effectively stateless. The NLD struck them off from the list of citizens of Myanmar and made them stateless "following pressure from the increasingly powerful ultranationalist Buddhist movement." ("No vote, no candidates: Myanmar's Muslims barred from their own election," 2015)

Myanmar government now claims that the

hundreds of thousands Rohingyas fleeing persecution in the Rakhine State are not genuinely Myanmar's citizens, as they speak a language that has some affinity with Chittagonian dialect, they are Chittagonians or Bangladeshis, a claim that can not be confirmed by conclusive evidence, and historians of Bangladesh and abroad have already convincingly refuted. The Rohingyas cannot speak Bangla, but the Chittagonianlanguage, which is not Bangla, but just one of the country's dialects. Such Burmese anti -Rohingya stance is vitiated by Xenophobia and Fascist or Nazi ideologies of World War periods, as it provides license to the elements of racism and communalism Myanmar to begin a campaign of ethnic Rohingya eviction or ethnic cleansing to grab their lands.

Stripping citizenship rights of the Rohingyas brought about dire consequences in the lives of the Rohingya people. It deprived the Rohingyas of a constitutional guarantee of equal rights and legal protection. They are denied fundamental rights. They are facing travel restrictions, marriage restrictions, and segregation. Their houses, shops, and other properties, such as land and, agricultural fields, cattle, are all being confiscated in the name of developing modern villages and settling Buddhist criminals, who are reportedly used for repression and oppressing the Rohingyas so that they are compelled to flee from their homes in Rakhine State.

UNDEMOCRATIC MILITARY RULE IN MYANMAR AND ANTI-ROHINGYA CAMPAIGNS

The Rohingyas' misfortune worsened in Myanmar's military regime began to relax its control. Freedom of speech helped preachers of Anti-Muslim hatred. The extremist nationalist and Buddhist monks are the perpetrators of oppression, aided by many elements of police, military, and border agencies to perform violence against the Rohingyas. The army and police, which can crush unrest when they choose to, stood by during the anti-Rohingya communal violence in 2012 involving Buddhist Rakhine perpetrators. Rapes, arson, targeted killings, and other atrocities have been committed against the Rohingyas by the security forces and their Rakhine agents since 9 October 2015 when unidentified insurgents allegedly killed nine policemen in an attack on a Rakhine border post. The World's media coverage characterized these actions of the Burmese security forces and their agents as religious persecution. Human Rights Watch described the anti-Rohingya violence as offenses "amounting to crimes against humanity", committed to cleansing the Rohingyas ethnically. John McKissick, the head of UN Refugee Agency, asserted that the Myanmar government has been carrying out ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya people. Aung San SuuKyi's Government did very little to stop the unfolding violence. In addition, she chastised the international community for fueling division in north-western Myanmar (Rakhine State). Kofi Annan, head of an international commission to study conditions in Rakhine State, was "deeply concerned" with reports of dozens of Rohingyas killed after 9 October incident ("What does the bloodshed in Rakhine state tell us?" 2016).

The racial and religious differences of the Rohingyas from the Buddhist Rakhine andBamar communities added fuel to the fire. The Rohingyas are dark-skinned Muslims, unlike the fair-skinned Tibeto-Burman Rakhines and Burman neighbors. The Rohingyas also speak a different Rohingya language.The Araka or Rakhine State region, situated on the east coast of Bay of Bengal, is a natural geographical extension of Bengalee political and cultural space separated by a difficult-to-traverse mountain range from Myanmar's heartland. The Rohingyas, although have ethnic and cultural affinities with the Bengalees, are Myanmar's citizens, as their country Arakan was annexed with Burma in 1785 by the then Burmese King Bodawpaya. But, the Rohingyas are treated as a threat to ethnic Rakhine and Bamar purity and, as such, should be cleansed out of Myanmar. For this purpose, more than one million Rohingyas were stripped of citizenship and made stateless, jobless, restricted of movements, driven out of their homes, which were then torched, and their women gang raped (Uddin, 2021, p. 120), men slaughtered, children burned to death, sick and injured denied of access to hospitals, resulting in deaths of injured, babies, and their mothers. Survivors are encamped in squalid camps in "apartheid-like" conditions, where aid workers have restricted or no entry. Myanmar's policies are driving many of them to flee away. Crimes against the Rohingyas are, thus, serious, widespread, and systematic violations of fundamental human rights, which in scale tantamount to "ethnic cleansing" of the Rohingyas, according to UNHCR, and UN Refugee Agency.

