Boundaries in Shaping the Rohingya Identity and the Shifting Context of Borderland Politics

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Abstract
In recent years, new waves of ethnic violence in the Arakan (Rakhine) state of Burma (Myanmar) have resulted in increased internal displacement and the continued exodus of the Rohingya people to neighbouring countries. At the heart of this problem is the fact that Burma (which the Rohingyas claim as their ancestral land) and Bangladesh (where many Rohingyas are unwelcome and/or undocumented refugees) continue to deny the Rohingyas their political identity, each insisting that the displaced Rohingyas are the responsibility of the other. This study examines the history of the region to explore how political identities are shaped (generally) and how Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, living along the borders, identify themselves in the midst of political sovereignty claims and a social space that exists across artificially drawn borders (specifically). This article argues that the true political identity of the displaced Rohingya refugees can be located in their social memory and their life-politics in the borderlands. In this social memory, the Rohingyas’ beliefs in ethnicity, identity, and belongingness play an important role in shaping their current identity. Their production of cultural artefacts while in exile suggests a non-conventional resistance, and the close proximity of the refugees to their homeland creates a completely different psychology of attachment and alienation, which needs further attention in refugee studies. Such an understanding of life-politics along the border may challenge our current understanding of borderland conflicts within the framework of state-imposed boundaries. The boundaries of identity may go beyond traditional notions of national borders and the identity of the state.

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Boundaries and borderlands are central to refugee studies. ‘Boundary’ refers to political lines that are consciously drawn or artificially constructed and that separate two states on a physical map, and is a subset of ‘borderland’, which combines boundary and borderland: where people live across political margins. Political authority links borders with sovereignty, while the people living on the borderline perceive it as social space that offers a different context of identity formation. Burma’s border with Bangladesh affects the Rohingya (an ethnic minority) of Burma both politically and socially. The porous boundary-line enables cross-border migration, which affects the identity politics of the Rohingya community living in the borderland. People’s everyday lives in these troubled political borderlands can provide a wealth of knowledge about their socio-political identity, as well as the role of this social space, in influencing, shaping, and complicating the matter.

The total population of Burma Rohingya to be about two million, of which approximately eight hundred thousand were living in the Northern Arakan State of Burma. Since the early 1990s, Rohingyas have been fleeing across the border into Bangladesh; an estimated 328,500 displaced Rohingyas now live in Bangladesh as registered and unregistered refugees. About half a million have immigrated to the Middle East, nearly fifty thousand to Malaysia, and the rest are scattered throughout the region. Such figures are merely indicative of some much deeper issues. The central problem of the Rohingyas is that they claim Burmese citizenship as their natural right and claim that they are entitled to enjoy all citizenship rights, including state protection, just like any other Burmese citizen. The Burmese state political authority continues to deny this natural right and entitlement, claiming that the Rohingyas are outsiders or illegal immigrants. Similarly, the Bangladesh government maintains that Rohingyas were not known in the country prior to 1978, when they crossed the border into Bangladesh due to political upheaval in their land of origin (Burma); hence, Bangladesh maintains that they are correctly classified as ‘foreign’. Such denials have only prolonged the crisis, as Rohingyas are pushed back and forth across the border.

Various studies have focused on Burmese history, politics, society, and its ethnic and religious situation, but have not (or have not intended to) outline and analyse the identity politics and ethnic policies of Burmese governments; nevertheless, the studies directly or indirectly reflect or hint at the Rohingya issue. The most obvious limitation of the literature on ethnic minorities is that all studies to date focus only on particular, or selected, minorities (such as the Karen, Karenni, Chin, Shan, Mon, and Kachin), leaving smaller groups largely invisible. Despite the Rohingya community’s untold sufferings due to forced migration, it appears that scant attention has been paid to this ethnic group on the Bangladesh-Burma border, compared with the problems faced by other ethnic minorities on Burma’s border with other neighbouring states such as China, India, Laos, and Thailand. Researchers have studied various aspects of the Rohingya refugees (Bahar 2010; Berlie 2008; Habibullah 1995; Karim 2000; Rahman 2005; Razzaq and Haque 1995; Saltsman 2009; Yegar 1981 [1972]; Yunus 1994), but none has addressed the issue of identity construction from the refugee group’s perspective. This reflects the group’s lack of importance, even to scholars.
There remains a substantial number of displaced Rohingya living in remote refugee camps in the borderland, who face an uncertain future from both sides of the River Naff. By examining the historical context, this article addresses the life-politics of the Rohingya refugees at the Burma-Bangladesh borderland to better understand how this community shapes its identities. It analyses Rohingya narratives and cultural artefacts (music and art) as textual clues to examine how the refugee community identifies itself in the borderland.

The article argues that the border region of Arakan is not only a geographic ‘region’ separate from Burma, but a region that is informally constructed by history, culture, and politics. The sovereign state of Burma incorporated this region within its political boundaries, but it failed to incorporate its diverse people into a single national entity. Post-independence, the state’s policy of exclusion and ethnicization has resulted in segregation and the creation of new identities for ethnic minorities. The displaced Rohingyas’ narratives and their documentary records of music and art in exile present an alternative and endogenous interpretation of the problem, in contrast to the exogenous one. The current shifting borderland context – which creates new refugees, religious violence, and less or no empathy towards other religious minorities – is directly linked to those imposed boundaries and identities, which can also be explained as consequences of state policies and a rigid attitude towards those it regards as outsiders. Hence, a borderland identity is in flux; this yields an approach that will provide a better understanding of state-created conflicts and other issues that unfold in this article.

Methodology

As part of a large-scale research project on Rohingya refugees’ identity perceptions and life in exile, this study was carried out over a period of six months between 2009 and 2010 in the south-east corner of Bangladesh, adjacent to Burma. The refugee experiences detailed in this article are from in-depth interviews with sixty-two respondents, about half of whom reside at the UNHCR Nayapara refugee camp (which is one of two official camps in the country), while the remaining respondents are unregistered refugees currently dispersed among the local population in numerous villages and townships in the Cox’s Bazar region. Besides interviews, focus group discussions provided a more introspective discussion on specific topics, which elicited valuable in-depth views from small groups of participants. This not only helped in the process of cross-checking several testimonies, gaps, or inconsistencies in the recording of individual interviews; it also allowed me to learn more about the perspectives of those participating in the study, whose voices are often marginalized.

