

## **Myanmar's Rohingya Genocide: Identity, History and Hate Speech**

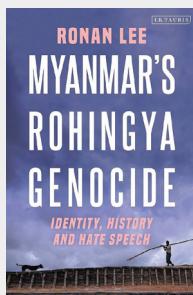
By Ronan Lee

I.B. Tauris, 2021, 308 pages, \$90.16, ISBN: 9780755602483

Reviewed by Onur Balci, Sakarya University

The general narrative of this book is about the crimes against humanity (genocide) that the Rohingya people were subjected to in Myanmar by the rulers (the army and government) and nationalists. Throughout the book, the author deals with the historical process of the existence of the Rohingya in the region, the constitution and citizenship laws in Myanmar, and offers a comprehensive analysis of findings in the field and the current situation. The book consists of eight chapters.

The first chapter describes the process from the ancient origins of the Rohingya until the colonial period in the region. The author states that according to the Myanmar government, the military (*Tatmadaw*), and nationalists, the Rohingya are not one of Myanmar's indigenous communities, defined as *taingyinthā*. According to them, the Rohingya have recently migrated from Bengal and are therefore people of different skin colors (darker skin tones). These claims are the main tool of the othering of the Rohingya by Myanmar's rule. It is said that the Muslim presence in Rakhine state cannot be explained simply by immigration, and that the Muslim population here is the result of commercial connections, migrations, and conversions. The political and geographical (mountain topography/range) factors of the racial differences between the people here and the arrival of Islam in these lands are explained.



Chapter 2 continues to address the historical roots of the Rohingya community in conjunction with the first. The author traces the Rohingya people through pre-colonial and colonial eras to strengthen the narrative of the Rohingya as an indigenous element of the region. In particular, language, population, and geographical pieces of evidence are revealed in the documents and studies (manuscripts, reports, and letters) of the East India Company in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, drawing attention to the fact that the Rohingya people were an indigenous Muslim group in the pre-colonial period. This chapter also discusses the increasing xenophobia in the 1920s, the 1930s, and the 1940s and the impact of the Second World War on demographic changes in Rakhine which meant that these two communities became alienated over time. It seems that the author used a large amount of literature to present these claims and findings.

After revealing the findings in the first two sections, that the Rohingya people are indigenous to the region, the third chapter deals with the legal dimension of citizenship in Myanmar and explains how the Rohingya people have become stateless through Myanmar's constitutions, laws, and practices of the Tatmadaw since its independence in 1948. The author states that, in the first democratic administration (including the army) during 1948-1962, the Rohingya were considered in-

digenous and had many rights, including voting. However, according to the author, after the 1962 coup, military rule began to reject this reality, and the legal system politicized due to military rule has been used as a weapon against the Rohingya. The author states that although the literature generally focuses on the fact that the Rohingya lost their citizenship rights by the 1982 Burma Citizenship Law, in fact, these people lost these rights at the beginning of military rule established in the 1962 coup, and by doing so the author contributes new information to the literature.

Chapter 4 explains that xenophobia, cultivated during military rule, became widespread during the civilian government period. The author claims that the quasi-civilian government has given nationalists an opportunity to spread hate speech that portrays the Rohingya as a threat to Myanmar's Buddhist character and allows Tatmadaw violence against the group. In particular, the chapter draws attention to the direction of social media (like Facebook) in spreading hate speech on anti-Muslim sentiments and legitimizing the claims and actions of the government and the army. As a very important point, this chapter tries to establish that these violations against the Rohingya are genocide. Finally, the author draws attention to the fact that escalating violence may lead the peaceful Rohingya to approach armed struggle. The emergence of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) in late 2016, which claims to represent the interests of the Rohingya community, is the most important indicator of this.

In chapter 5, the clashes between the Rohingya and the Myanmar administration, and the nationalists' narratives about the Rohingya people are included. The author emphasizes that the official narrative in Myanmar is in-

strumentalized in the rights violations of the Rohingya; therefore, the latest liberalization steps do not cover the Rohingya. After these explanations, the author turns the projection to colonial migration, which is the central narrative of Buddhist nationalists marginalizing the Rohingya, and even to the claims of immigration from Bangladesh, which experienced a civil war in 1971. The claims of the Myanmar government on this issue are rejected based on population and historical examples. Finally, there are discussions about the return of the Rohingya community living in camps in Bangladesh between the UN, Myanmar, and Bangladesh, and concerns about the lack of a citizenship guarantee for this return.

Chapter 6 discusses how the historical heritage of the Rohingya people, and the people themselves, have been targeted for destruction by Myanmar's rulers. The author cites interviews with Rohingya members from Myanmar and the diaspora conducted between 2015 and early 2017. With this, the author attempts to convey the history of the Rohingya and what they want from Myanmar, in the words of the Rohingya leaders themselves. The highlights of the interviews are as follows: these people want to be identified by the name they describe themselves (Rohingya), their centuries-old existence in the Rakhine state, the belief that the international community can help, and the negative consequences of the Burma Citizenship Law (1982). The Rohingya narratives in these interviews are in parallel with the historical narratives in the relevant chapters of the book.

In chapter 7, political violence tendencies among the Rohingya are discussed. Although some ethnic minorities have adopted their demands for political violence since the independence of Myanmar/Burma, the main-

stream leadership of the Rohingya generally has not used political violence. According to the author, the violence against the Rohingya in 2012, the ensuing mass incarceration, and the disenfranchisement of the Rohingya in 2015 prompted some Rohingyas to rethink the usefulness of peaceful strategies. In this context, attention is drawn to the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) organization, which attacked state security posts in northern Rakhine in October 2016, following the increasing violence and human rights violations by the Tatmadaw. On the other hand, it is claimed that the absence of an incriminating decision by the UNSC against the Tatmadaw facilitated the Tatmadaw's actions.

Chapter 8 and 9 is a review of the international aid and action taken for the Rohingya community and an assertion that a change in the domestic political environment is re-

quired for a solution. This change is said to require serious internal opposition, including from the civilian government to the brutal practices of the Tatmadaw. It outlines some (admittedly limited) political opportunities that could contribute to improvements in the Rohingya. However, according to the author, there seems to be little hope for the Rohingya community.

The book covers human rights violations, which the author describes as genocide, experienced by the Rohingya people; the Myanmar ruler's view of the Rohingya people; and how these people were made stateless in its historical and current dimensions. The author's field research, not only through documents, increases the analytical power of the study. This book is a comprehensive study for researchers and scientists interested in this subject.

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## **Humanitarian and Military Intervention in Libya and Syria: Parliamentary Debate and Policy Failure**

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*By Aran M. Lewis*

Routledge, 2023, 220 pages, £120.00, ISBN: 9781003317630

*Reviewed by Recep Şehitoğlu, Gaziantep University*

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In recent years, the literature on Libya and Syria has significantly expanded. Aran M. Lewis's *Humanitarian and Military Intervention in Libya and Syria: Parliamentary Debate and Policy Failure* is valuable work in this field in terms of examining the complexities and challenges surrounding humanitarian and military interventions in the conflicts in Libya and Syria. In the book, the author discusses the parliamentary debates and policy



decisions that shaped the international response to these crises and the contradictions that emerged as a result.

The book consists of nine chapters, including an introduction and a conclusion. The methodology chosen to divide the chapters into headings and analyze them separately is influential. The author used thematic analysis, which is a qualitative data analysis system,