Already weakened economically, socially, and legally by being stateless, the ethnic Rohingyas soon faced a systematic campaign of extinction, ethnic cleansing and genocide. In 2012, anti-Rohingya violence engulfed the North-Western Rakhine State. The violence gradually spread to central Myanmar and Mandalay. Accusations of sexual assaults and local disputes created a flashpoint of violence that quickly escalated into a widespread

anti-Rohingya hate campaign, which left about 200 Rohingyas dead and tens of thousands displaced. The authorities had been unable to prevent violence against the Rohingyas. They failed to act swiftly and assertively enough. Myanmar has a long history of ethnic mistrust, which was allowed to simmer, or at times exploited, under military rule. The Human Rights Watch claimed that although state forces did intervene to protect fleeing Muslims, more often, they fuelled unrest either by standing by or taking part in violence or directly supporting the assailants, committing killings, rape and other abuses ("Why is there communal violence in Myanmar?," 2012). From this time up to May 2023, Bangladesh has been sheltering more than one million Rohingya refugees who fled from the Rakhine state to escape the deadly reprisals from Myanmar's security forces.

In addition to the denial of citizenship, the Rohingyas have been undergoing systematic discrimination and severe restrictions on fundamental human rights of movements, works, and access to education and hospitals, resulting in delays and deaths of babies and their mothers during childbirth, sick and injured. They have also suffered executions, gang rape, and torture for a long time. Myanmar's army has used sexual violence to shame and destroy the Rohingyas. The Myanmar government is using the threat of sexual violence as a political tool (Waheed, 2015). The Myanmar government does not allow aid agencies, human rights groups, and media to access the scene of violence and squalid camps (Ben Westcott,CNN,Manny Maung for CNN, 2016). All these together may amount to crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing of ethnic Rohingyas.

CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY AND ETHNIC CLEANSING OF THE ROHINGYAS

The term "ethnic cleansing" has been used here to denote a purposeful policy by an ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographical areas. Rohingya population in Arakan State has been persecuted on ethnic grounds, which the United Nations Mission leader Linnea Arvidsson described as "crimes against humanity and ethnic Cleansing" (Nebehay, 2017). The UN bodies have long acknowledged deportation, forced population transfers, and other abuses against the Rohingyas. The policy of ethnic cleansing has been applied by the Rakhine and Bamar ethnic groups (Myanmar's security forces included) against the remaining civilian ethnic group of Rohingyas as a purposeful policy to remove the latter from their homes in the Rakhine State through violence and terrorism. The UN bodies have long acknowledged deportation, forced population transfers, and other abuses against the Rohingya in the Rakhine State. The UN special rapporteurs identified these abuses as "widespread", "systematic", and resulting from "state policy" in the 1990s (""All you can do is pray"," 2023).

The events of 2012 in Myanmar provide strong new evidence of crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. Evidence indicates that a certain group of Bamar and Rakhine leaders (both political and religious) planned, organized, and incited attacks against the Rohingyas in Arakan State. Their objectives were to drive the Rohingyas from the Arakan state. The Rakine State's political parties, monks' associations, and community groups issued anti-Rohingya pamphlets and public statements denying the existence of the Rohingyas. The local government officials and Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP) members held several meetings to press Rohingya to leave the area. On 18 October 2012, All Arakanese Monks' Solidarity Conference was held in Sittwe, issuing virulently anti-Rohingya statements that urged townships to band or group together to "help solve" the "problem". The townships then denied the Rohingyas freedom of movement and coerced them to abandon their homes and leave the area.

Vested interest circles in Myanmar, thus, treat the Rohingyas as badly as former South Africa treated its black population. A terrible human rights abuse has since been threatening to turn into something worse, like genocide. South African noble laureate Arch BishopDesmond Tutu has already described such persecution of the Rohingyas "a slow genocide", as most of the characteristics of genocide: stigmatization, harassment, isolation, and systematic weakening of rights of the Rohingyas have already been happening in the Rakhine State ("Apartheid on the Andaman Sea," 2015). Despite their sufferings, the Rohingyas do not have a known armed faction fighting for them. Since the Rohingyas were not recognized as one of Myanmar's ethnic groups, they were also not invited to the Peace Conference of the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), called the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference held in 2016.

Myanmar state involvement in the crimes is both direct and indirect. Much of the violence was carried out by mobs with weapons where various branches of state security forces stood by them.