Ethnographic observation also provided the opportunity to gain closer access to the community being studied and allowed me to be a private observer and eyewitness to events in their day-to-day life; this yielded incredible insights into ‘non-conventional’ aspects of Rohingya culture, such as the drawings and music of refugee life used to keep memories alive to pass on to future generations. In all, I collected fifteen drawings and twenty-one songs. In this article, I use two drawings and two songs produced by ordinary Rohingya refugees to analyse how these...
artefacts illustrate the refugees’ perspectives about territoriality, identity, and belongingness. These primary documents proved invaluable in providing first-hand documentation of, and insights into, Rohingya refugee experiences. My purpose in using these visual and aural records was to tease out the voices and nuances of the individuals behind those artefacts, as this music and artwork are powerful symbolic expressions of refugees’ identity that reflect their situation of being stranded.

The Historical and Politico-Military Context of the Border

The Northern Arakan or Rakhine state of Burma, which borders Bangladesh’s Chittagong and the Cox’s Bazar districts, shares a porous international boundary-line of 270 kilometres along the River Naff. Historically, the line separating these two political jurisdictions, between Burma and Bangladesh, was not conceptualized as the ‘boundary’ separating communities. Arakan’s natural geographic location is an important factor that binds this group into one sociological unit. Geographically, the area is separated by the Arakan Yoma (Mount Arakan), separating this region from the central Burma region (Oberoi 2006:172). Between Arakan and Chittagon, there is no physical barrier. Second, in pre-colonial days, this geographical area ‘changed hands among neighbouring feudal rulers and boundaries were always elastic’ (Zarni 2013). The Arakan kingdom, – formerly known by its ancient name, Maruk-U – was once independent (Charney 1998), separated from the two Burmese kingdoms in central Burma and the Irrawaddy delta, as well as Bengal and the Mogul empire in India. In 1459, the Arakan conquered Chittagong and ruled it until 1666.

The area between modern Burma and Bangladesh has a long history of people travelling or moving back and forth across the boundary. The history of the Rohingya Arakanese Muslims highlights their diverse origins, with roots going back several hundred years. Moshe Yegar’s (1981 [1972]), The Muslims of Burma, traced the Rohingyas’ ancestors to Arab and Persian traders who established their settlement in lower Burma and Arakan in the ninth century C.E.; Muslims have had a well-established presence in northern Arakan since the twelfth century.4 Yegar observed that, ‘Today, the Arakanese Muslims call themselves Rohinga or Roewengyah. This name is used more by the Muslims of North Arakan, . . . than by those living near Akyab’ (ibid.:25).

Events occurring throughout the era of Arakan rule in Chittagong resulted in a close relationship between the Arakanese and the Bengal of India. The Muslim influence in Arakan was so predominant that ‘the Arakanese kings though Buddhist in religion, became somewhat Mahomedanised in their ideas’ (Bhattacharya 1927:141). Evidence from Arakan genealogy demonstrates that during their occupation of Chittagong, the Arakanese kings adopted Muslim names, in addition to their own earlier names (Jilani 1999; Phayre 1967). During this time, the Muslims’ relationship with the Maruk-U (Arakan) kingdom became stronger, which also explains the Bengali influence in Arakan. ‘An attitude of tolerance prevailed, with Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, together with Brahmanism, Hinduism, animism and other beliefs flourished side by side’ (Blackburn 2000:14).
Conflict in Arakan can be traced to 1784, when the Burmese King Bodawpaya conquered and incorporated the Arakan region into the kingdom of Ava in central Burma. The Arakanese began to rebel against Burmese oppression immediately following the Burmese invasion, which led to a state of continual disorder. As G.E. Harvey (1967:280) explained, people who were not able to pay taxes would be summoned to various garrison headquarters and ‘when they arrived the Burmese would round them up and massacre them’. In one such incident, three thousand people were tasked to work on the Meiktila lake reconstruction; none returned. A number of comparable incidents reportedly took place between 1790 and 1797, and the Burmese king reportedly conscripted thousands of people into forced labour in the brickfields and construction sector. As a consequence, thousands of people (both Muslims and Buddhists Rakhines) from this area fled to the then-adjoining British colonial territory of Bengal (ibid.:282). Thus, the relationship between the state of Arakan and the Burmese king was marked by animosity and deep mistrust.

This historical context set the tone for the British colonial order; when the British imperial power colonized Burma (1824–1886), their first step was to annex Arakan and use it as a buffer zone in order to invade mainland Burma. Faced with severe oppression by the Burmese king, the Arakanese backed the British when the colonisers offered them their support. Arguably, it was the British policy of ‘divide-and-rule’ that was responsible for creating the idea of ethnic boundaries and enforcing territorial ownership. The British dual administration policy destroyed the traditional monarchical system and in the 1920s, introduced a limited form of parliamentary Home Rule in Ministerial Burma. In contrast, the ethnic minority-based Frontier Areas became subject to positive discrimination, where people from different ethnic and religious groups were able to reach various top levels of the colonial services (Smith 1999), and the peripheral states were allowed to govern their areas under the control of traditional rulers. During this time, Arakanese Muslims, Karen, Shan, and many other minority groups collaborated with the British colonial power against the Burmese state. This was a significant factor in solidifying the boundaries between the Burmese and ethnic minorities.

Another critical factor that contributed to the solidification of ethnic boundaries was the British power’s recruitment policy – gradually hiring more minorities while excluding Burmese – into the colonial armed forces. By 1925, the British had completely excluded the Burmese, replacing them with the Chin, Kachin, and Karen, thus creating a sense of ethnic insecurity among the Burmese, who saw this as a potential instrument of oppression and control by other ethnic minorities (Walton 2008). To compound the situation, the British military used the armed forces (comprising ethnic minorities) to suppress Burmese resistance to British rule (Moscotti 1977), which created a tense and conflictual relationship between the Burmese and ethnic minorities. The Japanese occupation during World War II brought about a clearer sense of boundaries between the Burmese and different peripheral states, which removed the protective arrangements the British had provided for minorities; this instigated attacks by the Burma Independent Army (BIA) on minorities, resulting in many bloody communal clashes. Hence, the historic ethnic tensions were deeply rooted even before Burma as a nation came into being.
A state of chaos characterized the country in the years leading up to independence and leaders disagreed on how to manage ethnic relations. Visionary leaders believed that in order to put an end to the enduring conflict, the new nation should follow a federal state system and allow ethnic groups to enjoy their local influence while remaining part of the greater unified nation (Thomson 1995). The 1947 Panglong Agreement signed between General Aung San and major ethnic groups prior to independence indicated such an approach. However, other national leaders opposed this policy, arguing instead for the creation of a single ‘Mahamaha’ or Great Burman nationality and an end to special treatment for minorities (Kratoska 2002). Following the assassination of Aung San later that year, the Panglong Agreement was abandoned (Ghosh 2002). The Union of Burma attained independence in January 1948, but the boundary lines between India and Burma remained undeniably arbitrary. Numerous nationalities situated on Burma’s border were unhappy with the mapping of the new state. Post-independence, the situation in these peripheral states deteriorated, and conflict with the Burmese government increased (Tinker 1957).

