

UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN | FACULTY OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS
STUDIES | RELIGION, CONFLICT AND GLOBALIZATION

MASTER THESIS

Ascribing the socio-political Identity
of the Rohingya and its consequences
for political belonging

Document Analysis of public records published and/ or approved by the Republic Union of
Myanmar

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26-08-2021

Thesis Supervisor: Dr Erin K. Wilson

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Word amount

Cover: 91

Abstract (incl. Key aspects): 322

List of abbreviations: 102

Table of Content: 250

Text: 21970

Headings: 282

Bibliography: 1763

Appendix: 1482

Key aspects

Rohingya; religious minority group; Myanmar; state authorities; identity; social identity, socio-political identity; identity ascription; religion; ethnicity; history; the “other”; good vs. bad; marginalisation; exclusion; discrimination; statelessness

Abstract

The stateless religious minority group, the Rohingya, has been suffering systematic persecution, violence, discrimination and violation of their fundamental human rights for decades. The year 2017 is considered the peak of violence and persecution against the Rohingya in Myanmar and has been described as a “genocide” by human rights organisations, among others. The Republic Union of Myanmar does not recognise the Rohingya as a national race and therefore not as citizens of Myanmar due to their perceived ethnicity.

In order to gain a better understanding of the essence of the conflict, it is necessary and highly relevant to engage academically with the socio-political identity of the Rohingya. Thus, the aim of the thesis is to elaborate possible identity attribution processes by external actors, such as state authorities of Myanmar, and the resulting consequences for the political belonging and the implementation of human rights of the Rohingya. To this end, the following research question is posed: How do external actors, such as state authorities, ascribe the socio-political identity of the stateless religious minority group - the Rohingya?

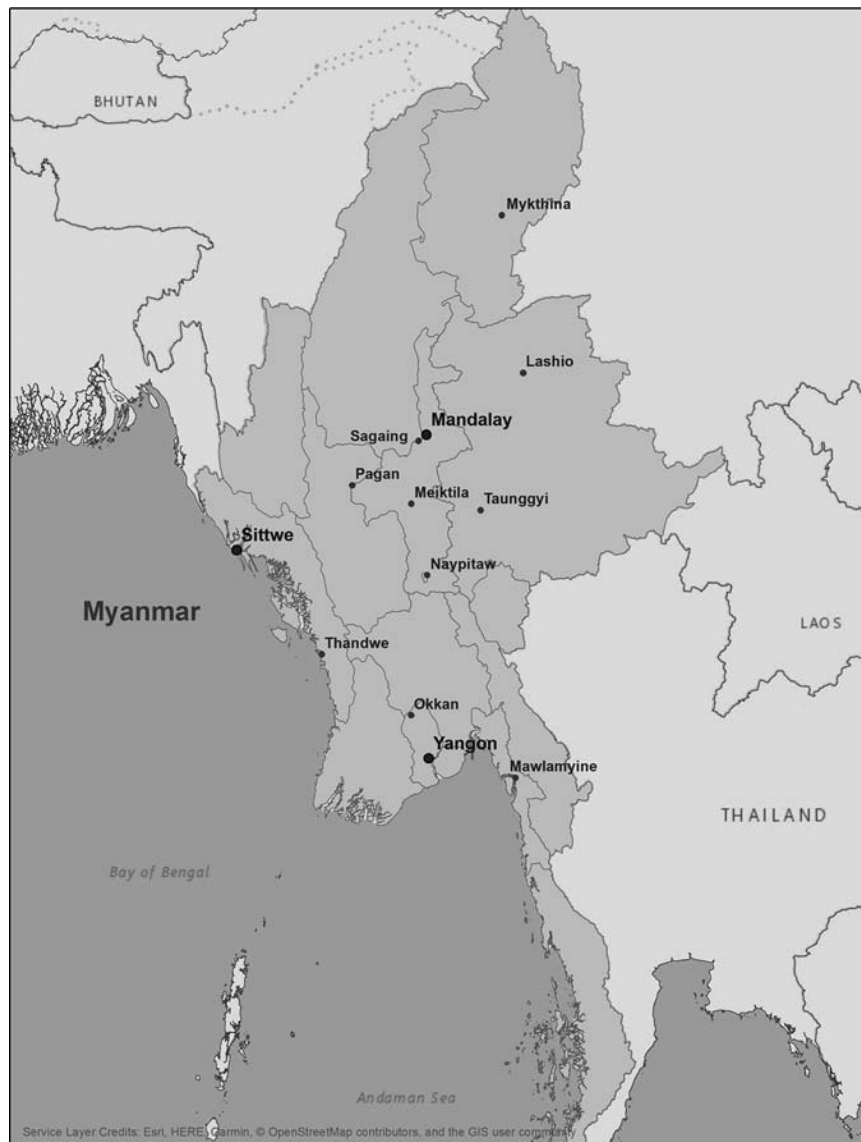
In order to answer the research question, the concepts of identity within academic literature and the historical background of the Rohingya in Myanmar are first examined. Next, through qualitative research using a document analysis methodology and a critical discourse analytical approach, public records published and/or approved by the state within the time period from late 2015 to August 2017 are analysed.

It is found that the socio-political identity of the Rohingya is either not addressed at all or conceived and attributed through misconceptions and biases by state authorities. These socio-political identity attribution processes and the lack of addressing their identity in general form the basis and justification for discrimination and violence against the Rohingya by state authorities.

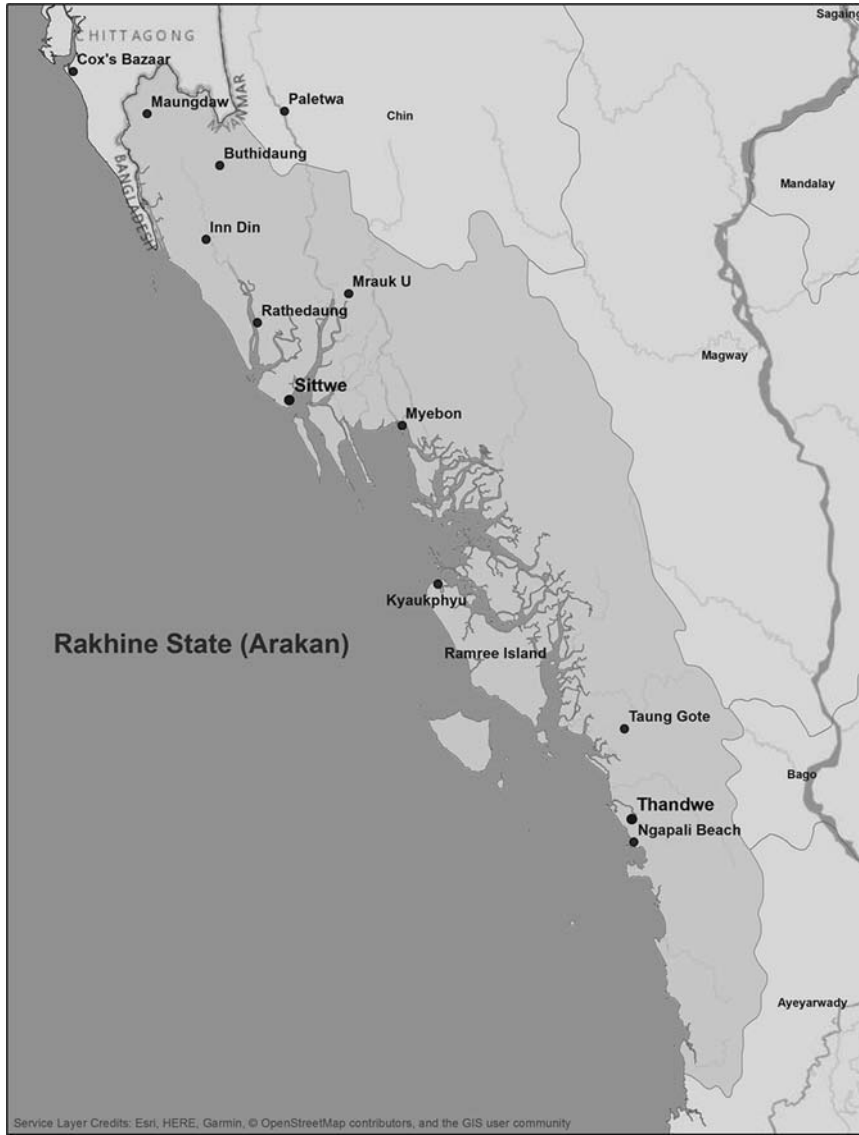
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I. The map of Myanmar and Rakhine State¹



¹ Holt, John Clifford: *Myanmar's Buddhist-Muslim Crisis. Rohingya, Arakanese, and Burmese Narratives of Siege and Fear*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu 2019, pp. xx-xxii.



II. List of abbreviations

Anti-Terrorism Central Committee	ATCC
Aqa Mul Mujahidin	AMM
Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army	ARSA
Critical discourse analytical approach	CDAA
Document Analysis	DA
Emergency Immigration Act	EIA
Faith-based organisations	FBOs
International relations	IR
Investigation Commission	IC
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	MFA
Ministry of Religious Affairs	MRA
National League of Democracy	NLD
National Verification Card	NVC
National Verification Process	NVP
Non-governmental organisations	NGOs
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights	OHCHR
Organization of the Islam Cooperation	OIC
Permanent Mission of the Republic of Myanmar	PMRM
Public International Law	PIL
Rohingya Solidarity Organisation	RSO
The Global New Light of Myanmar	GNLM

1 Introduction

*“Restricted mobility, denied citizenship, forced exodus, and enduring persecution for decades—the plight of the Rohingya community in Myanmar (previously Burma) has been one of the most violent and protracted humanitarian crises in contemporary world history.”*²

In 2017, Rakhine State in Myanmar, home of the majority of the stateless religious minority group, the Rohingya, was rocked by a massive outbreak of violence. On the 25 August 2017, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) attacked Myanmar police stations, border posts and killed police officers in response to years of oppression and violence against Rohingya by state authorities, the military and Buddhist nationalists.³ Myanmar considered these attacks as acts of terrorism. As a response, the Myanmar Military Tatmadaw, supported by state authorities, organised a campaign against the Rohingya, the so-called “clearance operation”.⁴ Consequently, structural violence in form of persecutions, sexual assault, rape, torture, killings and burning villages affected the Rakhine State and especially the Rohingya.⁵ This outbreak caused hundreds of deaths, thousands of traumatised people within the Rohingya community and over one million Rohingya have been forcibly displaced.⁶ As a result, Bangladesh experienced the largest influx of displaced people into its border after its independence.⁷ In 2018, an UN investigative report announced that “[...] top military commanders in Myanmar should be investigated and prosecuted for the “gravest” crimes against civilians under international law, including genocide.”⁸

The incidents in 2017 generated enormous media attention and put Myanmar at the centre of the discussion around a possible genocide taking place. Myanmar was strongly criticised internationally for its inhumane treatment of the Rohingya and put under strong

² Direct citation: Ansar, Anas: *The Unfolding of Belonging, Exclusion and Exile. A Reflection on the History of Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Southeast Asia*, in: *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 40:3, Tylor & Francis, London 2020, pp. 441–56, p. 441.

³ Bakali, Naved; Wasty, Shujaat: *Identity, Social Mobility, and Trauma: Post-Conflict Educational Realities for Survivors of the Rohingya Genocide*, in: *Religions*, 11:5, MDPI, Basel 2020, p. 4.

⁴ Bakali; Wasty: *Identity, Social Mobility, and Trauma*, p. 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Wolf, Siegfried: *Genocide, exodus and exploitation for jihad: The urgent need to address the Rohingya crisis*, South Asia Democratic Forum, 6, Brussels 2017, p. 4.; Bakali; Wasty: *Identity, Social Mobility, and Trauma*, p. 1.

⁷ Mahmud, Tareq; Khaled, Abu Faisal; Islam Fariba, Nafisa: *A Conflict Profile: The Rohingya Conflict in Myanmar*, in: *Journal of Social Science Research*, 14, Springer, Heidelberg 2019, pp. 3313–3324, p. 3313.

⁸ Direct citation: Bakali; Wasty: *Identity, Social Mobility, and Trauma*, p. 2.

pressure to act.⁹ Myanmar has acted in accordance to some of the measures and policies, which it was forced to follow and adopt, however the Rohingya are still deprived of citizenship, do not have the opportunity to attend sufficient educational programmes, to work or to live without experiencing violence.¹⁰

The conflict is mainly considered as a religious and ethnic conflict. It is marked by tensions between the Buddhist majority and Muslim Rohingya minority in Myanmar and its roots go back deep into the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial past.¹¹ In order to understand the core issues and the essence of the conflict, it is necessary to examine its perceived historical, ethnical and religious background as well as its socio-political circumstances.

Religious minority groups, such as the Rohingya, are generally more exposed to statelessness and discrimination by being religiously, ethnical and/or historically different from the respective majority of a country.¹² Here, different actors play impactful roles within the power dynamics of marginalisation processes. One of the main actors within these processes is the *state*. The state has the power to establish and to change systems of values, traditions, norms and hierarchies. Thus, a state is able to establish “identity hierarchies” and, based on these, to decide who is achieving protection and full access to, for example, electoral and fundamental human rights.¹³ The identity hierarchies emerge primarily based on how the respective state and population perceive and understand the *social identity* of a group. The thesis understands social identity as a construct that is formed of categories created by external actors.¹⁴ For the further course of the work, the identity categories ethnicity, religion and history play a crucial role. These categories are understood as identity and boundary makers between different groups of people.¹⁵ The composed social identity of a group through external actors often leads to misconceptions,

⁹ Ibid., p. 1 f.

¹⁰ Bakali; Wasty: Identity, Social Mobility, and Trauma, pp. 12 ff.

¹¹ Wolf: *Genocide, exodus and exploitation*, p. 3.; Mahmud; Khaled; Islam Fariba: A Conflict Profile, p. 3313.

¹² Minority Rights Group International: *Statelessness & minorities globally*, [online]

<https://stories.minorityrights.org/statelessness/chapter/statelessness-and-minorities-around-the-world/> [accessed: 07 December 2020].; Soen, Dan; Shechory, Mally; Ben David, Sarah: Introduction, in: Soen, Dan; Shechory, Mally; Ben David, Sarah (eds.): *Minority Groups. Coercion, Discrimination, Exclusion, Deviance and the Quest for Equality*, Nova Science Publisher's, New York 2012, pp. xv-1, p. xv.

¹³ Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Elena: The Faith-Gender-Asylum Nexus: An Intersectionalist Analysis of Representations of the Refugee Crisis, in: Mavelli, Luca; Wilson, Erin (eds.): *The Refugee Crisis and Religion: Secularism, Security and Hospitality in Question*, Rowman & Littlefield International, London 2016, pp. 207-222, pp. 207-212.

¹⁴ Chettri, Mona: *Ethnicity and Democracy in the Eastern Himalayan Borderland. Constructing Democracy*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2017, pp. 95 ff.

¹⁵ Chettri: *Ethnicity and Democracy in the Eastern Himalayan Borderland*, pp. 116 f.

biases and erroneous attributions.¹⁶ The perceived social identity can be the basis for exclusionary measures, policies, legislation and thus can lead to statelessness. Moreover, in the case of the Rohingya and in relation to their political affiliation, it is crucial to work out how the state authorities of Myanmar perceive their socio-political identity and construct it accordingly.

1.1 The aim of the thesis

It is necessary and highly relevant to engage academically with the socio-political identity of the Rohingya. By analysing relevant processes based on the Rohingya case, this work will provide added value for the evaluation of the treatment of other stateless (religious) minorities. It can thereby create a different perspective on the respective conflict and living conditions of these as well as potentially offer new approaches to solutions. In short, the research demonstrates the powerful influence that state authorities can have on the ascription of a group's socio-political identity. Additionally, it examines how these ascription processes can negatively affect a group's political, juridical and legal belonging. By analysing this dynamic, this research contributes to a broader understanding around the issue of Rohingya's and of other religious minorities' statelessness. Additionally, the research highlights that an analysis of such cases must consider the socio-political factors that shape laws in the first place, rather than treating them as a priori.

The thesis focuses on the period between October 2015 and September 2017. It emphasises this particular period as it demonstrates the attitude of the later newly elected government, the National League of Democracy (NLD), towards the Rohingya facing the November elections and allows to question how the peak of violence against the Rohingya in 2017 could occur. It is also relevant to analyse how state authorities publicly justify this violence by possible identity attribution processes.

To this end, the following research question and sub-questions are posed:

General research question

How do external actors, such as state authorities, ascribe the socio-political identity of the stateless religious minority group – the Rohingya?

¹⁶ Fiddian-Qasmiyeh: The Faith-Gender-Asylum Nexus, pp. 207-212.

Sub-questions

1. *How are the concepts of identity portrayed within academic literature?*
2. *How are the concepts of identity reflected in the historical background of the Rohingya?*
3. *What consequences do these processes of identity ascription have for the political belonging and consequently for the implementation of Rohingya's human rights?*

By using the term *socio-political* in relation to identity, it should be clarified that the thesis does not focus on the *personal identity* of the Rohingya. Thus, it is about how external actors conceive the socio-political status of the Rohingya and thereby ascribe a specific socio-political identity to them rather than the Rohingya's self-perception.

1.2 Chapter outline

In order to answer the general research questions and the sub-questions this thesis follows the structure outlined below:

In *chapter two* the first sub-question is addressed. It will provide an overview of relevant academic literature on theories and concepts of identity and identity ascription processes. Here, the following theories and concepts are of particular importance: The concept of the "other", social theory/social identity, social constructivism and the concept of identity within (Public International) law.

After the theories of identity and identity ascription processes have been explained to the necessary extent, the role of the state within these is examined in more detail and the extent to which it has an influence on identity ascription processes and thus on the composition of the socio-political identity of a group.

It then points out how the thesis understands the core elements of identity, i.e. history, ethnicity and religion, and what role they play within the attribution processes. In the following sub-chapter, possible socio-political consequences of the identity attribution processes are elaborated based on the categories mentioned.

Building upon this, the *third chapter* answers the second sub-question. Therefore, the case of the Rohingya is examined in detail. For this purpose, the historical background of the Rohingya in Myanmar is discussed. Key events in the history of Myanmar are selected, which had an influence on the perception and treatment of the Rohingya in the country. Starting with the origin of the Rohingya and ending with the peak of violence in 2017. Based on the historical background, it is examined whether and how the previously

elaborated identity concepts and identity ascription theories can be recognised in the past of the Rohingya in Myanmar.

In order to gain a thorough understanding of the relevant research methods suitable for the research questions, *chapter four* describes the research design.

The thesis conducts qualitative research using document analysis as a methodology with a critical discourse analytical approach. By conducting a qualitative research using a document analysis, I aim to gain an insight into documents, such as public records published and/or approved by state authorities regarding the understanding and treatment of Rohingya within the stated time period.

In the *fifth chapter*, the thesis analyses twelve selected public records (A-L) by using the mentioned methodology. However, due to space constraints, the detailed analysis of document “D” can be found in the appendix under the corresponding document.

The chapter is divided into three sub-chapters. Each of the sub-sections refers to certain key events and aspects within the period from October 2015 to September 2017 that refer directly or indirectly to the Rohingya and their identity. The documents are mainly selected according to the following two aspects: They must relate to the Rohingya’s socio-political identity and fit into the selected time period.

To conclude, in *chapter six* the key findings are summarised and the general research question as well as the third sub-question are answered. Afterwards, it reflects on the nature and process of the thesis and identifies difficulties that arose during the research. In the last part of the conclusion, a research outlook is given.

2 The concept of identity in academic literature

In the following, the thesis will take a closer look at the concept of identity in existing academic literature, specifically within the context of international relations (IR) and within (international) law.¹⁷ In doing so, it will specify which theories of identity and its components are relevant for the further understanding of this thesis. Based on these theories, I will discuss the role of the state in the composition of socio-political identity and its possible goals and interests behind this composition. I will only examine the role of the state as this is the most relevant actor in the case of the Rohingya. Subsequently, it will be worked out through which core elements and categories identity can be shaped by an external actor. Here, I will focus on three core elements in detail: History, ethnicity and religion. In the last part of the chapter I will examine how these can be and often are entangled with each other. The entanglement of certain aspects of an identity, such as religion, ethnicity and history, often has consequences for the consideration, political significance and treatment of a person/group belonging to this composed identity. At this point, I will mention possible consequences of the said entanglement.

2.1 Identity in IR – The concept of the “other”

In the field of *IR*, the formation of identity, based on theories of classical scholars such as Kant and Hegel, is understood as dependent on the simultaneous creation of the “other”. This means that identity can only emerge through the concept of the “other”.¹⁸ The “other” has often had negative connotations since its conceptualisation in the eighteenth century.¹⁹ It was and still is associated with enmity or antagonism, for example.

According to Kant and Hegel, among others, the existence of the “other” is indispensable and thus beneficial for state-building and national solidarity. The concept is ultimately also indispensable for the identity of the respective country/state that underlies national solidarity.²⁰ This concept and the hostility it can create within the “in-group” towards the respective “out-group” generates a national/“in-group” identity. It is argued that the “other” increases solidarity within the “in-group” and thus the willingness

¹⁷ Chapter two focuses on the first sub-question: How are the concepts of identity portrayed within academic literature?

¹⁸ Lebow, Richard Ned: Identity and International Relations, in: *International Relations*, 22:4, SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks 2008, pp. 473-492, p. 473.

¹⁹ Lebow: Identity in International Relations, p. 474 f.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 474.

to defend it through war, genocide or ethnic cleansing against the “other”/“out-group”.²¹ By establishing the two categories of “in- and out-group”, identity was and is at times defined in terms of “good” and “evil” within IR.²² This concept draws a clear line between “us” and “others”/“them”, where “us” has a positive connotation and “others” a negative one. This leads to a rigid definition of identity, which is formed in opposition to the respective “other”. Thus, the formation of solidarity also depends on the hatred towards the respective “other”.²³ Both, identity and solidarity would then be threatened by the respective external “other” or by the inclusion of people who have been formally excluded.²⁴

According to Kant and Hegel, this boundary between “us” and “others” creates an even stronger internal feeling of solidarity and common identity.²⁵ This emotional bonding would be created, for example, by governments to inspire people to sacrifice their lives in wars against potential enemies.²⁶ Thus, Kant and Hegel assume that the sense of identity is mobilised primarily by state authorities within a group/nation for a specific purpose.²⁷ Here, power is central for maintaining or even imposing identity. By doing so, a hierarchy of identity is established. This hierarchy determines which identities should be accepted and protected and which should be suppressed and marginalised.²⁸

In modern times, certain academics and politicians embrace this kind of negative stereotyping of the “other” and the a dichotomy between “us” and “them” or “us” and “others” in order to advance and support a particular authoritarian or even racist political agenda.²⁹ Samuel Huntington, for example, argues in his theory called *The Clash of Civilizations?* that the world is mainly divided into eight major civilisations: The Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and the African civilisation.³⁰ A civilisation is, Huntington argues, the “broadest level of identification”³¹. He identifies religion, language and culture as the main and fundamental differences between these eight civilisation and sub-civilisations. These differences would be a more precise divider

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., p. 476.

²³ Ibid., p. 487.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 476.

²⁹ Lebow: Identity in International Relations, p. 474.

³⁰ Huntington, Samuel: *The Clash of Civilizations?*, in: *Foreign Affairs*, 72:3, Council on Foreign Relations, New York 1993, p. 22-49, p. 25.

³¹ Direct citation: Huntington: *The Clash of Civilizations*, p. 24.

between civilisations than the differences in political and ideological terms.³² Huntington identifies the root of this divider in the end of the Cold War. The Cold war has created a shift from conflicts between (two) political ideologies to modern conflicts between different civilisations and, eventually, also between the respective religion.³³ Here, Huntington recognises Islam as the external “other” that threatens economics and the physical security (of the West).³⁴ Summing up, Huntington’s theory embraces Kant’s and Hegel’s understanding of identity and the boundary between “us” and the “other”. The “other” can be another religion, nation, culture, political order, language, ethnicity or other values, which are included in many of the previously mentioned aspects, that do not correspond to one’s own. An identity is always what someone professes to be, or what third parties attribute to someone.

However, not all intellectuals have accepted or identified the concept of the “other” as essential or necessary for the understanding of identity and its emergence. Although, it does exist a widespread understanding that identity is constantly surrounded and influenced by formative “others”.³⁵

To conclude the theoretical overview of understanding identity within IR, it can be referred to the scholars Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper and their five key points and uses of identity. They identify the following key points:

Identity can be understood as...

1. ... a basis for social or/ and political action.
2. ... a collective phenomenon marking certain degree of equality among a group of people or a category.
3. ... as a central element of individual or collective “selfhood”.
4. ... as a product of social or political action.
5. ... as a product of divers and competitive discourses.³⁶

As these key aspects illustrate, identity is a product and thus needs to be seen as dynamic, non-static. Things never retain their original form, they constantly change due to external circumstances and influences, so does identity.³⁷ In this regard, it must be mentioned that identity can be shaped by external factors and not only by the person or group itself.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., p. 48.

³⁴ Lebow: Identity in International Relations, p. 474.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 476.

³⁶ Brubaker, Rogers; Cooper, Frederick: Beyond identity, in: *Theory and Society*, 29:1, Springer, Heidelberg 2000, pp. 1–47, pp. 6 f.; Lebow: Identity in International Relations, p. 474.

³⁷ Bauman, Zygmunt: Identity in the Globalizing World, in: Elliott, Anthony; Du Gay, Paul (eds.): *Identity in Question*, Sage Publications, London 2009, pp. 19-27, p. 20.