They did nothing to provide security for attacked Rohingyas and sometimes participated directly in the atrocities. The Human Rights Watch found no indications that the Myanmar government seriously investigated or took legal action against them.

The absence of accountability lends credence to allegations that this was a government–supported campaign of ethnic cleansing in which crimes against humanity were committed. Security forces had actively encumbered liability and fairness by overseeing the digging of mass graves. Even in some cases, the security forces killed the Rohingyas. For instance, on 13 June 2012, a government security force truck dumped 18 naked and half-clothed bodies near a Rohingya IDP camp outside Sittwe, with some Rohingya victims "hogtied" with strings before being executed. By leaving the bodies near a Rohingya IDP camp, the soldiers were sending messages, consistent with the policy of ethnic cleansing, that the Rohingya should leave permanently.

Women and girls who lived in riot-affected Rakhine State were ten times more victimized. Merely, as a result of being born into an ethnic-religious minority, Rohingya women were stripped of their rights not to be protected as citizens of their country. Being stateless, they have been subjected to wide-ranging gender-based violence, discrimination, and defenselessness. Based on overstated fear (as the total Muslim population in Myanmar is just 4%) that the Rohingya Muslim population will outgrow Buddhists of Myanmar, government officials have been continuously abusing their power to authorize policies to control the lives of the minority Rohingyas. One prime example of the many outrageous policies is marriage restrictions. Marriage for a Rohingya has been made a state concern, not a private topic discussed solely by the consent of a man and woman. It required official permission that took years to be granted. Even once a legitimate concern to get married is obtained, Rohingya women are under strict pregnancy control. In an attempt to control Rohingya birth rates, Rohingya women are prohibited from having more than two children. Failure to abide by this legislation will result in their imprisonment for up to 10 years or paying a large fine that most of them can not afford. Frightened by the consequences that an unauthorized child will bring, the miserable pregnant mother has no other choice than to endure unsafe or risky abortion. Suppose the option of abortion is financially unavailable to her. In that case, the only way for her to survive is to bear the danger of carrying her pregnancy on boats for days, weeks, or months to seek refuge in an unfamiliar country. Many are coerced to marry a stranger or compelled to be sold into sexual slavery in that unfamiliar foreign country. On the contrary, a single Rohingya woman is at risk of being sexually assaulted by security force personnel at gunpoint or gang-raped by the Rakhine hooligans to shame and destroy the ethnic Rohingya minority. Rape, which is rarely prosecuted, has been used by Myanmar's security forces and Rikhine hooligans as a weapon against the Rohingyas to instill fear in their hearts and mind (Waheed, 2015).

ANTI-ROHINGYA HATE CAMPAIGN

Myanmar's "Buddhist Bin Laden", AshinWirathu, created a riot-mongering gang of 969 and formed the extremist Buddhist nationalist group *Ma Ba Tha* (Nyein, 2023) (the Committee for the Protection of Race and Religion). He called upon these groups to defend the country from foreign influence and protect Bamar and Rakhine races and Buddhist religion. Whipping up anti-Rohingya and anti-Muslim hatred has become Wirathu's trademark. The 969 and *Ma Ba Tha* interpret Islam as a severe threat to Myanmar. Wirathu worked for passing discriminatory legislation against the Muslim Rohingya, while threatening those who promote inter-religious harmony. For political gains, he attempted to leverage fears of a Muslim takeover of Myanmar. He incited people to violence but was not held accountable for it. He was jailed in 2003 for hate speech that incited anti-Muslim riots. But since his release in 2010, he has kept busy acquiring political power and military backing. President TheinSein has even called him the "Son of the Lord Buddha" (Waheed, 2015). In early September 2012, Thein Sein declared that he had a plan to send the Rohingyas to another country. The President's intention was hailed by Myanmar's Buddhist monks, who took to the streets in hundreds in solidarity with the President's plan, holding high a banner saying: "Save your motherland Myanmar by supporting the President". The leader of the march,Wirathu, declared that the "Rohingya are not among Myanmar's ethnic groups at all" ("Monks stage an anti-Rohingya march in Myanmar," 2012). Under this fervently anti-Muslim atmosphere in Myanmar, the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingyas happened in 2012, which reached a stage that could be described as "a process of genocide", according to Professor Penny Green of International State Crime Initiative at Queen Mary College, University of London. She asserts that Rohingyas in Myanmar have been stigmatized as Ben-

galees, denied citizenship, and kept out of Myanmar's official ethnic groups. They are under the harassment of job discrimination and religious persecution. They were also physically assaulted by state security. They have been isolated, herded in camps since 2012, and removed from their village homes. They have been systematically weakened as their identity cards were withdrawn from them. They are disenfranchised and barred from traveling, leading to the loss of their means of survival. Mass annihilation of Rohingyas has not yet occurred, but no one has been prosecuted for a killing spree against Rohingyas ("Nytimes.com," 2014) in 2012.

