THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

LIVING WITH VIOLENCE: THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF RECURRENT BUDDHIST-MUSLIM VIOLENCE IN MYANMAR

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2020

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have completed this project without my friends and colleagues in Myanmar, many of whom must remain anonymous for their own protection. I am thankful to my interviewees who, whether in anger or support, agreed to share their thoughts, experiences, and their lives with a total stranger who looked nothing like them. I am especially grateful to my translators, including Min Ko Ko and Thint Myat, who braved approaching interviewees, ranging from strangers on the street to military officials and notorious nationalists, on my behalf. Their thoughts on the project, whether they were over beers, while in the car, or over email, were a vital part of the process, and I cannot thank them enough for their support. I would also like to thank the Inya Institute, who provided me a great working environment in Yangon, as well as my friends and colleagues from SEASSI.

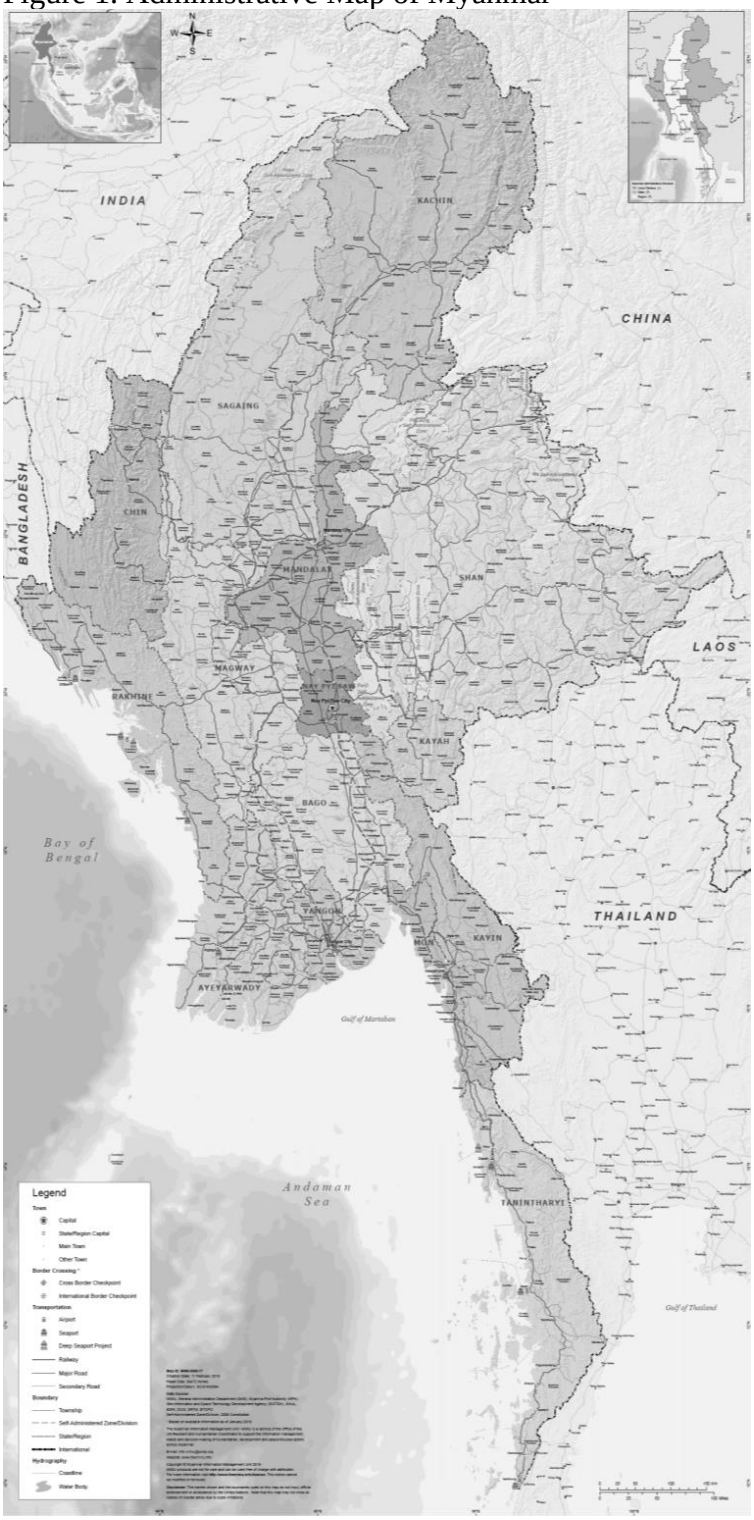
The dissertation was completed only through the support of my amazing PhD committee comprised of my committee chair, Prof. Kimberly Kay Hoang, and committee members Profs. Elisabeth Clemens, Marco Garrido, and Dan Slater. It was a privilege to work with such brilliant scholars these past few years. I would also like to thank the members of the Politics History and Society Workshop and the Inequalities Workshop at the University of Chicago, and the members and attendees of the Burma Studies Conference and the Southeast Asian Research Group, all of whose comments and feedback were vital in this process.

I would finally like to thank my brilliant wife, Vivian Yan-Gonzalez, whose inciteful comments, detailed line-edits, and constant support, carried me through this process.

ABSTRACT

Communal violence between Buddhists and Muslims has recurred in Myanmar since at least the British Colonial period in the late 19th and early 20th century. That violence has recurred under a distant colonial regime, a democratic one, a socialist one, a military junta, and has recurred in the newly elected democratic government of the past few years. This dissertation is about that recurrence. It asks why, given the vastly different historical, economic, and political contexts, this anti-Muslim violence continues to plague Myanmar. In investigating this case, the dissertation also seeks to answer a broader question about communal conflict globally: why do the same countries continue to face communal violence, while others, in similar demographic, economic, and political conditions, seem immune? The dissertation addresses this puzzle by drawing on historical data, one year of ethnographic evidence, as well as 93 interviews with government officials, religious leaders, reporters, teachers, businesspeople, students and others who are involved in instigating and responding to communal violence in two cities in central Myanmar. It finds that these communities are knowingly living in a context of violence and have developed robust institutions for responding to threats of escalating tension. People in Mandalay and Yangon are not surprised when violence seems imminent, but instead rely on their experience with conflict to see the patterns of escalation and respond accordingly. Violence recurs in these communities because it is institutionalized in the way their group boundaries are defined, the organizations that they have built, and the repertoires they rely on to act when violence seems imminent. By taking recurrence seriously, the dissertation shows that the pattern of observed violence is not due to some inherent incompatibly between the groups or an unseen mastermind manipulating the masses. Violence is built, so peace can be built in its stead.

Figure 1. Administrative Map of Myanmar



SOURCE: Myanmar Information Management Unit. *Myanmar: Administrative Map*. Feb 11, 2019. Countrywide Resources, Maps. https://themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Country_Map_Administrative_With_Sub_Region_Shan_Bago_MIMU539v17_11Feb2019_6ft-3ft.pdf.

CHAPTER 1

RECURRENT COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

1.1 Introduction

On hot summer day in Yangon, Myanmar, in 1938, over 10,000 people gathered at Shwedagon Pagoda, the holiest site of Buddhism in the country. The crowd stood on the hot marble floor, watching speeches in the shadow of the golden monument to Burmese Buddhism. The crowd was made up of Buddhist monks, lay people, students, reporters, and others. On a makeshift stage at the front of the crowd, a Buddhist monk stood at a podium as he delivered a passionate speech on the injustices his community was facing. His people were being exterminated, he claimed, by a foreign infiltrator who was stealing their riches and destroying their families. He demanded changes. The British colonial government needed to act to protect its people, lest the genocide conclude in the death of Buddhism. The enemy was clear: Muslims. They were taking advantage of poor and ignorant Buddhist women, either marrying them and forcing them to convert to their foreign religion or not marrying them at all and leaving them penniless when the foreigners returned to their wives in India. Something had to be done. The colonial government seemed deaf to their demands, so they would have to take matters into their own hands. Together, the crowd of thousands marched through the nearest Muslim neighborhood, igniting communal violence that engulfed the country for months.

A decade later in Western Myanmar, Muslim and Buddhist neighbors wielded British and Japanese rifles as they attacked each other, killing neighbors and destroying generations of homes and businesses. The British promised independence, and the Japanese freedom from European tyranny. The Muslims of Rakhine saw an opportunity in the pledge from the British:

official independence from Myanmar. The Buddhists instead saw foreigners helping foreigners, with the Japanese coming to the aid of their co-ethnics against the Western menace. Buddhists and Muslims killed neighbors and friends, each holding on to their doomed promises made by foreign powers who had no intention of keeping their promises. The fighting segregated their communities across the state, pushing Muslims north along the border with Bangladesh and Buddhists southward. When independence came years later, Rakhine was subsumed into the new federalist country. It wasn't long before civil war broke out in Rakhine and elsewhere, as the broken promises of the past echoed through generations of war that continue to this day. Rakhine Muslim and Buddhist revolutionaries have led their own wars against the Bamar central government, neither succeeding in their ultimate goal of self-determination.

…

A half-century after the British left Myanmar, in 2003, a Buddhist monk handed out fliers in Mandalay that called for Buddhists to wake up and recognize the threat posed by the foreign enemy in their midst: Muslims. These vile individuals had overstayed their welcome and had to be dealt with now before it was too late. They seduced good Buddhist women, converting them to Islam or beat them into submission as the women took any opportunity to flee to monasteries, making small donations in the shadows. The monk called for a boycott of Muslim owned businesses, and for legislative action that would control the Muslim threat once and for all. Days later, the monk watched as communal violence broke out in the city, leaving neighborhoods in ruin. After 8 years in prison the monk, U Wirathu, was released early from his 20-year sentence. A year later, in 2012, after communal violence in Rakhine State left hundreds dead, the monk saw his work grow to a country-wide nationalist movement. People everywhere were using stickers of his logo to identify Buddhist-owned businesses, encouraging a segregated economy

that left the minority Muslim businesses in ruins. In 2014, the legislature caved to demands by this monk and his peers, passing laws that restricted inter-religious marriage, required government approval for religious conversion, and gave the government the ability to control the birth rate of minorities.

A few years later, in 2017, as the Bamar in central Myanmar celebrated the democratic victory of Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party, a group of Muslim guerrillas attacked the border of Myanmar and Bangladesh, demanding the independence promised to their people decades earlier. Instead, the Bamar Military machine, honed by decades of civil war, responded decisively by destroying entire villages to seek out the hidden revolutionaries. Hundreds of thousands of people fled as children were executed, homes were burned with families locked inside, and women were raped in front of their husbands, parents, and children. Over the next year almost the entire Muslim population of the Rakhine State would flee to Bangladesh, where previous generations of refugees had set up camps with longer histories than some cities. The refugees continue to live in these make-shift cities, refusing to return to a country that has repeatedly attacked people who look like them and their families. Instead of supporting their plight, the newly elected government of Myanmar has instead protected their age-old enemies, the military, emphasizing the foreignness of these Muslims and their alleged terrorism.

…

The history of Buddhist-Muslim relations in Myanmar is replete with incidents of violence like these, and they continue to occur to this day.[1] The governments change, the

[1] See Appendix A for a list of all incidents of Buddhist-Muslim violence since the 19th century.

economic conditions vary, new technology is developed, but Buddhist-Muslim violence continues to recur. This dissertation is about that recurrence. It asks why, given the vastly different historical contexts, this anti-Muslim violence continues to plague Myanmar. In asking these questions, the dissertation also seeks to answer a broader question about communal conflict: why do the same countries continue to face communal violence, while others, in similar economic and political conditions, seem immune? To answer these questions the dissertation investigates violence, but it also investigates that far more common phenomena: communal peace. It argues that violence and peace are interrelated, and that to understand one we need to understand the other. The dissertation thus focuses on patterns of conflict, asking why violence occurs in some places and times while peace in others. In the process of addressing these questions, the dissertation will confront difficult ethical and theoretical problems. Discussing recurrence itself seems to reify the conflict, making it appear intractable and inevitable. The point, however, is quite the opposite. By taking recurrence seriously and understanding why violence happens in spaces with a history of violence, we can come closer to understanding the mechanisms of communal violence and thus prevent its recurrence.

1.2 Studying Recurrent Communal Violence

If we look to patterns of communal violence across the globe, we see that the highest rates of inter-group violence happen in the same countries; places like Nigeria, Sudan, India and Myanmar. In fact, 10 countries account for nearly 80% of all cases of inter-group violence

between 1989 and 2018.[2] Nigeria, for example, has seen over 100 cases of inter-group violence in that period. In Myanmar, Buddhist-Muslim violence has recurred since at least 1885. While scholars have previously recognized this pattern of recurrent violence, it has been under-theorized. Past conflict, for example, appears as one of the most common control variables in influential quantitative scholarship on the topic, often explaining much of the statistical variance.[3] Qualitative scholarship generally includes a discussion of past conflict as well, attributing it some causal power.[4] While this pattern is widely recognized, however, the mechanisms of communal conflict recurrence, and its consequences, are still largely unknown.