In the case of the Rohingya this external identity formation needs to be elaborated in order to examine what consequences this has for their socio-political belonging.

2.2 Social identity and social theory

Based on the developed aspects of identity in IR, now the so-called *social identity* will be discussed, as this is essential to understand how people and institutions perceive “others” and how that, in turn, influences the identity of the respective “other”.

A social identity is a “role identity”. Here, a group or a person is ascribed a certain role by third parties. This role is often decisive and a central component of the respective identity. Examples of this can be roles such as “mother”/“father”, or a profession, such as “teacher” to which people are assigned.³⁸ In other words, identity categories are developed and used to ascribe people to a social space. An attribution can also be based on broader categories, such as “nationality”, “ethnicity” or “religion”. The broader an identity category is, the more inclusive it is.³⁹ This in turn creates a breeding ground for the emergence of discrimination. Depending on which identity categories a person is assigned to by others, the respective identity of the individual or also of a group is composed. Thus, the identity of a person or a group consists of a mixture of different identities/identity categories.⁴⁰ Consequently, a social identity is derived from intergroup relations, the self and social influences.⁴¹

Social Theory

In addition to that, the so-called *social theory* aims “[...]to explain the uniformity and coherence of group and intergroup behaviour as mediated by social identity.”⁴² The theory argues that it is not sufficient to understand the personal identity of each individual in order to figure out group phenomena, but above all the social relationships and interdependencies within a group.⁴³ The classical sociologist Émile Durkheim also describes in his work “The Elementary Forms of Religious Life” the centrality of the collective for the emergence of symbols, practices, relationships and of the individual itself. According to Durkheim, ideas, beliefs, values, rituals,

³⁸ Snow, David: Collective Identity and Expressive Forms, in: Smelser, Neil; Baltes, Paul (eds.): *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavior Science*, Elsevier, Amsterdam; New York 2001, pp. 2212-2219, p. 2213.

³⁹ Snow: Collective Identity, p. 2213.

⁴⁰ Gentry, Bobby: *Why Youth Vote. Identity, Inspirational Leaders and Independence*, Springer, Heidelberg 2018, p. 25.

⁴¹ Abrams, David: Social identity, Psychology of, in: Smelser, Neil; Baltes, Paul (eds.): *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavior Science*, Elsevier, Amsterdam; New York 2001, pp. 14306-14309, p. 14306.

⁴² Direct Citation: Abrams: Social identity, p. 14306.

⁴³ Ibid.

etc. do not emerge from the individual itself, but from the community and from intensive interaction within it. These products of social interaction in turn shape and constitute the individual's identity.⁴⁴ As a consequence, Durkheim argues that the individual's identity can be seen as a product and spawn of collective life.⁴⁵

To conclude, as the aim is to understand how the socio-political identity of the Rohingya is composed and understood by external actors, it must be emphasised that it is not relevant for thesis how the individual understands his or her identity individually, but how others understand or compose it. This composition is determined by external, "legible" factors. This can also be called *social constructivism*, since it is about identity composed by external actors and not about the personal identity developed by the person her-/himself.⁴⁶

2.3 Social constructivist theory

Following Durkheim's argument that the existence of an individual's identity is dependent on the collective, the so-called *social constructivist theory* can be invoked. Similarly to Durkheim, the theory states that social relations construct people. Human beings would not be humans without social relations.⁴⁷ However, humans are constructing and creating the world, too.⁴⁸ Consequently and according to constructivists "[...] people make society and society makes people."⁴⁹ Thus, constructivism consists of two central elements: Society and people. These two elements are connected by a third. This third element is defined by *rules*. These can be social and/or legal rules. Such rules help to ensure that the mutual construction process is continuous. Rules instruct people how to act and think in a given situation. Here, society constructs the individual through assigned rules. These rules are used by people, so-called "agents".⁵⁰

Agents are acting on behalf of a collective of people, thus on social constructions. Giving an example, the government is a collective of people, which is acting on behalf of an even larger collection of people, the nation.⁵¹ Agents always have specific aims in mind when acting on behalf of others. On the one hand, these goals are based on the will of the people for

⁴⁴ Kippenberg, Hans: Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), in: Michaels, Axel (ed.): *Klassiker der Religionswissenschaft. Von Friedrich Schleiermacher bis Mircea Eliade*, C.H. Beck, München 2004, pp. 103-121.

⁴⁵ Kippenberg: Émile Durkheim, p. 110.

⁴⁶ Gentry: *Why Youth Vote*, pp. 38 ff.

⁴⁷ Greenwood Onuf, Nicholas: *Making Sense, Making Worlds. Constructivism in social theory and international relations*, Taylor & Francis, London 2013, p. 3 f.

⁴⁸ Greenwood Onuf: *Making Sense, Making Worlds*, p. 4.

⁴⁹ Direct citation: Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 5.

whom the agent acts, but on the other hand, these goals are also based on the individual will of the agent himself. In order to achieve these aims agents follow rules which are assigned to the respective situation they are acting in. Rules and related practices, the way how rules are used (e.g. followed/ not followed), form a template or pattern. Those patterns are institutions. Consequently, institutions, such as states, form patterns of rules and related practices. Thereby, institutions make people into agents and create an environment where these agents behave rationally.⁵² According to constructivist theory, society is made up of different institutions, most of which seem to be held together by rules connecting them to other institutions.⁵³ Being an agent means bearing responsibility. Every choice made has positive or negative consequences for the respective people for whom the agent acts.⁵⁴ However, patterns of institutions, rules and of possible consequences give society a structure. Construction processes take place on the basis of this structure. Thus, the agent is made by rules and rules are made by the agent. Likewise, rules form institutions and these in turn form society.⁵⁵

Summing up, constructivists argue that identity is a social construction process that involves choices made by the agent.⁵⁶ They assume that an individual matures in society and thereby develops its own identity within that particular society over time. Additionally, any socially connected group of individuals develop a common identity and some sense of collective self.⁵⁷ With regard to the Rohingya, similar processes and structures can be identified. The Republic Union of Myanmar can be understood as an agent that acts on behalf of the nation, but also pursues its own goals through certain rules and political structures. The socio-political identity of the Rohingya then develops from these patterns.

2.4 Identity in law

Since this thesis is about how state authorities attribute the socio-political identity of a group, it is important to understand how the concept of identity is dealt with within law, such as the Public International Law (PIL). Focusing on that, one can see that there is no clear definition of identity. However, a composition of identity can be identified. In the following, I will briefly examine this composition of identity within law. I refer to law in general and to the PIL, as this is internationally recognised and authoritative for a person's and state's rights and thus also for the recognition of socio-political identity.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., p.6.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 8; p. 13.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 75.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Identity is created through a composition of certain categories and characteristics to which people are assigned.⁵⁸ Based on that, rights are developed concerning specific types of people. Here, it can be noticed that law and legal institutions construct the *social identity* of people by broader identity categories.⁵⁹ Those are categories like “gender”, “ethnicity”, “race”, or “religion” that frame the social and later the legal identity of people.⁶⁰ This demonstrates the basic aspects of social (identity) theory.

Additionally, the social constructivist theory can also be recognised here. Giving a brief explanation, the social identity is constructed by agents (legal institutions) on the basis of rules (e.g. laws). Agents act on behalf of a collective of people with the goal of protecting a particular group (e.g. majority or minority group) by following or creating certain rules (laws). In doing so, agents or patterns of agents and rules, such as legal institutions, construct social identity and society in general. Based on collected information (e.g. historical background, culture) about a particular group of people, laws/rules are enacted that provide guidance for the treatment and protection of that group of people. However, this can lead to prejudice, generalisation, discrimination, exclusion, mistreatment and misperception of a particular group.⁶¹ Regarding the Rohingya, the state determines their social identity through certain identity categories. Based on this, laws are developed that have consequences for their political belonging and thus determine their socio-political identity.

Public International Law

Looking at PIL, it can be noticed that every person’s legal identity is primarily shaped and built by the respective nationality and citizenship. Citizenship is connected with membership of a state, which means that having a nationality does not automatically mean having citizenship. According to PIL, each state itself has the responsibility and power to decide who and under what conditions someone is entitled to receive or lose citizenship.⁶² If the state decides on basis of certain conditions that a group of people is not worthy of citizenship, they are considered stateless.

Looking at the definition of minority groups within PIL the above mentioned categories of identity can be noticed (see citation in footnote).⁶³ According to Naomi Mezey, an American

⁵⁸ Mitnick, Eric: Law, Cognition and Identity, in: *Louisiana Law Review*, 67:3, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge 2007, p. 823-869, p. 824.

⁵⁹ Mitnick: Law, Cognition and Identity, p. 828.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 830.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 834-836.

⁶² Herdegen, Matthias: *Völkerrecht*, C.H. Beck, Munich 2020, p. 210.

⁶³ “A minority is a group which is numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State and in a non-dominant position, whose members possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics which differ from those of the rest of the population [...]” (Direct citation in: Herdegen: *Völkerrecht*, p. 306.)

legal scholar, people shape law, however, on the other hand, law and legal institutions shape and construct people and their socio-political identity, too.⁶⁴ “We may in truth determine the content of our law, but our law will also play a significant role in determining who and what we are.”⁶⁵

The consideration of law and PIL is relevant to this thesis in that the Rohingya are considered stateless, which is a consequence of how their social identity is perceived by external actors (state; population) and consequently established within the political structure and law.

However, at this point I would like to dispense with the term constructivism in order to distance myself clearly from the common anthropological understanding of identity construction by the person her- or himself within a certain life span. I will therefore use the term “attribution” or “imposition” in the following. I will then use these terms in the context of socio-political identity to demonstrate that I am referring to an identity that is mainly imposed by third parties through broader socio-political categories (ethnicity, history, religion) and not necessarily through personal categories.

2.5 The role of the state within identity ascription processes

In the following, the state is discussed as one of the main actors/agents within the attribution processes of socio-political identity. This is relevant to this paper as it provides a theoretical basis for understanding the role of state authorities as major actors within the attribution processes of the socio-political identity to the Rohingya.

The state is a powerful institution that counts as one of the strongest existing “agents”, since a state is a conglomerate of agents and has decision-making and governing authority over laws and category systems. A state has the power to shape, change and then impose or enforce such a category system. In principle, a state seeks to monopolise and thereby gain, increase and legitimise not only its physical power but also symbolic power. Through such power, the state is able to name, categorise and ultimately determine the status of people. Such “identification” can take place through markers such as legal documents, like passports, or through other aspects, such as fingerprints, signatures or passport photos. Likewise, the state classifies people into categories such as gender, religion, ethnicity, or criminality.⁶⁶ Through such categorisation, the state creates self-determined definitions of people’s identities. This in turn provides the state with the means to deal with individuals in certain situations and to legitimise certain processes

⁶⁴ Mitnick: *Law, Cognition and Identity*, p. 826.

⁶⁵ Direct citation: *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Brubaker; Cooper: *Beyond identity*, p. 15.

of action with regard to these people. The state is therefore one of the most powerful “identifiers”.⁶⁷ This is not only because of its power to categorise people and thus create and ascribe their identity, but also because of its power to enforce its own definitions and category systems at all levels of society. Thus, it has the power to impose these category systems and identity classifications on other actors and social spheres. Consequently, they have no means to resist or act against these systems. Thus, bureaucracy, courts, educational institutions, but also non-state actors are forced to refer to the state’s category systems within their work and to act on the basis of them.⁶⁸ In the name of the state, politicians try to unify these identity categories to create exclusive groups. This in turn leads to the exclusion and marginalisation of certain groups of people.⁶⁹ For example, minority groups.

The concept of the “other” can also be identified within state identity attribution mechanisms. As described in 2.1, this concept is often used to create solidarity within a state’s own nation in order to marginalise and exclude the “other” defined by the state. In states where there is great multicultural diversity, such as in Southeast Asian countries like Myanmar, the “other” is shaped above all by the relationship between majority and minority society.⁷⁰ Thus, especially during the post-colonial period, more and more states show unease about cultural diversity. In these states, social categories of identity tend to become broader and focus primarily on the categories of minority and majority. As a result, more people are counted as minorities than as majority populations, which is often the cause of discrimination and persecution. Thus, minorities are often seen as the negatively connoted “others”, who in most cases are also denied political significance.⁷¹

In conclusion, power is essential to create and impose identity. Thus, hierarchies emerge, which, on the one hand, secure sanctioned identity categories and discourses and, on the other hand, punish those who do not conform to these principles and discourses by marginalising and suppressing them.⁷² Hence, hierarchies and the imposing of identity help states to achieve their socio-political goals.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Lebow: *Identity in International Relations*, p. 474.

⁷⁰ CK, Ashwati; Sarngadharan, Rajeesh: *Institutional Strategies of Identity Constructions and Exclusions. Exploring the State of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar*, in: *Otoritas: Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan*, 8:2, Department of Governmental Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences Muhammadiyah University of Makassar, Makassar 2018, pp. 82–97, p. 84.

⁷¹ CK; Sarngadharan: *Institutional Strategies*, p. 84.

⁷² Lebow: *Identity in International Relations*, p. 476.

2.6 The socio-political core elements of identity

As already described, an “agent”, in this case the state, always pursues a certain goal when it acts on behalf of others. The goal is shaped by the interests of the people for whom it acts, but also by its own interests. Since I focus primarily on religious minority groups, such as the Rohingya, categories like “religion” and “ethnicity” are decisive characteristic for identity attribution processes. As described in chapter 2.4, minorities are internationally described as religiously, ethnically and linguistically different from the majority of the population. At this point, however, the category “history” should be emphasised, too. History is instrumental in the creation and existence of social relations, identity categories and other realities.⁷³ Therefore, history can be understood as a category from which other categories emerge (e.g. religion and ethnicity) and the corresponding consequences of identity attribution follow. These three categories will be examined in more detail and it will be worked out why a state primarily resorts to them in order to compose and ascribe certain identities.

2.6.1 The role of history as a part of and influencing factor on socio-political identity

History can be thought of as a large container in which all previous events, social structures and relationships as well as traditions, practices, values, norms, conflicts and constrictions are collected. However, only certain of these have survived to the present day. This is what we call heritage.⁷⁴ Powerful agents, such as states and collectives of people, decide from generation to generation which events are crucial and formative for people today. The following will deal with the external, not personal, factors that play a decisive role in shaping history and eventually heritage.

Since every identity category is part and product of history, history is not only itself an identity category, but also a signifier and carrier of meaning.⁷⁵ Thus, history is a category or tool for agents to select, accept or exclude on the basis of “meaning-giving”. As a result, some (hi)stories are attributed more positive meaning than others. Consequently, dominant (hi)stories are passed on from generation to generation and are institutionalised as heritage while others are “eradicated” or, if they still exist in the present, seen as a minority and thus a target of exclusion and marginalisation.⁷⁶

⁷³ Rodenberg, Jeroen; Wagenaar, Pieter: Cultural Contestation: Heritage, Identity and the Role of Government, in: Rodenberg, Jeroen; Wagenaar, Pieter (eds.): *Cultural Contestation. Heritage, Identity and the Role of Government*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2018, pp. 1-13, 2 f.

⁷⁴ Rodenberg; Wagenaar: *Cultural Contestation*, pp. 2 f.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

History marks and determines socio-political boundaries in society. This is how different affiliations and boundaries between communities, cultures and religions emerge.⁷⁷ History shapes and creates the socio-political identity of people. Agents, such as political authorities, institutions or intellectuals often try to foster memories to achieve their individual (political) goals and needs.⁷⁸ By fostering memory and by reminding of a common past within a collective of people, agents are able to create a specific “We-feeling” within the respective group. In return, this feeling produces group identity and solidarity.⁷⁹

This category is important for understanding the attribution of identity to the Rohingya in that a particular narrative about the perception of the Rohingya by powerful agents has been passed down through generations. Based on this narrative, the socio-political identity is ascribed to the Rohingya today, which in turn has implications for their political affiliation.

2.6.2 The role of ethnicity as a part of and influencing factor on socio-political identity

Basically, all those aspects of one’s identity that are racial, ethnic or cultural can be counted as ethnic identity. This includes, for example, belonging to an ethnic group and distinguishing oneself from other groups through group-specific elements, such as language.⁸⁰

For external identity composition and ascription two approaches to ethnic identity are relevant: The so-called “internalist” and the “externalist” perspective.⁸¹ According these perspectives, ethnic identity of a group can be viewed and analysed from within a group and from outside a group.⁸² Here, the externalist perspective focuses on the external forces that shape the processes of identity formation. It focuses primarily on negative external influences, i.e. those that harm a particular ethnic group.⁸³

In contrast, internalists refer to the positive aspects of an ethnic group and demand protection and respect for the respective group. Internalists tend to stand for a positive ethnic identity and are often part of this group themselves (the “identified”).⁸⁴ In the following, however, I will concentrate more on the externalist perspective (identifiers), as this is of greater relevance for this work.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Lebow: *Identity in International Relations*, p. 480.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 480, p. 486.

⁸⁰ Abrams: *Social identity*, p. 14308.; Gentry: *Why Youth Vote*, pp. 38.

⁸¹ Simon, Thomas: *Ethnic Identity and Minority Protection. Designation, Discrimination, and Brutalization*, Lexington Books, Lanham 2012, p. 55.

⁸² Simon: *Ethnic Identity and Minority Protection*, p. 55.

⁸³ Ibid.; Ibid., p. 56.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 56 f.

A negative description of an ethnic identity is thus often carried out by people outside the respective ethnic group (“outsiders”).⁸⁵ This description is characterised by prejudices and creates a base for discrimination. Such a negative description has a greater political effectiveness. For example, a state only has to react to negative descriptions of ethnic identities by, for example, stopping discrimination, protecting the fundamental rights of the ethnic group, or by supporting this negative description.⁸⁶ The political effectiveness of a positive “insider” description is not quite as strong, as they usually have to rationally justify their positive description and give reasons why this ethnic group should be provided with certain rights and a certain position in a country.⁸⁷

The already described concept of the “other” can be identified here. The “other”, for example another ethnic group or the state, can ascribe and impose certain attributes of ethnic identity on a particular group. A positive identity (insider description) is often a reaction to negative external identity ascriptions.⁸⁸ This in turn also results in the emergence of the concept of “us” and “them”: “The brutish the forces of negative identity become, the simpler the divide between “us” and “them” becomes.”⁸⁹

Outsiders often determine the ethnic identity of another group through categories, such as ethnicity and religion. This often generalises the different identities of many people into a single static socio-political identity. If external actors misunderstand ethnic identity or ascribe prejudiced attributes to it, this can lead to the creation and ascription of a negative identity that in turn leads to exclusion, discrimination, inequality and persecution.⁹⁰ Identity categories, such as ethnicity, are not only “tools” used by outsiders to identify groups, however, they are the main “differentiator”, too. Consequently, one’s ethnic categorisation by external actors can influence access to protection, human rights, education, intellectual and social resources.⁹¹ This can be recognised within the case of the Rohingya. Here, the ethnic background of the Rohingya is considered as the “other” and is perceived negatively by outsiders.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 58.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 58 f.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 59.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 62.

⁸⁹ Direct citation: Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 60

⁹¹ Prentiss, Craig: Introduction, in: Prentiss, Craig (ed.): *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity. An Introduction*, New York University, New York; London 2003, pp. 1-13, pp. 2 f.

2.6.3 The role of religion as a part of and influencing factor on socio-political identity

Religion and its definition is widely discussed by several scholars, like Clifford Geertz, Max Weber, Melford Spiro, Talal Asad and multiple others. However, religion seems hard to define, as its definition differs from person to person, from faith to faith, from social and political background to another and “moves” within historical context.⁹² Thus, religion can be seen as a fluid dynamic of social life.⁹³ According to the Irish author Claire Mitchell, religion is “[...] a dynamic of personal and group identification”⁹⁴, it points out communal boundaries and gives meaning, structure and value to them.⁹⁵ Mitchell understands religion primarily in a functionalist way, attributing five key elements to it:

“Religion is a marker of social difference.”; “Religious ideas and symbols help constitute group identities.”; “Religious practices help construct community.”; “Religious beliefs can be politically salient.”; “Religious institutions are politically influential and provide structure to the boundary.”⁹⁶

I mainly refer to Mitchell’s work here, because she examines religion in the context of conflict and identifies it as a central element of social identity and politics. Thus, I consider her definition and approach to religion to be appropriate to the case of the Rohingya.

According to Mitchell, religion gives meanings to group identities and provides them with values, norms and structure. By creating certain values, traditions, dogmata and social relations within a particular group, religion forms identity, works as an “identity maker” and facilitates a sense of belonging or alienation.⁹⁷ By creating identities, religion also acts as a boundary maker. In this way, boundaries are drawn between social, political and ethnic groups. Among other things, religion is part of such group identities and often decisive for the differentiation from other identities. Religion not only shapes inner-group identities, but also the perception and understanding of “others”, especially under uncertain socio-political conditions.⁹⁸ Furthermore, religion provides content and meaning for categorisation processes and social comparisons. For example, the attribution of identity categories and thus the

⁹² Asad, Talal: *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1993, p. 27-30.; Spiro, Melford: Religion. Problems of Definition and Explanation, in: Banton, Michael (ed.): *Conference on new Approaches in Social Anthropology. Anthropological approaches to the study of religion*, Routledge, London 2004, p. 85-125, p. 85 f.

⁹³ Prentiss: Introduction, p. 3.

⁹⁴ Direct citation: Mitchell, Claire: *Religion, Identity and Politics in Northern Ireland. Boundaries of Belonging and Belief*, Taylor & Francis, New York 2006, p. 2.

⁹⁵ Mitchell: *Religion, Identity and Politics*, p. 2.

⁹⁶ Direct citations: *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 2.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

imposition of identity can be significantly shaped, controlled and justified by religious ideas and values.⁹⁹

Religion shapes social identity. In doing so, religion always remains socially significant and thus politically relevant. Political structures and procedures, for example, are “informed” by religion about certain social conditions and thereby religion creates a relationship between people and politics. However, the political significance of religion is always dependent on the respective context and political framework and is thus constantly changing. Nevertheless, politicians often use religion to organise and explain social relations, structures and ways of thinking. This often results in prejudices, discrimination and the favouring and disadvantaging of certain structures. Concerning the Rohingya, state authorities are also influenced by the Buddhist majority in the country regarding the treatment of the Rohingya.

Additionally, the concept of the negatively connoted “other” can be recognised within political structures.¹⁰⁰ Religion and identity are often understood through categories/characteristics of “good” and “bad”. Scott Appleby and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd are particularly worthy of mention here.¹⁰¹ In his work “The Ambivalence of the Sacred”, Appleby argues that religion can be a source of violence and conflict and at the same time a source of peace and conflict resolution. Shakman Hurd also points to a dichotomy of religion. She argues that religion is primarily characterised by the concepts of “good” and “bad” and calls this “the two faces of faith approach”.¹⁰²

Both of these theories are examples of how religion has been viewed especially since the end of the Cold War and later after 9/11. The previously developed Secularisation Theory initially assumed that religion would increasingly become a private matter and that its public political relevance would steadily decline. Due to historical events, such as the end of the Cold War and 9/11, religion has moved back into the focus of IR and politics. Since then, it has been increasingly assigned and evaluated by external actors according to concepts of “good” and “bad”.¹⁰³ Especially after 9/11, Islam was often perceived as the “bad” religion on a global level and seen as a danger and security threat. As a result, Muslims became the fearsome “other”.¹⁰⁴ This in turn may have had an impact on the perception and treatment of the Rohingya as a Muslim minority group within Myanmar.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Wilson, Erin: Being Critical of/on/about ‘religion’ in International Relations, in: Edkins, Jenny (ed): *Routledge Handbook of Critical International Relations*, Routledge, Abingdon; Oxon; New York 2019, pp. 143-160, p. 145.

¹⁰² Wilson: Being Critical of/on/about ‘religion’, p. 145.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ansar, Anas: *The Unfolding of Belonging, Exclusion and Exile*, p. 450.

At this point, it can be seen that identity categories, such as religion, are often evaluated, generalised and pigeonholed within the respective historical and socio-political context from the outside. In this way, third parties, such as the state, decide which religion is “bad” or “good” and which is more prone to violence and which to peace. Thus, third parties judge the identity of a collective of people based on externally perceptible attributes. Based on these aspects and considering the use of religion as one “construction stone” of identity ascription, the religious identity of a group can be used by the state in order to „[...] inferiorise or exclude groups from full membership and belonging to a national citizenship.“¹⁰⁵

In the course of the work, the role of religion becomes relevant in that it is perceived by external actors as a part of the Rohingya’s socio-political identity and as one of the driving and justifying factors for the marginalisation and exclusion of the Rohingya in Myanmar.

2.7 The entanglement of history, ethnicity and religion and its consequences

The attribution and composition of the named identity categories and subsequently their entanglement can lead to exclusion, killings, persecution, discrimination, genocides and much more.¹⁰⁶ People, who supposedly belong to these categories and are identified by these, are treated in certain ways.¹⁰⁷ Each category in itself already offers a wide scope for interpretation and thus attack. However, if all three are combined, this can lead to an even more fertile breeding ground for exclusion.