This evolving nature of borderlands’ geography has played an important role in constructing, reshaping, and complicating the Rohingya people’s identity, who have been living in the Burma-Bangladesh borderland for centuries. Perceived by the Burmese government to be collaborators with the British enemy, and since it was the British who brought large numbers of Indian labourers to Arakan,7 the Rohingyas were not deemed compatible with the push to promote a sense of national solidarity. Moreover, because of their religion, Islam, differed from the dominant practice of Buddhism, it was easy for government officials to view and represent them as ‘others’. These major historical events have impacted the way in which the Rohingya people are currently treated in Burma.

National Identity: Ethnicity and Ethnic Policy in Burma

Burmese nationalism has had a lasting impact on contemporary Burmese history. The new regime replaced Aung’s ethnic policy, either because it wished to maintain Burmese dominance, or because of the changing circumstances of political instability caused by ethnic and communist rebellions. The post-independence leader, Prime Minister U Nu, urged that the British government’s artificially created ethnic, cultural, and territorial divisions be replaced by ‘national unity’ through the development and use of a common language and education system and shared national culture. Since the Burmese are considered central to Burmese society, their culture, identity, and language received priority, and minorities were automatically relegated to the periphery. Undoubtedly, minority leaders saw this unitary assimilation policy as unrealistic, and a threat to their own cultural and ethnic identities. As Walton (2008) contends, Burmese ethnic policy is influenced by leadership idiosyncrasy, political ideology and state security concerns.

As part of the nation-building process, General Ne Win, who seized power in a coup in 1962, drastically changed the government’s policies. In a strong symbolic gesture, his military regime replaced the country’s colonial name of Burma to Myanmar, which translates to mean Burmese. They similarly modified other names to suit their political-symbolic purposes: Arakan is now Rakhine,
Rangoon is now Yangon, and so on. The military government dissolved the federal structure in favour of a tightly centralized unitary state under the model of the ‘Burmese Way to Socialism’. Since then, its ethnic policy has been to forcibly assimilate various groups into one unified Burmese identity. However, the 1974 Constitution adopted an apparent ethno-federalist structure dividing the country into fourteen regions according to ethnic group. Seven union republics were formed, with each representing a single ethnicity: Arakan, Chin, Kachin, Karen, Kayah, Mon, and Shan ethnic nations. Another seven regions were created for the Burmese ethnic majority: Rangoon, Irrawaddy, Tenasserim, Pegu, Magwe, Mandalay, and Sagaing. However, even if such administrative divisions appear to be ethno-federalist, in effect, the divisions were deprived of the basic characteristics of ethno-federalism, such as autonomy and a high degree of control over resources. In practice, therefore, the arrangement was intended to facilitate a greater centralized administration, with a basic faulty assumption of ‘a territorial policy that treats the great variety as a single assimilable [sic] entity’ (Thomson 1995:274). Moreover, the official process of ‘othering’ was very vividly expressed through its new constitution and the Burma Citizenship Law (1982). This new law officially recognized 135 distinctive ‘ethnic nationalities’, but rejected the ethnic Rohingyas and made them – and future generations of Rohingyas born in Burma – non-citizens of Burma. This resulted in the Rohingyas of Arakan becoming a stateless minority, which undermined their community identity.

Other than unitary assimilation policy and constitutional changes, the Burmese government also militarized its troubled border areas to securitise the borderland zones (Callahan 2004). Several military bases in Arakan were established and Buddhist Rakhines were encouraged to immigrate to the area. Militarization is not restricted to military presence; it also signifies systematic coercion, surveillance, and demands that made a tremendous impact on the Rohingyas’ everyday life in Arakan. Moreover, in-migration brought about more contestation over territory and natural resources between communities. That was how the Burmese state created artificial boundaries among social groups, separating the ‘non-Burmese’ as ‘minorities’, and distorting people’s understanding of the region’s history. The ethnic dimension of political conflict in Burma, therefore, was not caused by ethnicity or ethnic diversity per se; it is deeply rooted in the country’s complex historical development, along with the government’s policies of exclusion and ethnicization that have shaped the boundaries of minorities in Burma (Farzana 2010).

Now the question is: what does this stateless identity mean to the Rohingya community, and do they accept these imposed boundaries and social exclusions? The following section addresses this issue from the refugees’ perspective in order to understand how this has evolved in their lives and memories.

**Songs of Lament and Sketches of Life: The Rohingya Perspective**

Based on my respondents’ stories about their past, each and every refugee identified different types of abuses they had experienced, ranging from the denial of
citizenship rights, basic needs, and services to military operations and interference in their everyday lives. Most of the refugees mentioned their fear of ‘threats’ from the NaSaka (Border Security Force), the military, and the Rakhines in Arakan, in the form of physical torture of Rohingya men and women. Many respondents also experienced forced labour, eviction from their land and villages, insufficient and expensive medical treatment, forced relocation to model villages,\(^9\) denial of education, the settlement of Buddhist colonizers, and destruction of religious sites. It appears that some of these processes were more severe than others; however, it is not possible to determine or rank which of these had the greatest impact, because each, or a combination of these factors and threats, made individuals decide to leave home. These processes were complex and interconnected.