Scholars have generally been content to focus on factors that explain specific incidents of ethnic conflict, attributing the importance of past conflict to the influence of these same factors. Ted Gurr, the author of the modern grievances model, for example, focused his analysis on economic and political grievances even though the strongest predictor in his statistical models was past conflict.[5] He did so because he believed that past cases of conflict had, at their origin, some other grievances. However, as this dissertation will show, recurrent communal violence has

[2] Ralph Sundberg and Erik Melander, *UCDP Non-State Conflict Dataset*, V19.1 (Accessed August 29, 2019), distributed by Uppsala University, https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/#d7; Ralph Sundberg, Kristine Eck, and Joakim Kreutz, "Introducing the UCDP Non-State Conflict Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* 49, no. 2 (2012): 351–62; Therése Pettersson, Stina Högbladh, and Magnus Öberg, "Organized Violence, 1989–2018 and Peace Agreements," *Journal of Peace Research* 56, no. 4 (2019): 589–603.

[3] Daniel J. Myers, "Racial Rioting in the 1960s: An Event History Analysis of Local Conditions," *American Sociological Review* 62, no. 1 (1997): 94; James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Explaining Interethnic Cooperation," *American Political Science Review* 90, 04 (1996): 715–35; Ted R. Gurr, "Why Minorities Rebel: A Global Analysis of Communal Mobilization and Conflict Since 1945," *International Political Science Review* 14, no. 2 (1993): 161–201; Susan Olzak, *The Dynamics of Ethnic Competition and Conflict* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

[4] Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Paul R. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003).

[5] Gurr, "Why Minorities Rebel."

important consequences for the form and likelihood of communal violence that go beyond factors that explain specific incidents. The manuscript is centered on the observation that people who live in communities where violence recurs have learned when violence is likely to happen, and the form it is likely to take; they draw on their past experiences to predict conflict, and they prepare accordingly. This seemingly obvious observation challenges the way that we usually approach the study of communal violence.

If we study cases of communal violence as unique incidents, whether that be through a comparative study of cases across countries or as quantified "incidents" or "onsets" of violence, we cannot help but miss the relationship between any one incident and the incidents that informed the behavior and beliefs of the participant actors. People are in fact not spurred to violence in defense of their ideals anew every time, nor are they duped again and again by those who would manipulate them for their political or economic gains. Studying recurrence rather than incidents opens our eyes to a deeper and incredibly common process of learning in the face of violence. By studying incidents individually, we miss the way that people's personal experiences with past conflict change their beliefs and their behaviors, and we also miss all the cases where the community successfully dealt with potentially violent incidents, stopping them from occurring at all. In short, studying communal violence as incidents has blinded the academic literature to the far more important phenomena: the pattern of communal conflict.

How does one go about studying the pattern of communal conflict? Ideally this would be done over long periods of time. We would observe a community where communal violence has historically recurred, tracking any cases of actual violence but also those cases where communities were able to stop violence from happening even when it seemed imminent, and the time where violence was not threatened at all. Observing this pattern of violence, prevented

violence, and non-violence would give us a better idea of what predicts each kind of situation and how peace is made to last. This dissertation takes a step in this direction by using ethnographic and interview data of two cities in central Myanmar with varying histories of communal violence. It draws on archival data, over one year of ethnographic evidence, as well as 93 interviews with government officials, religious leaders, local leaders, teachers, journalists, businesspeople, students, and residents as they confronted the tension in their communities and, in some cases, dealt with escalating communal violence. We will observe the way those who have been accused of fomenting violence understand their behavior, and how their strategies have evolved over time. We will also see that there is a large group of organizations and individuals combating the actions of these instigators, responding to their attempts by developing their own counterstrategies in order to prevent violence. The dissertation will show how these actors learn what conflict looks like and respond when the same patterns recur in the future. We will see how religious leaders call for justice, how residents respond to violence in their streets, and government officials and civic leaders try to stop the escalating violence. In short, the dissertation will show how people living with violence cope with conflict, and how those strategies contribute to the pattern of communal violence, prevention, and peace that we observe.

1.3 Defining Communal Conflict and Communal Violence

This dissertation presents an analysis of the pattern of communal conflict in Myanmar with the goal of theorizing the impact of past incidents of violence on the form and likelihood of conflict. While “conflict” and “violence” are sometimes used interchangeably in everyday parlance, there are important nuances to these concepts that can help us better conceptualize our object of study. Communal conflict will be understood here as the broader category, including

cases that turn to violence but also ones that are prevented from escalating. We treat violence and violence-prevention together under the umbrella of "conflict" because theoretically, these two types of incidents share many characteristics. Specifically, the causal attributes that lead to violence in one case are also in place in cases of prevented violence. Widespread economic inequality coupled with a rising nationalist movement, for example, may exist in both an incident where violence occurred and in one where violence was prevented. The crucial difference between the two is in the prevented case, where, by definition, something intervened that stopped the conflict from escalating to violence.

Defining Communal Violence

Communal violence, sometimes called ethnic riots, is a form of violence distinct from other forms of violence because of its "communal", or ethnic, character. Communal violence is thus distinct from other forms of collective violence that lack an ethnic component, such as non-ethnic violence or gang violence. As opposed to some of the more quantitative studies on the topic, communal violence is understood here to include incidents where no individuals were killed. Communal violence thus refers to incidents of violence where groups, identified by ethnic characteristics, attacked each other's bodies or property, resulting in death, wounding, or infrastructure damage. Communal violence is, however, still treated as a form of violence, and is thus different from ethnically framed tension, protest, legal action etc. Communal violence, as understood here, also excludes ethnic or civil war, and any other form of violence that includes, as one of the groups, the state or government. The state or government can be, and often is, involved in cases of communal violence, either as instigators/participants or in attempting to quell violence, but the state is not, by definition, one of the two 'groups' in conflict.

Communal violence is further distinct from collective violence that targets specific individuals. The analysis is not meant to be applied to cases of lynching, for example, and similarly targeted forms of violence, even if they are motivated by ethnic categories. Communal violence is violence against individuals not for anything they've done, but as representatives of their ethnic categories. Individuals in these cases are targets because they can serve as "vicarious retribution" for some offense that their representative group is supposed to have committed.[6] In many cases, specific crimes or what are perceived to be as affronts are the spark for communal violence, but the targets in such incidents go far beyond the individuals who were allegedly culpable. The kind of violence under scrutiny here is taken as analytically identical to other cases of communal violence such as the endemic Hindu-Muslim violence in India and the Christian-Muslim violence in Indonesia after the fall of the Suharto regime.[7]

The term "riot" is not used in this dissertation, although it is often used in scholarship to refer to the same phenomenon, because it carries with it a criminal connotation.[8] As expertly explained by Paul Brass, riots are riots because they are labeled as such by elites, media, and the state in order to imply criminality and irrationality.[9] To analyze an "ethnic riot" therefore implies adopting elite and government definitions of the incident, while governments and elites have

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[6] Brian Lickel, Norman Miller, Douglas M. Stenstrom, Thomas F. Denson, and Toni Schmader, "Vicarious Retribution: The Role of Collective Blame in Intergroup Aggression," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 10, no. 4 (November 2006): 372–90.
[7] Steven I. Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civil Life*; Brass, *The Production of Hindu Muslim Violence*; Yuhki Tajima, *The Institutional Origins of Communal Violence: Indonesia's Transition from Authoritarian Rule* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Gerry van Klinken, *Communal Violence and Democratization in Indonesia: Small Town Wars* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007).
[8] Much of the scholarship on communal violence in the United States, for example, uses the term "race riot" to refer to violence between Whites and Blacks between the 1960s and 1990s.
[9] Brass, *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

vested interests in whether or not cases are labeled as such. Like the term "terrorism," calling something a "riot" allows the state to take action and provides justification for brutal force against supposedly deserving criminals. By analyzing cases as "riots" we are therefore reproducing a particular narrative of the conflict. Although it does not entirely fix the problem, analyzing the phenomenon as "communal violence" instead of "riot" encourages a broader analysis, with space for a discussion of decision making, organized mobilization, and the involvement of politicians and elites.

As a final definitional point, it is important to remember that although communal violence is often performed by members of a majority group against a minority, this is not necessarily the case.[10] This is true for Myanmar, where the vast majority of the population are Buddhists; according to the most recent census from 2014, Buddhists make up 89.8% of the country's population, while Muslims are 2.3% of the population. Given these vast demographic differences, Muslims are usually the victims in cases of communal violence, with Buddhists being the perpetrators. When communal violence occurs, Muslims tend to suffer more casualties and more Muslim infrastructure is destroyed. This does not necessarily mean that Buddhists are always the instigators, but it does mean that Muslims are almost always at a severe disadvantage in terms of sheer numbers. Furthermore, as is the case with violence generally, incidents of communal violence are rarely an equally matched affair but are instead performed by a large group against smaller groups or individuals.[11]

[10] Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000).
[11] Randall Collins, *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

The "communal" aspect of communal conflict

While this dissertation will discuss ethnic identity over time, connecting today's ethnic group identities to ones from a distant past, this does not mean that ethnicity is understood here as primordial or fixed. Scholars have been reluctant to theorize the recurrence of communal violence because it seems to imply that the pattern of violence exists out of history and is due to some "ancient hatred" or "inherent evil" in the groups involved. Indeed, those who wish to instigate violence often draw on framing that connects old conflict to new conflict as a way of convincing their audience that the "other" is inherently dangerous or violent. Extremists in the case of Myanmar, for example, suggest that Muslims have been taking advantage of Buddhists and seeking their destruction since they first arrived in the country, and that Buddhists must finally rise to defend themselves. Studying recurrence runs the risk of essentializing conflict and may inadvertently contribute to further violence by legitimizing such positions. As Matt Schissler, Matthew J. Walton and Phyu Phyu Thi have argued, "Discourse about violence in Myanmar can contribute to the mobilisation of that violence and scholars who write about Myanmar must consider the relationships between what they write and the production of violence."[12] While we must be careful not to essentialize the conflict, however, we must accept that it does recur. Analyzing this recurrence requires a careful conceptualization of ethnicity that can accept the malleability of ethnicity while also recognizing the stickiness of the past.

The essentialist implication of studying communal violence recurrence is tied to its entanglement with the notion that the "groups" in conflict, in this case Buddhists and Muslims, are the same across time. If the conflict is connected, so the logic goes, then the groups involved

[12] Schissler, Walton, and Thi, "Reconciling Contradictions: Buddhist-Muslim Violence, Narrative Making and Memory in Myanmar," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47, no. 3 (2017): 376–95, 378.

must be assumed the same. This is known as the "primordialist" theory of ethnicity. Primordialism, in its strictest form, suggests that ethnic group identities develop based on kinship, and these identities are therefore infused with an "ineffable significance."[13] This quality is said to explain various intergroup phenomena from in-group favoritism to communal violence in defense of that identity.[14] According to primordialists, these group identities are mostly fixed over history and defined at birth for the individual, although certain conditions, such as mass literacy, can increase the likelihood of ethnic group permanence.[15] Analyzing communal violence as a recurrent phenomenon seems to require a primordialist understanding of ethnicity, but this position has been largely abandoned by social scientists in favor of "constructivism."

Constructivism, on the other hand, emphasizes the porous and varying nature of ethnic group membership.[16] Constructivists point out that ethnic identity categories vary a great deal over time and ethnicity even varies for the individual depending on the social context.[17] Ethnic identities, according to these theorists, are dependent entirely on contextualized group dynamics.

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[13] Edward Shils, "Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties: Some Particular Observations on the Relationships of Sociological Research and Theory," *The British Journal of Sociology* 8, no. 2 (1957): 130–45.

[14] Steven Grosby, "The Verdict of History: The Inexpungeable Tie of Primordiality - A Reply to Eller and Coughlan," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17, no. 1 (1994): 164–71.

[15] Murat Bayar, "Reconsidering Primordialism: An Alternative Approach to the Study of Ethnicity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32, no. 9 (November 2009): 1639–57; Stephen Van Evera, "Primordialism Lives!," *Newsletter of the Organized Section in Comparative Politics of the American Political Science Association* 12, no. 1 (2001): 20–22.

[16] Constructivism is sometimes referred to as "circumstantialism" or "instrumentalism" in different scholarly literatures. Although the terms have different emphases, such as the utility of ethnic group identity as implied in instrumentalism, they all share the same foundational understanding of ethnic identity as deeply malleable.

[17] Jack David Eller and Reed M. Coughlan, "The Poverty of Primordialism: The Demystification of Ethnic Attachments," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 16, no. 2 (1993): 183–202; Edmund Leech, *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure* (London: London School of Economics, 1964).