AUNG SAN SUU KYI'S ANTI- ROHINGYA STANCE

Myanmar leader, Foreign Affairs Minister, State Counselor, and 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Aung San Suu Kyi defends herself against claims she has ignored Rohingya Muslim persecution by asserting that the Rohingyas are "ethnic militants" and they have engaged "*jihadis*" to destroy Myanmar's security and stability or integrity (Gowen, 2016). On-demand of the Burmese Buddhist extremist monks and lending credence to the repulsive campaign of fear initiated by these hate-mongering monks and their followers ("Aung San Suu Kyi denies Burmese genocide of Rohingya at The Hague," 2020), she even refused to call them by the term they identify themselves: "Rohingya", the term of their choice ("Rohingya and national identities in Burma," 2014). Su Kyi described Rohingya as an "old emotive term" (The Irrawaddy, 2023). She did not even go near the Rohingya camps during her November 2015 election campaigns and spoke of the violence against the Rohingyas only in the vaguest terms. "Our work is not to condemn but to achieve reconciliation" (Gowen, 2016), she remarked. Accordingly, the Myanmar government advised foreign embassies to avoid using the term Rohingya ("Aung San Suu Kyi, John Kerry discuss Myanmar's Rohingya issue and sanctions," 2016). However, the U. S. Secretary of State John Kerry refused to pay heed. Rohingyas were excluded from the peace talks with indigenous ethnic groups, confirming thegovernment's position of no recognition of the Rohingyas as a separate ethnic identity.She barred the Rohingyas in her National League for Democracy Party (NLD) from running in the 2015 national elections, stating that Rohingya issue is "not her priority". In early June 2016 Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD constituted a 27-member Central Committee ("Aung San Suu Kyi denies Burmese genocide of Rohingya at The Hague," 2020) for the implementation of Peace and Development in Rakhine State, which Aung San SuuKyi herself chaired. All the 27 members were either government Cabinet members or Rakhine State representatives. No Rohingya or Muslim was included in the Committee. Its finding was astonishing and a prebaked political conclusion. The ground situation was described as not so bad and methodologically flawed. The Committee had found no religious persecution against the Rohingyas. The analogy was that the Committee had seen some mosques still undestroyed. Because of such a prejudiced evaluation of the Rakhine situation, this army-led report has been widely discredited in human rights watch group circles.

But such "symbolic structures" could hardly realize Rohingya human rights (East Asia Forum, 2017). The term "Bengalee" is used by extremist Buddhist nationalists in a derogatory sense to imply that Rohingya do not belong to Burma but are illegal interlopers from Bangladesh ("No Rohingya on commission to address their fate," 2017). The racially prejudiced Myanmar government formed the Kofi Annan or Rakahine Commission, which fixed the terms of reference for the Commission. The Commission was mandated to operate in accordance with Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law, which has given the Rohingyas a dispiriting choice: "Prove your family has lived here for more than 60 years and qualify for second-class citizenship, or be placed in squalid camps and face deportation.

Government demand for proof of residence since 1948 is too onerous for many, who either do not have the paperwork or fall short of the sixty-year requirement. Those who can prove their residence qualify only for naturalized citizenship, which carries fewer rights than full citizenship and can be revoked. Moreover, they would be classified as "Bengalee", rather than Rohingya, suggesting that they are immigrants from Bangladesh, hence are open for deportation. Human Rights Watch describes this government plan as a "blueprint" for permanent segregation and statelessness". Due to the Government's perception of the Rohingyas as foreigners, the Rohingyas were prevented from participating in the national census. Law, thus, barred the Rohingyas from voting in the 2015 election ("Nytimes.com," 2014). Stripped of voting rights and citizenship and driven out of their homes, the Rohingyas have been attacked with impunity ("Meet the most persecuted minority in the world: Rohingya Muslims," 2017).