Despite this, during my fieldwork I observed that the Rohingyas are able to maintain the semblance of a cultural life despite this adversity. Songs (commonly known as taranas) seem common among both registered and unregistered refugee men and women. Some songs are thought out or ‘composed’ from their past, and others are produced during their self-exile in Bangladesh. Approximately once or twice a month, Nayapara refugees (those living in registered camps) sit around for small singing sessions, usually on a moonlit night, in the small area between their huts. Before their sing-along sessions, Rohingya camp representatives are required to seek permission from the camp authority, primarily the Camp-in-Charge.\(^10\) At these gatherings, they play traditional musical instruments – tabla and juri (a guitar-like instrument) – and sing folk songs, religious philosophical songs, and songs that represent everyday issues within the camp. In many cultures, songs are the glue to community bonding, and remain highly significant to their identity. For the ordinary Rohingyas, songs are their life-line, and are a cathartic means by which they express their thoughts, share their pain with fellow community members (who would understand their shared experiences), connect and strengthen their community bonds, and pass on their social memories to the next generation. As one refugee acknowledged, ‘Our memory remains alive in our taranas’. Therefore, it is not uncommon to find even a drifter expressing his or her sorrow in song.

**Songs as Cultural Depictions of Life in Exile**

Song 1 (tarana) documents the Rohingyas’ frustration and despair. Hafeza Khatun, a forty-two-year-old undocumented refugee and single mother of two daughters and one autistic son, is a beggar and, depending on availability of work, also serves as housemaid to the local community. Prior to leaving for Bangladesh, her home was in the Shikdar para of Maungdaw in Arakan. This song is a collaboration between Hafeza and Mojid Molla, a tarana producer from the same village who had also crossed the border into Bangladesh and shared similar experiences; the song is their way of ‘remember[ing] that history of why and how a village like Shikdar para had to vacate’. According to Hafeza, ‘This song is our song. For many years, people from Shikdar village experienced julum [persecution]. We are small people, could not resist [ara bodala loi no pari] them. After coming here we want to keep remembering that experience through songs.’
**Song 1. In Shikdar Village**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARKANI ORIGINAL</th>
<th>ENGLISH TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shikdar Para</strong></td>
<td><strong>In Shikdar Village</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shikdar parar Borna shitai ki kam joitaye ator ekkhan Mossod vagi mondir banaye (II)</td>
<td>What have you done you Burmese in Shikdarpara! You built a mondir destroying a big mosque!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mogor poyan shunnoni Arar kota raibami ator ekkhan Mossod vagi zati banaye</td>
<td>Will you listen to our plea Will you keep a word (why) You built a mandir (temple) destroying a big mosque!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh lo idori dori bondhu baidhare gor feli Napi khaiya moger jala Rohingya vaiyor shorir kala Chinta-chintai jai omboi mori re Allah re Chinta-chintai jai omboi mori</td>
<td>We made Bangladesh abode Leaving behind our home Caused by Mogs’ torture The bodies of Rohingya fellows turned black O God! we are dying helpless We are dying helpless like that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burma Mulluk feil kone jai Omboi Rohingya vai Burma mulluk felai kone jai?</td>
<td>Where should we go leaving behind Burma, O Rohingya fellows Where should we go leaving behind Burma?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shjoinna der shat torkari Majoinnader dailor pani (II) Loke vukhe khai mare oma jaite no pari Akyab er o jibolkhanai oma thaikum ken kori</td>
<td>Shajons enjoy tasty dishes But majons get only lentil soup We die of starvation Yet we cannot escape How would we spend our life In the prison of this Akyab?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age jodi jantum ma re jibolkhanar duk Nijor churi nije khaiya mone paitam shuk Akyab er o jibolkhanai oma thaikum ken kori</td>
<td>Had we known the taste of prison cell Would have gratified committing suicide ahead How would we spend our life In the prison of this Akyab?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aung san jodi na morito Sonar Burma santi hoito Baro bochor duk pailm, Baro bochor koshto pailm (II)</td>
<td>Had Aung San not been killed The golden Burma would have been a place of peace We felt pain for 12 years We suffered for 12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharati duniyai ghuriya berai Mon milenare manush milena re Kangal. Kangal boli more keo chine na re kangal</td>
<td>We wander around the world Friendless, without sympathy, oh, fate! Nobody pays attention to us Because we are enforced to adapt to nomadism, oh, fate!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Mojid Molla, a tarana producer, and Hafeza Khatun, both undocumented Rohingya refugees who crossed into Bangladesh from Shikdar para of Maungdaw)
The song is a living record of refugee experiences, particularly those originating from Shikdar village. The words are significant because they illustrate how the villagers faced the destruction of their mosques, which were then replaced with mondir (temple), and ultimately, eviction. The lyrics boldly express that they were deeply wounded by the Burmese authorities’ curt attitude and callous behaviour. The song is crying aloud for ears that would care to listen to their stories of suffering that illustrate why they were forced to leave behind their beloved ‘homeland’.

The song also tells of the Mogs (Rakhines) capturing and torturing the Rohingyas, for which ‘the bodies of the Rohingya fellows turned black’. The Rohingyas are portrayed as helpless, in fear of still more attacks, suffering severe food shortage (‘only lentil soup’) and many sleepless nights. Finally, hit with the realization that they could starve to death in their homeland, the Rohingyas decided that they had to leave home. The song recalls three instances in Akhiab (once the capital of Arakan) when life felt more like prison (jibolkhanar) to them, and how the taste of prison life often led them to thoughts of suicide. The song also asked listeners what they would do, or where they should go, if the suffering reached the extreme.

It then imagined a different scenario, one that could have occurred if their democratic leader, Aung Sun, had not been killed. In a way, it demonstrates their nationalism, and their long-lost hope for a ‘golden Burma’ that could have been achieved if Aung San were still alive and his liberal ethnic policy had prevailed in Burma. Now, the agony of a stateless life, being in a foreign country, and not being recognized by others as citizens of any sovereign state, turned them into beings not worthy of sympathy. The song seems to be a complete story in itself, of a Rohingya beggar and many others who could directly relate to it, which is probably why it has survived through the years.

Songs are often used to inspire deep feelings of patriotism to nations and communities. Lokman Hakim, aged forty, a registered refugee from the UNHCR Nayapara camp, shared Song 2, a patriotic song entitled Arkanor Nowjoan. He sang the song accompanied by traditional Rohingya musical instruments. According to him:

This tarana is based on our experience of torture, beating and humiliation in Arakan. It is because Mogs and military beat us mercilessly for no reason. If someone is sick or refuses to go for unpaid labour for the military, they will beat us a lot . . . . Moreover, they humiliate our females, in front of our eyes to torture us more. We could not take it anymore . . . and had to leave. This tarana is all about that feeling.