As determined by PIL, states have the power to decide who receives citizenship and who not. The attribution of a particular socio-political identity (assembled through the preceding categories) can provide a basis for the denial of political belonging, fundamental human rights and for persecution. Being included in a society’s dominating historical landscape and thereby sharing its socio-political identity means access to resources and opportunities. Thus, being acknowledged by a higher authority means to be legitimised.¹⁰⁸

Finally, I quote from Ashwati’s and Rajeesh’s book, which aptly sums up my insight:

“So, it’s obvious that there is a systemic or recognized political set up which draws territories or lines between various segments of societies. Therefore, socio, cultural and political identity of a person based on common norms, virtues and practices within a particular boundary would be taken as the prime criterion to determine whether a person is legal or illegal entity [...]. Such

¹⁰⁵ Direct citation: Modood, Tariq: National Identity and Ethnoreligious Identity, in: *Identities. Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 1:7, Taylor & Francis, New York 2021, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Simon: *Ethnic Identity and Minority Protection*, p. 64.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 64f.

¹⁰⁸ Rodenberg; Wagenaar: *Cultural Contestation*, p. 5.

inclusion or exclusion based on similarities and differences determine the status of a person within an established system.”¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

In conclusion, the concept of identity is described within academic literature as a complex, dynamic and non-static concept. Identity is changeable by external influences and can be attributed to individuals by agents (often states), who act on behalf of the respective majority. A state has the power to form, reshape and impose identity categories and hierarchies. These categories can be larger or smaller. The thesis focuses primarily on larger categories as described above. Identity composition and attribution is mostly shaped through concepts of “good” and “bad” and of the “other”. State authorities often determine a negatively connoted image of the enemy (the “other”) in order to increase national identity and solidarity. In doing so, they ascribe certain characteristics to the respective “image” through categories. If all three categories deviate strongly from those of the majority society, this provides a breeding ground for exclusion and discrimination of the respective group. Minority groups, such as the Rohingya, are often affected by this, resulting in statelessness. The external attribution of identity categories can lead to misconceptions and prejudices, which can reinforce possible human rights violations of the respective minority group.

¹⁰⁹ Direct citation: CK; Samgadhara: Institutional Strategies, p. 83.

3 Case Study – The Rohingya in Myanmar and the concepts of socio-political identity (ascription)

In the following, the thesis will refer to the case of the Rohingya in Myanmar and will examine, based on relevant literature, how the above elaborated concepts of identity (ascription) are reflected within the historical background of Rohingya.¹¹⁰ In order to elaborate on this, I will point out specific time periods, key events and aspects¹¹¹ within the history of Myanmar that are relevant and decisive for the socio-political identity ascription of the Rohingya and thus also for how they are treated by the state. Starting with the “origin” of the Rohingya and ending with the peak of violence against them in 2017.

The question of the origin

The Rohingya are a largely Muslim ethnic group native to the Arakan region of Myanmar. The Arakan area is today Rakhine State in Myanmar. Myanmar is a multi-ethnic and linguistic country. The Rohingya are one of the diverse ethnic groups living in Myanmar, who are distinct from the majority Buddhist population.¹¹² It is disputed when and from where the Rohingya migrated to Arakan. Some historians believe that the Rohingya are descendants of Indo-Aryan ethnic groups that migrated to the region three millennia ago. Others argue that the Rohingya’s presence in Myanmar today is due to a combination of migrations based on trade relations and a variety of changing ruling dynasties over the Arakan region from the eighth to the eighteenth century.¹¹³

What can be said definitively and for which there is solid historical evidence, is that there was a Muslim group called “Rooinga” in Arakan long before 1820. Thus, it can be assumed that the Rohingya have existed as an indigenous group in the Arakan region for centuries.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, the Rohingya are linguistically and ethnically distinct from the majority population in the Arakan region in Myanmar. This is mainly because the Arakan region was not originally part of Burma.¹¹⁵ Arakan is located in the western fringes of Myanmar bordering Bangladesh and has been governed by many different rulers throughout history. It

¹¹⁰ Chapter three focuses on sub-question two: How are the concepts of identity reflected in the historical background of the Rohingya?

¹¹¹ Relevant time periods: The origin of the Rohingya; Colonial Period, Post-colonial Period; Changes of 1982; Attempts at democratisation, 9/11 and the peak of violence in 2017.

¹¹² Bakali; Wasty: Identity, Social Mobility, and Trauma, p. 2.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 2 f.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 3

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

was only through the creation of a nation state in the colonial and post-colonial past that the Arakan region, now Rakhine State, came into the possession of Myanmar, then Burma.¹¹⁶

Buddhist extremists, the military and other state authorities later use the historical background and its various interpretations as one of the reasons and justifications for the exclusion and persecution of the Rohingya. They have repeatedly raised narratives that the Rohingya are foreigners, Bengali immigrants and thus not part of the nation state.¹¹⁷

Colonial Period

Other rhetorical formulations include that the British brought the Rohingya into the country as migrant workers from India during their colonial rule over Burma. This is why today Rohingya are often seen as descendants of an Indo-Aryan ethnic group. The British did bring labour migrants from India into the country, but these were mainly Hindus. Before colonisation many different ethnic minority groups existed in Burma. Therefore, Burma was already a multi-ethnic state. At that time, the different ethnic groups lived more or less peacefully with each other. This changed mainly due to the British colonial rule from 1824 to 1948. It is argued that the British preferred the Muslim minority groups to the Buddhist majority. Thus, Muslim minorities were favoured in terms of social mobility and in the administration of the colony. This resulted in the first tensions between the Muslim minorities and the Buddhist majority, especially in terms of religion and ethnicity.¹¹⁸

During the Second World War, the Rohingya remained loyal to the British, while the Burmese Buddhist majority to the Japanese. This led to an intensification of tensions between the ethno-religious groups. Nevertheless, these initially seemed surmountable.¹¹⁹

Post-Colonial Period

After colonial rule by the British and with Burmese independence, a new Burmese constitution was launched in 1948. This excluded Rohingya and other ethnic minorities from citizenship. However, they received so-called “National Registration Certificates”, which granted them full legal and electoral rights. The Rohingya were thus influenced to believe that they did not need to apply for citizenship because they were considered and accepted as one of the indigenous races of the Union of Burma.¹²⁰ It was therefore expectable that the tensions that had arisen previously would be mitigated. However, this never happened due to the military

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

takeover of the government in 1962 (led by Ne Win) and the resulting changes in Burma's political realities. Under military rule, the Rohingya lost more and more rights within the following years.¹²¹ In addition to this aspect, the situation of the Rohingya in Burma, which was initially a secular state upon independence, was exacerbated by the recognition of Buddhism as the state religion in 1961.¹²²

In 1974, the so-called "Emergency Immigration Act" (EIA) was passed. This law established ethnic-based identity cards, which only Burmese nationals received. Rohingya, in contrast, received "Foreign Registration Cards" that clearly identified them as non-citizens.¹²³ Furthermore, under the constitution of 1974, Article 145 stated that "[a]ll persons born of parents both of whom are nationals of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma are citizens of the Union"¹²⁴. Thus, through the EIA and article 145 of the constitution, the Rohingya were officially stateless and considered foreigners in the region where they had been living for generations.¹²⁵

The economic crisis, that emerged at the time, is cited as one of the reasons for the exclusion of the Rohingya. The military deliberately sought an enemy image in its own population, whereby the Rohingya were an easy target due to their linguistic, ethnic and religious difference from the majority and their rather weak military. The established civil rights restrictions and the resulting image of an enemy were supposed to lead to a stronger national Burmese identity and thus to a stronger solidarity within the population. This helped the military government to gain political expediency within the crisis and to shift the focus from the crisis to the newly created enemy, the Rohingya.¹²⁶

Here, you can recognise the concept of the "other" where the agent, in this case the military/state authority, is constructing a negative "other" to create a strong national identity and solidarity to achieve its own political goals.

The Citizenship Law of 1982

In 1982, the citizenship law, which is based on the principles of the 1948 Citizenship Law, was reformulated under the Ne Win government. Over the years and under military rule, a feeling among the population had emerged that Muslims were gaining an increasing presence in Myanmar. The Buddhist majority and state authorities perceived this as a threat to their

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Bechert, Heinz: „Das Lieblingsvolk Buddhas“: Buddhisten in Birma, in: Bechert, Heinz; Gombrich, Richard (eds.): *Buddhismus. Geschichte und Gegenwart*, C. H. Beck, München 2002, pp. 169-190, p. 177.

¹²³ Bakali; Wasty: *Identity, Social Mobility, and Trauma*, p. 4.

¹²⁴ Direct citation in: Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.; CK; Sarngadharan: *Institutional Strategies*, p. 91.

¹²⁶ Bakali; Wasty: *Identity, Social Mobility, and Trauma*, p. 4.

country, economy, culture as well as to their ethnic and national identity.¹²⁷ Furthermore, the political authorities saw the Citizenship Law of 1948 as flawed because it failed in managing citizenship and immigration issues.¹²⁸ Thus, the reformulation of the law aimed to address these issues and only grant citizenship to those who carried “pure” Burmese nationality, meaning that both parents had to be accepted citizens by the Citizenship Law of 1982.¹²⁹ Accordingly, Ne Win stated in one of his speeches that “[r]acially, only pure-blooded nationals will be called citizens.”¹³⁰ This would have been the only way to eliminate the previous conflicts and problems in the country.

Thus, the law can be seen as a deliberate and targeted campaign against ethnic minorities and especially against the Rohingya. The law not only meant the complete statelessness of the Rohingya, but also their exclusion from the (135) national races of the country.¹³¹ The 1982 Citizenship Law firmly rejected the use of the term “Rohingya” to refer to indigenous ethnic groups in Burma. Thus, there is an opinion on the state side that the term did not exist before 1950 and was only invented by illegal Bengali immigrants in Rakhine State to establish their indigenous identity in the region. Based on this assumption, Rohingya were not counted as national races of the country and thus not accepted by the Citizenship Law in 1982 as an ethnic group that existed before British colonial rule.¹³² This still prevails today.

Only people who immigrated to Burma before 1821 belong to the national races and thus acquire full citizenship. People who immigrated later, as is wrongly claimed about the Rohingya, acquire only limited citizenship or no citizenship at all. This is legally defined by the graded categories of citizenship.¹³³ The law divides Burmese citizenship into three categories: Full Citizenship; Associated Citizenship and Naturalised Citizenship.¹³⁴ Most Rohingya belong to the third category, where they are considered non-nationals and non-affiliated to the national races. The few Rohingya, who applied for a National Registration Card

¹²⁷ Haque, Md. Mahbulul: Rohingya Ethnic Muslim Minority and the 1982 Citizenship Law in Burma, in: *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 37:4, Taylor & Francis, London 2017, pp. 454–469, p. 456.

¹²⁸ Haque: Rohingya Ethnic Muslim Minority, p. 456.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Direct citation: General Ne Win: Speech held in Central Meeting Hall President House, 8. October 1982, translation in: *The Working's People Daily*, 9. October 1982, [online] https://www.burmalibrary.org/docs6/Ne_Win%27s_speech_Oct-1982-Citizenship_Law.pdf [accessed: 13 May 2021].; Haque: Rohingya Ethnic Muslim Minority, p. 456.

¹³¹ Haque: Rohingya Ethnic Muslim Minority, p. 456.; Zöllner, Hans-Bernd: Die Rohingyas. Konstruktion, De-Konstruktion Und Re-Konstruktion Einer Ethnisch-Religiösen Identität, in: *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, 1:1, Society for South-East Asian Studies, Wien 2008, pp. 53–64, p. 61.

¹³² Haque: Rohingya Ethnic Muslim Minority, p. 461.

¹³³ Zöllner: Die Rohingyas, p. 61.

¹³⁴ Haque: Rohingya Ethnic Muslim Minority, pp. 456 f.

in 1948, belong to the second category. However, these cards were often not recognised and did not lead to any preferential treatment.¹³⁵

These categories subdivide people's legal identity based on other categories, such as the duration of stay, language, ethnicity, history and religion.¹³⁶ At this point, the previously conducted theory on "Identity in Law" can be recognised. Rohingya's legal identity is determined by categories and attributed on the basis of these. This not only leads to a negative foreign-determined identity, but also creates an official basis and justification for marginalisation and discrimination of the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities. It can also be observed that laws, such as the 1982, are often created in response to previous identity ascription processes.

Due to the increasingly strict laws against minorities between 1970 and 1990 violence and marginalisation by state authorities and the Burmese Buddhist majority against them increased and led to a flight of several hundred thousand Rohingya to Bangladesh.

Attempts at democratisation, 9/11 and the peak of violence in 2017

At the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, attempts at democratisation were noted within the country of Myanmar, which was renamed by the military from Burma into Myanmar in 1989.¹³⁷ In 2008, the new constitution appeared as a return to a limited form of democracy. However, this has not helped the Rohingya. The 2008 constitution has made the situation of the Rohingya and their recognition in the country even more precarious. For instance, this constitution was even stricter in terms of granting citizenship than the restrictions of 1974 and 1982. The 2008 constitution only grants citizenship to those who are either children of parents who both already hold Myanmar citizenship or those who are already legal citizens of the Union on the date of the constitution.¹³⁸ Next to that, while the constitution recognises all five world religions, including Islam, it clearly indicates that Buddhism is the most practised religion in the country and is thus accorded a special position.¹³⁹ This in turn has indirect implications for the recognition of the Rohingya and their political status in the country.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 458.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Bakali; Wasty: Identity, Social Mobility, and Trauma, p. 4.

¹³⁸ Ibrahim: The Rohingyas. *Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide*, p. 57.; Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2008, [online] <https://www.myanmar-law-library.org/law-library/laws-and-regulations/constitutions/2008-constitution.html> [accessed: 14 May 2020], p. 149.

¹³⁹ "361. The Union recognizes special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens of the Union.; 362. The Union also recognizes Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Animism as the religions existing in the Union at the day of the coming into operation of this Constitution." (Direct citation: Constitution (2008), p. 151.).

In the following years, especially in 2012 and 2013, there was another massive outbreak of violence against the Rohingya and other Muslim minorities.¹⁴⁰ Some scholars, including Anas Anasar, claim that this violence has its origins in the event of 9/11. The global order changed after 9/11. Religion, especially Islam, returned to the focus of IR. The view of Islam, and therefore of Muslims, has changed negatively as a result of the terrorist act. This is also the case in Myanmar. The Rohingya, based on their religion, were now seen as the “fearsome other”, as terrorists and thus as a security threat to the country. Now, not only their origin and history were used as the main reason and justification for persecution, discrimination and statelessness, but also their religious identity.¹⁴¹

After some time marked by political unrest, election boycotts and a growing public discontent, the NLD came to power in 2015 under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi. Initially, this was a sign towards democracy and a glimmer of hope for an improvement in the situation of the Rohingya. However, this was in vain, as the military still claimed 25 percent of the seats in parliament.¹⁴² The NLD managed to come to power mainly through Suu Kyi’s ability to achieve support from the Buddhist majority population. Suu Kyi now had to meet the demands of the military and those of the Buddhist populist elite in order not to fuel further political conflict and to maintain her base of supporters. Thus, the pseudo-democratic government was deeply mired in power-political dynamics, leading the NLD to wordlessly accept the brutal actions of the military and the violence by Buddhist extremists against Rohingya.¹⁴³

There had been repeated discussions years before about whether and how the 2008 constitution should be amended, as it had been created under strong military influence and was still subject to the power of the military. With the formation of the new government after the 2015 elections, a few places in the constitution were edited through word changes.¹⁴⁴ However, the political affiliation for the Rohingya remained unchanged. The Rohingya remained primarily stateless and a unrecognised ethnic group in Myanmar.¹⁴⁵

In 2015, the National Verification Card (NVC) was established in accordance with the 1982 Citizenship Law and was continued under the leadership of Suu Kyi. Researchers refer to

¹⁴⁰ Ibrahim, Azeem: *The Rohingyas. Inside Myanmar’s Hidden Genocide*, Hurst and Company, London 2016, p. 81.

¹⁴¹ Anasar, Anas: *The Unfolding of Belonging, Exclusion and Exile*, p. 450.

¹⁴² Bakali; Wasty: *Identity, Social Mobility, and Trauma*, p. 4.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Crouch, Melissa; Ginsburg, Tom: *Between endurance and change in South-East Asia: the military and constitutional reform in Myanmar and Thailand*, in: *Annual Review of Constitution-Building Processes: 2015*, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm 2016, pp. 67-82, pp. 68-74.

¹⁴⁵ Crouch; Ginsburg: *Between endurance and change*, p. 74.

this card as the “tool of genocide”.¹⁴⁶ The state required Rohingya to register through these cards. In 2015, they were demanded to state their religious and ethnic affiliation in the card, but not their “self-proclaimed” name Rohingya. Thus, they were forced to indicate their identity mainly through labels such as Muslim, Islam or “Bengali” within this registration. Many of the Rohingya have refused such registration for fear of persecution due to their declared identity. The state, however, suggested to them that they could obtain more freedom and rights through this card. However, the opposite actually occurred. Instead of receiving more rights, they were denied them because of their “foreign” identity.¹⁴⁷ This process is seen by researchers as an administrative process of increasing persecution and discrimination. This led to further violence against the Rohingya and ultimately to one of the largest displacements in Rohingya history.¹⁴⁸ In September 2016, Suu Kyi appointed a commission of experts chaired by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. It was to make proposals on how the situation in Rakhine State can be improved. A month later, on the 9 October, the Aqa Mul Mujahidin (AMM), a group related to the Rohingya Solidary Organisation (RSO), later renamed to the so-called ARSA, attacked Myanmar border posts, resulting in deaths. Armed forces of Myanmar (Tatmadaw) responded with large-scale operations, also called “clearance operations”, against the Rohingya, causing thousands of Rohingya to flee, to be raped and killed.¹⁴⁹ Media and human rights reports called these operations as an act of “genocide” and “ethnic cleansing”.¹⁵⁰

On 25 August 2017, ARSA again attacked police stations, border posts and killed police officers in revenge for years of oppression and violence against Rohingya people.¹⁵¹ These attacks were claimed by Buddhist extremists and Myanmar’s military as a reason for massive violence against the Rohingya that followed. The Myanmar government declared that ARSA was a terrorist group that had to be fought. Regarding this, Myanmar authorities continued using the term “clearance operation” to describe acts and operations against insurgents from

¹⁴⁶ Fortify Rights: “Tools of Genocide”. *The National Verification Cards and the Denial of Citizenship of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar*, 2019, [online]

https://www.burmalibrary.org/sites/burmalibrary.org/files/obl/2019-09-03-Tools-of-Genocide-Summary-Fortify_Rights-en-red.pdf [accessed: 22 June 2021].

¹⁴⁷ Potter, Richard; Win, Kyaw: *National Verification Cards - A Barrier to Rohingya Repatriation*, Burma Human Rights Network, 2019, [online] <https://www.bhrn.org.uk/en/report/1090-national-verification-cards-a-barrier-to-rohingya-repatriation-full-report.html> [accessed: 14 May 2021].

¹⁴⁸ Bakali; Wasty: Identity, Social Mobility, and Trauma, p. 4.

¹⁴⁹ Deutsche Welle: *Chronologie der Krise im Rakhine-Staat*, 2018, [online] <https://www.dw.com/de/chronologie-der-krise-im-rakhine-staat/a-43323534> [accessed: 14 May 2021].

¹⁵⁰ Wilkinson, Bard: UN official convinced of Myanmar Rohingya “genocide”, *CNN*, 2018, [online] <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/03/12/asia/myanmar-rohingya-un-violence-genocide-intl/index.html> [accessed: 14 May 2021].

¹⁵¹ Bakali; Wasty: Identity, Social Mobility, and Trauma, pp. 4 f.

“Rohingya terrorists” in Rakhine.¹⁵² Thus, in August, several hundred thousand Rohingya were arbitrarily killed, raped, burned, tortured and displaced regardless of membership in the alleged terrorist group. Rohingya houses and small villages were destroyed or set on fire. This caused the greatest influx of Rohingya into the border of Bangladesh. The year 2017 is considered the peak of systematic violence and discrimination against the Rohingya in a country they call home.¹⁵³

Conclusion

Within the period elaborated, the Rohingya were always seen as the negative “other”. This negative perception was generated in particular by their religious, ethnic, linguistic and their historical difference from the Buddhist majority population. The socio-political “otherness”/identity attributed to them formed a fertile basis for the justification of violence against them. The state and its various power dynamics act as a proxy for the Buddhist nationalist majority in the country and their demands. However, the state also pursues its own goals. The goals of the Buddhist nationalists and of the state may be different, but their ways of achieving them are very similar. Both ascribe a certain socio-political identity to the Rohingya, mostly based on historical narratives, in order to justify violence against them and ultimately achieve their respective goals. This is in line with the aforementioned role of agents within the social constructivism theory outlined in 2.3.

It should be noted that the socio-political identity of the Rohingya has been perceived and attributed in different ways throughout history. For example, during the late colonial period, the Rohingya were seen as traitors because they were supporting the British; during the post-colonial period, they were seen as illegal migrants or foreigners because of their perceived origin; and after 9/11, they were seen as terrorists due to their religion.¹⁵⁴ Yet, all identity ascriptions remain to stay and not to disappear. All three variants can be and are used to justify violence against and displacement of Rohingya. It can be stated that the socio-political identity of the Rohingya has been arbitrarily shaped by external actors based on the will of the majority population or colonial influence throughout history. It can also be interpreted that the heritage of the Rohingya has been determined and passed on from generation to generation by external agents. From which their religious and ethnic origin has also been externally determined and guided. Based on these solidified narratives of their social identity, laws were enacted that

¹⁵² Mallard, William: *Thousands in western Myanmar flee as army plans operations, monitors say*, Reuters, 2020, [online] <https://www.reuters.com/article/myanmar-rakhine/thousands-in-western-myanmar-flee-as-army-plans-operations-monitors-say-idINKBN23Y0Q5> [accessed: 14 May 2021].

¹⁵³ Bakali; Wasty: *Identity, Social Mobility, and Trauma*, p. 5.

¹⁵⁴ Ansar, Anas: *The Unfolding of Belonging, Exclusion and Exile*, p. 453.

defined the legal identity and thus the socio-political identity of the Rohingya. Consequently, their persecution is indirectly but officially justified by law. Here, the 1982 law is of central significance.

Overall, the concepts of identity ascription can be recognised in the history of the Rohingya. Identity categories are consistently present within their historical background and form the basis for exclusion.

Having discussed the conditions that caused the situation of statelessness and persecution of the Rohingya and the peak of violence and displacement in 2017, the thesis now turns to describe the methodological framework and processes used in this study to understand how specifically the state perceives and attributes the socio-political identity of the Rohingya to justify its actions against them.

4 Methodology

In order to understand how state authorities create and ascribe the socio-political identity of the Rohingya and what consequences this has for their political belonging and implementation of their human rights the thesis undertakes a *qualitative research* using a *document analysis (DA)* with a *critical discourse analytical approach (CDAA)*. This research design has been selected for several reasons. First, DA is an effective way to collect a wide amount of data over a longer period of time. Secondly, the data sources are stable and not reactive.¹⁵⁵ This is beneficial given the sensitive subject matter, as what is said and written is officially approved by state authorities and thus cannot be reversed. This makes it difficult for authorities to revise or deny statements afterwards. Thus, the result of the analysis is reliable and does not lose its significance due to changes. Additionally, DA provides the opportunity to track changes and developments within the period from late 2015 to shortly after the peak of violence in 2017.¹⁵⁶ This is relevant in that it shows whether the perception and living conditions of the Rohingya have changed within this period due to the elected democratic government in 2015.

The thesis analyses *official documents and public records* published or approved by the state. The analysis focuses on *press releases, speeches, interviews, executive summaries, articles and official orders* made or held by state authorities or state-owned institutions. The selected documents have been published in English, indicating that they are accessible and intended for an international audience, which increases the political significance of the content. The public records are first skimmed, thoroughly examined, placed in temporal and historical context and finally interpreted. It is crucial that the documents fit into the selected time period and refer to the Rohingya in a socio-political manner.

The thesis will analyse the documents through a CDAA. CDA focuses on social problems such as social inequality and power relations.¹⁵⁷ For this purpose, the relationship between language and power is examined in particular. Through language reality is created and meanings can be directly or indirectly attributed to contexts and

¹⁵⁵ Bowen, Glenn: Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method, in: *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9:2, RMIT Publishing, Melbourne 2009, pp. 27-40, pp. 27-30.

¹⁵⁶ Bowen: Document Analysis, p. 30.

¹⁵⁷ Amoussou, Franck; Allagbe, Ayodele: Principles, Theories and Approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis, in: *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, 6:1, ARC Publications, Ongole 2018, pp. 11-18, pp. 12 f.

issues.¹⁵⁸ Language and text are critically studied, interpreted and explained to reveal the hidden and non-obvious meaning of power as well as ideology and its social influence. To do this, the respective document must be placed in its context (historical, social, political circumstances and background). In this way, correlations can be explained and interpreted.

I will pay special attention to the type of language, its vocabulary and structure. Additionally, it is essential to consider the unambiguity or ambiguity of statements (vagueness) and to understand and analyse the meaning behind them.¹⁵⁹ By doing so, it will be examined how the state uses language in relation to the Rohingya in public records to generate a certain image of Rohingya's socio-political identity in order to achieve or justify its goals. CDAA is mainly used to work out what effect certain formulations and text structures have on the perception and thus on the treatment of the Rohingya and their socio-political identity. Therefore, I try to read out underlying patterns and assumptions in the texts. Furthermore, it is crucial to analyse how state authorities use language in relation to the respective social, political and historical context in order to pass on certain values, assumptions and images to the population and the general public.¹⁶⁰

I have deliberately chosen to conduct a DA using CDAA rather than conducting interviews, because I suggest that my power and position as a postgraduate student would not be sufficient to find state officials to interview. Interviews with the Rohingya themselves would only be helpful to confirm or refute findings. Moreover, due to my lack of Burmese language skills, it is not advantageous to conduct interviews.