In its strictest form constructivist theories of ethnicity define a member of an ethnic group as one that fulfills "the conditions for being referred to by the linguistic expression that names the identity."[18] In other words, the only requirement for being part of an ethnic group is being identified as part of that group. Constructivist theories vary a great deal, but Brubaker's emphasis on ethnicity as a "perspective on the world" instead of "things in the world" is the most influential in the social sciences.[19] By this logic, referred to as a "cognitive turn" in the study of ethnicity, ethnic conflict is ethnic only in so far as it is "ethnically framed," and is otherwise similar to non-ethnic kinds of violence. [20] Studying ethnic conflict as a conflict between two "groups" mistakenly categorizes people by a socially and contextually determined ascriptive identity, contributing to a myth of "groupness" that flattens important questions about the agency and actions of individual members of these "groups."[21]

If we accept the constructivist position, as most contemporary scholars do, and understand ethnic identities as malleable and constantly shifting, then the pattern of recurrent communal violence cannot be easily analyzed as a conflict between two "groups." The constructivist position instead pushes us to analyze each case of conflict independently by considering the role of constructions of ethnic identity in that specific context.[22] Indeed, this is precisely the intuition behind the caution emphasized by Schissler et. al.[23] If we compare two

[18] Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Waveland Press, 1969), 21.
[19] Rogers Brubaker, "Ethnicity, Race, and Nationalism," *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (2009): 21–42, 32.
[20] Rogers Brubaker, Mara Loveman, and Peter Stamatov, "Ethnicity as Cognition," *Theory and Society* 33, no. 1 (2004): 31–64.
[21] Brubaker, Rogers. "Ethnicity without Groups." *European Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 2 (2002): 163–189.
[22] Rogers Brubaker, "Religious Dimensions of Political Conflict and Violence." *Sociological Theory* 33, no. 1 (2015): 1–19.
[23] Schissler et al, "Reconciling Contradictions."

conflicts across different periods of time, especially ones as far apart as those studied in this dissertation, we run the risk of implying that the "groups" we are discussing are the same today as they were in the early 20th century. As we will see, however, what it means to be Buddhist and what it meant to be Muslim was very different in the age of British colonialism than it is in contemporary Myanmar. Thus, directly connecting conflict in the 1930s to contemporary conflict is insincere, if not dangerous. So how are we to reconcile these positions?

The most promising avenue for reconciliation is a theory that recognizes the relative fixity of ethnic group identity over time but can explain that fixity through contextualized group dynamics. A theory that does this well, while sometimes cited as opposed to these two theories, is institutionalism.[24] Institutionalist theories of ethnicity argue that ethnic group categories are made meaningful when they are institutionalized in politics, the economy, and culture. Lieberman and Singh, for example, argue that a government's use of ethnic categories across political institutions lays the foundation for conflicts over status and power.[25] In their study of 11 African countries, these authors find that ethnic conflicts occur when political institutions are developed along ethnic lines.[26] A similar case can be made for violence in India, where ethnically identified parties, because they are communally defined, vie for power by mobilizing different ethnic categories.[27] Charles Tilly makes a similar argument about the institutional

[24] Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*.
[25] Evan S. Lieberman and Prerna Singh, "The Institutional Origins of Ethnic Violence," *Comparative Politics* 45, no. 1 (2012); Evan S. Lieberman and Prerna Singh. "Conceptualizing and Measuring Ethnic Politics: An Institutional Complement to Demographic, Behavioral, and Cognitive Approaches," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 47, no. 3 (2012): 255–86.
[26] Lieberman and Singh, "The Institutional Origins."
[27] Stanley J. Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996).

origins of inequality, suggesting that differences in resources across groups are durable because they are formally institutionalized in politics, the economy, and law.[28] Economic differences are entrenched, for example, through segregation in the labor market. Institutional theory of ethnic identity is an important development for communal violence studies because it emphasizes the dual nature of group formation: its fixity, and its flexibility. Ethnic group differences are institutionalized, but these institutions can be changed.

In Myanmar, what it means to be Buddhist and what it means to be Muslim is different in different parts of the country and has changed over the years. That said, there are certain beliefs that connect Buddhism and Islam over time; the institutional structure of these religions has crystalized what it means, at least officially, to be Buddhist or Muslim.[29] In other words, while these institutionalized religions can and do change over time, this is a history that can be traced and studied.[30] The Buddhist sangha, for example, has undergone various changes throughout Myanmar's history as government-sanctioned Sasana Reforms determined what branches of Buddhism were considered official and which were perversions.[31] Likewise, the branches of

[28] Charles Tilly, *Durable Inequality*, (University of California Press, 1998).
[29] While religion is usually treated in scholarship as a sub-set within ethnicity, there are important differences that make institutionalism a better fit for religious violence than for other forms of ethnic conflict. Religions are generally more institutionalized than are ethnic group identities; they have specific leadership structures, sets of agreed upon beliefs, and they have spaces and resources that aid mobilization. While the line between religion and ethnicity is fuzzy, with many characteristics being shared by both, the more common institutionalization of religion makes the study of these identities over time far easier than for racial or ethnic groups.
[30] Matthew J. Walton, *Buddhism, Politics and Political Thought in Myanmar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Melissa Crouch, *Islam and the State in Myanmar: Muslim-Buddhist Relations and the Politics of Belonging* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016); Melissa Crouch, "Constructing Religion by Law in Myanmar," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 13, no. 4 (2015): 1–11.
[31] Tin Maung Maung Than, "Sangha Reforms and Renewal of Sasana in Myanmar: Historical Trends and Contemporary Practice," in *Buddhist Trends in Southeast Asia*, ed. Trevor Ling (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993).

Islam that are recognized by the Burmese government are institutionalized through the official sanctioning of five Muslim organizations recognized by the Burmese government.[32] Observing how public actors, and especially the government, define groups through such actions allows us to come close to observing changes over time. Public and sanctioned versions of a religion or ethnic group can only get us so far, however, since these rarely coincide with how members of these groups see themselves and others on the ground.[33]

1.4 The Causes of Communal Violence

The scholarship on communal violence itself is interdisciplinary with work by sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists, historians, economists, psychologists, international studies scholars, peace studies scholars, and others. This literature is also global with theories developing out of cases in North America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Theories of communal violence reflect this breadth, encompassing a wide variety of interests and methodologies. This variety makes collation difficult, as each discipline and topical focus has their own definitions for communal violence and methods for analyzing these cases. Despite these complications, theories of communal violence can be broadly divided into two methodological clusters. The first considers communal violence from a structural level, analyzing the conditions that make communal violence more likely to occur. These studies often overlap with studies of other violent phenomena, including ethnic civil war, genocide, and revolutions. The second analyzes communal violence at a processual level, focusing instead on the way that communal violence occurs. This latter group is championed by scholars with

[32] Crouch, *Islam and the State.*
[33] Leech, *Political Systems*.

connections to the social movement literature and a focus on collective action, thus overlapping with the theoretical work of scholars studying non-violent phenomena like protests. While theorists from both clusters have included the notion of recurrent violence in their work, none have adequately theorized the mechanisms that lead to recurrence, nor its consequences. Studying communal violence recurrence further allows us to theorize the relationship between these two clusters, connecting broader structural conditions to incidents of conflict, over time.

Structural Explanations for Communal Violence

Scholars who focus on the structural conditions that make communal violence more likely generally begin from the assumption that communal violence is form of collective action that is rational and tied to minority grievances. The focus for this cluster is on the interests of the participants, and how different confluences of these interests predict different forms of ethnic conflict. Those who take part in communal violence do so not because they are irrationally caught up in some "mob mentality," but instead do so out of frustration with some perceived or actual injustice. In his influential analysis of the general determinants of global ethnic conflict, Ted Gurr[34] found that an ethnic group's political and economic grievances are the most important determinants for ethnic conflict, after controlling for previous violence. Although contemporary scholarship has turned away from a focus on grievances and instead turned to theories that focus on mobilization, the structural conditions that make up the reasons for minority grievance remain important predictors in large-scale quantitative scholarship, and in analyses outside of academia. Ultimately, while structural conditions such as the nature of

[34] Gurr, *Why Minorities Rebel*.

government and the state of the economy undoubtedly play a role in explaining the circumstances of violence, they fail to explain the powerful explanatory power of past conflict.

Economic concerns in particular have been a focus of communal violence research for as long as the topic has been of interest. The poor, uneducated, and unemployed are found to be the most likely to engage in this violence, and the violence is generally seen to occur more often when economic conditions are worse.[35] While there is disagreement over why this is the case, the mechanism connecting economic grievances to communal violence is generally articulated as competition: communal violence is thought to be the outcome of the tension arising from increased competition for limited resources. Susan Olzak's influential work on race riots in the United States, for example, suggests that the riots followed increased competition between whites and blacks due to the de-segregation of the economy.[36] In their study of post-independence India, Anirban Mitra and Debraj Ray similarly found that increasing wages in the Muslim minority communities increased violence overall, suggesting that violence followed rising competition between Muslims and Hindus.[37]

Apart from economic conditions, the other primary focus for studies of ethnic conflict at the structural level is the structure and character of government. The logic here generally follows studies of civil war which suggest that ethnic minorities are more likely to revolt when their

[35] Anjali Thomas Bohlken and Ernest John Sergenti, "Economic Growth and Ethnic Violence: An Empirical Investigation of Hindu—Muslim Riots in India," *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 5 (2010): 589–600.
[36] Susan Olzak and Suzanne Shanahan, "Deprivation and Race Riots: An Extension of Spilerman's Analysis." *Social Forces* 74, no. 3 (1996): 931–61.; Olzak, *The Dynamics of Ethnic*.
[37] Mitra and Ray, "Implications of an Economic Theory of Conflict: Hindu-Muslim Violence in India," *Journal of Political Economy* 122, no. 4 (2014): 719–65.

interests are not addressed or when they are not represented in government.[38] Arend Ljphart's now classic study on the relationship between democratic systems and ethnic conflict, for example, identified parliamentary and federalist systems as the least likely to experience ethnic conflict as they are best able to include minority voices in the decision-making process.[39] This finding has been developed further by the work of scholars like Andreas Wimmer, Lars-Erik Cederman, and Brian Min, who argue that different levels of political inclusion are related to specific forms of unrest.[40] Rebellion, for example, is identified as more likely when minorities are excluded from government, while government in-fighting is more likely if several ethnic groups share political power. Beyond political exclusion, political structure has also been tied to ethnic violence through the mechanism of political opportunity, which will be discussed more fully below. Certain political structures and related political events, such as elections, provide opportunities for uniquely effective outcomes of collective action.

Theories of the Mobilization and the Process of Violence

As opposed to structural theories of communal violence, the processual cluster of theories focuses instead on the way that communal violence happens, placing more attention on explaining why violence happens at a particular time and in a particular place within a country. The processual literature on communal violence can be broadly dived into two general theories: elite manipulation, and inter-group contact. Elite manipulation theories of communal violence

[38] Andreas Wimmer, Lars-Erik Cederman, and Brian Min, "Ethnic Politics and Armed Conflict: A Configurational Analysis of a New Global Data Set," *American Sociological Review* 74, no. 2 (2009): 316–337.
[39] Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).
[40] Wimmer, Cederman and Min, "Ethnic Politics and Armed Conflict."

suggest that political elites mobilize large groups of people using ethnic symbols as a means of achieving their ends, and that this manipulation can lead to communal violence or ethnic war by encouraging ultra-nationalism or the actual targeting of opposing groups.[41] Inter-group contact theories, on the other hand, argue that communal violence is the outcome of the relationship between members of the groups, with certain arrangements such as segregation or inequality creating situations where violence is more likely.[42] While both of these sets of theories have found support, they are generally unsatisfactory for explaining recurrent incidents of violence. Elite manipulation theories ignore the relationship between members of different groups, arguing, contrary to patterns of recurrent communal violence, that politicians can spark violence anywhere they see fit.[43] Inter-group contact theories, on the other hand, ignore the large amount of evidence that politicians and elites are often involved in sparking violence, and that this process is learned and developed over time.[44]

The political manipulation literature focuses on the incentives of political elites, arguing that violence is the outcome of either their direct involvement in fomenting conflict or in their lack of intervention in preventing violence. This literature begins from the observation that while

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[41] Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence*; Paul Brass, ed. *Riots and Pogroms* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence*; Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, "Democratic Transitions, Institutional Strength, and War," *International Organization* 56, no. 2 (2002): 297–338; Veena Das, "Privileging the Local: The 1984 Riots," *Seminar* 425 (1995): 97–102.

[42] Ravi Bhavnani, Karsten Donnay, Dan Miodownik, Maayan Mor, and Dirk Helbing, "Group Segregation and Urban Violence," *American Journal of Political Science* 58, no. 1 (2014): 226–45; Jeffrey S. Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg, "Deadly Communities: Local Political Milieus and the Persecution of Jews in Occupied Poland," *Comparative Political Studies* 44, no. 3 (2011): 259–83; Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*.

[43] Susan Olzak, Suzanne Shanahan, and Elizabeth H. McEneaney, "Poverty, Segregation, and Race Riots: 1960 to 1993," *American Sociological Review* 61, no. 4 (August 1996): 590-613; Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence*.