This patriotic song illustrates the Rohingyas’ perception of freedom and liberty. It points to their lack of rights in Arakan, which is why they are tortured by the Rakhines, and the torture and humiliation dealt to their ‘mothers and sisters’. The experiences of rape and humiliation, of torture and death, of massacres and disappearances, have all deeply impacted individuals and been embedded in their collective imagination through a constant sense of fear and threats. Such humilia-
tions are a sensitive issue for any community. Therefore, the song calls on the Arakan youth, as their community’s future, to take charge and free Arakan from these immoral acts. It also urges fellow Rohingyas to come together to participate in a mission – to fight against all odds – and rebuild a new Arakan, where people are not persecuted because of their race and belief. Through this song, the heavy responsibility to save their land is handed over to the young; calling on the Young Brothers (Nowjoans) to be united in the cause. Although the song was produced in Arakan during a time when they were undergoing severe pain and suffering, it continues to circulate and be sung after all these years among ordinary Rohingyas as part of their collective memory. Such a song reflects a collective resistance to dominance and oppression. When an ordinary refugee considers their situation one where ‘we are like people without knees, we are unable to protest against anyone, and hence, taranas are the only way to tell our sorrows and sufferings to another person’, it indicates resistance by the people: a limiting case of James Scott’s Weapons of the Weak, applied in a more extreme context. Scott’s book focuses on more informal and alternative forms of resistance where disadvantaged and powerless groups tend to use informal means such as signs, symbols, and a vocabulary of exploitation to express themselves (Scott 1985:292). This non-conventional form of resistance is more humble, but nevertheless distinct in nature.

### Song 2. The Young Brothers of Arakan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rohingya</th>
<th>ARKANI ORIGINALDS</th>
<th>ENGLISH TRANSLATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arkanor Nowjoan</strong></td>
<td><strong>Hara-hara aiyo O Arkanor nowjoan vai</strong> Azadi korte mon thakhile jihad kora chai</td>
<td><strong>The Young Brothers of Arakan</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ma-boner julum dhekhlle lojjai fati jai</strong> Killa arar pran tai onole hijrot koro chai</td>
<td>We feel ashamed of torture on our mothers and sisters Why should we migrate to somewhere else while we are alive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Imanor janda tuli loum vai</strong> Arkan desh gorgoi hano hano hatot loiye Vam gan jona choli Oi Arkan</td>
<td>Bearing the standard of Iman (faith) Let’s go to fight to free Arakan Let’s march towards Arakan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arkan desh goroi gor hano hano (II)</strong></td>
<td>Let’s go to fight to free Arakan (II)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Md Mojid, a forty-six-year-old ordinary Rohingya singer and tarana producer from the Nayapara camp)
It appears that the Rohingya do not have a word in their language that means ‘resistance’. Jobeda Begum (a refugee respondent) described their situation in Myanmar as ‘whatever they want to do on us will do, we are not supposed to say anything, all have to be tolerated’, and expressed the resentment Rohingyas feel for the discrimination they face in their own homeland. Lyrics such as this are cathartic for the displaced, and may demonstrate a form of resistance that does not directly confront the oppressors, but expresses a refusal to accept their refugee condition. Such songs are memories they carry and cherish in their everyday life, and help to bind them together through their shared experience of living within a displaced community.

**Sketches as Visual Depictions of Life in Exile**

Similarly to songs, Rohingya sketches of refugee life also illustrate their life in the past and present. Although not as widespread as songs due to Rohingyas’ fear of direct confrontation with authority, individuals nonetheless use these privately in order to express themselves, pass along their memories to future generations, and inform outsiders about their situation. Drawing 1 is by Eman Ali, aged forty-five, a registered male refugee in Nayapara originally from the Maungdaw of Arakan.

This drawing illustrates the situation in his Arakan village, where the NaSaKa border security force surrounded their village from every corner and torched their houses. Thick black smoke is coming out of burning houses as people run for their lives. Security forces in vehicles confiscate the Rohingyas’ property. Those who do

**Drawing 1. Destruction of Rohingya Property in Arakan**

(Source: Eman Ali, a refugee from UNHCR Nayapara camp)
not obey are severely punished. Refugees’ narratives of ‘Gram tuli diche/Desh vagi diche’ (being evicted, and their village was destroyed) often surfaced during fieldwork; there were numerous instances when their settlements were burned to the ground so the eviction process would be swifter. Land confiscation resulted in the Rohingya being displaced, which legitimized the government’s claim that they are ‘floating people’. There appears to be a cyclical relationship between the confiscation of property and consolidation of reasons for treating the Rohingya as non-citizens.

Moreover, it appears that as females move from a conflict situation, social humiliation and sexual harassment become commonplace (Ghosal 2000). Expressions that appear frequently in female refugees’ narratives were ‘jala-jontrona dei maiya pola go’ (physical and psychological torture to females), or ‘Oshomman kore maiya go’ (humiliate females). Local Mogs also use derogatory words to label Rohingya women. Intimidation and humiliation by military officials and security officers often make the situation worse. In Jubaida Khatun’s (aged forty-eight) words: ‘They [the military and NaSaKa] behave with us so badly . . . as if we are not counted as human beings.’ This shows how their identity changes as they become victims without a state. For many, it was the extreme point where they had to choose between conflict and self-exile, as there was no other alternative.

The Rohingyas’ concept of border is clearly reflected in Drawing 2, from Boshir Ahmed, aged thirty-seven, of the Nayapara refugee camp. Depicting the realities of

**Drawing 2. Complicated and Difficult Realities on Both Sides of the River Naff**

(Source: Boshir Ahmed, a thirty-seven-year-old refugee from the Nayapara UNHCR camp)
life on both sides of the River Naff, he points out poignantly that life on either side of the border is equally difficult.