When analysing official documents, care is always taken to ensure that they are officially verified translations or approved by the state. However, here it is crucial to note possible shortcomings and a lack of translations. For this reason, the analysis is limited to a selection of accessible and translated documents.

¹⁵⁸ Krippendorff, Klaus: *Content Analysis. An Introduction to Its Methodology*, SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks; London; New Delhi 2004, pp. 18 f.

¹⁵⁹ Amoussou; Allagbe: *Principles, Theories and Approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis*, p. 16.

¹⁶⁰ Wilson, Erin: *After Secularism. Rethinking Religion in Global Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2012, p. 122, p. 145 f.; Johnston, Jay; Von Stuckrad, Kocku: Introduction, in: Johnston, Jay; Von Stuckrad, Kocku (eds.): *Discourse Research and Religion. Disciplinary Use and Interdisciplinary Dialogues*, De Gruyter, Berlin; Boston 2021, p. 3.

Reflection

As I am analysing public records, no humans will be directly involved in my research and analysis. Nevertheless, the topic affects a very particular and vulnerable group of people. Thus, special care must be taken to be ethically and morally correct and to leave no room for generalisations and discrimination. Furthermore, it is important to always reflect on my own interpretations and analyses in order to be neutral and unbiased as well as to avoid misinterpretations and misjudgements.

5 The presence and representation of Rohingya's socio-political identity in state-controlled documents

The analysis will examine selected public records chronologically from shortly before the elections in October 2015 to September 2017 shortly after the second incident committed by ARSA. I have chosen this particular period as it starts and ends with contradictory events. It begins with the election of the new democratic government, which raised hope for change and recognition of the Rohingya, and ends with the peak of violence against them. The time span is divided into sections, each of which is marked by significant incidents or events which are decisive for the Rohingya and their perceived identity. Each document is analysed in terms of whether and to what extent they address the socio-political identity of the Rohingya and how this is presented. This is placed in the respective temporal, historical and theoretical context. It is evident that the socio-political identity of the Rohingya is either not addressed at all, or is conceived and ascribed by state authorities on the basis of certain narratives and identity categories¹⁶¹. All documents can be found in chronological order in the appendix (A-L).¹⁶²

5.1 The attitude towards the Rohingya within the period of the elections in 2015

A)

On **11 October 2015**, shortly before the November elections, **Aung San Suu Kyi speaks in an interview with Karan Thapar¹⁶³ from INDIA TODAY¹⁶⁴** about the political situation in Myanmar and her political goals in the event of a NLD election victory.¹⁶⁵ Only two parts of the interview are analysed, as these refer to the Muslim community, including the Rohingya in Myanmar. I analyse this interview because it goes into more detail than other interviews about Suu Kyi's goals and aspirations to win the election, as well as her attitude towards the Rohingya. This interview is also interesting as it took

¹⁶¹ For example, Rohingya are described by stereotypes such as „Muslims“, „foreigners“/ „Bengali“, „terrorists“, „the negative other“.

¹⁶² The analysis of document “D” has been added to the document in the appendix due to space constraints.

¹⁶³ Karan Thapar is an Indian Journalist and news presenter. He has a very direct way of conducting interviews, which is also one of the reasons why I chose this interview.

¹⁶⁴ INDIA TODAY is an English-language live TV newscast based in India. I dissociate myself from everything the news programme stands for. This interview was selected only for the reasons stated above, its useful content in relation to the topic of the thesis and the time at which it was conducted.

¹⁶⁵ INDIA TODAY/ To The Point/ Nothing But The Truth; Interview between Karan Thapar (Interviewer) and Aung San Suu Kyi (Interviewee): *Aung San Suu Kyi Speaks Ahead Of Myanmar Elections*, 11. October 2015, [online] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OU7rKCpMkRY> [accessed: 18 May 2021], 13 – 13:49 min. (Whole length: 43:54 min., 13 – 13:49 min.; 21:54 – 25:27 min., transcribed by Saskia Hübner).

place shortly before the elections and is of international significance due to the English language and the Indian origin of the newscasts.

It is noticeable that although the interviewer, Karan Thapar, specifically asks about her and the NLD's attitude towards the Rohingya, Suu Kyi does not use the term Rohingya even once in the approximately forty-four minute interview. She responds to these questions in a very general way, referring to all Muslims, but not explicitly to the Rohingya. She avoids using this term consistently.

When asked why she did not put forward a Muslim candidate for this election and whether she regrets this, Suu Kyi responded by saying that “[...] the Election Commission has said he [the Muslim candidate] was not eligible because of residency qualifications that he could not meet.”¹⁶⁶ And that she was “[...] sorry that in this election this has become an issue. Because at previous elections this is not an issue. In our country now there are very, very worrying signs of religious intolerance which we did not have in this country before.”¹⁶⁷ It can be seen that she denies and ignores the historical socio-political problems that have existed for decades for Muslim minorities in Myanmar. She deliberately ignores the existence of the Rohingya and their systematic socio-political non-recognition and persecution over many years. This issue of religious and ethnic intolerance has not only existed since the 2015 elections, but is a problem that has grown out of history.

In minute 21:54, Thapar asks Suu Kyi about her attitude towards the increasing role of religion and Buddhist nationalism in politics and the conflicts that go along with it, such as the “Rohingya problem”. What causes she sees behind this and how she wants to tackle them. Suu Kyi responds that she is concerned about this, but that she and the NLD would not be able to make further comments on this, as they might violate the principles of the constitution with that.¹⁶⁸ She then points out: “I am a Buddhist but I can't go around saying I am a Buddhist therefore, that's against the constitution.”¹⁶⁹ With this statement, she indicates which party she is supportive to with regard to religion and thus

¹⁶⁶ Direct citation: INDIA TODAY/ To The Point/ Nothing But The Truth: *Aung San Suu Kyi Speaks Ahead Of Myanmar Elections*, 13 – 13:49 min.

¹⁶⁷ Direct citation: Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Suu Kyi refers to following principles: “And it is doubly difficult for us because the constitution forbids us to mix religion with politics. So I have to be very careful about what I say and the NLD has to be very careful. [...]. It's very difficult for us to make any comments about these matters without the danger of infringing the constitution. And then of course I am a Buddhist but I can't go around saying I am a Buddhist therefore, that's against the constitution. [...].” (Direct citation: INDIA TODAY/ To The Point/ Nothing But The Truth: *Aung San Suu Kyi Speaks Ahead Of Myanmar Elections*, 21:54 – 25:27 min.).

¹⁶⁹ Direct citation: INDIA TODAY/ To The Point/ Nothing But The Truth: *Aung San Suu Kyi Speaks Ahead Of Myanmar Elections*, 21:54 – 25:27 min.

distances herself to the Muslim population and thus also to the Rohingya. The concept of the “other” can be recognised here once again.

Moreover, she does not specifically address Buddhist nationalism and the conflict between it and the Rohingya, which also shows an indirect positioning on the side of Buddhist nationalists, who were also her main supporter in the election. Suu Kyi again avoids referring to the Rohingya “issue” and continues to keep her answers very general.

Thapar then asks more specifically, pointing to her silence and non-committal stand regarding the Rohingya “issue”. Thapar asks whether this is an expression of her policy or of necessary discretion, as she is not yet in power.¹⁷⁰ Suu Kyi’s response to this is reserved. She points out that that reconciliation between the different ethnic communities is the only way to peace in Rakhine State. Additionally, she refrains from condemning Rakhine State because it would have suffered from political “grievances” caused by the military government in recent years. With such a narrative, Suu Kyi puts Rakhine State in the role of a victim and diverts attention from the “Rohingya problem” to another issue, which was not object of the initial question.

Finally, she states: “People must learn to live together in peace and harmony within the security provided for them by the right kind of political framework¹⁷¹.”¹⁷² The political and legal framework, in which the Rohingya were living at this time, peaceful and harmonious coexistence was not possible as they were and still are deprived of their fundamental rights. Suu Kyi has not mentioned this problem even once and thus shows a clear avoidance of it. Her focus is on the issues that arise for Rakhine State as a result of these conflicts and on possible solutions of these, which can only be considered for citizens or politics, but are in no way possible for the Rohingya due to their political non-recognition. By avoiding the core issue and by simply stating that “people must learn to live together [...] within the security provided for them by the right kind of political framework”, she seems to support the oppression of the Rohingya.

¹⁷⁰ Direct citation: INDIA TODAY/ To The Point/ Nothing But The Truth: *Aung San Suu Kyi Speaks Ahead Of Myanmar Elections*, 21:54 – 25:27 min.

¹⁷¹ With regard to the political framework, Suu Kyi states the following: “We are limited by what we are allowed to do, allowed to say because we are a legal political party which has to work within the framework of the constitution and within the framework of the laws laid down for political parties. [...]” (Direct citation: INDIA TODAY/ To The Point/ Nothing But The Truth: *Aung San Suu Kyi Speaks Ahead Of Myanmar Elections*, 21:54 – 25:27 min.).

¹⁷² Direct citation: Ibid.

B)

As mentioned earlier, state authorities of Myanmar reject the term “Rohingya” as the term is considered to be invented up by Bengali immigrants. With the **victory of the NLD in November 2015**, the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)** issued a **press release on 8 November 2015** publicly stating that they decisively reject the name “Rohingya” and consider it an invented term.¹⁷³ The press release responds to allegations of genocide against the Rohingya and is addressed to the general public, media and human rights organisations. In particular, it responds to the reports published by the **human rights organisation Fortify Rights**¹⁷⁴ and the **International State Crime Initiative**¹⁷⁵, which confirm the allegations of genocide and oppression based on detailed investigations.¹⁷⁶

The MFA firmly rejects the allegation of genocide on the basis of its understanding of the term “Rohingya”. Accordingly, it cannot be drawn a connection between Myanmar and genocide of “Rohingya”, as the MFA does not consider them as such. With this communication, Myanmar questions the existence of the Rohingya and publicly denies them their self-determined identity. Rather, the communication addresses the damage that such reporting has on the country’s image itself.

This document can be considered one of the key documents within the timeframe from the election victory of the NLD’s government in 2015 to the peak in 2017. By rejecting the name publicly, the MFA acts on behalf of state institutions and “people of Myanmar”¹⁷⁷. It determines Rohingya’s socio-political identity based on historical narratives and assumptions. Thus, with the new government, the old narratives have been

¹⁷³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *Press Release. Myanmar do not recognize the term “Rohingya”*, 08 November 2015, [online] https://myanmarmissionnewyork.org/images/pdf/2015/PressRelease/Press_Release_Myanmar_do_not_recognize_the_term_Rohingya_Eng.pdf [accessed: 16 May 2021].

¹⁷⁴ “Fortify Rights works to end remedy and human rights abuses. We investigate human rights violations, engage people with power, and strengthen responses to abuses through trainings and collaborative support for human rights defenders. We are an independent, nonprofit organization based in Southeast Asia and registered in the United States and Switzerland.” (Direct citation: Lindblom, Alina; Marsh, Elizabeth; Motala, Tasnim; Munyan, Katherine: *Persecution of the Rohingya Muslims: Is Genocide Occurring in Myanmar’s Rakhine State? A Legal Analysis*, Allard K. Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic, Yale 2015, p. 76.).

¹⁷⁵ “The International State Crime Initiative (ISCI) is an interdisciplinary forum for research, reportage, training and debate on state violence and corruption. Through both empirical and theoretical enquiry our community of scholars aims to connect rigorous research with emancipatory activism. [...] ISCI is based at Queen Mary University of London with an additional centre at Ulster University which specialises in kleptocracy and corruption.” (Direct citation: International State Crime Initiative: *About ISCI*, [online] <http://statecrime.org/about-isci/> [accessed: 16 August 2021].).

¹⁷⁶ Green, Penny; MacManus, Thomas; de la Cour Venning, Alicia: *Countdown to Annihilation: Genocide in Myanmar*, International State Crime Initiative, London 2015.; Lindblom; Marsh; Motala; Munyan: *Persecution of the Rohingya Muslims*.

¹⁷⁷ Direct citation: Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *Press Release. Myanmar do not recognize the term*.

adopted and the basis for persecution has been further perpetuated. The denial of the genocide by rejecting the name “Rohingya” erases the existence of their identity.

It can be assumed that the MFA is aware of the ethnic minority referred to in the reports, but still does not provide an alternative name for them. By not giving an alternative to it, it also denies the minority any existence and relevance of its socio-political identity within the country. Moreover, there is no attempt to explain or recognise the existing conflict in any other way. It is merely pointed out that such reports in relation to the Rohingya endanger the internal peace of the country, which de facto, especially for the Rohingya, did not exist at that time. Conversely, this may mean that state institutions attribute little relevance to the Rohingya and only because of them the peace of the country is endangered. Thus, the MFA comments as follows: “Such unfounded allegations are interfering in the internal affairs of Myanmar and disturbing the peace and tranquillity of the country as well as causing distrust towards the peace loving people of Myanmar.”¹⁷⁸ “[T]he peace loving people of Myanmar”¹⁷⁹ expresses the positive “otherness” of the “real” Burmese in relation to the conflict, which is representative for the Rohingya. The Rohingya are thus not recognised and are indirectly seen as the negative “other” compared to the positive connoted “real” Burmese. The negative “other” is thus understood as the root of the conflict and a threat to internal peace.

With this attitude of state institutions and the then future political leader towards the Rohingya in mind, the following will analyse further key documents of the subsequent period.

5.2 The NLD in power and the incidents of 2016

C)

On **30 March 2016**, **President U Htin Kyaw**, Myanmar’s first president without ties to the military since its takeover in 1962, gave his **inaugural speech after the NLD’s election victory in November 2015**.¹⁸⁰ This speech is particularly interesting as it gives an indication for the new president’s attitude towards the Rohingya. In his rather short speech, he focuses on what the new government will implement in its policies based on

¹⁷⁸ Direct citation: Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *Press Release. Myanmar do not recognize the term.*

¹⁷⁹ Direct citation: *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Unfortunately, only a non-official translation of the speech is available, but it has been published by the President’s Office of the Republic Union of Myanmar itself. For this reason, I have decided to use it. By publishing it, the translation has been indirectly endorsed by the President and thus seems to reflect what he stands for.

the amended constitution of 2008. Therefore, he points out four main aspects: “national reconciliation; internal peace; the emergence of a constitution that will lead to effectuation of a democratic, federal union; and raising the quality of life of the majority of the people.”¹⁸¹

It is noticeable here that he, like Suu Kyi in the interview sequences analysed above, focuses primarily on internal peace and reconciliation, which at first seems promising for the improvement of the Rohingya’s situation. However, as mentioned above, there has been little change in the 2008 constitution by the new government and especially nothing meaningful for the Rohingya.

In his last point, the choice of words like “the majority of the people” is particularly striking. This may have deliberately left room for the exclusion of certain groups of people, e.g. of ethno-religious minorities. At the end of his speech U Htin Kyaw says: “I wish all citizens peace and prosperity in treading upon their respective paths of life.”¹⁸² The word “citizens” highlights to whom this speech and thus the goal of inner peace and of higher quality of life is addressed. Namely, only to citizens, which the majority of the Rohingya de facto is not. Thus, the new government suggests to the international community, through language and the aspects analysed, hope for peace and harmony in the country. But this is indirectly guaranteed or intended only for certain people.

D)

This is also evident in another public record published on **14 July 2016** by a **state-owned newspaper, The Global New Light of Myanmar (GNLM)**.¹⁸³ Here, it appears that all religions, including Islam, are tolerated and recognised and there is no discrimination on the grounds of religion. But on further analysis, this too is only the appearance that is being suggested as Buddhism is indirectly put on a different level than other religions. Additionally, it demonstrates the strong interactions of the new elected government and state-owned publishers. A similar strategy of objectivism and exclusion of the respective

¹⁸¹ Direct citation: Inaugural speech of President U Htin Kyaw at the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw: *The constitution to be in accord with democratic norms: President U Htin Kyaw*, 30 March 2016, [online] <https://www.president-office.gov.mm/en/?q=briefing-room/speeches-and-remarks/2016/03/31/id-6157> [accessed: 20 May 2021].

¹⁸² Direct citation: Inaugural speech of President U Htin Kyaw at the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw: *The constitution to be in accord with democratic norms: President U Htin Kyaw*.

¹⁸³ Sein, Ba; Ministry of Religious Affairs: Freedom of other religions (Christianity, Hinduism, Islamism, Animism and others) in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, in: *The Global New Light of Myanmar*, 14 July 2016, [online] <https://www.gnlm.com.mm/freedom-of-other-religions-christianity-hinduism-islamism-animism-and-others-in-the-republic-of-the-union-of-myanmar/> [accessed: 20 May 2021].

“other”, here Muslims, is noticeable both in government direct statements and indirect publications distributed through the GNLM.

The detailed analysis of the record can be found in the appendix under document “D”.

The incidents of 2016

E)

On **9 October 2016**, there were **riots and attacks on border guard police posts** in Maungdaw Township in Rakhine State. The **Myanmar President’s Office issued a press release on 13 October 2016** describing the circumstances of the attacks and the threat they posed to Myanmar in twelve sections. The attack is described in paragraph four as an attempt to spread an extremist ideology within Rakhine Muslim society.¹⁸⁴ The 2016 incidents are central to the perception of the Rohingya and crucial for further development. The release can therefore be seen as representative for the future attitude of the state authorities towards the Rohingya. From paragraph five onwards, the sections are divided by six headings^{185, 186}

In section five, it is clearly stated who carried out the attacks. According to the release, the attacks on 9 October were carried out by the organisation “Aqa Mul Mujahidin” (AMM). This organisation is said to have links to the armed Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO). This is the first time the term “Rohingya” has been used. In other contexts, the use of the term is rejected altogether. However, the name is used without further explanation in connection with the attacks classified as terrorist by the government. No indication is given that the use of the name is rejected in principle. There should not be a distinction in the use of the term, since it is the same whether an entire ethnic group or an armed force (using that term) standing up for the rights of that ethnic minority. One possible interpretation could be that the name RSO was deliberately used without comment within the context of terrorism in order to give it a negative, extremist connotation and thus indirectly associate terrorist ideas with the entire Rohingya ethnic minority group.

¹⁸⁴ Myanmar President Office: *Latest Situation in Rakhine State. Press Release Regarding the Attacks on Border Guard Police Posts in Maungdaw Township Rakhine State of Myanmar*, 13 October 2016, [online] [https://myanmarmissionnewyork.org/images/pdf/2016/Announcement/13 Oct 2016 Press Release on Border attacks in Maungdaw.pdf](https://myanmarmissionnewyork.org/images/pdf/2016/Announcement/13%20Oct%202016%20Press%20Release%20on%20Border%20attacks%20in%20Maungdaw.pdf) [accessed: 20 May 2021].

¹⁸⁵ Beginning with section five: “The Planned Attacks”; six to nine “The four main instigators”; nine to ten “Terrorist Methods”; ten to eleven “Present Danger”; eleven to twelve “Systematically Planned” and concluding section twelve “Prevent spread of further conflicts”. (Direct citation: Myanmar President Office: *Latest Situation in Rakhine State.*).

¹⁸⁶ Myanmar President Office: *Latest Situation in Rakhine State.*

In section nine, “Terrorist Methods”, the attackers’ modus operandi is compared with the terrorist methods of Al Qaeda and IS, among others. It says:

“According to their plan, they intended to take over the majority-Muslim areas of Buthitaung and Maungdaw, and to spread propaganda through disseminating video files on the internet and via social networks, in line with the methods of terrorist organisations such as the Taleban, Al Qaeda and ISIS, in order to attract greater foreign support and funding and encourage the cooperation and participation of domestic and foreign religious extremists.”¹⁸⁷

However, this information is not necessary at this point to better assess and understand the situation. It does not provide any concrete information about which methods exactly were used in a similar way and is therefore irrelevant. This insertion merely draws attention to an alleged similarity to “Islamist terrorism”. It is thereby trying to outline a comparable picture of the incidents and those of IS and Al Qaeda by equating the scale of the attacks carried out by AMM with those of, for example, IS. This is executed without providing background information of the act. In this way, the readership, which mainly consists of the international community and parts of the general public, is made to believe in a comparable character of the AMM and well known Islamist terrorist groups. The strategic outline of this comparability is over-emphasising the role of the AMM as a terrorist group, which is without giving deeper background information, at least questionable. There is no intention to downplay or devalue the number of killed people in the attack or the value of human life with regards to the analysis of the mentioned insertion. However, the severity of the attack cannot be compared to attacks by IS or Al Qaeda over the last decade.

By mentioning the name “Rohingya” within this context, the reader is drawn a general connection between the ethnic group, Muslims and terrorism. Here, the negative connotation of Islam/Muslims through the link to terrorism, which has already been addressed in the theory and historical background of the Rohingya (after 9/11), can be recognised and is conveyed to the outside world accordingly. It can additionally be identified that a Muslim or Islamist identity is automatically attributed to the attacks due to the association with RSO, without addressing or perceiving the actual goals of the RSO. The RSO actually stands up for the fundamental rights of the ethno-religious minority and not just for the religion of Islam. This attribution in turn creates the historically conditioned link between ethnicity, religion and terrorism.

¹⁸⁷ Direct citation: Myanmar President Office: *Latest Situation in Rakhine State*, p. 3.

Section ten, “Present Danger”, indicates that the Tatmadaw military is responding to the still ongoing attacks with a so-called “clearance operation”¹⁸⁸ within the said region to provide security and protection. The term “clearance operation” remains without further comment. There is no mention of how this is being done or who is being targeted. It can be assumed that the “clearance operation” is intended to “clear” the region from the mentioned “terrorists”. Here, it is striking that it is not pointed out that there is a decisive difference between the civilian Muslim population, especially the Rohingya, and the actual “terrorists” and their sympathisers. This creates the danger of generalising the incidents and extremist ideology to the Muslim community in the region, but especially to the Rohingya. This in turn builds the basis for hatred and prejudice of the Muslim community and the Rohingya with regard to the terrorist attacks.

Similarly, sections eleven and twelve again refer only to “citizens” and thus exclude stateless ethnic groups, such as the majority of the Rohingya. For example, it states that the “[...] attacks were an attempt to attack and destroy the security of the nation, and the lives, property and security of the citizens of the country.”¹⁸⁹ Here, a distinction is made between the security of the nation, which includes live and property of its own citizens, and that of not mentioned, and thereby implicitly excluded, stateless minorities. The prioritisation in this case is on the security of the nation and thus on that of the legally recognised persons in the country. This means that the legal identity of the Rohingya and other stateless minorities is not taken into account and thus seemingly excluded from the security measures.

Paragraph twelve appeals for cohesion and cooperation among citizens and with the government. There is a call for common resistance to the attacks: “And we ask our citizens to cooperate with the government for the sake of national security and the defence of the Union.”¹⁹⁰ This sentence again points to the demarcation from the “other”. In this case, the “other” is “Islamist” terrorism and the groups that do not belong to the nation. Nothing else was clearly mentioned or explained in the communication. So, at this point, the concept of the “other” can be seen. By creating an image of the enemy, especially within a crisis situation, an attempt is made to form and strengthen the national identity, which here seems to consist only of legally recognised citizens. This is possibly sought above all in view of the country’s multiethnicity and colonial past.

¹⁸⁸ Direct citation: Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁸⁹ Direct citation: Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

5.3 The aftermath of the incidents in October 2016

F)

As mentioned in chapter three, an **Advisory Commission on Rakhine State** was introduced before the attacks in October 2016. It was established in September 2016 at the request of the State Counsellor, Suu Kyi, by the Kofi Annan Foundation and the Office of the State Counsellor „[...] to examine the complex challenges facing Rakhine State and to propose answers to those challenges.”¹⁹¹ The commission is **chaired by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan** and was composed by local and international experts.¹⁹² Since the commission was co-initiated and built up by a state authority, I consider its publications to be a partial product of the state. For this reason, and in view of the subject matter, I will refer here **to a note by Kofi Annan on the situation in Rakhine State**, which was published by the **Advisory Commission on 6 December 2016** after the events of 9 October. The note clarifies what the commission’s tasks are and what goals it is pursuing with them. In the following, I will only go into individual passages of the note that are relevant for the further course.¹⁹³

Basically, it is noticeable that although the note was published only a few weeks after the incidents in October 2016 and the commission deals with precisely this conflict, it does not specifically address the Rohingya. Annan only refers in general to the “communities” living in Rakhine State. Referring to the events in October, Annan says: “You may be aware that we visited parts of northern Rakhine affected by the recent violence as well as areas that remained peaceful, a few days ago. We are deeply concerned by the reports of alleged human rights abuses.”¹⁹⁴ The word “concerned” cannot be clearly assigned. It could mean that they were not able to detect it during their visits to the region and are therefore “surprised” and concerned about such reporting. At this time, human rights violations by state authorities, such as the military, have already been established, as described above. However, Annan goes on to say that

“[...] wherever security operations might be necessary, civilians must be protected at all times and I urge the security services to act in full compliance with the rule of law. We also stressed that security operations must not impede humanitarian access to the population. We have

¹⁹¹ Direct citation: Advisory Commission on Rakhine State: *Final Report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State*, [online] <https://www.rakhinecommission.org/> [accessed: 01 June 2021].

¹⁹² Advisory Commission on Rakhine State: *Final Report*.

¹⁹³ Advisory Commission on Rakhine State: *Remarks by Kofi Annan, Chairman of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State*, 06 December 2016, [online] <https://www.rakhinecommission.org/remarks-kofi-annan-chairman-advisory-commission-rakhine-state/> [accessed: 01 June 2021].