[44] Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence*.

ethnic antagonisms and inter-group grievances can create tension between two groups, these characteristics are far too common to explain the rare cases of inter-group violence. Antagonisms alone cannot explain violence, but they instead must be activated by charismatic leaders in order to be effective. The focus in this literature is generally on political elites who have the most power in inciting or quelling violence. The work of Jack Snyder, for example, mobilizes this logic to argue that ethnic conflict follows periods of democratization because political elites in these contexts have strong incentives to use nationalistic language in order to garner votes.[45] Similarly, Steven I. Wilkinson's work in India showed how incumbent politicians are incentivized not to intervene in some cases of communal violence because this violence could help them garner votes during upcoming elections.[46] Gerry van Klinken's work in Indonesia found similar patterns at the local level, where low-level politicians decided whether to get involved in incidents of violence depending on the economic and political benefits that they could gain.[47] While there is substantial evidence for the role of political elites in inciting conflict, however, these theories over-emphasize the power of these elites to control where violence occurs.[48] By focusing only on positive cases of violence, these theories miss the important role of factors that inhibit communal violence from occurring, even when political elites may want to incite violence.[49]

[45] Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000); Mansfield and Snyder, "Democratic Transitions."
[46] Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence*.; Wilkinson, *Riots*.
[47] van Klinken, *Communal Violence and Democratization.*
[48] For Varshney's argument with Wilkinson on this point, see Ashutosh Varshney and Joshua R. Gubler, "Does the State Promote Communal Violence for Electoral Reasons?," *India Review* 11, no. 3 (July 1, 2012): 191–99; Steven I. Wilkinson, "Electoral Competition, the State, and Communal Violence: A Reply," *India Review* 12, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 92–107.
[49] Ibid

The inter-group contact literature, on the other hand, draws on the influential work of social psychologist Gordon Allport, whose theory of prejudice and discrimination based on group contact has led to decades of research on the influence of contact between people of different groups and the development of negative and positive stereotypes.[50] Similar theories have developed in sociology, particularly focusing on the relationship between segregation and discrimination.[51] This body of scholarship explains communal violence as a consequence of social distance, defined as minimal or unequal contact between members of different groups. Ravi Bhavnani and their coauthors, for example, used an agent-based model to analyze the patterns of violence in Jerusalem between 2001 and 2009, finding that both spatial proximity to people from the other ethnic group and the groups' social distance best explains where violence occurred.[52] Ashutosh Varshey's influential work on communal violence in India uses this logic as well, suggesting that when a city or town has a history of inter-group organizations and contact between the two groups is high, violence is unlikely. According to Varshney, strong inter-group organizations and the absence of job-segregation by ethnicity allow members of different groups to manage individual-level conflicts.[53] Similar theories, like that of Fearon and Laitin, emphasize the importance of inter-group contact at the institutional level, as through community leaders, for the prevention of violence.[54]

[50] Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1954).
[51] Bhavnani et al, "Group Segregation and Urban Violence"; Kopstein and Wittenberg, "Deadly Communities.
[52] Bhavnani et al, "Group Segregation and Urban Violence."
[53] Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*.
[54] Fearon and Laitin, "Explaining Interethnic Cooperation."

1.5 Institutionalized Systems of Communal Conflict

This dissertation will argue that in order to understand any one case of communal violence we need to understand its place in the broader pattern of communal conflict. Communal violence tends to recur in the same communities, allowing the actors involved to learn patterns of behavior and respond accordingly. Furthermore, communal violence is not ignited suddenly and without warning but is instead telegraphed by periods of tension and expectation. Often, this allows communal violence to be prevented; local government officials or civil society leaders come together to organize neighborhood watch systems, early warning networks, and encourage everyone to stay at home, thus preventing violence from escalating. Communal violence is thus not completely new or unexpected every time but is instead part of a broader pattern that is only obvious to those who live in that community. The consequences of this for the study of communal violence are substantial. Rather than looking to each case of violence individually, we should be focusing on how patterns of communal conflict establish the beliefs, organizations, and strategies that define the form and likelihood of recurring violence. In other words, we should be looking at the institutions that are developed in such spaces, and the ways that these institutions shape patterns of conflict.

The literature on institutionalized systems related to communal violence has focused on systems developed either to ignite violence or to prevent it from escalating. Paul Brass' work on such systems in India, for example, focuses on the role of political elites in creating networks of people who know how to ignite communal violence in order to effect changes in local elections.[55] In contrast, Varshney's work identified the systems of communal violence

[55] Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence*.

prevention, where local leaders coordinate peacekeeping groups and share information, that are in place in many peaceful cities in India.[56] Although both systems have been identified in countries with recurrent cases of communal violence, they are generally taken as alternative theories for explaining that distribution of communal violence. Thus, the relationship between these systems is rarely, if ever, discussed. As we will see in this dissertation, spaces with a history of recurrent communal violence in fact have both "systems" in place. Some politicians and organizations do coordinate to instigate violence at opportune moments, but they do not do so in a vacuum; there are other politicians, community leaders, and residents who mobilize peacekeeping efforts to prevent their attempts at escalation. Thus, while Varshney and Brass identified important systems in place in such spaces, they each missed the key element that helps explain the broader patterns of violence: these systems are built together and are part of a broader pattern of institutionalization based on conflict. Actors in these spaces learn what violence looks like and they develop narratives, organizations, and strategies around those lessons. They know, for example, that rumors of rape can lead to violence or that allegations of illegal business practices by Muslims will cause a certain response. These lessons are tested in every new case of conflict, evolving based on new experiences, and laying the foundation for how future conflict will be understood.

This dissertation provides a close analysis of the people and organizations that shape the way communal conflict happens. While providing conceptual support for our analyses of communal violence, the language of communal violence production and prevention creates the illusion of a simple story that is supposed to repeat in every case: there are nefarious figures that want violence to occur, and honest, diverse, communities that work to stop them. In fact, the

[56] Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*.

story is more complicated. The nefarious figures may honestly believe that the other they are targeting is a threat to their lives, and that their actions are only meant to bring them to justice. In fact, violence may not be the goal at all. On the other side, interfaith organizations touted as protectors of the people may in fact contribute little during actual cases of violence. Their work may focus more on developing the relationship between communities, rather than acting when violence is imminent. While the dissertation does rely on the conceptual categories of the "institutionalized peace system" and the "institutionalized riot system," it is important to remember that these are ideal typical categories. The actors that are affiliated with each system vary in how well they fit into the categories. The goal of our study is not necessarily to decide who is part of each but is instead to understand the mechanisms by which the patterns of conflict develop, and the institutions that are established as it recurs. The dissertation identifies three such mechanisms: (1) the institutionalization of group boundaries, (2) the institutionalization of networks, associations, and formal structures that are meant to respond to conflict, and (3) the institutionalization of repertoires that explain the conflict and outline the correct behavior in response to conflict.

Recurrent violence makes groups

Communal violence brightens group boundaries, making them especially salient as communities decide who is one of "us" and should therefore be protected, and who is one of "them" and deserving of violence. While group boundaries are affected by a variety of events, violence is uniquely unforgiving in its ability to distinguish people belonging to different "groups." This heightening of boundaries has important consequences for the way that violence happens in the moment, and for the way that instigators and peacekeepers prepare for and

respond to future cases of potential violence. The boundary work during violence identifies anyone that shares an ascriptive characteristic as a legitimate target of violence, allowing for what Brian Lickel and coauthors called the "vicarious retribution" of perceived slights to one's group.[57] This heightened moment of salient boundaries also solidifies ethnic distinctions, encouraging the institutionalization of them through, for example, narrative discourse about the conflict, legal action against supposed instigators, and the development of organizations and strategies directed toward preventing future conflict.

The intuition that group identity is affected by episodes of violence is not new, but instead can be traced to the foundational texts of the social science disciplines. In Georg Simmel's work from the early 20th century, for example, he argued that violence, and particularly war, led to internal group cohesion.[58] Simmel argued that as individuals face a common foe, they forget their differences and unite as a group. Simmel went so far as to argue that war is the origin of ethnic group cohesion.[59] Max Weber wrote about the relationship between group identity and violence as well but focused instead on the effect that violence had on shaping group identity, rather than arguing about its origin.[60] In his work on the early Jewish community, for example, Weber argued that Judaism would not have developed its priestly character, and dropped its monarchical one, were not for the pressure placed on Judah by the Assyrian and Syrian armies: "Except for the world politics of the great powers, which threatened their homeland and constituted the message of their most impressive oracles, the prophets could not have

[57] Lickel et al., "Vicarious Retribution."
[58] Georg Simmel. *Conflict: The Web of Group Affiliations* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1964).
[59] Ibid.
[60] Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1952).

emerged."[61] While Weber and Simmel dealt with the problem of ethnic conflict directly, the intuition that ethnic violence is tied to ethnic group identity formation by heightening an "us" versus "them" distinction is a long-standing theory in the social sciences and appears in the seminal works of other scholars such as Emile Durkheim, Clifford Geertz, and Mary Douglas.[62]

The contemporary scholarship on the relationship between ethnic identity and violence generally focuses on the policing of "boundaries," following the Durkheimian tradition on the relationship between ethnicity and violence. Arjun Appadurai's work, for example, argues that ethnic conflict is the consequence of the "uncertainty in social life," which is exacerbated by globalization processes that challenge the assumption of a fixed or primordial ethnic and national identity.[63] The threat of ethnic group erasure that stems from this globalization is, according to Appadurai, the primary source of contemporary ethnic nationalist violence.[64] Other work has followed this same logic, suggesting that inter-group violence arises from increasingly blurred boundaries.[65] In the United States, for example, Black-White violence can be traced to the

[61] Ibid, 268.
[62] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields, rev. ed. (New York: Free Press, [1912] 1995).; Collins, *Violence*; Clifford Geertz, *Primordial Loyalties and Standing Entities: Anthropological Reflections on the Politics of Identity* (Budapest: Collegium Budapest, Institute for Advanced Study, 1994); Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Robert M. Hayden, "Imagined Communities and Real Victims: Self-Determination and Ethnic Cleansing in Yugoslavia," *American Ethnologist* 23, no. 4 (1996): 783–801.
[63] Arjun Appadurai, "Dead Certainty: Ethnic Violence in the Era of Globalization," *Development and Change* 29, no. 4 (1998): 905–25.
[64] Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
[65] Andreas Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*; Das, "Privileging the Local"; Veena Das, "Specificities: Official Narratives, Rumour, and the Social Production of Hate," *Social Identities* 4, no. 1 (1998): 109–30.

increased tension stemming from the de-segregation of the economy, challenging existing group hierarchies.[66]

The dissertation contributes to this literature by arguing that while the threat of ethnic group erasure undoubtedly does contribute to the rise of ethnic conflict, such boundary threats are not enough to explain the general trend of recurrent communal violence. Communal violence may be a consequence of threatened group boundaries in some cases, but the mechanisms leading to threatened group identity, such as globalization, are far too common to be a proximate cause for violence.[67] Furthermore, such effects are unable to explain variation within countries or over time. If we take Myanmar as an example, the liberalization of the economy and the exposure to the international labor market in the past ten or so years have undoubtedly worried nationalists and increased tension. However, communal violence has recurred in that country since at least the British colonial period at the end of the 19th century, and has recurred throughout the democratic, socialist, and military periods of its history. While globalization can help explain some aspects of the current tension in the country, it cannot explain the general trend of recurrent violence. In order to explain recurrent communal violence, then, we need a different approach.

This dissertation argues that recurrent communal violence establishes the "rules of the game" for future cases of violence by institutionalizing ethnic cleavages and the reasons for conflict. It will show how recurrence builds "scripts" for the way that communal violence happens, establishing likely times for violence, legitimate reasons for conflict, and the various actors who have a role in this conflict. While communal violence may be the consequence of

[66] Olzak, *The Dynamics of Ethnic*.
[67] Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers*.

blurred boundaries, it also contributes to the brightening of boundaries, with associated information about the reasons for conflict and the way that violence happens.

Networks and Associations

Recurrent communal violence establishes the means by which communities mobilize in preparation for conflict. This preparation is centered on the development of associations and networks, both formal and informal, that can support mobilization. Nationalist organizations, for example, developed in response to communal violence in Myanmar, India, and Indonesia, providing an important source for mobilization in future cases of conflict.[68] Similarly, communities develop associations and networks for the prevention of communal violence such as temporary peacekeeping groups or interfaith organizations.[69] The character of the associations and networks that are established after incidents of violence have important consequences for the form and likelihood of future communal violence. These preparations affect the likelihood of conflict by increasing the mobilization capabilities of those who establish them, and the form of conflict by establishing and reinforcing specific framings, thus institutionalizing what the conflict was about and what shape future conflict will likely take.

Actors prepare for future cases of communal violence by establishing formal and informal associations that can prepare the community or be called upon when violence seems imminent. These associations are often developed with broad goals such as the protection of

[68] Matt Schissler, Matthew J. Walton, and Phyu Phyu Thi, "Threat and Virtuous Defence: Listening to Narratives of Religious Conflict in Six Myanmar Cities," *Myanmar Media and Society* Working Paper 1, no. 1 (2015); Schissler et al, "Reconciling Contradictions"; Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence*; van Klinken, *Small Town Wars*.
[69] Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*.

one's group or the reconstruction of the relationship between groups. The associations can be short-term, built primarily to respond to some threat, or they can be long-term, with more generalized goals. This includes groups intent on violence prevention such as the Peacekeeping Committee in India, as well as organizations supporting violence such as the Association for the Protection of Race and Religion in Myanmar. Associations are one of the central ways that past conflict affects future violence as they train their constituents on a particular framing of the conflict and establish strategies for how to respond when violence seems imminent.