This drawing expresses the Rohingyas’ sorrows, grievances, and experiences in both Burma and Bangladesh. It depicts a very complex life for the Rohingya community on either side of the River Naff. The incorporation of the river into the drawing is significant because it portrays that, in their minds, the river constitutes the international border between the two countries. As Boshir Ahmed noted: ‘We came to this side to save our lives.’ They crossed over to Bangladesh with the hope that life might be different – hopefully better – than what they had experienced in Arakan. Unfortunately, in their self-exile in Bangladesh, they are again treated as ‘lesser’ humans. Examples of such torture and humiliation have also been documented in literature produced by human rights organizations, which depict persecution, especially during the process of forced repatriation to Burma. As Boshir explicitly wrote on his picture: ‘We came from Burma to save our life leaving behind everything we had; now here [in Bangladesh], we face the same julum [discrimination] again. What a pathetic life we have.’ His art appropriately expresses his deep sadness and perspective on refugee life, identity, and loss of belongingness to anywhere (Arendt 1966). For the Rohingya, their exile life as registered and unregistered refugees has transpired and become a new identity, but in many ways, it poses many of the same types of restrictions and persecutions as when they were living in Burma. In short, the scene and the perpetrators are different, but the torment, shame, and loss of identity are the same.

By having to endure the traumatic experiences involved in forced migration, many refugees suffer from physical injuries as well as post-traumatic stress disorder, which makes it difficult for them to reconcile themselves to their new restricted identities as registered and unregistered refugees in Bangladesh. Life in exile does not permit them to feel settled; instead, they are constantly reminded of their stateless situation, foreign origin, and separate identity. For registered refugees living in camps, food and medical conditions are very basic, but even such basics are non-existent for those who are unregistered or undocumented. Under such conditions, parents in exile, whether living in camps or on the fringe, produce malnourished and premature children. Within Rohingya camps, disability is on the rise; thus, organizations such as Handicap International (HI) volunteer in the Nayapara camp in order to train young refugees to care for their own community.

Discussion

The analysis in this section on ordinary Rohingya refugees’ songs of lament and sketches of life in Bangladesh brings out significant insights about their life, beliefs, and belongingness. Firstly, as opposed to the official claim that Rohingyas are outsiders, from their perspective, they are native and indigenous to Arakan. They have developed a strong sense of belongingness to territory (i.e. Arakan), even though the authorities refuse to recognize them as citizens or to grant them some kind of rights in the land of their ancestors. Their rootedness in the land is so deep that their long absence from Arakan cannot uproot it from their memories; ironically, perhaps this is all the more so because of controls and restrictions placed
on them by Bangladesh as a host state. Rohingya women still dress in the traditional Burmese *sarong* and the men in *longyi*-shrouded pants. They feel a strong attachment to the homeland just on the other side of the River Naff, while at the same time realising that their home does not welcome them. At this point, they feel alienated and betrayed. Sadly, their strong emotional feeling of belongingness to the land and such unreserved love further reinforces their Burmese identity. This suggests a completely different – and contradictory – social and historical representation of the Rohingya problem than is offered in current official narratives.

Secondly, Rohingya resistance is embedded in their refusal to accept their statelessness and non-citizenship status, as expressed through interviews, songs, and drawings. As Joseph Brodsky (1992:221) asserts, ‘Art is a form of resistance to the imperfection of reality, as well as an attempt to create an alternative reality’. Rohingyas’ visual and verbal expressions clearly portray their sorrows and frustrations in life, and certainly show their resentment towards their home state, its military, as well as the local Rakhines who make them suffer. They also show their resentment towards the host state that places restrictions on their life as exiles and inflicts many similar types of torture on them. Therefore, they challenge the domination Rohingyas face, especially in daring to ask the question ‘why’, and serve as a painful memory of the homeland and of how Rohingyas’ lives have changed. These are expressions of an unconventional resistance against those discriminations, and an attributed identity that has been imposed on them from above, making them subjects without protection, and beyond the law (Arendt 1966). This is their way of protesting – a different form of ‘everyday resistance’ (Scott 1985) – which is central to their borderland life.

Thirdly, the commonalities among these artefacts are that these represent ordinary refugees. This provides clues to their collective social memory, expressed through the artful depictions of their struggles, resistance, and patriotism (memories of Arakan), and demonstrates their Rohingya identity and solidarity. They maintain their social memory in stories, tales, practical experiences, and expressive words and symbols that preserve a vast reservoir of information and evidence that are evidently absent in public claims regarding the Rohingya. While each of these artefacts constitutes, first of all, an individual memory, individual Rohingya refugees share similar memories to others in their community. Community members relate to one another due to the similarity of their respective situations within the historical context. Such individual memories then become their collective memory. This collective memory can be termed social memory, which they use for community bonding and as the basis for their new identity in exile.

However, there are clear gender differences in the refugee experience. Accounts from female refugees demonstrate the different reality that women face within a conflict-ridden situation. Numerous stories recount family members being arrested and taken away by the military. In numerous cases, men from the paras and villages fled while military operations were underway, leaving women and children behind. In such cases, women assume responsibility for the family in the men’s absence, and consequently, experience a change in status. This changed status gives these women more responsibility and greater resilience.
Women’s experience of camp-life in exile is very different, because of their gender-specific identity and characteristics. In their confined, congested living spaces, women in particular encounter a serious lack of privacy. This situation is further exacerbated by the constant fear of physical humiliation and abuse by family members, society, and camp authorities. Many of their insecurities, such as fear, humiliation, abuse, and threats to life in refugee camps, are similar to what they had encountered previously in Arakan.

The Shifting Context of Borderland Politics: Current Realities in the Borderland

Borderland politics are currently undergoing a significant change, as a new social order is gradually and noticeably emerging among refugees in camps and the various national and international groups linked to them. Although refugees officially remain non-political beings, multiple authorities of various degrees that are involved with them are turning them into political beings. By now, many of these refugees have been living within the contested space of refugee camps for more than two decades, and a social arrangement has gradually emerged that is both conflicting and multi-dimensional. There are various layers within this emergent refugee society: ordinary refugees, leaders, followers, Camp-in-Charge (CIC), CIC officials, camp police, international organizations, and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Each layer is intertwined in a complex manner with others. On the vertical level, there is conflict between state official and refugees; and on the horizontal level, conflict exists among refugees, refugee leaders, as well as neighbouring villagers. Within the camp, refugees are constantly involved in fights and struggles to establish their rights, in a game of internal power politics.

The relationship between state officials and refugees is highly conflictual. State officials control the camps’ entry-exit points and food distribution policies. Although UNHCR is the main funding organization, it is the host state, Bangladesh, that decides which organization should participate in refugee activities and to what extent. Since 1992, Bangladesh authorities have restricted refugee movements in the registered camps and stopped receiving new arrivals to the camps. In this ‘state of exception’ (Agamben 1998) refugees are to maintain a passive life if they wish to remain entitled to receive rations. At the same time, they have to be ready to leave at a moment’s notice in case Bangladesh decides to repatriate them. Thus the relationship is marked by intense distrust and dissatisfaction.