¹⁹⁴ Direct citation: Advisory Commission on Rakhine State: *Remarks by Kofi Annan*.

been given the assurance that humanitarian assistance is allowed access and trust that all communities in need will receive the assistance they require.”¹⁹⁵

With this statement the commission indirectly distances itself from the military’s approach. The Advisory Commission could be seen as a mouthpiece for Suu Kyi, which makes her appear positive to the international community while remaining untouchable for the military and the supporters of the clearance operation.

Moreover, Annan lists examples for a solution of the conflict.¹⁹⁶ He suggests the “citizenship verification”, which refers to the NVC already mentioned in chapter three, as a proposed solution to resolve the situation and especially the citizenship issue in Rakhine State for certain communities. I will discuss the NVC aspect in more detail later in document L.

It is evident from this document that even Advisory Commissions are influenced in the nature of their narrative by the power of state authorities. For example, the term “Rohingya” is consistently omitted here, even though the conflict directly affects them. However, a positive aspect is that it speaks of “all people of Rakhine state” and not of “citizens”. This is one of the main differences to purely state documents.

G)

On 18 December 2016, the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Myanmar (PMRM) issued a press release addressed to the United Nations Office in Geneva and other international organisations. In the release, the PMRM reports on the government’s efforts to bring peace and reconciliation to Rakhine State since taking office. It also specifically addresses the conflict resolution efforts following the 9 October 2016 attacks.¹⁹⁷ This record is particularly interesting as it is deliberately aimed at an international audience and it also reflects long-term approaches for peace-making in the region and not reacting to allegations or specific incidents.

In section two of six, the mission refers to the various international humanitarian partners providing assistance to those in need on the ground. Likewise, local and foreign media groups have been allowed to visit the region and report on the situation. Thus, the

¹⁹⁵ Direct citation: Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ “Our discussions focused on the reconciliation among the communities of Rakhine, freedom of movement, citizenship verification, and economic and social development of Rakhine State.” (Direct citation: Ibid.).

¹⁹⁷ Permanent Mission of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar: *Press Release to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations*, 18 December 2016, [online] https://myanmarmissionnewyork.org/images/pdf/2016/Announcement/Dec_18_2016_Geneva_Press_Res.jpg [accessed: 03 June 2021].

release initially suggests openness and transparency with regard to the prevailing circumstances on the ground and communicates them at the international level.

In section three, it refers specifically to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). It draws attention to a meeting with the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Retreat on 19 December 2016, including a briefing on the measures taken for peace in Rakhine State, and thus conveys to the readership the involvement of these states in current measures.

Section four states: “In response to violation of human rights allegations, a national high-level investigation commission led by Vice President U Myint Swe has been formed to probe into, among others, verification of such allegations.” Again, the choice of words is remarkable. It indicates that the allegations of human rights violations, which at this point had already been made to Myanmar for weeks, are still not considered valid by the government and therefore still need to be investigated, which again provides more time.

The following section draws attention to the establishment of the Advisory Commission. By specifically listing the measures taken so far, the pressure on Myanmar from the UN and international organisations is reduced and an image of finding a solution is suggested. This is also emphasised in the last section: “As such national measures require time and space to run their courses until they are fully exhausted.”

In general, it is noticeable that although the core conflict is still not specifically named and the name of the Rohingya is still not used, the word “citizen” is avoided and “people” is used instead, as in Annan’s remarks.

In summary, this document points to how language can be used by state authorities to alleviate international pressure and compulsion to act, and to gain time to consider a strategy for action.

H)

As mentioned in the previous document, a Myanmar-initiated and hosted ASEAN Foreign Minister Retreat and briefing on the conflict in Rakhine State was held in December 2016. Only a month later, in **January 2017, the MFA responded to an “extraordinary session of the Organization of the Islam Cooperation (OIC)”** convened by Malaysia regarding the situation in Rakhine State on 19 January 2017.¹⁹⁸ The respond was published as a **press release on 20 January 2017** and is divided into six sections. The release is relevant insofar as it indirectly addresses the OIC and thus increases in international significance.

¹⁹⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *Press Release*, 20 January 2017, [online] <https://myanmarmissionnewyork.org/images/pdf/2017/Statements/Press%20Release%20OIC%20e%201.pdf> [accessed: 03 June 2021], p. 1.

The MFA begins the release with: “It is regrettable that Malaysia, fellow ASEAN member, considers it fit to convene an extraordinary session of the OIC to take up Myanmar’s Rakhine Issue.”¹⁹⁹ The phrase “Myanmar’s Rakhine Issue”²⁰⁰ is notable. This phrase conveys a dehumanising picture of the conflict to the reader. The suffering of the people, including the Rohingya, who are directly affected by the conflict is ignored and generalised as a problem that seems to primarily affect the country of Myanmar.

In the second section, the release highlights that “Malaysia’s concern regarding the situation in Rakhine State is no doubt based on prodigious media reports alleging dire human rights situations as well as deliberate misinterpretations of the situations obtaining on the ground.” Thus, Myanmar initially does not take Malaysia’s concern seriously and refers to erroneous media reports and misinterpretation in this regard, which is, according to the release, “regrettable”. However, “[w]hat is more regrettable is that the sensitive issue has been exploited to promote a certain political agenda.” Through terms such as “regrettable”, the MFA firstly expresses its incomprehension and disappointment towards Malaysia’s “unfounded” concern about “alleged” human rights violations. Secondly, it condemns Malaysia for exploiting the situation due to political interests. In this way, Myanmar places itself in the “victim role” and diverts attention from the conflict in Rakhine State to itself and its own sense of being unfairly blamed by fellow ASEAN members. This becomes clear again in the following section three. It states: “Malaysia’s action disregards the genuine efforts being made by the Myanmar Government to address the issue.”²⁰¹

Moreover, it is mentioned that “[t]here is no attempt to persecute a community on grounds of religion.”²⁰² Hereby, the MFA denies any complicity in the persecution of the Rohingya and indirectly even denies the persecution itself. Similarly, the communication only addresses persecution “on grounds of religion”.²⁰³ Thus, the socio-political background of the conflict is excluded and withdrawn from attention. However, these are central to the conflict and the main reason for the persecution of the Rohingya and the violation of their human rights. The name Rohingya also remains unmentioned in this document.

In the fourth paragraph, the MFA states that it is “disturbing to note that the OIC meeting [...] failed to acknowledge that the situation was a direct result of the well planned and coordinated attacks on police outposts in the northern Rakhine State on 9 October 2016 by

¹⁹⁹ Direct citation: Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *Press Release*, p. 1.

²⁰⁰ Direct citation: *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ Direct citation: *Ibid.*

²⁰² Direct citation: *Ibid.*

²⁰³ Direct citation: *Ibid.*

extremist elements both funded and inspired from abroad.”²⁰⁴ With this statement, the MFA is trying to portray the conflict in Rakhine as a consequence of the attacks in October 2016. However, it is not only the consequence of the attacks, contrastingly much more the cause of the attacks. This again shows that the cause and the background of the conflict are merely, if at all, addressed in the documents analysed so far. Instead, the conflict is seen as a newly emerged “problem” that primarily disturbs and endangers the socio-economic and socio-political conditions of Myanmar and not the lives of the Rohingya.

In the final section, the MFA again calls on the international community for greater understanding and cooperation with the government and asks that external pressures be alleviated. External pressure would “make a complicated issue worse”²⁰⁵. In short, this document shows that Myanmar is deliberately taking on the role of “victim” in order to gain time, understanding and cooperation from the international community regarding the situation in Rakhine. Even international pressure, as initiated here by Malaysia, does not soften Myanmar state authorities regarding the treatment of the Rohingya, and their identity continues to be ignored in socio-political terms.

I)

Only a few days later, on **8 February 2017**, the **MFA responded to a report by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)** entitled: “**Interviews with Rohingya fleeing from Myanmar since 9 October 2016**”.²⁰⁶ This was published on **3 February 2017** and, according to the press release, makes “allegations” about the situation of the Rohingya. This reaction to the report is particularly interesting because the report reflects very personal experiences of the Rohingya and thus leaves no room for Myanmar to avoid addressing the Rohingya directly.

The government seems to be concerned about the report, which is why it has appointed the so-called Investigation Commission (IC) to look into these allegations. In a telephone conversation with the OHCHR High Commissioner, Suu Kyi assured that the government would take appropriate measures if these allegations were confirmed by the IC.

²⁰⁴ Direct citation: Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Direct citation: Ibid., p. 2.

²⁰⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *Press Release regarding OHCHR report on 03 February 2017*, 08 February 2017, [online]

https://myanmarmissionnewyork.org/images/pdf/2017/Statements/Press%20Release%20regarding%20OHCHR%20report%20release%20on%203%20feb%202017_Eng.pdf [accessed: 10 June 2021].

The background to the situation in Rakhine State is then briefly summarised. In particular, the measures taken to establish peace before 9 October 2016 are listed again. It then briefly recounts the 9 October incident and emphasises that the stability and security of Myanmar was severely affected and jeopardised by it, without referring to the Rohingya. The focus is mainly on the problems and consequences for Myanmar arising from the situation in Rakhine.

Section six deals with the establishment of the IC initiated by the government. It goes on by stating the “allegations” relating to the “clearance operation” would be taken up and investigated by the commission. These would have to be investigated first before confirming them.²⁰⁷

In view of the report, in which the Rohingya state serious human rights violations such as rape, sexual violence, torture, burnings and indiscriminate killings by the Myanmar military, the announced investigations of these incidents seem to be superfluous.²⁰⁸ Not only this report, but also other organisations, media and countries accuse Myanmar of structural persecution and violence against the Rohingya. Despite this, Myanmar state authorities justify their failure to intervene in these circumstances with the same measures repeatedly.

At this point, four months have already passed since the 9 October incidents, and the documents analysed in this paper alone show that Myanmar was made aware of the grievances by third parties on several occasions. Nevertheless, the MFA’s press release, which is addressed directly to the international community and to the OHCHR, remains very superficial and neutral. Although the OHCHR-report explains the situation in detail and even includes the name of the Rohingya in the title of the report, the MFA still avoids using the name. In this case, it avoids not only the use, but the mention of the Rohingya altogether. The identity seems to be non-existent in this and the documents analysed so far.

J)

On **8 August 2017**, the **MFA** released a **Summary Report of the IC for Maungdaw in Rakhine State**. This report summarises the tasks, duties and general activities of the commission in connection with its mandate to investigate the incidents in Maungdaw and

²⁰⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *Press Release regarding OHCHR report*, p. 2.

²⁰⁸ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner: *Report of the OHCHR mission to Bangladesh. Interviews with Rohingyas fleeing from Myanmar since 9 October 2016*, 03 February 2017, [online] <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/MM/FlashReport3Feb2017.pdf> [accessed: 10 June 2021], p. 9.

to make appropriate recommendations. The report provides information on the “[...] overall political, socio-economic, ethnic and religious situation of Rakhine State in general and Maungdaw in particular.”²⁰⁹ It also addresses “allegations” of genocide and ethnic cleansing made by third parties. For example, it refers to the aforementioned OHCHR-report. The IC, headed by Vice-President U Myint Swe, was established by Myanmar in 2016 to investigate the background of the October attacks and to prevent further incidents. This summary report is relevant to analyse in that it is representative of the state looking back at the time since 9 October and reflects the outcome of the investigation of the situation so far. It can be assumed that the narrative has been deliberately chosen and thought through several times, as this report is internationally significant.

The report is divided into six sections²¹⁰. In the following, the analysis refers only to parts of the sections “Information in the report” and “Findings of the Commission”, as these sum up the most crucial information and the outcome of the investigations. The commission conducted interviews with local organisations and villagers as well as focus group and roundtable discussions as investigation techniques.²¹¹

Information in the Report

First, a table is presented that shows an annual increase in the number of Muslims in Rakhine State after the 1824 Anglo-Myanmar War. This increase would have been a consequence out “[...] of large numbers of Muslims from Chittagong being allowed into the Rakhine coastal areas, which had fallen under British rule, to work as farm labourers, who first stayed on a temporary seasonal basis but later decided to settle.”²¹²

At this point, indirect reference is made to the history of the Rohingya, which is accepted by the majority population and state authorities. As mentioned in chapter three, the majority rejects the historical background and presence of the Rohingya in Myanmar/Burma before 1824. It is assumed that they only came to the country under British colonial rule as “farm labourers”²¹³. The term “Rohingya” is not used and only

²⁰⁹ Direct citation: Investigation Commission: *Summary of the Report of the Investigation Commission for Maungdaw in Rakhine State*, 08 August 2017, [online] <http://www.myanmarembassydhaka.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Summary-Report-of-the-Investigation-Com.-8.8.17.pdf> [accessed: 15 June 2021], p. 1.

²¹⁰ Headings of the sections: “Introduction”; “Investigation Techniques Employed by the Commission”; “Information in the Report”; “Findings of the Commission”; “Overall Conclusion” and “Recommendations of the Commission”. (Direct citation: Investigation Commission: *Summary of the report*.)

²¹¹ Investigation Commission: *Summary of the Report*, p. 1 f.

²¹² Direct citation: *Ibid*, p. 2.

²¹³ Direct citation: *Ibid*.

“Muslims” are referred to. This creates a basis for justifying subsequent findings, because it emphasises that the Rohingya/the “Muslims” affected by the conflict are not officially recognised by the state (according to the Citizenship Law of 1982, which is still the basis of significant laws and of systematic exclusion at this time).

In section five, the composition of the population in Maungdaw district is described. It states that it “[...] consists of ethnic peoples and Muslims.”²¹⁴ At this point, a distinction is made between “ethnic peoples” and “Muslims”. Considering the history of Muslims in Myanmar, this is a “logical” distinction between “us” and “them”. The word “ethnic” before “people” highlights that most Muslims are not integrated among the recognised ethnic groups in Myanmar. This is another indication that the Rohingya are meant by “Muslims”, as they were excluded from the national ethnic races in 1982. Such a narrative in turn creates the frequently analysed image of the Rohingya as the negative “other”.

Section eight shows through percentages that the majority of economic activities in Maungdaw are carried out by Muslims. Then, in the ninth paragraph, it is pointed out that Rakhine State has a poverty rate of 44 percent, which would be the second highest in the country. In thick letters, it then states that this would clearly indicate “[...] a lack of economic development and shortage of employment opportunities”.²¹⁵ Through these two paragraphs, a link is made between Muslims and poor economic development of the area and puts Muslims, which I understand here as Rohingya, in a negative light and as a cause of the described issues.

Accordingly, the next paragraph states: “The low socio-economic development in Rakhine State can be identified as the principal root cause of frequent conflicts in the area.”²¹⁶ Here again, as in the previously cited documents, the historical background and causes of the conflict are ignored and alternatives for them are sought and named. The socio-economic grievances in the region are merely consequences of socio-political grievances that are deeply rooted in history and from which the Rohingya, among others, suffered greatly, but which are not taken into account here.

Section twelve refers specifically to the background situation of the conflict in Rakhine State. This is mainly described by the differences in “[...] religion, customs, cultural traditions and social practices and interpersonal relations between ethnic peoples

²¹⁴ Direct citation: Ibid.

²¹⁵ Direct citation: Ibid., p. 3.

²¹⁶ Direct citation: Ibid.

and Muslims in Maungdaw area.”²¹⁷ Here again, the distinction between “ethnic peoples” (us) and “Muslims” (them) can be recognised. It goes on to say: “With the increase in the number of Muslims, unequal political, economic and social conditions together with poverty and low levels of development made it impossible for mutually acceptable solutions to existing problems to be found.”²¹⁸ This statement expresses the complicity of Muslims, including the Rohingya, in the conflict and the complexity of finding solutions.

Furthermore, at the end of the section, reference is made to conflicts between “ethnic Rakhine and local Muslims” in 1942 and 2012 and especially to the resulting death toll of “ethnic Rakhines”. These conflicts would have “[...] negatively affected mutual trust and understanding between the two communities.”²¹⁹ This indirectly conveys to the reader that in these conflicts it was mainly Muslims who used violence against the “ethnic Rakhines” and that they had already triggered conflicts in the past. This leads to an “enemy image” in the form of Muslims and thereby attributes the blame for the circumstances prevailing at the time to them.

Findings of the Commission

In general, the commission addresses the extent to which allegations of violence by Myanmar forces against the Muslim community could be corroborated by the commission and how such a high number of emigrations to Bangladesh occurred.

Section 17 states that the terrorists, i.e. members of ARSA, were living among the people in Rakhine State and thus urged fellow people to support ARSA, or else they would burn their houses. Section 18 argues that “some of the media carried horror stories fabricated by some organisations that never actually happened in Myanmar, and together with statements from extremist religious leaders [...] they gave rise to misconceptions of the activities of the security forces among Muslim villagers, which became another factor pushing them to leave for the neighbouring country.”²²⁰ The reason for the high number of fleeing people is thus seen primarily in the presence of ARSA and not in the action against the Muslims/Rohingya in the region by Myanmar forces.

In section 26, however, the commission sees a fault with the government. By imposing restrictions on people whose citizenship has not been verified, it would have enabled terrorists to influence and organise “local Muslims”. Thus, “the current three-fold surveys consisting of village mapping, collecting building data and compiling household member

²¹⁷ Direct citation: Ibid.

²¹⁸ Direct citation: Ibid.

²¹⁹ Direct citation: Ibid.

²²⁰ Direct citation: Ibid., p. 5.

lists [...] should continue in a systematic manner to ensure access to valid evidence and reliable data on villages in Maungdaw area.”²²¹ Only in this way could “[...] accurate citizenship verification under Citizenship Law of 1982”²²² take place. This statement gives the impression that the collection of data will contribute to the positive and more rights for Muslims. However, for the majority of the Rohingya this would have further legal and political consequences. As already mentioned in chapter three, most of them have no opportunity to obtain unrestricted citizenship justified in the 1982 Citizenship Law, despite verification.

From paragraphs 34 to 40, the summary specifically addresses external allegations such as “[...] rape, torture, arson, human rights violations, discrimination and even genocide in Muslim villages.”²²³ All these allegations, including those mentioned in the OHCHR – report, were investigated and could either be confirmed, not confirmed, or not clearly assigned. For example, arson attacks could not be attributed to whom they were instigated or whether they resulted from the general fire. Other allegations, such as that “[...] gang rape against women in villages, that underage children were killed brutally with their throats slashed open, and that torture and killings took place in villages, and that elderly people were brutally killed”²²⁴, could not be uncovered. Other cases could be confirmed through interviews, however, noting that: “Investigations in cases such as taking of jewellery while conducting body searches, touching of sexual organs, loss of cattle, goats and motorcycles require witnesses and will always be difficult to conduct.”²²⁵ Continuing: “For cases where violations have been proved to have occurred, effective action is taken in accordance with the laws, rules and regulations of the Armed Forces and Myanmar Police Force.”²²⁶

Finally, the IC’s summary can be used as a summary of the previously analysed documents. Basically accusations of human rights violations and genocide are rejected and attributed primarily to the ARSA group and its supporters. The commission and other state authorities see the root of the existing conflicts in socio-economic difficulties that prevail in this region. It indirectly blames the Muslims, who form the majority there, for the weak socio-economic situation. This leads to a negatively connoted enemy image of the Rohingya. The summary also

²²¹ Direct citation: Ibid., p. 7.

²²² Direct citation: Ibid.

²²³ Direct citation: Ibid., p. 8.

²²⁴ Direct citation: Ibid., p. 10.

²²⁵ Direct citation: Ibid., p. 13.

²²⁶ Direct citation: Ibid.

supports the widespread opinion about the historical origin of the Muslims/Rohingya, i.e. that they immigrated as workers only after 1824. It recommends a verification of citizenship, which at this point is based on the 1982 Citizenship Law and would not give the Rohingya any additional rights in the country. Therefore, the recommendation should rather be to grant full and unrestricted citizenship to the Rohingya without treating the 1982 Citizenship Law as natural. The socio-political factors that shaped the creation of the 1982 law should rather be analysed and questioned.

In principle, the identity of the Rohingya can only be read implicitly. However, this is often created on the basis of prejudices and narratives and tends to create a negative image. The name Rohingya is again not mentioned and the group is clearly distinguished from “ethnic peoples” and thus not understood as part of the nation of Myanmar.

5.4 Retrospect and the incidents of 2017

Retrospect

Looking back at the previously analysed documents within the period spanning from just before the 2015 elections to the IC’s summary report in August 2017, it can be stated that: The name of the Rohingya is consistently avoided and not recognised by Myanmar authorities. Rohingya are mainly named as “Bengalis” or as “Muslims”. State authorities dismiss or classify allegations of genocide and human rights violations against the Rohingya as “to be examined” and Muslims/Rohingya are indirectly seen as the root of the conflicts. They are not considered as citizens and thus not part of the nation.

The socio-historical identity of the Rohingya is considered only very one-sidedly, which is often used as a basis for their exclusion, just as it creates the basis for the rejection of the name Rohingya. Thus, after looking at the documents within this time period, it is evident that not much has been done to improve the rights of the Rohingya. By avoiding the name and rejecting what has happened, the Rohingya are almost deprived of their socio-political identity by the political power dynamics in Myanmar. Their socio-political identity is made almost “invisible” in the documents analysed. On the one hand, the political authorities act for their own benefit, as this keeps their attack surface as small as possible and gives them more freedom of action with regard to the Rohingya. On the other hand, they are acting in the name of the majority of the nation, where such an attitude also prevails, especially among Buddhist nationalists toward the Rohingya.

The incidents of 2017 and the state's reaction

K)

On the **25 August 2017**, attacks by ARSA and subsequent persecution of the Rohingya by Myanmar forces occurred, which are considered as the peak of violence in this thesis.

On the same day of the incidents, the **Anti-Terrorism Central Committee (ATCC) of the Republic Union of Myanmar** issued an **order** titled: **“Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) declared as terrorist group.”** This order was confirmed by the Union Government and issued in exercise of the Anti-Terrorism law Section-72 Sub-section (B).²²⁷

The order is divided into six sections and revisits the incidents in 2016 and then transitions to the incidents on 25 August 2017. At the end of the order, the ATCC, on behalf of the Republic, officially declares the ARSA group and its supporters “[...]as a terrorist group in accordance with the Counter-Terrorism Law Section 6, Sub-Section 5.”²²⁸ This document is crucial as it considers the main incidents of 2017 and 2016 that are central to the perception of Rohingya’s identity.

Section three states that the government has already worked with Tatmadaw forces to ensure security in the region after the 2016 incidents. This section focuses on the use of “clearance operations” and states that they “[...] have also uncovered multiple terrorist training camps”²²⁹ in the region. However, The OHCHR – report of 3 February 2017 states that military forces and police officers have arbitrarily accused Rohingya villagers of being supporters of or of having taken in members of the RSO.²³⁰ As a result, Rohingya were often “[...] subjected to beatings, other forms of torture, cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment by the security forces during “area clearance operations” [...].”²³¹ This remains uncommented and unconfirmed in this document, which can also be seen in the previous analysis. As a result of the incidents of 25 August 2017, ARSA was officially classified as a terrorist group. However, it is said that “its supporters” also belong to this group and are classified as terrorist. At this point, a reference to the distancing from the general ethnic group of the Rohingya is again omitted. By mentioning their name in the name of the group ARSA, which is classified as

²²⁷ Anti-terrorism Central Committee: *Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) declared as terrorist group*, Order No. 1/2017, 25 August 2017, [online] <https://myanmarmissionnewyork.org/images/pdf/2017/Announcement/terror%20attack%20order%201%2025-8-17.pdf> [accessed: 20 June 2021].

²²⁸ Direct citation: Anti-terrorism Central Committee: *ARSA declared as terrorist group*.

²²⁹ Direct citation: Ibid.

²³⁰ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner: *Report of the OHCHR mission to Bangladesh*, pp. 13-25.

²³¹ Direct citation: United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner: *Report of the OHCHR mission to Bangladesh*, p. 25.

terrorist, there is again room for interpretation of a possible connection of the group with the ethnic minority. At least this is not denied or excluded. It is also not defined here who the supporters could be. In light of the OHCHR – report, the mere affiliation to the Rohingya ethnic group seems to indicate that these people are also considered as supporters of the group. This in turn is then used as a basis and justification for violence and persecution of Rohingya.

In summary, this document ascribes a negatively connoted identity to the Rohingya in that it refrains from clarifying who is a supporter of the terrorist group and who not, thus leaving room for interpretation of a possible link between a person’s ethno-religious background and membership of a terrorist group. This poses a danger to the majority of the Rohingya as it exposes them to arbitrary decisions by the executing forces, as described in the OHCHR – report. This in turn creates and conveys the picture of the negative and threatening “other”, in form of the Rohingya as terrorists, and an even greater distance between “us” and “them” to the general public and especially to the population of the country.

L)

On **19 September 2017**, State Counsellor **Suu Kyi** delivered her **first speech after the events of 25 August 2017** in the capital of Myanmar, Nay Pyi Taw. In her speech, she referred to the **government’s efforts towards national reconciliation and peace**.²³² She delivered this speech in English, indicating that it was primarily addressed to the international community, the UN and a general international audience, rather than to “her own people”. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein had previously described the military operations, which according to human rights organisations were still taking place at the time and were identified as the main reason for the large number of people fleeing to Bangladesh, as a “textbook example of ethnic cleansing”.²³³

Suu Kyi’s speech serves as the conclusion of the analysis at this point, as she gained international attention through her own notoriety and “breaking her silence” towards the Rohingya. In the following, I will only go into the parts of the speech that I consider relevant to answering my research question.