The associations of interest here are established primarily by members of civil society, sometimes with support from members of the government or other interested actors, with goals directly related to communal violence. While scholars such as Ashutosh Varshney have focused more generally on civil society, including groups such as business associations and hobby groups, we are interested here more specifically in groups that are developed in response to incidents of communal violence.[70] While other organizations, such as inter-communal bowling groups, have a role to play in communal relations, their role is incidental to conflict. Since we are interested in the role of recurrent violence, the organizations being discussed here are ones that are established in response to real or expected conflict, and have goals specifically related to this conflict. These are associations that expect to be involved in incidents of communal violence, as either supporters or de-escalators.

The associations discussed in this dissertation will be inter-communal, involving members of several groups, and intra-communal and made up of members of only one group. Associations that encourage the escalation of violence are almost by definition intra-communal,

[70] Ibid.

but associations working for de-escalation can be either intra-communal or inter-communal, and the ethno-religious composition of these groups provides specific advantages. Inter-communal associations are in a strong position to create peace as members of different communities can collaborate to create narrative consensus around the conflict by sharing information and dispelling rumors.[71] These associations can be spaces were leaders of the various communities can meet, negotiate terms, and agree on peaceful resolution. Through such inter-group associations, groups can show solidarity and combat attempts to polarize the community. Intra-communal associations, on the other hand, can be more effective at mobilizing people, particularly if such associations are made up of majority group members. While inter-group associations may be disregarded by those who are prone to oppose the other, intra-group associations led by respect leaders in the majority community can have a strong effect on de-escalation. In his study of communal violence in India, for example, Varshney found that Hindu nationalists would in some cases work for preventing and de-escalating violence. This happened, according to Varshney, when it was in the economic interest of the nationalists to maintain that peace.[72] The associations discussed in this dissertation can also be part of broader networks of mobilization, which can connect inter-communal associations with intra-communal ones.

Besides associations, communities also develop strong networks of actors that can be called upon in cases of potential communal violence. Those who wish to instigate violence can develop networks of instigators or "riot professionals," as identified by Paul Brass, while those who wish to de-escalate conflict can develop similarly effective networks of counter-riot professionals, or peacekeepers.[73] In the case of the latter, peacekeepers mobilize during cases of

[71] Fearon and Laitin, "Explaining Interethnic Cooperation."
[72] Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*.
[73] Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence*.

potential communal violence in order to prevent conflicts from escalating further. More often than not, these peacekeepers are involved in many of the civil society organizations and efforts around the prevention of communal violence. Furthermore, they can individually be involved in seeking to de-escalate conflict by drawing on their personal charisma or their renown in the community. Peacekeepers are thus people like religious leaders, members of NGOs, locally elected members of government, and members of local business associations who have a vested interest in preventing the escalation of conflict. The majority of these individuals tend to be professionals in the field, meaning that they have occupations tied to the de-escalation of conflict.

Peacekeepers mobilize to prevent violence through their associations and by drawing on their network of fellow peacekeepers. These networks are built both horizontally, across different fields of expertise, and vertically, across different hierarchies of power. Religious leaders can work with local government officials and renown local leaders, for example, and each of these has connections vertically with people who have more power. Local government officials, for example, can draw on their positions to mobilize the police, or higher levels of government, in response to the threat of communal violence. Similarly, religious and community leaders can draw vertically from regional leaders with more renown or power, in order to mobilize them in seeking to prevent conflict. When violence seems imminent, peacekeepers can draw on their horizontal networks to get information from a different field and collectively mobilize a response. They can furthermore draw on their vertical networks to gather and share information with their superiors and mobilize their own power to force others to act. Locally elected officials can, for example, draw on their relationship with religious leaders to gather information about

what is happening, and then relay that information to their superiors while suggesting immediate and directed action.

The nature and content of the associations and networks that instigators and peacekeepers will employ in relation to potential violence depends on the details of each local community. Firstly, it depends on the legal boundaries around association and formally establishing organizations. Under draconian leadership, both groups may only be able to officially organize with direct involvement and support of government officials. In more democratic settings, such approval may not be necessary. Furthermore, the law will also determine which individuals in a community have directive power over the police and other means of violence prevention and de-escalation. The nature of effective networks will thus depend on who these individuals are. Secondly, associations and effective networks will also depend on the culture of the local community. If, for example, religious authorities are held in highest renown, then associations will undoubtedly include such religious figures and effective networks will be established around their authority. To summarize, while associations and networks are the primary institutions used by both instigators and peacekeepers, the content of these will depend on the specific characteristics tied spatially and temporally to that community.

Repertoires of Communal Violence

Beyond the associations and networks that develop over time, instigators and peacekeepers furthermore develop repertoires of escalation and de-escalation that are recurrently performed and strategically altered in each case of violence. As communal violence recurs, the actors involved learn what works in escalating conflict, and they can learn what is effective at de-escalating the violence. As Brass and others have found, instigators learn what works for

starting conflict and develop their organizations and resources around these strategies.[74] Peacekeepers, on the other hand, learn the strategies of instigators and develop their own counter-strategies in order to prevent conflicts from escalating to violence. These strategies are shaped by specific assumptions about the causes of communal violence and the shape that these incidents are likely to take. The combination of these framings and the strategies that follow make up particular "repertoires of communal violence," that are learned by both those who want to instigate violence, and by those who wish to de-escalate it. Which is successful depends on whether or not the peacekeepers accurately predict the intentions and strategies of the instigators.

The frames at the heart of repertoires of communal violence allow actors to predict when violence might happen, and to prepare for the strategies and behavior of the other actors involved. The content of these frames is obviously unique to each case of recurrent communal violence, but they tend to follow many of the same patterns. The framings used by instigators, for example, tend to target the other as an existential threat, intent on destroying their livelihoods, families, and their own lives. This framing will encourage the interpretation of quotidian conflicts as representatives of this larger threat, and thus as moments when protection from the vile other is necessary. On the other hand, framings mobilized by peacekeepers may lay the blame on hidden figures who are manipulation each side toward violence. Instead of inter-group antagonism, what really lies behind the violence, according to this framing, is a manipulative political regime or elites who want violence for material benefit. Depending on which framing is mobilized, different sets of strategies and behaviors will seem effective. For example, if one believes that the other is intent on destroying one's family, then the only recourse may seem to take up arms to defend your home against attackers. On the other hand, if

[74] Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence*.

you believe that this other group does not in fact hate you but instead is being manipulated toward violence, then you might seek to sever their ties with political elites or you may choose not to play their game at all and instead stay at home.

The strategies that are mobilized based on these framings are highly variable by case but can be generally organized temporally. We can divide every case of communal violence into three phases: (1) Before, (2) During, and (3) After. During each of these phases, actors can mobilize strategies to either escalate or de-escalate conflict. Before violence occurs, for example, residents may avoid people of the different group, and any spaces where they would be forced to interact. In extreme cases, residents may choose to stay in their homes, avoiding any possible contact with the other group for fear of violence. Instigators may in turn prepare for escalation by developing relationships with political leaders, or through hate speech disseminated over social media or in person. Peacekeepers may in turn organize their own networks and associations, establishing neighborhood watch groups, or may try to stop hate speech and rumors from spreading. As communal violence escalates, actors will draw on available evidence to determine the most effective strategies to achieve their goals. This may mean, for example, building barricades along streets to stop people from entering, or mobilizing official relationships in order to bring the police to bear on the case. Finally, after violence has occurred, a period of de-escalation usually follows, along with the development of a narrative around the causes of the conflict and attempts to prevent any further escalation based on that narrative.

While the conceptual shape of these repertoires of communal violence is constant, the content therein will change over time in response to changes in the law, technology, and in the roster of actors. Just as recurrent communal violence alters the shape and contours of each ethnic group in conflict, it also alters the shape of the repertoires of communal violence used to explain

and react to escalating violence. Actors can, for example, learn new strategies and develop new networks based on changing legal structure, or exposure to methods used by different organizations. Also, as individuals leave positions in the network, new relationships must be built in order to continue to mobilize in the same manner. Furthermore, repertoires change with changing technology. New methods of reaching out to the community provides new opportunities for mobilization, and new spaces for the dissemination of points of view. Finally, the framings used to explain communal violence also change as violence recurs and new incidents must be fitted to the existing framings. Alterations may be made to the individuals identified as culprits and can also be made to the reasonings these people may have. Such changes will in turn affect strategy and will encourage different mobilization.

1.6 Methodology

The dissertation used a mixed methods approach to gather data related to incidents of communal violence in Myanmar between 1885 and 2017. It relies on 93 interviews, over one year of ethnographic research, and extensive archival data. The data collection occurred during various field sites visits beginning in 2013, with most interviews and ethnographic work occurring between 2016 and 2017. Most of the data was collected in the cities of Yangon and Mandalay, where I lived for a consecutive five months each between 2016 and 2017.

Case Selection

In 2012, as I began my PhD studies, communal violence broke out in the Rakhine State and ignited a conflict that would last for two years. At the time, I was interested in investigating

the relationship between ethnic composition and democratic stability. When I read about the conflict in Myanmar, a newly democratizing country, I was immediately intrigued. I spent the next few months learning all I could about the country and began collecting data on my first visit that following summer. Myanmar proved to be a tremendously interesting country to me, both personally and academically. I learned that the communal violence of 2012-2014 was not new under democracy but had instead recurred for more than a century. It had been entrenched in the way people interacted with each other, with government, and with their religious beliefs. Over time it became clear to me that Myanmar was not a case of ethnic conflict during democracy but is instead a clear example of a far more common phenomena: recurring violence that is entrenched through the beliefs, practices, and institutions of its residents. Violence did not erupt in Myanmar in 2012 just because of the democratization of 2011, but instead recurred in this time of tension based on an existing blueprint for conflict. While Myanmar is unique in many ways, it is also exemplary of the endemic recurrence that countries from Nigeria to the United States have faced for decades.

Communal violence has recurred in Myanmar since the British colonial period, but it has not recurred everywhere in the country nor at the same rates. Buddhist-Muslim violence tends to recur most often in three regions: Rakhine State, Mandalay Region, and Yangon Region.[75] Consequently the study was originally focused on gathering data from urban areas, where most violence occurs, in these three regions. The 2013 pilot data collection, for example, included interviews with leaders in Sittwe, the capital of the Rakhine State, as well as the cities of Yangon

[75] There are seven states and seven regions in Myanmar as of the 2008 Constitution. The administrative structures of regions and states are equivalent, but they differ in ethnic composition. Regions, such as Yangon and Mandalay, are territories with a majority Bamar ethnic composition. States, such as Rakhine, have large populations of a minority ethnic group.

and Mandalay. It became quickly apparent, however, that the pattern of communal conflict in Rakhine State was dramatically different from those in Mandalay and Yangon. Rakhine has a long history of armed conflict, a different political culture to central Myanmar, and the communal conflict there is tied more closely to the citizenship claims of Muslims than it is in other regions of the country. Furthermore, people in Rakhine speak a different dialect than people in central Myanmar, and many of the Muslims of Rakhine speak yet another language, complicating my efforts to learn the language and communicate with my interlocutors. Finally, the violence in 2012-2014 and its recurrence in 2016-2017 placed severe limits on the ability of foreigners to move in the region and to speak to residents. During my stay in Sittwe in 2013, for example, I was not allowed into any Muslim neighborhoods, the entrances to which were barred by military checkpoints, and was only able to speak to a few Muslim men at a Mosque after negotiating with military officials. For all these reasons, the data collection shifted from these three cases to two: Yangon and Mandalay.

The cities of Yangon and Mandalay are the largest urban centers in the country. Yangon is by far the largest, with a population of 5.2 million as of the latest census.[76] Yangon was the capital of British Burma until the country's independence in 1948, and it remained the capital of independent Myanmar until 2005, when the capital was moved to the newly constructed city of Nay Pyi Taw. While it is no longer the official capital, Yangon remains the commercial capital of the country and the central hub for most political and economic activity both domestically and

[76] The Republic of the Union of Myanmar Department of Population and the United Nations Population Fund, *Thematic Report on Population Dynamics*, Census Report Volume 4-E, The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar: Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, 2017, https://myanmar.unfpa.org/en/publications/thematic-report-population-dynamics (accessed June 11, 2020).

internationally. Mandalay is the second largest city of the country with a far smaller population of 1.2 million.[77] While Yangon is the economic and political capital, Mandalay is arguably the cultural capital of the country. It is home to many of the most important Buddhist monasteries and universities and it was the capital of the Konbaung Dynasty, the last bastion of Myanmar rule before British occupation in 1885. Both cities have faced recurrent Buddhist-Muslim violence since the British colonial period, but it has been far more severe in Mandalay. During the 2012-2014 violence, for example, Yangon faced some potential conflict but was able to prevent escalation.[78] Mandalay, on the other hand, faced the last incident of communal violence in the period, which left two people dead.[79] The two cities serve as an important comparative case that brings to the fore the different ways that communities have learned to respond to communal violence.