The Kofi Annan Commission was formed under pressure from abroad. It was headed by My-

anmar's Vice President Myint Saw, a former general. It was, therefore, widely expected that its final report could be a whitewash. Since its inception, it began to work ignoring the Rohingyas.A survey of activities of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State from November to December 2016 shows that there is no meeting schedule with the "Rohingya". "Muslims" (identified by religion) are scheduled as the Rakhine (identified by ethnicity or race) counterpart. Thus, Muslim Rohingyas are treated as mixed blood group. Hence, no Rohingyais allowed to stay over night, or to rent a house. No intermarriage was allowed with a Rohingya ('"No Muslims allowed': How nationalism is rising in Aung San Suu Kyi's Myanmar," 2016).

Again, on 2 May 2017, following meetings with EU Chiefs in Brussels, SuuKyi declared her intention to cooperate with the UN investigation team to probe into alleged atrocities against the Rohingyas, nor would she allow this inquiry team entry to her country, betraying the Rohingya cause and ignoring the need for bringing the perpetrators of violence into book ("Visiting EU, Suu Kyi refuses UN probe into alleged Myanmar war crimes," 2017).

Aung San Suu Kyi's Government, thus, defies the findings of the UN Commission investigation. In that case, the international community may bring the leaders of Myanmar's armed forces to face trials against genocide or crimes against humanity in the International Court of Justice. Otherwise, the helpless and hard-pressed Rohingyas could be put into a situation where it would be easier for them to fall prey to terrorist organizations like *Al-Qaeda* or ISIS.

CONCLUSION

Myanmar's claim of Rohingyas as Bangladeshi illegal immigrants to the Rakhine State is absurd because the Rohingyas lived there for centuries as citizens. Given the region's growing economic significance and consequent competition of significant powers to develop and control connections with it, calling the Rohingyas Bangladeshi is a new development. This anti-Rohingya stance of the vested interests in Myanmar appears to have been designed to grab Rohingya land by applying the policy of fear, intimidation, and ethnic cleansing. The USDP and NLD governments of Myanmar described the Rohingyas as "Bengalees", implying that they are not indigenous Arakanese but illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. At one point, then President U Thein Sein suggested that they should be resettled to a third country under an initiative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, a proposition that was rejected outright by the UN. Such propositions from the highest order of the Myanmar government sounded like "new Nazism" or "new Fascism". Such a move of the Myanmar government, by all intention and purpose, has been directed towards grabbing the Rohingya lands by ousting them from their homes in the Rakhine State. These cleared lands could then be leased out to foreign farms for developing infrastructure, as well as oil and gas explorations.

Archival records and government documents have convincingly established the indigenousness of the Rohingyas in Arakan. Yet, about 1.1 million Rohingyas are denied citizenship by Myanmar's 1982 citizenship laws, severely restricting their movements and confining hundreds of thousands of them in internally displaced camps, where they have been facing daily violence amounting to ethnic cleansing. To escape ethnic cleansing, the Rohingyas have been taking refuge in Bangladesh and other world countries. Nearly one million Rohingyas have fled from Myanmar due to widespread persecution. Over 1000,000 have taken refuge in Bangladesh ("Rohingya | Today's latest from Al Jazeera," 2023).

The Rohingyas have been fleeing from Rakhine to Bangladesh and other countries due to their sufferings at the hands of Rakhine and Bamar persecutors. The suffering and consequent exodus of the Rohingyas continues. In that case, the Rohingya resistance might have drawn foreign *jihadis* into the region and escalated violence with financial and moral support from Rohingya diaspora living in the Middle East and other countries ("Persecuted Minority in Myanmar" 2017). This might foil Myanmar's intention of leasing out Rohingya lands and off-shore oil and gas fields to foreign companies for economic development.

The UN adopted a Resolution to set up an independent, international mission in March 2017. The UN appointed a three-member team to investigate human rights abuses committed by Myanmar's security forces on 30 May 2017. The mission is expected to present a full report in March 2018. As Myanmar has staunchly opposed a UN Commission of Inquiry into abuses against the Rohingyas, and SuuKyi has already declared her unwillingness to allow the delegation visas ("Myanmar refuses entry to UN investigators | Tamil guardian," 2017) to enter into Myanmar or cooperate with them, it remains to be seen if the UN team will be able to complete its mission successfully. The head of the UN Mission hoped the UN mission's recommenda-

tions would impact and awaken the international community's conscience ("UN appoints team to probe crackdown against Rohingyas," 2017).

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