In general, Suu Kyi discusses what Myanmar has already achieved in “a short period of time” under her party’s government for the advancement of peace and reconciliation in the country. However and accordingly to Suu Kyi, the situation in Myanmar is too diverse and

²³² Suu Kyi, Aung San: *Speech by State Counsellor on Government’s efforts with regard to National Reconciliation and Peace*, 19 September 2017, Channel Eight News, [online] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qmp0FIONC88&t=63s> [accessed: 20 June 2021].

²³³ Direct citation: Potter; Win: *National Verification Cards*.

complex in the nature of its conflicts that it cannot be expected that all these conflicts are resolved in such a short time. Suu Kyi also discusses the incidents of 9 October and the measures initiated by the government to create security and peace after the incidents. Only then she addresses the incidents of 25 August 2017, saying:

“After several months of seemingly quiet and peace, on the 25th of August 30 police outposts as the regimental headquarters [...] were attacked by armed groups. Consequent to these attacks the government declared Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army and its supporters, responsible for acts of terrorism, as a terrorist group in accordance with the counterterrorism law [...].”²³⁴

The documents analysed before and several human rights reports did not confirm the said “quiet and peace” in the months before the second incident. The analysed documents show that since October 2016 at the latest, ongoing unrest in the region has been repeatedly referred to in press releases and reports. Thus, the issue was de facto not resolved at that point. With this statement, she not only denies the ongoing conflict in the region, but also the suffering the Rohingya have endured in recent months. Similarly, Suu Kyi does not refer directly to the Rohingya. The only reference by name was expressed through the name of ARSA. Thus, as seen in other documents, a link is drawn between the Rohingya and “terrorists”.

Suu Kyi calls on Myanmar state authorities to condemn all human rights violations and unlawful violence. However, she does not address existing allegations of “ethnic cleansing”. She rather addresses other minority groups: “Those who have had to flee the homes are many, not just Muslims and Rakhines but also small minority groups [...] of whose the presence most of the world is totally unaware.”²³⁵ With this, Suu Kyi diverts attention from the Rohingya to other ethnic groups. The clear distinction and demarcation between Muslims and Rakhines is also striking. It thus becomes clear that Suu Kyi does not consider the Muslims she refers to, i.e. in a figurative sense the Rohingya, as Rakhines and thus distinguishes them from the nation. Later she argues:

“Since the 5th of September there have been no armed clashes and there have been no clearance operations. Nevertheless we are concerned to hear that numbers of Muslims are fleeing across the border to Bangladesh. We want to find out why this exodus is happening. [...] I think it is very little known that the great majority of Muslims in the Rakhine State have not joined the exodus. More than 50 percent of the villages of Muslims are intact. They are as they were before the attacks took place.”²³⁶

According to human rights organisations and refugee testimonies, this statement is false. At that time, clearance operations were still taking place and so were violence and armed clashes

²³⁴ Direct citation: Suu Kyi: *Speech by State Counsellor on Government's efforts*, 5:30-6:02 min.

²³⁵ Direct citation: *Ibid.*, 7:07-7:25 min.

²³⁶ Direct citation: *Ibid.*, 8:47-9:34 min.

within the population.²³⁷ Subsequently, she points out that a “great majority of Muslims” remained in the villages and only “numbers of Muslims” fled. In this way, Suu Kyi attempts to diminish the drama and seriousness of the conflict and indirectly expresses that those who have stayed and the “intact villages” show that the allegations of massive human rights violations cannot necessarily be true. Similarly, with the statement “we want to find out why this exodus is happening”, she ignores the historical conflicts that have existed for decades between the communities and between them and the military.

Furthermore, Suu Kyi invites the international community to visit the areas where there have been “no problems” so as to learn from the “Muslims”, “[...] who have integrated successfully into the Rakhine State”²³⁸. This demonstrates that the Muslims she addresses are not considered to be originally from Myanmar. She thus generalises an entire community as “foreigners” and suggests to the listener that those who fled were not able to integrate. In doing so, she is addressing the majority of the Rohingya and indirectly justifying their exodus by that. At a later stage, she refers to the “national verification process” (NVP):

“With regard to citizenship a strategy with specific timeline has been developed to move forward the national verification process but this process needs cooperation from all communities. In some Muslim communities their leaders have decided that they are not to join in the verification process. We would appreciate it if all friends could persuade them to join in the process because they have nothing to lose by it.”²³⁹

The NVP is described by the organisation Fortify Rights as a “tool of genocide”²⁴⁰. The report states that Rohingya were forced to fill out the NVCs even though they refused. According to the report, Rohingya have stated that they were asked to indicate in the document where they come from and through which border they entered Myanmar. They were coerced, among others by violence, to indicate “Bengali” or another foreign nationality and not “Rohingya”. This determines the identity of the Rohingya as “outsiders” and “foreigners”. Nevertheless, Suu Kyi points to this process and determines it as a necessary aspect for the positive advancement of establishing peace and security in the country. Additionally, she says that Muslims have “nothing to lose” by agreeing to a

²³⁷ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner: *Mission report of OHCHR rapid response mission to Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh*, 13-24 September 2017, [online] <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/MM/CXBMissionSummaryFindingsOctober2017.pdf> [accessed: 22 June 2021], p. 4.

²³⁸ Direct citation: Suu Kyi: *Speech by State Counsellor on Government’s efforts*, 10:01-10:11 min.

²³⁹ Direct citation: *Ibid.*, 12:46-13:16 min.

²⁴⁰ Fortify Rights: “*Tools of Genocide*”. *The National Verification Cards and the Denial of Citizenship of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar*, 2019, [online] https://www.burmalibrary.org/sites/burmalibrary.org/files/obl/2019-09-03-Tools-of-Genocide-Summary-Fortify_Rights-en-red.pdf [accessed: 22 June 2021].

NVP. But they would have. With the consent, their citizenship is not yet secured, but rather their identity is first determined, which for the majority of the Rohingya (under duress) would mean “Bengali”. This process is used at this point by Suu Kyi as a cover to suggest that the rights of the Rohingya would be secured through this process. However, they will only be secured if the Rohingya are identified as “citizens” within this process. Thus, the verification only serves as a basis and justification for not securing rights.

To conclude, even after the incidents in 2017, it can be seen that state authorities portray the conflict in a similar way as within the time period before. The state rejects accusations of genocide or ignores them altogether. Likewise, it is mainly the consequences of the conflict that are highlighted and not the socio-political and historical causes. The socio-political and historical identity of the Rohingya is portrayed similarly. Since the end of 2015, the identity has been consistently shaped by characteristics such as “Muslims”, “terrorists”, “foreigners”, “Bengali”, “outsiders”, or is simply not present.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Evaluation of the research result

Finally and to answer the general research question²⁴¹, it can be stated that Myanmar state authorities have an ambivalent way of attributing the socio-political identity of the Rohingya. By refusing to use the name “Rohingya” and by frequently avoiding any references to the religious minority, despite concrete requests by human rights organisations or other states, some kind of a “lack” of identity regarding the Rohingya can be noted. At least a lack of significance of their socio-political identity. The absence of alternatives to address or recognise the Rohingya denies them almost any existence as a distinct ethnic group and thus any legal basis for fundamental human rights. By denying their existence and their socio-political affiliation, the state does not initially see itself as responsible or even addressed when it comes to accusations of genocide. Genocide cannot be committed against a “non-existent” group. Nevertheless, indirect references are made to the Rohingya, that often lead to a mostly negative, hostile image of the Rohingya and suggest an image of the “other”.

Muslims

In some documents, the Rohingya are only referred to in the context of the entire “Muslim community” and even this is only interpretation and can only be identified on the basis of background information. When they are considered part of the general Muslim community, they are usually associated with weak socio-economic development and seen as the main cause of the existing conflict in Rakhine State. However, this often fails to name or consider the root cause of the existing conflicts and only refers to the consequences of it.

Similarly, a distinction is often made between “ethnic people” and Muslims. This clearly demonstrates that religion is one of the factors that determines ethnicity and thus national and political affiliation. There is a strong prioritisation of Buddhism in the country. Even if other world religions are officially recognised, Buddhism is often placed on the same level as “ethnic people” and is treated accordingly. Additionally, Muslims are mainly perceived as foreigners due to their assumed historical background. Based on that, there is a distinct line drawn between “us”, the ethnic (Buddhist) population and “them”, the Muslim, non-ethnic community – the Rohingya.

²⁴¹ How do external agents in the displacement sector, such as Myanmar state authorities, ascribe the socio-political identity of the Rohingya?

Terrorists

This line is reinforced by the indirect attribution of identity as “terrorists” or supporters of terrorists noted in the documents. Only within the context of the ARSA attacks, which were classified as terrorist by the state, were the Rohingya mentioned by name. Even if this is only through the name of ARSA, it nevertheless creates a connection between the Rohingya in general and the terrorist attacks. None of the documents clearly distinguish between the ARSA or its supporters and the Rohingya. Thus, the choice of words used in the records leads outsiders and the Myanmar population to assume that the ARSA is representative for the Rohingya. This connection is also an indirect justification for the “clearance operation”. Due to the lack of a concrete definition of ARSA and its supporters, Rohingya are generally suspected of belonging to this group due to their ethnic and religious affiliation. This legitimises violence against them through the “clearance operation”.

By indirectly linking the Rohingya with terrorism, they are dehumanised and their suffering from the causes of the conflict is not acknowledged. ARSA’s attacks are also compared to those of Al-Qaeda and IS, thus linking them to 9/11 and Islamist terrorism. Thereby, Rohingya’s identity as Muslims is seen as endangering to the nation and identified as the “threatening other” compared to Buddhism. At this point, Appleby and Hurd’s ambivalent concept of “good” and “bad” religion can be recognised again. Here, the concept can be understood as Islam being the “bad” (more prone to violence/ source of conflict) and Buddhism being the “good”, peaceful religion.

In this way, their religious affiliation becomes a breeding ground for exclusion and the violation of their human rights.

Foreigners

If the Rohingya are not defined by their religious affiliation, then by their assumed ethnic-historical background. Based on historical identity ascriptions, such as that the Rohingya migrated to Myanmar from present-day Bangladesh as farm labourers under British colonial rule, the ethnic identity “Bengali” is ascribed to them. This attribution ignores other historical narratives, such as that the Rohingya lived in Myanmar already before colonial rule. Consequently, the use of “Bengali” conceptually refers to the Rohingya’s non-affiliation to Myanmar and thus their status as “foreigners” in the country.

The “other”

The identity attributions listed above show that the concept of the “other” can be found in all attribution processes. In all three, the distinction between “us” and “them” is noticeable, whereby the “other”, i.e. “them”/Rohingya, is attributed negative or completely different characteristics than “us”. The more negative, differentiating aspects can be identified, the “easier” it is to draw the line between “us” and “them”.

By creating an “enemy image” and a boundary between this and the majority population, Myanmar is able to strengthen its national identity. This could be the goal of the state authorities and the Buddhist population, especially in view of the country’s colonial past and multi-ethnic character. With regard to the theoretical framework, the attribution processes can be explained as follows:

The social identity of the Rohingya is categorised by an external agent, the collective of state authorities. In this thesis, the categories of ethnicity, religion and history have been highlighted and are the most influential in the attribution of the Rohingya’s socio-political identity. Based on historical processes, religion and ethnic belonging are decisive differentiators in a society, such as in a multi-ethnic country like Myanmar. These categories are “filled” with information and characteristics by the agent, who acts as a proxy on behalf of the majority of the population, but also for its own goals. The information about the different identity categories is created on the basis of the perception of the Rohingya by the collective (agents (state and population)). This often leads to misconceptions and biases.

However, it is not the state itself, but rather the collective of people, rules and institutions that condition these processes of attribution. Patterns of practices and rules regarding the Rohingya emerge based on collective perceptions and the narrative about their social identity that has been passed down through generations. Thus, the externally formed social identity influences laws and the treatment of the Rohingya. This then has a negative impact, in this case, on political affiliation and the securing of the Rohingya’s fundamental human rights. Here, reference can be made to identity theories, especially to social constructivism (chapter two): People create society, society makes law and law in turn again makes people.

Change

There is no significant difference in the perception and treatment of the Rohingya between the newly elected government in 2015 and the events in 2017. Within the documents analysed, it can only be noted that at the beginning only “citizens” were addressed, especially with regard to the establishment of peace and harmony in the country. This has changed over time and with the establishment of the Advisory Commission, for example. Instead of “citizens”, the term “people of Myanmar” was used. However, this is only a minor change that has not had a positive impact on the overall legal situation and may only have served to appease the international community. Furthermore, it can be noticed that the more intense the international pressure on Myanmar became over time, the more the identity of the Rohingya was attributed.

The consequences of attribution processes for political belonging and the implementation of human rights

Regarding the third sub-question, the following is found²⁴²:

In principle, any human rights violations based on the perceived socio-political identity of the Rohingya are denied, ignored or declared as in “need of examination” by Myanmar state authorities. Due to international pressure, the state proposed solutions and measures to restore peace and harmony in the country. However and as mentioned earlier, those do not consider the root of the conflict, but rather at the consequences and in some cases further fuel the conflict. This can be seen, for example, in the NVC/NVP as an initiated measure. This is not a measure to improve the situation or to secure fundamental human rights or even the right to citizenship for the Rohingya, but much more a tool for socio-political identity ascription and thus an administratively recorded systematic exclusion of the Rohingya.

As shown in chapter 2.6.2, it is easier to react to allegations of discrimination and to use language to suggest change than to stand up for more rights and recognition of a group. This is especially difficult in view of the Buddhist majority population, where the opinion about the Rohingya is predominantly negative.

The only way to enforce real change is through international pressure and increased scientific research into the causes of the conflicts rather than the consequences. Thus, the historical attribution of identity can be identified as one of the main reasons for the

²⁴² Third sub-question: What consequences do these processes of identity ascription have for the political belonging and consequently for the implementation of Rohingya’s human rights?

conflicts. This needs to be addressed more scientifically in order to raise international awareness about the conflicts and human rights violations concerning the Rohingya and to recognise these violations as a socio-political problem rather than a legal one. Most scholars assume that statelessness and the violence against the Rohingya are primarily a legal problem.²⁴³ Based on my research result, I rather assume that it is a socio-political issue which has only led to a legal determination. Thus, I see the socio-political ascription of identity as the core problem within this situation. It is rather crucial to understand how the socio-political identity of the Rohingya is perceived and ascribed than to understand the legal restrictions against them as these seem to be more a consequence of identity ascription. The 1982 Citizenship Law can be seen as a law established in response to the ascribed identity of the Rohingya to ensure that they are permanently denied citizenship. This reflects a general issue with approaches focused on purely legal analysis. Laws are often understood as a priori and the socio-political factors, that influence the creation of specific laws in the first place, are often not considered. Thus, analysing identity ascription processes and the respective socio-political circumstances is essential for understanding the development of certain laws and the protection of fundamental human rights of other (religious) minority groups.

6.2 Reflection

In retrospect, it should be noted that it would additionally be relevant to analyse documents that are not within the selected time span of the work. In this way, a greater abundance of data sources could be obtained. Due to the scope of this thesis, however, I had to focus on a particular time span. Consequently, the number of analysable documents is limited. Nevertheless, I consider the quality of the analysed documents to be high and therefore sufficient for a high-quality analysis result.

Moreover, It is noticeable that the more internationally significant a document is, the more identity attribution processes can be seen. The international significance of a document could increase the pressure on state authorities to justify the treatment of the Rohingya to the international community. This is then done primarily on the basis of a particular socio-political narrative. If a record is addressed to the own population, the pressure to justify the treatment is not as high as the treatment of the Rohingya is widely accepted there anyway. This might be justified by the historical development (see 2.1; 2.6.1; 3) of the

²⁴³ Alam, Jobair: The Rohingya of Myanmar. Theoretical Significance of the Minority Status, in: *Asian Ethnicity*, 19:2, Tylor & Francis, London 2018, pp. 180–210, p. 455.

concept of the “other”, here non-Burmese, Bengali or Muslim, that shaped the identity of Myanmar’s majority population.

Finally, it must also be noted that the original website of the President’s Office of Myanmar was renewed and rebuilt during my work period. So there is a possibility that some links may no longer work, which is why I have attached each document to the thesis. Similarly, almost all the documents that were previously accessible through the website are no longer available on the new one, which may be related to the current events in Myanmar.

6.3 Research outlook

The current situation in Myanmar, which has its origins in a coup initiated by the military in February 2021, can have a positive impact on the perception of the Rohingya within the population. Through the state of emergency, people in Myanmar have gathered in the streets to protest, regardless of their ethnicity or religion. This is a sign of standing together in a crisis and standing up for common rights. The Rohingya have also taken to the streets and openly identified themselves as such through signs. Thus, the coup could change Buddhist nationalist attitudes and lead to more acceptance towards the Rohingya among the population.²⁴⁴ This would be the first and most important step towards asserting their basic human and civil rights. A scientific investigation of a possible turnaround would thus be relevant to show whether the narrative about the socio-political identity of the Rohingya within the population and additionally at the state level could be changed by the coup.

As described above, international pressure on the respective state is indispensable for a long-term change in relation to ascription processes and thus statelessness. When transferring the research results to other (religious) minority groups, the respective specifics of the group and the geo-political region should be taken into account. It is relevant to examine how international pressure (e.g. through the international community, UN) on the respective state varies according to geo-political “relevance” of the region. For example, the international community’s own geo-political interests could be decisive

²⁴⁴ Georgetown University: *Faith and the Coup: An Interview with Susan Hayward and Iselin Frydenlund on the Religious Dimensions of the Situation in Myanmar*, 2021 [online] <https://religionanddiplomacy.org/2021/03/03/faith-and-the-coup-an-interview-with-susan-hayward-and-iselin-frydenlund-on-the-religious-dimensions-of-the-situation-in-myanmar/> [accessed: 27 June 2021].

for the intensity of its efforts with regard to the protection and implementation of the human rights of the respective stateless minority group.

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8 Appendix

Appendix A)

INDIA TODAY/ To The Point/ Nothing But The Truth; Interview between Karan Thapar (Interviewer) and Aung San Suu Kyi (Interviewee): *Aung San Suu Kyi Speaks Ahead Of Myanmar Elections*, 11. October 2015, [online] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OU7rKCpMkRY> [accessed: 18 May 2021]. (Whole length: 43:54 min., 13 – 13:49 min.; 21:54 – 25:27 min. transcribed by Saskia Hübner)

13:00 – 13:49 min

Q: Apparently, I am told you don't have a single Muslim candidate. Could you not find one that was suitable?

A: Well, we did have one. But he was ... he has not been recognised ... the Election Commission has said he was not eligible because of residency qualifications that he could not meet.

Q: Are you sorry that you don't have more candidates from the Muslim community that you could field as yours?

A: I am sorry that in this election this has become an issue. Because at previous elections this is not an issue. In our country now there are very, very worrying signs of religious intolerance which we did not have in this country before.

21:54 – 25:27 min.

Q: The second critical challenge you would face if you come to pass is the increasing, [...], worrying role of religion in politics. I am referring not just to the Rohingya problem, not just to the anti-Muslim sentiment but also to [...] the raise of Buddhist and nationalism. Why and how has this come to be the situation in Burma, does it worry you and how do you propose to tackle it?

A: Of course it worries me and there is not an easy answer, you know how religious passions are. And it is doubly difficult for us because the constitution forbids us to mix religion with politics. So I have to be very careful about what I say and the NLD has to be very careful. [...]. It's very difficult for us to make any comments about these matters without the danger of infringing the constitution. And then of course I am a Buddhist but I can't go around saying I am a Buddhist therefore, that's against the constitution. [...]. We want justice for everybody. Obviously democracy has to be based on justice for everybody. Regardless of race, religion, etcetera. And is this what this government is trying to do or is it not? These are questions that to be put more to this government than to us. We are limited by what we are allowed to do, allowed to say because we are a legal political party which has to work within the framework of the constitution and within the framework of the laws laid down for political parties. [...].

Q: Many in the West are perplexed by what they call your silence or your non-committal stand on the Rohingya issue. Is that politics or is it necessary discretion because you are not in power and therefore you have to be careful about what you say?

A: I have talked about it but people are not interested because what they want me to do is to condemn the Rakhine. I can't condemn the Rakhine for the simple fact that the Rakhine had many grievances as well which are a result of policies that were pursued by the military authorities for decades. And I don't want to set more flames a light. My rule is not to set the community against another but to try to bring reconciliation between them. I cannot do that by condemning either community. What people would like to hear are flaming words of condemnation and I am not out for condemnation. What I am trying to achieve is reconciliation and we have got to keep to that path because there is a bit long future ahead of us. People

must learn to live together in peace and harmony within the security provided for them by the right kind of political framework.

Appendix B)

Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *Press Release. Myanmar do not recognize the term “Rohingya”*, 08 November 2015, [online]

https://myanmarmissionnewyork.org/images/pdf/2015/PressRelease/Press_Release_Myanmar_do_not_recognize_the_term_Rohingya_Eng.pdf [accessed: 16 May 2021].

Press Release

1. Recently, Fortify Rights and International State Crime Initiative released papers containing genocide of so called “Rohingyas” in Rakhine State and other various unfounded allegations. Such accusations were orchestrated intentionally at a time the Human Rights Council is reviewing the national report of Myanmar under the Universal Periodic Review, and when the country is at an important juncture of holding the multiparty General Elections. At the same time, Al Jazeera News Agency broadcasted a similar fabricated news.
2. Such news and papers were prepared on baseless, deceptive and false allegations. The Government and people of Myanmar do not recognize the term “Rohingya” as it is an invented terminology. In this respect, the Government of Myanmar categorically rejects the unfounded allegations mentioned in the said papers and news broadcast.
3. Such unfounded allegations are interfering in the internal affairs of Myanmar and disturbing the peace and tranquility of the country as well as causing distrust towards the peace loving people of Myanmar. Therefore, Myanmar strongly rejects such malicious acts.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Nay Pyi Taw

8 November 2015

2/2

Appendix C)

Inaugural speech of President U Htin Kyaw at the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw:

The constitution to be in accord with democratic norms: President U Htin Kyaw, 30 March 2016, [online] <https://www.president-office.gov.mm/en/?q=briefing-room/speeches-and-remarks/2016/03/31/id-6157> [accessed: 20 May 2021].

The constitution to be in accord with democratic norms: President U Htin Kyaw



The constitution to be in accord with democratic norms: President U Htin Kyaw



The following is the unofficial translation of the inaugural speech of President U Htin Kyaw at the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw on 30 March.

First of all, I would like to express my delight at being elected president by Pyidaungsu Hluttaw because it is a significant, historic event. As I have now become the president, I am the person who is accountable for the Union Parliament. [Myanmar's] second hluttaws and the governments resulting from the November 2015 election were formed to be in accordance with the policies of the National League for Democracy, led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Our new government will implement the following policies:

	•national reconciliation;
	• internal peace;
	• the emergence of a constitution that will lead to effectuation of a democratic, federal union; and
	• raising the quality of life of the majority of the people.

I would like to emphasise the fact that I will invariably be cautious of my duty to keep these oaths. Moreover, I am responsible for the emergence of a constitution that is in accord with democratic norms suited to our country. I am also aware that I need to be patient enough to realise this political objective, for which the people have long aspired.

May I now conclude by emphasising that our Union government will exert strenuous efforts to fulfill the people's aspirations and wishes. I wish all citizens peace and prosperity in treading upon your respective paths of life.

Appendix D)

Sein, Ba; Ministry of Religious Affairs: Freedom of other religions (Christianity, Hinduism, Islamism, Animism and others) in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, in: *The Global New Light of Myanmar*, 14 July 2016, [online] <https://www.gnlm.com.mm/freedom-of-other-religions-christianity-hinduism-islamism-animism-and-others-in-the-republic-of-the-union-of-myanmar/> [accessed: 20 May 2021].

Ba Sein

(Religious Affairs)

Christianity

About 10 per cent of the entire population of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar takes faith in Christianity. There are many Christian churches and worship centers throughout the country. The Christian people have lived peacefully and harmoniously with other national races of different religions in the Republic of Union of Myanmar since years ago. There are four Christian religious organizations mainly recognized by the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, and Christian religious leaders and other Christian personnel are allowed to go abroad to attend their religious meetings, conferences, seminars and trainings. Congratulatory messages of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar are sent to the ceremonies of Christian holy days such as Easter Day, Christmas Eve and other festivals. The financial grant is also yearly provided by the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to be able to promote and flourish the Christianity in the country. Various kinds of books, magazines and journals on Christianity are freely published and distributed, and also renovations and constructions of churches and worship centers all over the country are allowed. Some of leaders of Christian Religious Organizations are issued traveling free pass in order to tour the whole country to carry out their religious matters and affairs.

Islamism

About 4 per cent of the entire population of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar takes faith in Islamism, and many Islamic mosques, worship centers and religious schools are situated throughout the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. Altogether 5 Islamic Religious Organizations are mainly recognized by the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and all these organizations are able to perform freely and carry out their religious affairs in accordance with the existing laws and orders of the country. Many leaders of the Islamic Religious Organization and other Islamic personnel are occasionally allowed to go abroad to attend their religious meetings, seminars, conferences and trainings. Congratulatory messages of the Ministry of Religious Affairs are sent to the ceremonies of their holy days and other religious festivals such as the Prophet Mohammed Birthday, Idulfiti day, Iduladwaha day and other significant religious days. Many books, magazines and journals on Islamism are freely published and distributed and financial grant is provided by the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to promote and flourish their religion in the country. The Haj Pilgrims from the Republic of Union of Myanmar are yearly sent by the arrangements of Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to fulfill their religious duties there in accordance with five pillars of Islamic faith. Atid also renovations and constructions of mosques and other religious buildings are allowed. Besides, some of leaders of Islamic Religious Organizations are issued traveling free pass to tour the whole country in order to perform and carry out their religious matters and affairs.