Patterns of communal conflict vary by city, but they also vary within them. Neighborhoods that are known to house larger Muslim populations, for example, are often victims of violence because they are targeted by instigators.[80] Data was therefore collected from at least two neighborhoods in each city, each with a different relationship to past conflict. In Yangon, for example, I conducted interviews in a township with a relatively small population of Muslims, and other interviews in a township with a large Muslim population and a recent case of violence. While many interviews with community leaders and government officials were not tied

[77] Ibid.
[78] "Religious Attack in Rangoon Wreaks Havoc on Local Community," *DVB Multimedia Group*, February 21, 2013, http://english.dvb.no/news/religious-attack-in-rangoon-wreaks-havoc-on-local-community/26541.
[79] "Anti-Muslim Riots Turn Deadly in Myanmar's Mandalay City," *Radio Free Asia*, July 2, 2014, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/riot-07022014164236.html.
[80] Data on religious beliefs from the 2014 census is only available at the state/region level. The government decided to limit the data available because they believed that releasing specific numbers would lead to more communal conflict.

to space, I tried as much as possible to gather data that would be representative of different neighborhood's relationships to violence. Securing a similarly representative sample in Mandalay was more difficult as neighborhoods are geographically larger and community leaders are less tied to space. Nevertheless, gathering data in this way allowed me to observe the way that community response to conflict varies within cities as well as between them.

Interviews and Sample Description

The majority of ethnographic and interview data used for this dissertation comes from the 10 months I lived in Myanmar between 2016 and 2017. Out of the 93 interviews, 13 of them were conducted between 2013 and 2015, while 80 were conducted between 2016 and 2017. Table 1 outlines the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The interviews were conducted with a wide breadth of people including Members of Parliament, military officials, NLD officials, Buddhist monks of various political affiliations, Muslim leaders and Imams, political activists, community leaders, CSO and NGO members, journalists, businesspeople, teachers, students, and many others. We, my translators and I, interviewed an approximately equal number of Buddhists and Muslims (49 and 42 respectively), and a similar number of individuals in each city (55 in Yangon, 38 in Mandalay). In order to protect their confidentiality, Table 1 identifies government officials and other community leaders under the same title of "Community Leader" while the title of "Religious leaders" includes both clergy as well as lay leadership. The goal during sampling was to include an equal number of men and women in the sample, but most interviews (81 out of 93) were ultimately conducted with men. Religious and political figures tended to be men and were thus overrepresented in those samples. Men were also more willing to be interviewed by myself (male) and my translators (also male) than were

women. Although we attempted to interview more women for the project by visiting public spaces often frequented by women in Myanmar (markets and parks), the majority refused to be interviewed. Due to limitations in time, funding, and availability, I was unable to hire female translators to overcome these issues.

The interview sampling occurred in three stages. First, we approached individuals at tea shops, restaurants, businesses, and market stalls in each neighborhood, making sure to interview an equal sample of Buddhists and Muslims. Second, based on the responses of residents and recognized local leaders, we interviewed people that they suggested had or would become involved in cases of communal violence. Finally, this sample was supplemented by a theory-driven sample of religious leaders, government officials, and civic organizations. This final sample was a used as means of testing findings against influential theories from the literature which suggest that these figures are most important in cases of communal violence. The three sampling stages often overlapped as we scheduled interviews with local leaders and developed rapport within the different networks. By interviewing a variety of different people in each neighborhood we were able to triangulate information and test people's claims of involvement cases of communal conflict.

Table 1. Interview Respondents by Religion

	Buddhist	Muslim	Other	Total
Status in community				
Religious leaders	19	9	1	29
Community leaders	18	17	1	36
Other residents	12	16	0	28
City				
Yangon	29	26	0	55
Mandalay	20	17	1	38
Sex				
Men	41	38	2	81
Women	8	4	0	12
Total	49	42	2	93

During the semi-structured interviews, participants were asked to discuss their experiences with people of different religions, their general impressions of Buddhist-Muslim relations in their community, and the how their community was either responding to a current case of conflict or had responded to a conflict in the past. The interviews were structured to build rapport with the interviewee, allowing them to discuss topics that are at the forefront of their mind before delving into specific questions about their response to communal conflict. The interviews lasted between one and four hours, with the average interview lasting one and a half hours. Most interviews were conducted entirely in Burmese, although a few respondents preferred to conduct the interviews in English. The Burmese interviews were conducted with simultaneous translation into English, with the help of a translator. Four translators, two in each city, were hired for the project. The translators were all relatively young men between 20 and 30 years old. Three of the translators were Atheists, although they were coded as Buddhist by interviewees, and one was Muslim. The translators were selected based on recommendations from other scholars, their general aptitude, and their willingness to work on the sensitive topic of Buddhist-Muslim relations.

Archives and Documents

The dissertation argues that the observed patterns of communal violence reflects a legacy of conflict institutionalized in ethnic boundaries, organizations, and repertoires of action. As such, part of the argument relies on historical data. These materials include secondary sources as well as archival documents gathered at the Myanmar National Archive in Yangon. Documents that date before the British Colonial period were gathered from various primary and secondary

sources such as the travelogues of Chinese and Arab explorers and bureaucrats as well as the careful analysis of Burmese artifacts by historians such as Michael Aung Thwin and Jacques Leider. Materials from the British Colonial era were gathered from the Myanmar National Archive and include primary source documents such as the letters and reports written by the leadership in various territories in British Burma in response to tension or conflict in the region. The local leadership wrote ongoing reports during the 1930 and 1938 communal violence, for example, explaining the reasons they saw for escalation as well as the debate over how to respond to that escalation. Material on the short democratic period and the military junta is primarily drawn from the important work of scholars like Michael Smith and Mary Callahan, as well as reports written by NGOs, newspapers, and governments. Given Myanmar's military past, Burmese government sources are dealt with skeptically throughout and are used only where the information can be validated by third party sources. Likewise, information from non-profit and newspaper documents is triangulated where possible and used only where interview data was inadequate to answer a specific question or was unavailable.

1.7 Dissertation Structure

This dissertation argues that communal violence ought to be studied in its context of patterned communal conflict, and that the best way of doing so is through a focus on institutionalization. The dissertation is structured around this argument, beginning with a discussion of the history of Buddhist-Muslim violence in Myanmar, then moving to the three kinds of institutions build around communal conflict. Chapter 2 lays the foundation for understanding the case of Myanmar through an overview of Buddhist-Muslim violence in the country. The chapter follows the institutionalization of ethnic group categories, organizations,

and repertoires of communal conflict in Myanmar in broad form, tracking their development over time. The following three chapters delve deeper into each of the three institutions. Chapter 3 tracks the institutionalization of the categories of Islam and Buddhism, and argues that these have been shaped, at least in part, by the relationship between them in cases of violence. Chapter 4 analyzes the institutionalization of organizations and structures that contribute to the pattern of observed communal conflict. Specifically, it delves into the peacekeeping and the extremist organizations that contributed to the pattern of communal conflict observed in 2012-2014, and it argues that such organizations have since contributed to the collective action capacity of these interests for future conflict. Chapter 5 tracks the institutionalization of the repertoires of action which shape the form of conflict and the beliefs that they are based upon. It focuses on a case of communal violence that occurred in 2017, delving into the rationale behind each side of the conflict and explaining the behavior of the instigators, peacekeepers, and non-participant residents. The chapter argues that the beliefs about the conflict, as well as the institutionalized ethnic boundaries and relevant organizations, shape the strategies that instigators and peacekeepers use in the face of escalating tension. The final chapter concludes the dissertation by outlining the contributions that the dissertation makes to various scholarly arguments and by examining the implications of these findings for the way that we try to prevent communal violence globally.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF BUDDHIST-MUSLIM RELATIONS IN MYANMAR

2.1 Introduction

To write a history of Myanmar is necessarily anachronistic. There was no Burma before the Anglo-Burmese Wars of the late 19th century, no Burma as distinct from India until 1937, and there was no Myanmar before the 1988 Student Uprising against the military regime.[1] Writing a complete history of this land that lies between contemporary China, India, and Thailand is impossible with reference to "Myanmar" alone. Fortunately, the scope of this project does not require such an ambitious history. We will limit ourselves to describing the history of this land only in so far as it helps explain the contemporary relationship between Buddhists and Muslims. Rather than present a complete history of the territory, the goal of this chapter is to present a historical context for contemporary social relations as a means of introducing the country to a new audience, and as a shared knowledge we can draw on in later arguments. In so doing, the chapter lays the foundation for understanding the institutions of communal violence recurrence that are discussed in latter chapters.

[1] Before the British invasion, the region we now call Myanmar was subjected to periods of varying unity as empires fought, conquered each other, and disappeared. It was not, however, an entirely unified territory until British occupation. Still, the people and the region were known as Mramma or Myamma at the time of the British invaded (the sound "r" does not exist in the Burmese dialect of central Myanmar, although it does for the dialect in Rakhine State, so "Myamma" is the contemporary pronunciation of Myanmar in the central region). The British name of "Burma" is a reference to a particular ethnic group, the Bamar, who make up the majority of the population in central Myanmar. The name of the country was changed officially from Burma to Myanmar in 1989, after the 1988 Student Uprising forced a reconstruction of the government.

Any history of a "nation" is necessarily constructed based on pieces of information left from the past imagined from the perspective of the present. An a-political or 'factual' history of a nation is virtually impossible. This history is no different. To borrow a phrase from Michel Foucault, what we are doing here is not identifying the true historical progression of events, but instead we are constructing a "history of the presents," and in this case, a history of contemporary Buddhist-Muslim relations.[2] Rather than polish out the differences in accounts and evidence in order to construct a coherent narrative, I will instead endeavor to present the history of contemporary Buddhist-Muslim relations with its contradictions, complexities, and competing facts. I will present events for which we have physical evidence as well as the myths and stories that are more suspect. Whether true or false, such stories tell us how people attempt to understand contemporary social relations. In short, this chapter will take part in the construction of a narrative about Myanmar but will do so with open eyes and in an honest a way as possible. This will undoubtedly make the chapter more difficult to digest as our minds like comprehensive and complete stories, but this is as far as I can go without more anthropological and historical scholarship on the topic. The chapter is organized chronologically and divided into four periods: pre-colonial, colonial, independence, and post-1988.[3]

[2] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Publishing, [1975] 1995), 31.

[3] The vast time period under scrutiny means that the chapter is undoubtedly incomplete as group relations in each period deserves an independent analysis. The focus is selective, explaining periods and aspects of those periods that are relevant for the analysis of contemporary relations found in later chapters of the dissertation. Although scholarship on Myanmar's history has grown dramatically in the last decade or so, there is still vastly more written about the earlier periods than about the time under military rule. Given the limited evidence available for the period between 1962 and 2008, this chapter will be similarly skewed.

2.2 Buddhist-Muslim Relations in Pre-Colonial Burma

The history of Buddhist-Muslim relations in Myanmar begins with the initial construction of these categories in this territory. While they have undoubtedly changed over time, the categories of "Buddhist" and "Muslim" have traceable histories. Interestingly, both can be traced to the region west of the Irrawaddy River, now known as the Rakhine State. This state is host to the most violent recurring conflicts between Buddhists and Muslims in the country. Most recently, the Burmese military led a brutal campaign against a Muslim insurgent group called the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). Although the Myanmar government claims that the attacks were warranted, they reportedly included the destruction of whole villages, the alleged rape of Muslim women, and the killing of children.[4] The Burmese military has thus been accused of committing ethnic cleansing or even genocide.[5] The violent conflicts in precisely the same region that brought both religions to the nation serves as a powerful metaphor for the combating interests in the nation-building process. This section will briefly outline the origin stories of both religions in the country beginning with the first to arrive, Buddhism. The section on Islam will be far longer as the history of Buddhism is well documented in other sources and is not nearly as disputed.[6]

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[4] Jeffrey Gettlemen, "Rohingya Recount Atrocities: 'They Threw My Baby Into a Fire'," *New York Times*, Oct 11, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/11/world/asia/rohingya-myanmar-atrocities.html.

[5] "UN human rights chief points to 'textbook example of ethnic cleansing' in Myanmar," *UN News*, Sept 11, 2017, https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/09/564622-un-human-rights-chief-points-textbook-example-ethnic-cleansing-myanmar; "Myanmar Rohingya: Suu Kyi accused of 'silence' in genocide trial," *BBC News*, Dec 12, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-50763180.

[6] For an overview of the history of Buddhism in Myanmar see Michael Aung-Thwin and Maitrii Aung-Thwin, *A History of Myanmar since Ancient Times: Traditions and Transformations* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012); Matthew J. Walton, *Buddhism, Politics and Political Thought in Myanmar* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

The origins of Buddhism in Myanmar

A deeply Buddhist country, Myanmar traces the origins of Buddhism in its country to the days of the historical Buddha himself. The most popular of these legends traces the original spread of Buddhism to a city referred to as Aparanta, which is said to lie on the West bank of the Irrawaddy River in central Myanmar.[7] A merchant from Aparanta named Punna is said to have visited a city where the Buddha was teaching, became a student of the Buddha, and then returned to Aparanta to share what he had learned. After a time, Punna invited the Buddha to visit Aparanta, which he did for a single night.[8] The Buddha is said to have visited two other locations in the area on his return to India and to have left a footprint in each, which are revered to this day. Another legend, this one from Rakhine, tells of the Buddha's visit to Dhannavati after King Candrasuriya expressed an interest in learning the *dhamma*.[9] The Buddha is said to have traveled by air with his disciples in order to meet the King, and spent a week in the city teaching him. During that time, the Buddha is said to have allowed the commissioning of a sculpture of himself called the Mahamuni image, which is today one of the most sacred in the country.[10]

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[7] Much of what we know about the early adoption of Buddhism in Myanmar comes from the Sāsana Vaṃsa, a text written by the Burmese Buddhist monk Paññāsāmi in 1861 for the Fifth Buddhist Council of 1867 in Mandalay, between the second and third Anglo-Burmese Wars. The text was translated and studied by the British as an introduction to Burmese Buddhism. Although the text is quite recent, it is the most comprehensive work on the origins of Buddhism as it incorporates both an analysis of documents and oral tradition. Paññāsāmi wrote the manuscript as a history of Buddhism but focused primarily on the spread of the religion through nine missionaries, five of whom he suggests visited Southeast Asia. Of these, the work of the missionary that visited the city of Aparanta in the year 235 is discussed in the most detail.