Whenever the Bangladesh and Burmese governments reach a new agreement and sign a repatriation treaty to that effect, registered refugees escape from official camps in search of greater security among the local population. Some prefer to give their daughters to locals as housemaids; others marry their daughters off to local villagers so as to meet their strategic needs. An interesting point here is that the Bangladesh government refuses to acknowledge unregistered refugees as ‘official refugees’; thus, undocumented refugees are beyond institutional protection and could be subject to arrest and deportation if caught. Yet, for as long as they remain undocumented – which is necessarily the case, since the Bangladesh government has refused to receive new refugees in over two decades – these
unregistered refugees remain within the shared village space and, unofficially, compete with local Bangladesh citizens for economic resources, including jobs. Though illegal, the local villagers need the refugees’ cheap labour to do many of their jobs. Therefore, in this sense, the two populations depend on each other in a symbiotic state. Moreover, refugees are involved in the local economy in many ways; some find themselves drawn into the black market, crime, and prostituting themselves to make a living. There are allegations that Rohingya camps in Cox’s Bazar are a thoroughfare for drugs, human trafficking, and other illegal activities (The Daily Star 2004; Kaladan News 2011; Weng 2009). Although it is often the case that refugees are blamed for any delinquencies and wrongdoing, such activities rarely occur without local involvement or the ‘Bangladeshi connection’. Refugees remain an easy target for locals to exploit them for various means. This suggests that the Bangladeshi government’s resolve against the Rohingyas may not be limited only to arguments of citizenship and state sovereignty. These considerations are more complex and, therefore, demand a more careful investigation.

The changing and fragile relationship on the horizontal level among refugees, refugee leaders, as well as neighbouring villagers, indicates different levels and forms of resistance for the community. The hardship experienced in their everyday life, their sense of hopelessness and non-belongingness, and the politics of survival in refugee camps have corrupted a number of their community leaders (majhees), who do not hesitate to use their networks to deprive or exploit members of their own Rohingya community. Thus, ordinary refugees find themselves helpless in another way: not only do they have to fight against state officials and security forces, but also against their own corrupt community leaders. Many of their artefacts (music and arts) address this negative aspect of camp life, and encourage refugees to stay united, and not to forget their identity. The refugees’ relationship with local Bangladeshi villagers is also affected by contesting economic resources. Local villagers regard the refugees as lazy freeloaders because they receive free food and household items. According to Ismail, a local villager, ‘these refugees in camps do not do any work. They just sit, eat and produce many children’ (communication with a local educated professional in Teknaf, 29 December 2010). This attitude has been manifested by a number of local resistance movements termed Rohingya Hotao (Expel the Rohingyas), based in Ukhiya, that maintain that the Rohingyas are creating all types of social problems and are, therefore, a threat to the country (Gittleman 2012).

The second dimension of shifting borderland politics is that Rohingyas are often en route to a third destination. Frustrated with their situation, some young refugees in Bangladesh, whether registered or unregistered, take desperate life-threatening risks, including attempting get to other countries illegally by means of rickety boats, as ‘boat people’. Official refugees in Bangladeshi camps lament that the UNHCR third-country repatriation process is tedious and slow-moving, and that their chances of getting to a third country legally are limited. As a result, this forces them to seek desperate measures to flee their situation as quickly as possible. Undocumented Rohingyas are not entitled to any such official processes and are likely to use their personal connections to find illegal means of making the long and dangerous journey to a third country. Refugees often do this by collaborating
with local Bangladeshi syndicates or *dalals* who send Rohingyas to third countries (Ahmed 2009). Those fleeing Burma to other Southeast Asian countries occasionally use Bangladesh as a transit point. It is a huge risk to take and many die out at sea or end up in jails where they may be held without trial.

The third and most significant dimension of shifting borderland politics is the communal violence that takes place in the borderlands. Based on historical events leading to Rohingyas’ forced migration from Arakan, and refugees’ perspectives as discussed in previous sections, it is evident that the current state of violence is not an isolated phenomenon. The Rohingya community has been systematically targeted. As this article shows, Rohingya narratives (both oral/aural and visual) highlight their fear of attacks by the armed military and Buddhist Rakhines; such incidents have received attention from many human rights organizations. What is new here is the involvement of religion – in particular, Buddhist monks – in the picture. The nature of ethno-religious intolerance in recent violence appeared in *Time* magazine as ‘The Face of Buddhist Terror’ (Beech 2013), which succinctly captured how individuals dressed in Buddhist monk robes are spreading the ‘mantra of hate’ against Rohingyas. Increasing access to the internet allows some radical Buddhists to spread more hatred, make comments with a genocidal tendency, and spread rumours through Facebook posts or on Twitter (Latt 2012).

Evidence of what has occurred in Arakan is conflicting and complex. With the restricted access of media to the region, the available data came from various human rights organizations and suggest serious violations of human rights against the Rohingya community. A Human Rights Watch (2013) report entitled *Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya Muslims: Unpunished Crime Against Humanity*, reported that thousands of Rohingyas had attempted to flee Arakan seeking a safe haven; instead, faced with adversity in Bangladesh, they fled in boats and were later captured in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. Burmese security forces are reported to have been actively involved in the violence against the Rohingyas, but the authorities have denied any governmental responsibility in the conflict and maintained that its military was not involved in any casualty in Arakan. The opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has remained resolutely silent on the issue. Despite allegations of ethnic cleansing, the government investigation and report on the Rohingya Ethnic Cleansing Inquiry Commission denied the idea of ethnic cleansing on the grounds that Rohingya is not a recognized ethnicity as a threshold matter (Zarni 2013). But the question remains as to whether a state can avoid its responsibility to protect the people (citizens and non-citizens alike) within its boundaries.