Hinduism

About 4 per cent of the entire population of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar take faith in Hinduism, and there are many Hindu temples and worship centers throughout the country. Despite differences among people of different religious of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Hindu people have been living in harmony together with other national people of different religions since years ago. Two Hindu religious organizations are mainly recognized by the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and they are freely carrying out their religious affairs in accordance with the existing laws and orders of the country. The financial grant is yearly provided by the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to the Hindu Religious Organizations to promote and flourish their religion in the country. Besides, books, magazines and journals on Hinduism are freely published and distributed. Congratulatory messages of the Ministry of Religious Affairs are sent to their religious ceremonies such as Depavali day and other festivals. Some of leaders of Hindu Religious Organizations are issued traveling free pass to tour throughout the country in order to carry out their religious matters and affairs.

Animism and others

About one per cent each of the entire population of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar takes faith in Animism and others. From time immemorial, all Myanmar nationalities of different religions in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar extending and attaching great importance to each other, have lived through thick and thin regardless of colour, caste and religion.

Analysis of Document D)

On **14 July 2016**, the state-owned newspaper “**The Global New Light of Myanmar**” (GNLM) published an article by Ba Sein of the **Ministry of Religious Affairs (MRA)** entitled “**Freedom of other religions (Christianity, Hinduism, Islamism, Animism and others) in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar**”²⁴⁵. Since this is a state-owned newspaper, I assume that it has been reviewed by the state and that the publications have been approved accordingly. For this reason, publications via this newspaper are equivalent to documents published directly by the state.

In this article the author Ba Sein explains to what extent the individual religious orientations are represented in Myanmar and points to a high level of acceptance and tolerance of these in the country.

In the Islam paragraph, attention is clearly drawn to the fact that “[...] some of leaders of Islamic Religious Organizations are issued traveling free pass to tour the whole country in order to perform and carry out their religious matters and affairs.”²⁴⁶ Here it is noticeable that firstly only “some” leaders are allowed to travel through the country and secondly it basically draws attention to the fact that there are (travel) restrictions for certain people due to their religious or ethnic affiliation (see NVC). For example, for Rohingya. So there does not seem to be such described acceptance for all streams of Islam.

In conclusion, Sein says: “From time immemorial, all Myanmar nationalities of different religions in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar extending and attaching great importance to each other, have lived through thick and thin regardless of colour, caste and religion.”²⁴⁷ This sentence excludes all those ethno-religious conflicts of the past and the present from which not only the Rohingya suffered greatly.

At first glance, however, the article seems very open and expresses the supposedly strong acceptance and harmony of other religions. But this is also very one-sided, as it does not take into account the different religious currents and also draws attention to the “otherness”. Buddhism, for example, is not mentioned, which in turn could indicate that no mention is needed for this religion, since acceptance is given anyway, and thus puts this religion on a different level than those mentioned in the article. The percentage also highlights the minority position of the mentioned religions in the country.

This article demonstrates the strong interactions of the new elected government and state-owned publishers. A similar strategy of objectivism and exclusion of the respective “other” is noticeable both in government direct statements as well as indirect publications distributed through the MRA and the GNLM.

²⁴⁵ Sein, Ba; Ministry of Religious Affairs: Freedom of other religions (Christianity, Hinduism, Islamism, Animism and others) in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, in: *The Global New Light of Myanmar*, 14 July 2016, [online] <https://www.gnlm.com.mm/freedom-of-other-religions-christianity-hinduism-islamism-animism-and-others-in-the-republic-of-the-union-of-myanmar/> [accessed: 20 May 2021].

²⁴⁶ Direct citation: Sein, Ba; Ministry of Religious Affairs: Freedom of other religions.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

Appendix E)

Myanmar President Office: *Latest Situation in Rakhine State. Press Release Regarding the Attacks on Border Guard Police Posts in Maungdaw Township Rakhine State of Myanmar*, 13 October 2016, [online] <https://myanmarmissionnewyork.org/images/pdf/2016/Announcement/13%20Oct%202016%20Press%20Release%20on%20Border%20attacks%20in%20Maungdaw.pdf> [accessed: 20 May 2021].

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Myanmar President Office
Press Release Regarding
the Attacks on the Border Guard Police Posts
in Maungdaw Township
Rakhine State of Myanmar

13th October 2016 - English Translation



Myanmar President Office

Press release regarding the attacks on the Border Guard Police posts in Maungdaw Township 13th October 2016 - English translation

1. On the morning of 9th October 2016, armed attackers carried out a surprise attack on Kyikanpyin Border Guard Police (Number One) Headquarters, Kotankauk Police Outpost, and Ngakhuya Local Police Office. As a result of this attack, 9 members of the Myanmar Police Force were killed, and 48 weapons of various types and 6624 rounds of assorted ammunition, 47 bayonets, and 164 magazines were lost. Following the defensive actions of the police, the bodies of 8 attackers were found, and 2 attackers were captured alive. From them, 1 homemade pistol, 2 rounds of ammunition, and 1 magazine were recovered.

2. The armed attackers, with the weapons and ammunition they had seized, continued to move around the Maungdaw District and carry out attacks. Tatmadaw infantry units together with members of the Myanmar Police Force have carried out joint combat operations against the attackers. Joint columns of Tatmadaw and police have conducted clearance operations in the areas where the attackers are hiding. During these operations they have had frequently come into armed contact with the attackers. So far, five members of the Tatmadaw have given their lives.

3. According to the initial findings of the interrogations of the two attackers who were captured and two additional attackers whom Bangladesh handed over to Myanmar, the attacks in Maungdaw Township were systematically planned in advance over a long period of time, assisted by foreign funding and the support of members of foreign terrorist organisations.

4. According to the findings of the interrogations, the attacks in Maungdaw were intended to promote extremist violent ideology among the majority Muslim population in the area. Using Maungdaw as a foothold, this was an attempt to take over the areas of Maungdaw and Buthitaung. For this, they received significant financial support from extremist individuals in some Middle Eastern countries. This funding was not provided by particular organisations, but was provided secretly through contacts between individuals.

The Planned Attacks

5. Interrogations have revealed that the attacks in Maungdaw were carried out by the Aqa Mul Mujahidin organisation which is active in Maungdaw, and which is linked to the Rohingya Solidarity Organization - RSO armed organisation. The leader of this organisation is Havistoohar, a religious and social extremist aged around 45 years old, of Kyaukpyinseik village in Maungdaw Township. He previously attended a six-month Taliban training course in Pakistan, and he has 4 sisters and 1 brother living in Saudi Arabia. Assuming the identity of a refugee, he frequently went to stay in a village near Teknaf in Bangladesh, from where he received funding from organisations based in the Middle East. Among those he worked with were: a Pakistani citizen called Kalis who came to NgaKuRa village

Present Danger

10. At present, the small armed organisation led by Havistoohar is still attempting to carry out continued attacks in the Maungdaw area with a strength of almost 400 extremist armed attackers. Members of the Myanmar Police Force are taking responsibility for security and rule of law, and Tatmadaw military columns have responsibility for clearance operations. The police and the Tatmadaw are carrying out these responsibilities at full strength. In doing so, they are frequently coming into armed contact with the attackers. At the same time, investigations are continuing into domestic and foreign terrorist links and supporters of terrorism. Further news will continue to be released as it is received, so as to keep the general public informed.

Systematically Planned

11. The attacks in Maungdaw were systematically planned and prepared over a long period of time with the support and assistance of foreign terrorist organisations and supporters of terrorism. These attacks were an attempt to attack and destroy the security of the nation, and the lives, property and security of the citizens of the country. We will take effective action to defend against, respond to and defeat all armed violent attacks and attempted attacks, in accordance with the Constitution, the anti-terrorism law, and other existing laws relating to security and defence. Not only the attacks in Maungdaw, but all violent attacks or attempted attacks will be responded to effectively, and defeated. We will continue to investigate and identify those controlling and organising the armed attacks from behind the scenes, those who are secretly providing funding, and all organisations and individuals that support armed attacks, and we will take effective action against them. Furthermore, we will take strong action in line with the law against those who try to take advantage of these attacks by instigating or attempting to instigate religious or social conflicts and unrest between communities.

Prevent spread of further conflicts

12. We call on our citizens to understand the actions of the government, and to be aware and pay attention to the danger of violent attacks. We call on our citizens to work together with responsible persons to prevent instigation on religious or social grounds within your communities, and to prevent the spread of conflict to other areas. We ask religious and community leaders to make every effort to work together to help to prevent the emergence of conflicts. And we ask our citizens to cooperate with the government for the sake of national security and the defence of the Union.

after living in Bangladesh; Ibrahim, Aza, and Aytullah who lived in Kutabaloun refugee camp in Bangladesh; and 12 men living in Nila refugee camp including individuals called Zubaid and Islam. Kalis previously attended a terrorist training camp in Pakistan, and he speaks Myanmar, Bengali, Arakan, Malay and Pakistani languages fluently. Around five months ago, through the arrangement of Havistoohar, Kalis came to Maungdaw and began delivering armed training classes to local extremist youths recruited and mobilised by Havistoohar.

The four main instigators

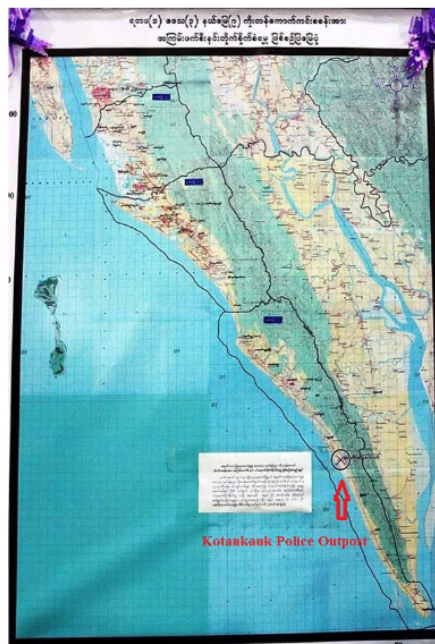
6. The four main instigators in Middle NgaKuRa village, called Abdul Rahman, Munet, Kapiktulah and Akis, had all attended an RSO training course. Havistoohar, Kalis, Mabuya of Maungnama Village (who led the attack on Kyikanpyin), together with 12 attackers who had come from a refugee camp in Bangladesh, had carried out robberies in the villages of Pha Wut Chaung, Ale Than Kyaw and Nga Chaung in Maungdaw Township.

7. According to the findings of the interrogations, Havistoohar and his organisation mobilised extremist youths in the Maungdaw area. They secretly ran weapons training and self-defence training in remote locations in the hills and forests, as well as in the compound of Abdul Rahman in the Middle Nga Ku Ra village, and in the forest near Kyauk Pyin Seik village. Following this, plans were drawn up to carry out violent attacks.

8. Havistoohar had planned for a total of around 400 attackers to simultaneously launch attacks on 6 separate locations: Mabuya would lead around 100 attackers against Kyikanpyin Border Guard Police (Number One) Headquarters; Kalis and Abdul Rahman would lead around 100 attackers against Ngakhuya Police Local Office; Wadif would lead around 50 attackers against Kyain Chaung Local Police Office; Aza would lead around 50 attackers against Kyauk Hlay Kar Local Police Office; Raw Paing would lead around 50 attackers against Ywet Nyo Taung Local Police Office; and Abu Kumar would lead around 12 attackers against Kotankauk Police Outpost. However, on 9th October they were only able to attack three locations: Kyikanpyin, Kotankauk, and Ngakhuya. Havistoohar had instructed that after attacking the bases, the attackers should murder the members of the police, take their weapons and equipment, and use those weapons to further attacks on nearby Tatmadaw and police bases. Before the attacks took place, the organisation leaders systematically explained to the attackers the plan of attack.

Terrorist Methods

9. The Aqa Mul Mujahidin organisation deployed tactics often used in violent armed attacks around the world: receiving foreign funding (from those originally from Maungdaw but now in the Middle East); attending terrorist training courses (delivered by the Taliban in Pakistan, and RSO in Bangladesh); and using religion to mobilise extremist youth in Maungdaw. According to their plan, they intended to take over the majority-Muslim areas of Buthitaung and Maungdaw, and to spread propaganda through disseminating video files on the internet and via social networks, in line with the methods of terrorist organisations such as the Taleban, Al Qaeda and ISIS, in order to attract greater foreign support and funding and encourage the cooperation and participation of domestic and foreign religious extremists.

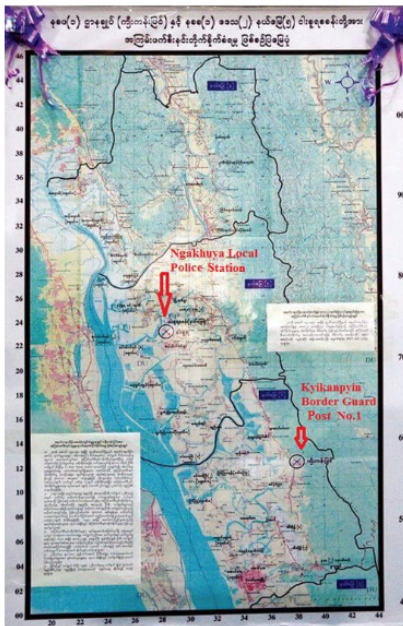


Map showing Kotankauk Police Outpost



Map showing places of violent attacks in the areas of Buthitaung and Maungdaw

Documents and flags of militant RSO discovered during security sweep



Map showing Kyikanpyin Border Guard Post No.1 and Ngakhuya Local Police Station

Houses burnt down by the attackers



Appendix F)

Advisory Commission on Rakhine State: *Remarks by Kofi Annan, Chairman of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State*, 06 December 2016, [online] <https://www.rakhinecommission.org/remarks-kofi-annan-chairman-advisory-commission-rakhine-state/> [accessed: 01 June 2021].

Remarks by Kofi Annan, Chairman of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State

DECEMBER 6, 2016

Yangon – We have since September met with a host of youth groups, community leaders, parliamentarians, women groups as well with the Government that mandated us to carry out our work.

Our discussions focused on the reconciliation among the communities of Rakhine, freedom of movement, citizenship verification, and economic and social development of Rakhine state. We also spoke about the preservation and promotion of the rich cultural heritage of the state.

We discussed these issues with the President, and, earlier today, when we met with the State Counselor and the Commander-in-Chief.

Let me at this stage remind you that our mandate is to submit recommendations to the Government on how it may promote reconciliation, strengthen local institutions, advance development, resolve conflict, and provide humanitarian assistance, in Rakhine State.

The recent violence in northern Rakhine underlines the importance and immediacy of the Commission's task.

You may be aware that we visited parts of northern Rakhine affected by the recent violence as well as areas that remained peaceful, a few days ago. We are deeply concerned by the reports of alleged human rights abuses.

We stressed in all our meetings that wherever security operations might be necessary, civilians must be protected at all times and I urge the security services to act in full compliance with the rule of law. We also stressed that security operations must not impede humanitarian access to the population. We have been given the assurance that humanitarian assistance is allowed access and trust that all communities in need will receive the assistance they require.

Let me conclude by saying that we were encouraged by the cooperative spirit of the younger generation. We are here to listen to the needs and concerns of all people of Rakhine state and to give them a voice.

Appendix G)

Permanent Mission of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar: *Press Release to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations*, 18 December 2016, [online]

https://myanmarmissionnewyork.org/images/pdf/2016/Announcement/Dec_18_2016_Geneva_Press_Res.jpg
[accessed: 03 June 2021].



Permanent Mission of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to
the United Nations Office and other International Organizations
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PRESS RELEASE

1. Since the new administration took office in March 2016 in Myanmar, finding a sustainable resolution for peace, harmony and development in Rakhine State has been one of the highest priorities and concrete measures are put in place to materialize it. In this context, Myanmar has been taking a series of measures to address the concern expressed by the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights in the Press Release issued on 16 December 2016, and to promote peace, security and development of the people in Rakhine State.
2. In the aftermath of the October 9 attacks on border police posts in Maungtaw, the security environment remains highly sensitive and thus unfettered access to the region has to be carefully balanced against it. Meanwhile, international humanitarian partners including WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, ICRC, Malteser, MSF, Bridge Asia Japan-BAJ, CARE Myanmar and Action Contre La Faim-ACF are providing humanitarian assistance to all affected people in Maungtaw. To widen media access to the region, an independent 13 members local and foreign media group will be visiting Maungtaw from 19-21 December 2016.
3. Myanmar took the initiative to host ASEAN Foreign Ministers Retreat on 19 December 2016 with the spirit of ASEAN unity and solidarity to brief fellow ASEAN family members on its efforts to address the complex issue.
4. In response to violation of human rights allegations, a national high-level investigation commission led by Vice President U Myint Swe has been formed to probe into, among others, verification of such allegations. The Commission shall submit its report to the President by 31 January 2017.
5. The Advisory Commission on Rakhine State led by former Secretary-General of the United Nations Mr. Kofi Annan visited Rakhine State in November and December 2016 and met with people from all communities from the affected areas. The Commission was mandated for 12 months and an interim report will be submitted by the end of January, 2017.
6. All such national measures require time and space to run their courses until they are fully exhausted. In the meantime, Myanmar will continue to extend its cooperation as national circumstances permit with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in a best possible manner such as longer stay for three human rights officers operating already in the country, and visits to Rakhine State as in the past.

Dated: 18 December 2016.

Appendix H)

Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *Press Release*, 20 January 2017, [online]

<https://myanmarmissionnewyork.org/images/pdf/2017/Statements/Press%20Release%20OIC%20e%201.pdf>
[accessed: 03 June 2021].



Press Release

1. It is regrettable that Malaysia, a fellow ASEAN member, considers it fit to convene an extraordinary session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to take up Myanmar's Rakhine Issue.
2. Malaysia's concern regarding the situation in Rakhine State is no doubt based on prodigious media reports alleging dire human rights situations as well as deliberate misinterpretation of the situations obtaining on the ground. What is more regrettable is that the sensitive issue has been exploited to promote a certain political agenda.
3. Malaysia's action disregards the genuine efforts being made by the Myanmar Government to address the issue. There is no attempt to persecute a community on grounds of religion. The Government has been endeavouring to safeguard lives and ensure the security of the people from the violent attacks of new extremists. The Government has instructed security personnel to strictly adhere to the laws and exercise maximum restraint.
4. It is disturbing to note that the OIC meeting held in Kuala Lumpur on 19 January 2017 failed to acknowledge that the situation was a direct result of the well planned and coordinated attacks on police outposts in the northern Rakhine State on 9 October 2016 by extremist elements both funded and inspired from abroad. It resulted in the loss of lives of 9 police officers and large cache of arms and ammunition.
5. No one is more concerned about peace and stability of Rakhine State than the Government and the people of Myanmar. The Government is genuinely committed to resolve this issue and ensure that security

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prevails in Rakhine State. All necessary steps are being taken. The Government is focused on finding practical means to solving the issue and has constituted a number of mechanisms to comprehensively address the issue. They include the establishment of the Central Committee on Implementation of Peace, Stability and Development of Rakhine State with four Working Committees focusing on the relevant areas, including the citizenship verification process. In addition, the Rakhine Advisory Committee headed by Dr. Kofi Annan has been set up to buttress Myanmar's efforts and help find a solution to the long standing issue. An investigation commission headed by a Vice President has also been formed to look into the causes of recent incidents and the allegations. With the improvement of the security situation, the areas of humanitarian access have been gradually expanded.

6. The interest of the two communities in Rakhine State will be best served by focusing on lasting solutions to the issue rather than asserting undue external pressure. Such action would only make a complicated issue worse. It is essential that the international community lends their understanding and extends cooperation to the Myanmar Government in addressing the issue of Rakhine State.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Nay Pyi Taw
Dated: 20 January 2017

Appendix I)

Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *Press Release regarding OHCHR report on 03 February 2017*, 08 February 2017, [online] [https://myanmarmissionnewyork.org/images/pdf/2017/Statements/Press Release regarding OHCHR report release on 3 feb 2017_Eng.pdf](https://myanmarmissionnewyork.org/images/pdf/2017/Statements/Press%20Release%20regarding%20OHCHR%20report%20release%20on%203%20feb%202017_Eng.pdf) [accessed: 10 June 2021].



Press Release

1. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a report entitled "Interviews with Rohingyas fleeing from Myanmar since 9 October 2016" on 3 February 2017. The Government of Myanmar considers the allegations contained in the report very serious in nature and is also deeply concerned about the report. Thus, the Government is investigating these allegations through the investigation commission led by Vice-President U Myint Swe. As State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi made it clear in her telephone conversation with OHCHR High Commissioner Prince Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein on 3rd February, where there is clear evidence of abuses and violations, the Government will take necessary measures.

Background to the situation in Rakhine State

2. The Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar places high priority on addressing the situation in Rakhine State, and is striving to find a durable solution.

3. The Government is taking a comprehensive approach with the aim of fostering peace and stability in the State. It has adopted short and long term programmes to promote understanding and trust. The Government has formed the Central Committee on Implementation of Peace, Stability and Development of Rakhine State on 30th May 2016 with State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as Chairperson. Four working committees have been set up to facilitate the work of the Central Committee.

4. The Government of Myanmar has also established the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, chaired by Dr. Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, to support the Government's efforts in addressing the issue comprehensively. Prior to issuing its final report in second half of 2017, the Commission will be submitting its interim report to the Government of Myanmar.

5. Even as constructive steps were being undertaken, three police border outposts in northern Rakhine State were attacked by armed men funded and inspired from abroad on 9 October 2016. As the International Crisis Group (ICG) noted in their recent report, the attack seriously threatens the prospects of stability and development in the state. In these circumstances, the Government is taking steps to ensure the safety and security of its people.

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The Myanmar security forces have been instructed to act within the parameters of rule of law in compliance with human rights refraining from use of excessive force. The Government will spare no effort to take legal action against any perpetrators if there is clear evidence of human rights abuses.

6. On 1 December 2016, an investigation commission led by Vice President U Myint Swe was formed to look into the causes of 9 October and 12-13 November attacks and their consequences. The mandate of the Commission which inheres the guarantee of security and human rights for all the people of Rakhine, requires it to verify all allegations including those related to area clearance operations. The Commission was tasked to submit a report on 31 January 2017. However, the submission date has been extended so that a thorough report could be prepared after necessary investigations. Myanmar also facilitated the visits of Ambassadors, media and international experts including Ms. Yanghee Lee, Special Rapporteur of the situation of human rights in Myanmar, to the affected areas in Rakhine State. International aid organizations are resuming humanitarian aid to many affected areas in Rakhine.

7. Since the new Government took office, promotion and protection of human rights has been high on its agenda. The work of the National Investigation Commission with regard to all allegations will continue and action will be taken against the perpetrators of illegal acts and human rights violations. The Government of Myanmar stands firm in its commitment to national reconciliation and peace throughout the country.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Nay Pyi Taw
8 February 2017

Appendix J)

Investigation Commission: *Summary of the Report of the Investigation Commission for Maungdaw in Rakhine State*, 08 August 2017, [online] <http://www.myanmarembassydhaka.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Summary-Report-of-the-Investigation-Com.-8.8.17.pdf> [accessed: 15 June 2021].

Summary of the Report of the Investigation Commission for Maungdaw in Rakhine State

Introduction

1. The first part of the report outlines the formation, assignment of duties, purpose and activities of the Commission in accordance with its mandate to investigate the incidents in Maungdaw area and to submit recommendations. It is followed by background information, which includes the situation of Rakhine State, entry of Muslims from Chittagong into Rakhine State, the situation of Bangladesh, the overall situation of Maungdaw area and the background **background information** information on the conflict in Rakhine State. **These sections are intended to provide on the overall political, socio-economic, ethnic and religious situation of Rakhine State in general and Maungdaw area in particular.**

2. The second part of the report is an account of the violent incidents in Maungdaw area, casualties and the injured, destruction by burning, terrorist organizations involved in the incidents, financial support, training, unusual features of incidents in Maungdaw area, the situation of peace and stability and rule of law in the local area, the extent to which public security and fundamental human rights can be guaranteed, conflict prevention and provision of humanitarian assistance, investigations into allegations from outside sources, points made in the report of OHCHR, investigations conducted by the Commission in Bangladesh, recommendations of the Commission and conclusion. **This part of the report is the essence of the whole report as it presents the current violent incidents, findings of the Commission and recommendations made. The recommendations are intended to be forward-looking and contain practical measures that should be prioritized for implementation.**

Investigation Techniques Employed by the Commission

3. With a view to uncovering the actual incidents and situations while preventing similar violence from recurring in the future, the Commission employed techniques that are in use internationally, in similar situations, on its field investigation visits to affected villages and camps and in interviewing persons concerned. The rapid assessment method was mainly utilized, combined with cross-sectional, qualitative methods such as roundtable discussions, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews in virtually all

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villages. Women were interviewed in their own groups in separate spaces where privacy was ensured. Interviewees were selected in some cases by local organizations and in other cases by the Commission on a random basis. The names and addresses of the interviewees were kept confidential where the interviewees so wished. Where information on possible crimes came to light, the relevant locations were visited and investigated.