[8] Paññāsāmisirikavidhaja, *Sāsanavamsa*, ed. Mabel Haynes Bode (London: Pali Text Society, 1897), *Internet Archive*, Jan 13, 2020, https://archive.org/details/sasanavamsa00pa.

[9] Emanuel Forchhammer, *Report on the Antiquities of Arakan* (Rangoon: Superintendent, Government Printing and Stationery, 1892), 5-6, *HathiTrust Digital Library*, Jan 13, 2020, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/inu.30000110381526.

[10] The image was worshipped in Rakhine until 1784, when the Burmese King Bodawpaya moved the image to Mandalay after conquering the Arakan Empire, where remains today.

Outside of these oral traditions, the earliest traces of Buddhism in the territory can be found in the Rakhine State, where numerous stone slabs with Buddhist scripture written in Pali and Sanskrit have been discovered.[11] These inscriptions were mostly found around the city of Dhannavati, where the oral tradition suggests the Buddha himself visited during his lifetime. The inscriptions are likely from the fifth or sixth century, when similar inscriptions were common throughout India.[12] The language used in the inscriptions and the similarity of other sculptures to ones from the Gupta Empire in northern India give further evidence that Buddhism arrived to Arakan around the 5th or 6th century. The number of inscriptions and their association with royalty further suggest that Buddhism was well established in the region soon afterward.

The establishment of Theravada Buddhism in the political and social institutions of Myanmar is generally attributed to the kings of the Pagan Dynasty (9th-13th centuries). This dynasty is considered the "classical" era of Burmese history to which much of the indigenous economic and institutional structures can be traced.[13] King Anawratha (1044-1077), known today as one of the "great unifiers of Burma," expanded the empire through conquest from his capital in central Myanmar.[14] By the 12th century, the Pagan Empire included much of contemporary Myanmar. Although the Buddhist *thangha*, or monastic community, had already developed to some extent by the time of Anawratha, he was instrumental to increasing their

[11] Pierre-Yves Manguin, A. Mani, and Geoff Wade, eds. *Early Interactions Between South and Southeast Asia: Reflections on Cross-Cultural Exchange* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2011).
[12] The fifty or so inscriptions discovered were primarily of the "ye dhamma." One important stone slab identifies the queen Niti Candra, who is thought to have ruled between 520-575 CE. For a further discussion of these sources, see Manguin, Mani, and Wade, *Early Interactions.*
[13] Michael Aung-Thwin, *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985); Robert H. Taylor, *The State in Myanmar* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009).
[14] Aung-Thwin, *Pagan*, 4.

power due to his practice of donating a large proportion of the spoils of military conquest.[15] Over the next two centuries, the initial religious and ethnic diversity of the conquered territories was homogenized as Theravada Buddhism became a signifier for status and inclusion in the Pagan Empire.[16] The Pagan Empire fell in the 13th century due to a multitude of factors including the central state's inability to control the wealth accumulation of the *thangha*, the related inability to deal with the economic pressure and military offensives of the rival Mongol and Thai empires, as well as the economic pressure from the growth of Chinese and Indian trade by sea.[17]

Despite its role in weakening the economic power of the central authority in Bagan, Buddhism played a central role in the social structure of the Burmese empires of central Burma beginning in the Pagan era and reaching forward to the Toungoo (1510-1752) and Konbaung (1752-1885) dynasties that followed. While the empires of these period were more or less centralized, they relied heavily on the twin roles of Buddhist monasteries and the town and township chieftains to provide public goods and to exact their authority.[18] Monasteries provided many of the benefits we associate today with the local government such as inexpensive and

[15] Today's most visited tourist attraction in Myanmar, the Bagan Archeological Zone, is home to the stupas erected through such donations by Anawratha and later Kings.
[16] Taylor, *The State*. Anawratha's successor, Kyanzittha, (1084–1111), worked to develop a coherent empire based on the vast ethnic diversity that Anawratha had incorporated into the kingdom through collaboration, compromise, and syncretism. Kyanzuttha's successor, Alaungsithu (1113-1170), on the other hand, emphasized centralization and a common culture, which established the economic and social institutions that would underpin Myanmar's Theravada Buddhism.
[17] Michael Aung-Thwin, "The Role of Sasana Reform in Burmese History: Economic Dimensions of a Religious Purification," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 38, no. 4 (1979): 671. The interdependence of the Buddhist sangha and the monarchy established Buddhism as a vital component to pre-colonial rule, but also created conflict. This relationship established a cycle of economic redistribution whereby large donations by the monarchs during times of prosperity were followed by *sasana* reforms, purifications of a *thangha* that was seen as too materialistic, through which the monarchy reclaimed property and wealth.
[18] Ibid.

sometimes free education, mediation of local disputes, and small term loans. Furthermore, becoming part of the *thangha* was then, as it remains to this day, an important avenue for social mobility through access to education and other important resources.[19] The Buddhist monastic community also had an important role in legitimizing the king who was viewed through the Theravada tradition as the Buddhist exemplar.[20]

The Origins of Islam in Myanmar

The arrival of Islam to Myanmar can be traced to two geographical areas: to the West on the border of contemporary Bangladesh, and to the north, along the contemporary border with China. The two geographically distinct entrances of Islam have unique histories and associated myths. Just as with Buddhism, the history of Islam in Myanmar is traced by oral tradition to the lifetime of the religion's founding figure, the Prophet Muhammad. This section will trace the legends of Islam's arrival and outline the physical evidence we have available in two sub-sections, the first discussing the arrival from the North and the second discussing its arrival from the West. The history of Islam in Myanmar is marred in a scholarly and political controversy with real consequences for the wellbeing of Muslims living in the country. Thus, in the following section, I am careful to note information that can be validated by reliable and accessible sources, with citations from those sources where relevant.

[19] Ibid. This was also noted by several interview respondents as a source of their education and, for monks, a reason for joining the *thangha*.
[20] Aung-Thwin, "The Role of Sasana."

Islam from the North

The earliest account of Muslims in the territory we now know as Myanmar is a legend that traces the arrival of Muslim settlers to the lifetime of the prophet Muhammad.[21] The legend says that on the sixth year of the Sui Dynasty (586 AD), the same year that the Prophet Muhammad began his preaching, an unknown star appeared in the sky above China.[22] When the emperor, Wen Sui (541-604), inquired about the star to his astrologer, the astrologer divined that an extraordinary man had appeared in the West. The Emperor sent an envoy to search for this great man. Upon finding him, the envoy asked the Prophet Muhammad to return with him to China, but the Prophet refused. Instead, the Prophet Muhammad sent his uncle Sa'id and three others to return with the envoy. As well as returning with these guests, the envoy also brought with him a painting that he drew of the Prophet Muhammad. One day, the emperor took the painting, hung it on a wall, and began to pray to it. When he looked up, however, the painting had disappeared. Confused, he asked Sa'id what could have happened. Sa'id explained that the Prophet Muhammad had forbidden the worship of images, and that the disappearance of this image was evidence of his influence. Dutifully impressed, the Emperor built the Mosque of Holy Remembrance in Canton in 627 AD, where it stands to this day.[23]

Although there is little other historical evidence that Sa'id visited China, let alone had a hand in building the ancient mosque, there is substantial evidence for early Muslim settlements in the region. These settlements grew during the Tang Dynasty, especially between 661 and 750

[21] Jielian Liu, *The Arabian Prophet: A Life of Mohammed from Chinese and Arabic Sources*, trans. Isaac Mason (Shanghai: Commercial Press Ltd, [1724] 1921).
[22] Many of the details in the legend vary. What follows is the account found in Jielian Liu's *The Arabian Prophet*.
[23] Liu, *The Arabian Prophet*, 94-95.

when the head of the Umayyad Caliphate, Hajjaj Bin Yusuf, led ruthless campaigns of persecution against the Sunnis in Arabia.[24] The refugees from this persecution spread throughout the Middle East and Asia, including to the border between contemporary Myanmar and China. Evidence for this settlement is particularly strong as it based on a report on the Yunnan Province from 860 AD written for the Chinese Emperor. In the report entitled "Man Shu" or "The Book of Southern Barbarians," Fan Ch'o, the author, twice mentions the presence of "Possu," usually understood to refer to Persians, in the area on the border with contemporary Myanmar.[25] Given the time period and the substantiation from Arab sources, these Persians were most likely Muslim.[26]

Fan Ch'o first mentions the Possu in his notes about the groups of people that live south of a city called Yin-sheng.[27] Today the ancient city of Yin-Sheng is known as Jingdong and lies in western Yunnan Province, not far from the contemporary border with Myanmar. The second

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[24] Jonathan N. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China* (University of Washington Press, 1997), 40; Sayyid Qudratullah Fatimi, "The Role of China in the Spread of Islam in Southeast Asia," (Paper presented at the First International Conference of South-East Asian Historians, Singapore, 16-22 January, 1961), 6. Fatimi mentions another possible Muslim settlement on an island referred to as Jazirat al-Yaqut, or Island of Ruby. The island is supposed to lie in the Gulf of Martaban. Fatimi's source suggests that the settlement existed only until 712 A.D., when the King of Prome, in mainland Burma sent the female inhabitants of the colony back to Arabia after the male inhabitants were murdered by pirates. Although this story does suggest an early association between Arabs and the Burmese kingdoms, the island mentioned is most likely Sri Lanka as Sri Lanka was often referred to as Serendib (Island of Rubies) and sometimes as Jazirat al-Yaqut.

[25] Fan Ch'o, *The Man Shu: Book of the Southern Barbarians*, trans. Gordon H. Luce (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Dept. of Far Eastern Studies, Cornell University, 1961), *eCommons*, Jan 13, 2020, https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/57513.

[26] Fatimi, "The Role of China," 9.

[27] Fan Ch'o wrote: "Yin-sheng (Born of Silver) city. It is to the south of P'u-t'an, 10 day-stages distant from Lung-wei (Dragon's Tail) city. … Again to the south there are the P'o-lo-men (Brahmans), Po-ssu (Persia?), She-po (Java), P'o-ni (Borneo), K'un-lun, and various peoples. In the places for outside intercourse and trade, there is an abundance of all sorts of precious things." Ch'o, *The Man Shu*, 61.

mention of Muslims in Fan Ch'o's "Man Shu" is of Possu as bordering the "P'iao Kingdom," located to the west of Yunnan. Fan Ch'o is unsure about the exact location of this kingdom, but his sources suggest that it is located 20 "stage-days" east of a city called She-li.

> (The P'iao) join frontiers with Po-ssu (Persia ?) and P'o-1o-men (the Brahmans). To the west, they are 20 day-stages distant from She-li city. According to Buddhist sutras She-li city is a kingdom of Central India (Tien-chu). Near the city there are sandy mountains where grasses and trees will not grow (91).

She-li likely refers to the ancient city of Ayodhya, modern day Saketa. Assuming that one stage-day is the equivalent of about 100km, a traveler from Saketa would reach central Myanmar in about the allotted time (~2100 km). Furthermore, in Burmese histories, the Chinese term "P'iao" is often taken to refer to the Pyu people of Myanmar.[28] The Pyu are the first group of people that established urban centers in the territory, and lived in northern Myanmar until around the 9th century.[29] Assuming that P'iao does in fact refer to the Pyu city states of central Myanmar, and that Fan Ch'o was right in saying that Persians border the kingdom, then Fan Ch'o's comments do provide some evidence for early Muslim settlements within the territory we now call Myanmar. The relationship between the terms P'iao and Pyu, however, is very tenuous, and Fan Ch'o is suspected to never have visited many of the places in southern Yunnan that he wrote about in his report.[30]

Whether or not Muslims lived in Myanmar by the turn of the millennium, however, there is substantial evidence that there was at least some contact between the Burmese kingdoms and

[28] Aung-Thwin and Aung-Thwin, *A History of Myanmar*.
[29] Ibid, 63.
[30] Ibid, 64.