This has had serious repercussions in Bangladesh as religious violence and rumours spread into the bordering areas. An Equal Rights Trust (2012) report suggests that the Bangladeshi government closed its border completely, refusing the fleeing refugees, but could not stop the consequences of religious intolerance. Fieldwork-based research by Shapan Adnan (19 July 2013) on the destruction of the Ramu Temple in Bangladesh suggests that some cross-cutting religious and ethnic conflicts have also taken place in Bangladesh. For instance, in Ramu, Ukhiya, and Cox’s Bazar, there have been several conflicts between religious and ethnic groups (Bengali Muslim versus Rakhine Buddhist), and temples have been
burned down to protest the deaths of Muslims in Arakan. Moreover, conflict within the same (Bengali) ethnic group (Bengali Muslims versus Barua Buddhists) has also unfolded. Bengali Barua18 Buddhists temples and homesteads have been intentionally targeted and destroyed by some Bengali Muslim mobs indicating anti-Buddhist public opinion among Muslims in Bangladesh. In all of these conflicts, Bangladesh’s national security forces either failed or were unwilling to take protective measures. Often, the security forces arrived after the incident, or the incidents took place despite their presence. If authorities allow this hatred and intolerance to spread further, it could encourage religious extremism on the part of both radical Muslims and Buddhists. Due to religious sentiment attached to this transnational cross-border chaos, its implications could be serious for the region.

**Conclusion**

The Rohingya minority’s ethnic identity has been being built and reorganized as it has journeyed through Burma’s pre-colonial, colonial, and contemporary history. The politicization of identity by the two bordering states, Burma and Bangladesh, has complicated the lives of this community in the borderland for centuries. The current shifting borderland realities are socially constructed and are the direct consequence of state policies and rigid attitudes towards the Rohingya. However, they should not be blamed for their culture, race, or religion, and there should be an end put to their stateless situation. Therefore, a more accurate understanding of the Rohingya problem warrants going beyond official claims and narratives, and taking into consideration the voices of marginalized and displaced refugees.

The Rohingya community speaks for their identity through narratives and various cultural artefacts. They have clearly indicated their origin and their affiliation with their ancestral homeland in Arakan. To them, they are ‘stateless’ only by the standard of state authorities. What their artefacts represent is not of the past but of a possible future, and suggests that reforms are in order before the Rohingyas can see a happy end to their displacement within their claimed homeland. It is the part of individuals’ survival strategy to use non-conventional resistance, while at the same time, projecting their dignity, reclaiming control over their lives, and asserting a role for themselves as rightful citizens within Burma’s contemporary history. Their life-politics in the borderlands makes us rethink the political boundary in shaping and/or complicating people’s identity.

A solution to this would require that both sets of governments first recognize that the Rohingyas have a right to live and exist in the borderlands. Ignoring the Rohingya as an ethnic group means denying Burma’s historical borders. Burma’s government must acknowledge the group claims and demands of differentiated rights, and ensure Rohingyas’ socio-economic and political security. As Burma continues to move forward in establishing democracy and inviting foreign investment, the national government needs to assert serious efforts to change the long established international impression that Burma represents repression, xenophobia, and civil abuse. The Bangladesh government must not stop providing temporary shelters and should not breach its non-refoulement obligation on refugee matters.
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Notes

1. Dispute over their maritime boundary in the Bay of Bengal has been a long standing issue between the two countries, and was settled on 14 March 2012 when the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea gave its final verdict, allowing Bangladesh authority over 111,000 square kilometres of exclusive economic zone water into the sea.
2. The total Muslim population in Burma is about 2.5 million, about 4% of its entire population of predominantly Buddhists.
3. The two official camps house only 28,500 refugees; an overwhelming majority, estimated at two to three hundred thousand, are unregistered and live in two unofficial ‘campsites’ and in scattered settlements among the host population.
5. The British first annexed Arakan and Tenasserim in 1824, followed by Pegu in 1852 and Upper Burma in 1885.
7. For administrative convenience, the British ruled Burma as a province of colonial India until 1937. Therefore, labour flow in the region was completely legal. A large number of Indian labourers were brought to Arakan as plantation employees and worked for the British in the docks and municipal services (Brookes 2000).
8. The Burmese government’s military operation in Northern Arakan began in 1962 with militarization and various operations in the area.
9. The Burmese government initiated the model village program in 1988 to encourage ethnic Burmese Buddhist villagers from the Irrawaddy delta to move voluntarily into the sites. Initially, the government supplied some basic assistance such as oil, rice, peas, cart wheels, and a little money to the villagers.
10. Nayapara’s Camp-in-Charge represents the Bangladeshi Government, and is responsible for law and order, as well as daily management in the camps. He is assisted by several camp officers.
11. Hanna Arendt (1966:267) defines statelessness as a situation when people had ‘left their homeland they remained homeless, once they had left their state they became stateless, and once they had been deprived of their human rights they were rightless’.
12. Burma accepted 236,599 Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh under their mutual repatriation process (Habib 2012).
13. In the local community, the Rohingyas work in farming, fishing, and low-skill jobs.
14. This was likely because the local villagers are also poor and get upset that the international organizations do not help them.
15. A major Rohingya crisis was recorded in 1977, when the ‘Dragon King Operation’ forced over two hundred thousand Rohingyas across the Bangladesh border (Mattern 1978). Although by 1979 most of them had been repatriated to Burma, they were again pushed into Bangladesh because of violence in greater number in the early 1990s.
16 The story is complicated and has many conflicting versions. Some sources suggest that it all started in a response to the rape-murder of a young Rakhine woman in late May 2012, allegedly by three Rohingya men. On 3 June 2012, a crowd of nearly three hundred Buddhist Rakhines from Tounggout Township in Arakan State sought revenge, forcing a bus to stop, and killing eleven Muslim passengers who were travelling to Yangon. One of them was a female Muslim passenger, who was reportedly raped and murdered. This incident was followed by many Muslim properties being destroyed and Rohingyas killed.

17 Statistics show that during the first wave of violence in June 2012, 4,188 Rohingya homes were destroyed, while Rakhine lost 1,150 homes. During the second wave in October 2012, 2,371 Rohingya homes were destroyed, compared to forty-two Rakhine homes. A total of 1,835 Rohingyas and 246 Rakhine were arrested for acts of violence.

18 Bengali Barua Buddhists are an ethnic religious minority mostly concentrated in the Chittagong district and Southern part of Bangladesh. Their ancestral history goes back to pre-colonial times when Chittagong was ruled by the King of Arakan when a large number of Buddhists settled in Chittagong, which is now part of Bangladesh, and a large number of Muslims settled in Arakan, which is now part of Burma. As ethno-religious violence spread in Arakan in June 2012, Bangladeshi Barua Buddhists were also affected by religious intolerance.

References