Information in the Report

4. Part 1 of the report includes a table showing the yearly increase in the number of Muslims in Rakhine State after the 1824 Anglo-Myanmar War, as a result of large numbers of Muslims from Chittagong being allowed into the Rakhine coastal areas, which had fallen under British rule, to work as farm labourers, who first stayed on a temporary seasonal basis but later decided to settle. The numbers rose from 515,484 in 1973 to 604,636 in 1983, to 718,569 in 1993, to 875,005 in 2003, to 1,052,163 in 2013, and then to 1,054,790 in 2016.

5. The population in Maungdaw District consists of ethnic peoples and Muslims. Out of a total population of 834,637, 90.50% or 755,371 are Muslims. In Maungdaw Township, 93.8% are Muslims. Among the villages in Maungdaw District, 447 are Muslim villages, 240 ethnic villages, 12 mixed villages and 4 other villages.

6. Information on religion in Maungdaw is provided in a tabular format where the numbers of Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and Christians are given. There are 222 monasteries where 486 members of the Sangha and novices live, 1278 mosques, 1143 Arabic schools, 1659 prayer leaders (*Mawlawis*), 17 Hindu temples and 7 churches.

7. The border between Myanmar and Bangladesh is 168.57 miles long. The construction of border fencing began in 2009, but 42 miles of border has not yet been fenced. Photographs of broken fencing in some parts where the construction has been completed are also attached.

8. The staple economic activities in Maungdaw area consist of agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture farms. **Currently, the majority of these economic activities are in the hands of Muslims, who also form the majority of the local population. Statistics show that out of the 157,705 acres of farmland, 125,401 acres are farmed by Muslims. Out of 15,640.46 acres of aquaculture, Muslims operate 8982.92 acres.**

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9. However, the poverty rate of 44% in Rakhine State is the second highest in the country after Chin State, while the poverty rate for the whole country is 26%. While the average per capita annual income for the whole country is Kyat 1.506 million and that for Rakhine State is Kyat 1.076 million, the average per capita income for the densely populated Maungdaw area is only Kyat 0.37 million, **clearly indicating a lack of economic development and shortage of employment opportunities.**

10. The low socio-economic development in Rakhine State can be identified as the principal root cause of frequent conflicts in the area. This indicates the need to prioritize rapid socio-economic development through development in agriculture, livestock breeding, connectivity and industry as well as in education, health and electrification, while focusing on security, peace and stability and rule of law in the area. In particular, agriculture, livestock breeding and fisheries, heavy and light industries are sectors in which development measures are likely to be effective.

11. **Beginning with 2016, seizures of methamphetamine tablets are on the rise especially in Maungdaw area and a narcotic drugs trafficking route has appeared.**

12. As for the background situation of conflict in Rakhine State, clear differences exist in religion, customs, cultural traditions and social practices and interpersonal relations between the ethnic peoples and Muslims in Maungdaw area. Communities live separately without any integration. With the increase in the number of Muslims, unequal political, economic and social conditions together with poverty and low levels of development made it impossible for mutually acceptable solutions to existing problems to be found. Instead, the situation became more complicated and tensions appeared between the two communities. The conflict between ethnic Rakhines and local Muslims in May 1942 that led to the burning down of Rakhine villages and the killing of more than 20,000 ethnic Rakhines, and the loss of lives and property among the local population during the five-month conflict in 2012 have negatively affected mutual trust and understanding between the two communities.

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Findings of the Commission

13. Investigations show that the violent attacks in Maungdaw were the work of Aqa Mul Mujahidin, a group related to the RSO terrorist group. Aqa Mul Mujahidin is led by Habib Tuhar aka Arpu Hamad Zuluni, a religious and racial extremist from Kyauk Seik Pyin Village in Maungdaw Township. The group changed its name to Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), according to its "official" statement released on 29 March 2017.

14. **Unusual features of incidents in Maungdaw.** Unlike the previous conflicts in Rakhine State which occurred between the two local communities, the incidents in Maungdaw involved violent attacks on Kyi Kan Pyin Border Guard Police (Number One) Headquarters, Ngakhuya Local Police Office, outposts and brutal killings of some of the police charged with the enforcement of rule of law by the State. They constituted an armed insurgency against a State institution by a terrorist group that had received support and assistance from extremists' organizations in foreign countries to organize themselves and train systematically. With evidence pointing to a foreign connection, the situation is complex. Shortly before the violent incidents, large numbers of methamphetamine tablets were seized in Maungdaw, leading to suspicions that those who suffered losses as a result of the drug seizures might have played a role as well. The range of complicating factors have made the incidents in Maungdaw unusual.

15. More people fled to the neighbouring country after the incidents in Maungdaw in 2016 than during the conflict between two communities in 2012, the specific reasons for which would require consideration. Under the administration system currently in place in Maungdaw, village mapping and building and household member surveys are conducted every year. Records show that the total of number of missing persons is approximately 30,000, and the number of those who are now in the neighbouring country should not exceed this figure, but it is significantly lower than the numbers mentioned by some international organizations.

16. Unlike the conflict in 2012 that took place between the two communities, the Maungdaw incidents involved purposeful premeditated attacks by armed extremist terrorists on outposts of Kyi Kan Pyin Border Guard Police (Number One) Headquarters, Ngakhuya Local Police Office, outposts which are charged with the enforcement of rule of

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law by the State, giving rise to concerns among the local Muslims for their livelihood security. The terrorist extremists planned for the conflict, and the villagers were aware of the organizing, preparation, and training for sabotage including arson and were either in contact with or involved in those activities in one way or another and moved out to the neighbouring country mainly out of various forms of fear, concern, and trepidation.

17. Moreover, while the security forces consisting of the members of the Armed Forces and the Police were conducting field operations for local security and rule of law down to the village level, the members of terrorist groups were living in the villages among the villagers and telling them that at least one person from each household should go out to fight back, or else their houses would be burnt down and they would be killed. Such threats, organizing and instigations put the villagers in a very difficult position, leading them to leave in greater numbers than before.

18. At the same time, some of the media carried horror stories fabricated by some organizations that never actually happened in Myanmar, and together with statements from extremist religious leaders, and purposeful instigations by members of armed terrorist organizations using video files, they gave rise to misconceptions of the activities of the security forces among Muslim villagers, which became another factor pushing them to leave for the neighbouring country. Under those circumstances, Myanmar's response to those misconceptions through the media was ineffective and the prolonged restrictions on access to Maungdaw imposed on foreign media and expatriate personnel from INGOs for security considerations provided good opportunities for terrorist organizations.

19. Further action is required for local area security, stability, peace and rule of law, as intimidation and killings by terrorists continue, more venues for terrorist training are uncovered and more terrorists arrested. Some awareness-raising activities and measures for stability and peace have yet to be undertaken. Given those circumstances, Section 144 and curfew orders should remain in place with appropriate adjustments in the curfew hours.

20. The two communities in the area continue to be divided with fixed mindsets, divergent beliefs, cultures and languages. What is worst is the lack of trust, understanding and interaction. The indigenous people, who are the minority, harbour grievances and concerns while the Muslims feel discriminated against and their rights restricted. **Given**

organize or persuade the local Muslims. A more appropriate solution needs to be found that integrates comprehensive measures in political, administrative, economic and social sectors.

27. **It should be emphasized that prolonged restrictions on media access to the area for security reasons, either for domestic or foreign media, had the unintended consequence of providing good opportunities for the terrorist groups while real-time release of accurate information and news on the situation in the area through the media can promote transparency. It is noted that a total of 18 domestic and foreign media teams have been given access to Maungdaw District beginning with 29 March 2017.**

28. The current three-fold surveys consisting of village mapping, collecting building data and compiling household member lists should continue in a systematic manner to ensure access to valid evidence and reliable data on villages in Maungdaw area. Educational activities should be conducted for inclusion and participation of village people. Such basic statistics will enable accurate citizenship verification under Citizenship Law of 1982.

29. Given the diversity in ethnicity and religion, lack of stability in the local area negatively affects fundamental rights to livelihood, education, health, etc. in one way or another. There have been delays in filing charges against those arrested in connection with the violent incidents, while their families were not allowed to see them, which constituted a denial of their fundamental rights. The Commission helped with the coordination work to address this and under the arrangements put in place by the Rakhine State Government, the family members concerned can now go to the prison without any difficulty and meet those arrested.

30. Most Muslim villagers in Maungdaw wish to earn their livelihood and live in a peaceful stable environment, but the influence of some of the local prayer leaders (*Mawlawá*) with misguided extremist views, external instigations, financial support for terrorist acts, and covert terrorist training being provided all point to the possibility for the recurrence of terrorist violence. **To be able to guarantee fundamental rights of the people, the main requirement is the rule of law, stability, peace and security in the local area. Efforts**

the standpoints and ways of thinking on both sides, peaceful living together remains out of reach.

21. Security and assurance for indigenous people living among the majority Muslims is important while Muslims need good treatment. As the ordinary Muslims who wish to live peaceful lives are the majority and they are facing intimidation by the terrorist groups, it is important to provide protection to them. **Issues such as weaknesses, corruption and poor service provided by departmental personnel need to be addressed.**

22. **It is necessary to address effectively the current administrative shortcomings in Maungdaw area and establish a sound governance structure well adapted to the border area, while taking policy initiatives, such as doubling the salaries, transfers to other areas after 3 or 4 years of service and promotions, to raise the morale of the civil service personnel assigned to the area and eliminate corruption.**

23. In countering the growth of drug trafficking routes through Maungdaw that make use of the area's departure points, the usual connections between transnational crime and the armed insurgent organizations in border areas should be taken into consideration.

24. Among the villagers involved in the incidents, some were intimidated into participation by terrorists, but some were persuaded by incentives and the organizing work of the terrorists. In taking action against such villagers according to law, there should be no undue delays and the process of justice should be properly carried out. In addition, other measures to promote community stability should be identified and implemented. **At the recommendation of the Commission, three special courts have now been established in Buthitang to hear and rule on cases without delay.**

25. Meetings with village administrators, 100-household heads, 10-household heads, community elders and leaders of social organizations should be frequently held on a broad basis to obtain their inputs. Greater interaction with the responsible persons at the lower level administration is recommended, while at the same time providing for their security and protection.

26. **The practice of imposing administrative restrictions on those in Maungdaw area whose citizenship has not been verified might have created opportunities for extremists to**

to address this requirement will need to strike a balance with the requirements in various other sectors.

31. Humanitarian assistance provided by donor countries and organizations should be in line with the national policies on humanitarian assistance in order to ensure equitable and effective distribution of assistance to where it is needed.

32. **Access restrictions have been imposed on the expatriate staff of humanitarian assistance organizations for reasons of their personal security.** Different organizations have set up separate security units to undertake security of their staff, and given the general improvements in the overall situation, strict restrictions may be relaxed to allow such staff access for their humanitarian operations.

33. **Provision of materials and supplies as humanitarian assistance requires transparency and equity, as well as clear coordination between the Government and the donors in developing allocation criteria and programmes as well in as actual distribution. Humanitarian assistance from other countries should be offered and coordinated through diplomatic channels.**

34. **Findings on external allegations.** The Commission conducted a careful investigation into external allegations of rape, torture, arson, human rights violations, discrimination and even genocide in Muslim villages.

35. With regard to allegations of rape of Muslim women, the Commission carefully investigated the allegations on foreign media that the husband of Noor Ayesha from Kyet Yo Pyin Village was killed and her two daughters raped, and the cases of Ma Jama Hali from Pyaung Pike Village and Daw Than Than (a) Ma Oorian, who presented their cases directly to the Commission. **The members of the Commission personally interviewed men and women of different ages and from different social classes individually and in groups, but as the allegations could not be confirmed, concluded that the cases require further investigation.**

36. A field investigation in the villages where buildings had burned down indicated that the fires might have been caused either by the fighting or by arson. **It was difficult to confirm in practice who set fire to which village. In any case, the Commission made**

arrangements for case files to be lodged in accordance with the law so that action may be taken.

37. Cases of human rights violations and torture are being investigated and there have also been cases where action was taken.

38. Allegations of disproportionate use of force by security personnel may point to weaknesses on the part of the security forces, who would need to take precautions to avoid even the perception of disproportionate use of force in the future. For cases where disproportionate use of force can be proven, the responsible persons concerned will need to be investigated and action taken against them. There have also been such cases where action was taken. Awareness-raising and educational activities should continue down to the lower levels to ensure that the security forces concerned have a better understanding of the international norms and existing legislation.

39. During the conflict, there could have been actions that were not in accordance with the law, excessive actions on the part of individual members of security forces and incidents that have not been exposed, just as there can be exaggerations and fabricated allegations. As it is necessary to conduct careful investigations to uncover what in fact happened, the responsible persons at various levels of administration need to look into the issues carefully and take action when cases are uncovered.

40. Points contained in the report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The Commission took sufficient time to conduct field investigations in villages reported to be affected including the 20 villages mentioned in the OHCHR Report, using techniques based on the international practice in such investigations, in order to verify whether the very strong points made in the report are true, whether there had been unlawful indiscriminate shootings, disappearances, raping of women individually and in groups, severe beatings, torture, racial and religious discrimination, looting, theft, burning and destruction of property in Muslim villages, whether there have been incidents in which the right to survival of Muslims in Northern Rakhine State has been disregarded, and whether

there are any grounds for concerns that crimes against humanity had potentially been committed, possibly leading to ethnic cleansing.

41. Some findings of the Commission:

- (a) The Commission conducted thorough and systematic investigations into claims that security forces committed gang rape against women in villages, that underage children were killed brutally with their throats slashed open, and that torture and killings took place in villages, and that elderly people were brutally killed. However, no such cases were uncovered. Alleged cases where houses were burnt down with people inside were investigated, but the local villagers told the Commission that they had no knowledge of such incidents.
- (b) Claims that pregnant women were raped, that a pregnant woman miscarried after being kicked with a military boot in the stomach, were also investigated. But with the villagers responding that such incidents never happened, there were no grounds for further questioning.
- (c) However, it came to light that men and women were made to stand in line and were subjected to body searches. As for claims that those conducting the searches took pieces of jewellery hidden on their bodies or that women were purposefully touched on their sexual organs, there was no evidence, and as the cases involve individuals, they need to be considered on a case by case basis. Similarly, for allegations of rape, it has not been possible to collect evidence to verify those cases for immediate action to be taken. Instead, arrangements were made to enable the filing of complaints in accordance with the law.
- (d) The OHCHR report mentions 1407 burnt buildings in 7 locations calculated on the basis of statements made by 111 refugees and an analysis of satellite imagery. The Commission found that 1152 buildings were destroyed by fire in 13 villages. However, it was difficult to identify who set fire to the buildings with any level of certainty, whether it was the security forces, or villagers or members of terrorist organizations. Huts and houses might have caught fire during the fighting between the security forces and the terrorists as grenade launchers were used. According to

statements made by some of those who have been arrested, there were cases of terrorists setting fire to some of the buildings.

- (c) Muslim villagers are living in fear as they face questioning and arrest by security forces and the administrative personnel as well as coercion and intimidation by terrorists. Twenty-three innocent people who were considered to have worked with the government organizations have been abducted or have disappeared and 41 have been brutally murdered with their throats slashed open by terrorists. In Zin Paing Nyar Village, the Commission members saw for themselves the direct threats sent by someone in Malaysia through Viber against those who are in contact with or have helped government organizations. Further investigations are in progress.
- (f) The incidence of shooting from a helicopter on 12 November 2016 near Yay Khut Chaung Gwa Sone Village was also investigated. A military column and an infantry company led by Major Kyaw Zeya from No. 345 Light Infantry Regiment in pursuit of the terrorist attackers retreating from Pwint Phyu Chaung Village toward Gwa Sone Village was attacked by about 800 people armed with guns, swords, spears and harpoons led by terrorist attackers. As hand-to-hand combat would lead to large number of casualties among villagers, two MI-2 helicopters from the Armed Forces (Air Force) were called in to provide protection to the military column led by the regiment commander, using the machine guns rather than the heavy weapons that the helicopter was equipped with to fire warning shots to disperse the attackers. After the warning shots were fired, the attackers fled into Gwa Sone Village. Reports were received that in the incident, 9 males and 1 female lost their lives. The Acting Commander of the Regiment Major Kyaw Zeya was killed when a bullet fired by the attackers hit his neck. Corporal Than Yee and Lance Corporal Soe Moe were injured by enemy fire. If disproportionate force had been used by firing the heavy weapons that the MI-2s were equipped with, it is clear that the number of casualties would have been many times greater.
- (g) During visits to Muslim villages, the Commission carefully questioned Muslim men and women on the losses they suffered and made arrangements to enable the filing of complaints in accordance with the law in order to have justice served in courts of law. Between 14 February 2017 and 3 March 2017, 21 cases were filed for murder, rape, arson, destruction of evidence, loss of money/property and deaths. For some

of the cases, there were mismatches between the complaint and the results of the investigation and in some other cases, the complaints were fabricated.

- (h) While the security forces generally followed the rules and regulations of the unit, there could have been cases of violations in areas of weak command. Action was and is being taken against such violations. Measures have also been put in place to take action if additional violations are uncovered.
42. **The Commission's Investigations in Bangladesh.** A six-member team from the Commission, led by its Secretary went to Bangladesh between 18 and 22 March 2017 to conduct an investigation with the refugees at three refugee camps. While the living conditions in the camps were inferior with the refugees living in makeshift tents, there had been political instigation and some of the refugees mentioned their recognition as Rohingya as a precondition for returning to Myanmar.
43. **Some of the refugees told the Commission about the losses they suffered, and the Commission offered to make arrangements for them to return to Myanmar safely and file complaints in Myanmar if they so wish.**
44. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), which is in charge of the refugee camps, told the Commission that approximately 66,000 refugees arrived at the camp after October 2016. The Commission responded that according to the surveys in our country only about 30,000 were absent in their villages. IOM mentioned that the camp population was not stable with some refugees entering the camp while some others were leaving.
45. IOM made arrangements for the Commission members to conduct face-to-face interviews with male and female Muslim refugees at Kutupalang Refugee Camp. At Balu Khali, refugees spoke from behind a piece yellow cloth that covered their face and upper body. At Leda, refugees stayed behind a piece of white cloth that hid them from head to toe. The Commission was not allowed to take photographs or to make video or audio recordings. The restrictions were strictly imposed on the Commission, so that the refugees could only be heard and not seen. IOM also prohibited the use of Myanmar language with those refugees who spoke Myanmar. While the Commission was unhappy with the

restrictions and prohibitions imposed by IOM, it made no protests as IOM was the organization making the arrangements, and instead focused on completing its duties.

46. **In the Commission's view, greater cooperation with the Government of neighbouring Bangladesh would help to address not only the refugee issue, but also the issues of cross-border drug trafficking and various forms of transnational crime being committed by members of terrorist organizations.**

Overall Conclusion

47. In securing local area tranquility and stability, some violations of rules and regulations were found to have occurred where supervision was lax in the security units or where there were individual weaknesses in compliance with rules and regulations. For cases such as murder, rape, arson, destruction of evidence and deaths, arrangements were made to enable the filing of complaints in accordance with the law if the persons concerned so desired. But for some cases, evidence was insufficient or invalid and allegations appeared to be fabricated. Investigations in cases such as taking of jewellery while conducting body searches, touching of sexual organs, loss of cattle, goats and motorcycles require witnesses and will always be difficult to conduct. Lawsuits can be filed and sufficient evidence and witnesses can be presented while the accused have the right to defend themselves according to law. For cases where violations have been proved to have occurred, effective action is taken in accordance with the laws, rules and regulations of the Armed Forces and the Myanmar Police Force.

48. Among the serious cases, death cases should be filed for deaths in detention in accordance with the law, presented to the court of law, and investigated in accordance with police procedures with the evidence fully and comprehensively compiled for filing. This should be carried out, for example, for the death of a child under 16 years of age while receiving medical treatment in hospital and the deaths of 10 persons in detention.

49. Similarly, in the Commission's view, procedures for the treatment and protection of children in detention in accordance with the Child Rights Law should be made public in full detail together with the actions that will be taken against responsible persons at various levels who fail to comply with those procedures. For cases of arson in villages

where houses were burnt down, charges should be filed at a court of law without delay and witnesses presented, whether the offenders have been arrested or not.

50. For loss of motorcycles, cattle and goats, cases should be filed according to law whether the offenders have been arrested or not. Meetings should be arranged together with the village elders concerned to address the losses in a practical manner and provide appropriate remedies.

51. Incidents in Maungdaw can be divided into three periods. During the first period between October and November of 2016, the terrorists initiated attacks on the Headquarters of the Border Police Force Command and police outposts. In this period, 6 members of the security forces lost their lives and 2 sustained injuries. Losses included 63 pieces of assorted firearms, 10,130 rounds of ammunition, and weapon accessories.

52. During the second period, the security forces consisting of members of the Armed Forces and the Police jointly undertook local area security, stability and rule of law. As a result of clashes, there were casualties, injuries, cases of buildings burning down, displacement of people from homes, loss of property and so on. Various allegations were made against the actions of the security forces, creating misconceptions at the international level.

53. In the third period, local area peace and stability was achieved to a certain extent. Members of the terrorist group found this development unfavorable to them and began committing acts of violence and human rights violations such as intimidation, murder and abduction.

54. The OHCHR report failed to take into consideration the violent acts committed by members of the Muslim terrorist group during the first and third periods, but focused on the second period when the security forces were building local area peace, stability and security. Making use of the testimonies of 204 persons who had fled Myanmar, it describes the alleged human rights violations and brutal treatment of Muslim villagers by the security forces. The report does not contain forward-looking constructive recommendations for the future on the basis of the past and the present situations, but

instead, expresses "serious concerns" that the security forces and the Government are putting into practice "a purposeful and systematic policy of ethnic cleansing".

55. The OHCHR report was put together within the Terms of Reference of their programme within a specified timeframe. The findings of our Commission were not available at the time of its submission and the report could have benefitted from an overall balanced view.

Recommendations of the Commission

56. The recommendations are presented on the premise derived from the above considerations that the recurrence of similar violent attacks in the future and other undesirable consequences can only be prevented through integrated measures with specific goals, taken in parallel as part of an overall plan, for the security and defence as well as the administration, of the Maungdaw border area, its socio-economic development and all-round development of the local area.

57. The 48 recommendations are categorized under governance and administration, news media, UN agencies and INGOs, citizenship verification, religious affairs, socio-economic matters, national security and border security, cooperation with international security organizations and miscellaneous.

58. In addition, as a special recommendation, a high-level committee should be formed by the Union Government to undertake the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report of this Investigation Commission as well as the recommendations of the Rakhine State Advisory Commission headed by Mr. Kofi Annan.

Appendix K)

Anti-terrorism Central Committee: *Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) declared as terrorist group*, Order No. 1/2017, 25 August 2017, [online]
[https://myanmarmissionnewyork.org/images/pdf/2017/Announcement/terror attack order 1 25-8-17.pdf](https://myanmarmissionnewyork.org/images/pdf/2017/Announcement/terror%20attack%20order%201%2025-8-17.pdf)
[accessed: 20 June 2021].



The Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Anti-terrorism Central Committee

Order No. 1/2017
1379 MY 4 Waxing Day of Tawthalin
(25 August 2017)

ARAKAN ROHINGYA SALVATION ARMY (ARSA) DECLARED AS TERRORIST GROUP

The Anti-Terrorism Central Committee has issued this Order with the approval of the Union Government in exercise of the Anti-Terrorism law Section-72 Sub-section (B).

1. The Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has formed various committees to undertake the tasks to ensure security, stability and peace, rule of law and regional development in Rakhine State. It has also carried out regional security and development tasks and provided health care services fulfilling the requirements of the State.
2. On 9 October 2016, the terrorists launched a surprise attack on the No.1 Border Guard Police Command Headquarters (Kyikanpyin), police outpost at Kotankauk and the Ngakhuya local administrative office. In that incident, 9 policemen were killed and 48 assorted arms, 6624 bullets, 47 bayonets, and 164 bullet cartridges seized by the terrorists. Investigation reveals that terrorists had infiltrated the area where the majority of the residents were Muslims and organized violent attacks to escalate terrorist acts in that area.
3. In response to the situation, Border Guard Police Command No.1 reinforced troops and has been collaborating with the Tatmadaw to provide security in the region. The multiple killings, threats and propaganda have adversely affected the process for regional peace and rule of law. Clearance operations in May Yu mountain range have also uncovered multiple terrorist training camps.

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4. On 25 August, extremist terrorist groups again launched sneak attacks on 30 police outposts in Maungtau, Buthidaung and Yathedaung townships as well as against the Regiment Headquarters in Taungthazar village. 10 police officers, 1 soldier and 1 immigration officer were killed. 9 security officers and a number of civilians were wounded. 6 firearms were lost.
5. The Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar strongly condemns these terrorist acts and will do all in its power to prevent them from occurring again. It will strive to bring the perpetrators to justice.
6. The Union Government hereby declares that the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and its supporters, responsible for the acts of terrorism, as a terrorist group in accordance with the Counter-Terrorism Law Section 6, Sub-Section 5.

Chairman
Anti-terrorism Central Committee

Appendix L)

Suu Kyi, Aung San: *Speech by State Counsellor on Government's efforts with regard to National Reconciliation and Peace*, Channel Eight News, 19 September 2017, [online]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qmp0F1ONC88&t=63s> [accessed: 20 June 2021].

9 Declaration of Academic Integrity

Declaration of Academic Integrity

Hereby, I declare that I have composed the presented paper independently on my own and without any other resources than the ones indicated. All thoughts taken directly or indirectly from external sources are properly denoted as such.

This paper has neither been previously submitted to another authority nor has it been published yet.

Hamburg, 26 August 2021



Saskia Hübner