Arab ones since at least the 9th century. In his geographical treatise for the Abbasid Caliphate written in 846-847, the Persian geographer and civil servant for the province of Jibal, Ibn Khordadhbeh, describes several cities in southern Myanmar, including Bago.[31] The territory also appears in the writings of Suleiman, an Arab traveler who wrote in 851, and the Persian traveler Ibn al-Farqih from the following century.[32] Col. Ba Shin, tasked with establishing an official history of Islam in Myanmar by the Burmese government, also mentions several other Arab merchants and travelers that wrote of visiting the country.[33]

The earliest account of Muslims settling in Myanmar from a Burmese source is from 1055 AD, during King Anawratha's reign.[34] An Arab father and his two sons, Shwepyin-gyi and Shwepyin-nge, are said to have shipwrecked on the shore of southern Myanmar during the king's reign.[35] The two sons served in Anawratha's army as horsemen until they were executed for

[31] Moshe Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma: A Study of a Minority Group*, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1972).
[32] Col. Ba Shin, *The Coming of Islam to Burma Down to 1700 AD* (New Delhi: Burma Historical Commission, 1961); Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma*.
[33] Col. Ba Shin, *The Coming of Islam*, 880, 943, 1120. These sources include an anonymous Arab text that tells of two Arab travelers who visited the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal in 871 A.D., the *Book of Countries* written by the geographer Abu Abbas Al-Yoqoubi during the Abbasid Calaphate (750-1258 A.D.), *Meadows of Gold* written by Ali al-Mas'udi in the 10th century A.D., *Boundaries of the World* written by an unknown Persian author in the 10th century A.D., and *On China, the Turks and India* written by Saraf al-Zaman Tahir al-Marvazi in the 12th century A.D..
[34] Another early account of Muslims serving in the Burmese administration tells of deceit and murder during the reign of King Anawratha's successor, King Sawlu (1077-1088). King Sawlu was educated by a Muslim Arab tutor. When he took power, King Sawlu appointed his tutor's son, Yaman Khan, as governor of a city that was then called Ussa, now called Bago. Yaman Khan ended up revolting against King Sawlu, took him captive, and executed him. Yaman Khan then marched on the capital of Pagan, but was defeated by Sawlu's brother, Kyanzittha. This King would later lead many incursions into India and bring back Muslim captives. These captives became the ancestors of several Burmese Muslim groups in central Myanmar.
[35] Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma*; G. E. Harvey, *History of Burma: From the Earliest Times to 10 March 1824 The Beginning of the English Conquest*, (New York: Routledge, [1925] 2000); John

refusing to help the King build a pagoda. The King was returning to central Myanmar after a military campaign in China and wanted to build a pagoda near Mandalay to commemorate his victories. All of the soldiers who were part of that campaign contributed to building the pagoda, but Shwepyin-gyi and Shwepyin-nge refused. The two are now considered *nats*, or spirits, who live in the pagoda. Based on this belief, people who visit the pagoda and/or worship these *nats* refrain from eating pork.

The descendants of Muslims who migrated from China into Myanmar are now categorized by the government under the ethnic group of "Panthay."[36] This ethnic group is made up of the descendants of Hui Chinese, a large proportion of whom immigrated into Myanmar in the late 19th century. The origin of this ethnic group as told in the oral tradition is traced to 801 A.D., when the Emperor requested military support from their allies in the Middle East against an imminent rebellion in Tibet.[37] Many of the 20,000 soldiers who fought to put down the rebellion decided to remain in China. While there was trade and interaction between the panthay and Myanmar since, most of the migration occurred in the late 19th century. In 1856, during a tumultuous time for China, a Hui-led revolt against Han Chinese silver mine owners ignited a rebellion that would last eighteen years.[38] The rebels claimed an independent empire called

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Percy Hardiman, *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States, vol 2* (Rangoon: Superintendent, Government printing, Burma, 1901), 155.

[36] The origin of government's term is unclear but may be a distortion of the word "Parsi" or "Farsi," or of the Burmese word for Persian, "Pathi." For more information on the linguistic origins of the term see Moshe Yegar, "The Panthay (Chinese Muslims) of Burma and Yunnan," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 7, 1 (1966): 73–85.

[37] David G. Atwill, "Blinkered Visions: Islamic Identity, Hui Ethnicity, and the Panthay Rebellion in Southwest China, 1856-1873," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 4 (2003): 1079–1108.

[38] Ibid.

Pingnan Guo, also known as the Yunnan Sultanate or the Islamic Kingdom of Yunnan, and were led by Du Wenxiu, who took on the title of Sultan Suleiman.

While it would not last long, the Sultanate developed strong relationships with British Burma and the Konbaung Dynasty in Mandalay. The Sultanate was in an important geopolitical location between China and Myanmar, and it provided the best route for trade through its access to the Irrawaddy River. Thus, the empires to the south wasted no time in establishing trade relations despite the region's instability due to constant attacks by bandits and armies from China.[39] The British, who relied heavily on that trade route, negotiated an agreement with Du Wenxiu and King Mindon, providing the Sultanate substantial legitimacy. As part of that relationship, King Mindon funded a project to build the Panthay Mosque in Mandalay and gave the surrounding land to Panthay families.[40] When the Sultanate fell to Chinese forces in December 1872, the refugees that fled the conquest and the merchants who were in Myanmar at the time were given refuge in the northern provinces of Myanmar and in cities along the Irrawaddy trade route, including Mandalay.[41]

Islam from the West

The largest Muslim presence in the country, and the most established Muslim influence, is in the Rakhine State, which lies in western Myanmar bordering with contemporary Bangladesh

[39] Yegar, "The Panthay (Chinese Muslims)."
[40] Wen-Chin Chang, "Islamic Transnationalism: Yunnanese Muslims," in *Beyond Borders: Stories of Yunnanese Chinese Migrants of Burma* (Cornell University Press, 2014), 114–46; Thaung, "Panthay Interlude in Yunnan: A Study in Vicissitudes through the Burmese Kaleidoscope," in *Fiftieth Anniversary Publications, No. 1: Some of the papers read at the Fiftieth Anniversary Conference* (Rangoon: Burma Research Society, 1961).
[41] Chang, "Islamic Transnationalism"; Andrew D. W. Forbes, "History of Panglong, 1875-1900: A 'Panthay' (Chinese Muslim) Settlement in the Burmese Wa States," *The Muslim World* 78, no. 1 (1988): 38–50.

and India. The Rakhine State developed independently from the kingdoms in the Irrawaddy delta primarily due to the Arakan Mountain Range, which kept the two regions geographically isolated for centuries. The Rakhine State is the current location of deadly Buddhist-Muslim violence based on claims and counterclaims of citizenship status by a Muslim minority known to the international community as the Rohingya. Their status as citizens depends on their history in the country, and specifically whether they arrived in the country before or after British colonial rule. Thus, any discussion of Islam in the Rakhine State is marred in a political controversy, and one with real consequences for the people who live there. In what follows I follow contemporary Western scholarship that dates the presence of Muslims in the Rakhine State to, at the latest, the 15th century.[42] The substantial evidence found in accounts of court proceedings, including the titles that the Arakan leaders adopted, and in physical form, such as written Arabic on coins, provides very strong support for the argument that Islam had a strong influence in the region since at least that time. Whether or not the Muslims that appear in this narrative are the ancestors of the people who are known today as Rohingya, however, continues to be an open question.[43]

There are oral traditions that trace the history of Muslims in the Rakhine State to as early as the seventh century, but our best evidence of Muslim influence in the region comes from the early 15th century.[44] According to Arakanese chronicle traditions and an anonymous account

[42] Jacques P. Leider, "Tilling the Lord's Vineyard and Defending Portuguese Interests: Towards a Critical Reading of Father S. Manrique's Account of Arakan," *Journal of the Siam Society* 90, no. 1 & 2 (2002): 39-58.

[43] For more on this issue see Jacques Leider's articles on the topic including, Leider, "Tilling the Lord's"; Leider, "Rohingya: The History of a Muslim Identity in Myanmar," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History* (Oxford University Press, 2018). Others disagree with this position; cf. Aye Chan. "The Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakan (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar)," *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research* 3, no. 2 (2005): 396–420.

[44] Oral tradition traces the history of Muslims in the Rakhine State to 680 A.D. when Sayed Muhammad al-Hanafia, the son of Caliph Ali, is said to have conquered the territory of the

written in palm leaf, the rise of the Arakanese empire and its capital of Mrauk U can be traced back to King Narameikhla of Arakan, who in 1404 fled from his empire after an invasion by the Burmese Court of Ava and took refuge in the Bengali Sultanate.[45] The Bengali sultanate welcomed him and gave him a position in the Sultan's armies until 1429. The Sultan's successor then provided Narameikhla with an army with which to regain his throne. After some deception by his general, Narameikhla, who changed his name to Man Co Mwan, took back his empire and founded a new capital, Mrauk U, which remained the capital until the empire was conquered by the Burmese in 1785. In exchange for the army, Man Co Mwan's empire is said to have become a vassal of the sultanate. The rulers of the Arakan Empire, despite being Buddhist, thus took on Muslim titles, and the country started using coins in the style of the Bengali Sultanate. The vassalage is supposed to have lasted until 1531, while the influence of Islam undoubtedly continued. The administration and ceremonies of the courts followed the style of the Moghul courts, and Muslims filled important ranks within the bureaucracy.[46]

"cannibal queen" Khaira Pari who ruled the northern Rakhine region. After a bloody battle, Hanafia was victorious, took the queen as his wife, and all her followers converted to Islam. Abu al-Fazl Ezzati, *The Spread of Islam: The Contributing Factors* (London: Saqi Books, 2002), 482; There was likely some influence before the 15th century through trade with the sultanates of India, but archeological work in the area has not uncovered anything that can definitively trace Muslim influence in the Chittagong area to any time before 1370. For the details of this argument, see Leider, "Rohingya: The History of a Muslim."

[45] Stephan Egbert Arie van Galen, "Arakan and Bengal: The Rise and Decline of the Mrauk U Kingdom (Burma) from the Fifteenth to the Seventeeth Century AD," (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2008), https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/12637; Michael W. Charney, "Crisis and Reformation in a Maritime Kingdom of Southeast Asia: Forces of Instability and Political Disintegration in Western Burma (Arakan), 1603-1701," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 41, no. 2 (1998): 185–219; Daniel George Edward Hall, *A History of South-East Asia* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1999).

[46] Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma*.

Although the specifics of the legend of Mrauk U's founding are likely a construct of the 17th or 18th century, we can trace a cultural influence on Mrauk U from the Bengali sultanate starting in, at the latest, 1495.[47] The physical evidence for this influence comes from a coin dated to 1495 that has a bilingual inscription in Persian and Arakanese.[48] The inscription on the coin makes it clear that the rulers of the Arakan Kingdom took Muslim titles like their neighbors in the Mogul Empire of India, and that Arabic was used at least in trade if not also in political agreements more generally.[49] We also know from an account written by the Augustin monk Fray Sebastião Manrique that the court ceremonies and administrative methods of the Arakan Empire mirrored those in Delhi as they included the use of eunuchs, harems, slaves, and hangmen as well as the language and expressions of the Mogul courts.[50] It is unclear whether this influence was a result of the dramatic refugee story of Narameikhla or simply a result of their close land and sea connections. Still, the available evidence suggests that although Arakan was a strictly Theravada Buddhist empire, the important role of Muslim trade, if not political reciprocity, established a tradition of religious tolerance in the early Mrauk U period.[51]

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[47] There is no evidence from Bengali sources to suggest that the sultan at the time, Jala ud-Din (1418-1433), provided any kind of aid to Narameikhla. It is also unclear what the sultan's interest in restoring a Buddhist to the throne of Arakan would have been. For more on this argument, see Leider, "Tilling the Lord's Vineyard," 128.

[48] Abu Mohammed Habibullah, "Two Inscriptions from Arakan," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan*, 11, no. 1 (1966): 121–4.

[49] Thibaut d' Hubert, "The Lord of the Elephant: Interpreting the Islamicate Epigraphic, Numismatic, and Literary Material from the Mrauk U Period of Arakan (ca. 1430−1784)." *Journal of Burma Studies* 19, no. 2 (December 21, 2015): 341–70.

[50] Sebastien Manrique, *Travels of Fray Sebastien Manrique (1629-1643), a Translation of the "Itinerario de las Misiones Orientales,"* ed. Charles Eckford Luard, trans. Henry Hosten (Oxford: Hakluyt Society, 1927); Leider, "Tilling the Lord's Vineyard"; Yegar, The Muslims of Burma.

[51] Charney, "Crisis and Reformation."

In the 16th and 17th centuries the Arakan empire began an expansionist tradition that established it as a key empire in the region.[52] Under the leadership of rulers like Man Raja-kri, the Arakanese empire conquered sections of the Bengali sultanate to the west, fought off invasions from empires in central Myanmar, took part in the overthrow of the Pegu empire in the east, and conquered cities along the coastline of Myanmar as far south as Thanlyin.[53] This century of expansionism increased the empire's territorial and economic power, and it also brought with it new opportunities for cultural interaction. In the late 16th century, possibly in 1578, Man Phalaung, the king of Arakan, conquered the Bengali port of Chittagong.[54] This conquest bolstered the empire's economy as it was one of the most important ports in the region. After the conquest the king established local rulers and then returned to Mrauk U accompanied by a large contingent of Bengali laborers.[55] Not all of the population was relegated to manual labor, however, since Muslims also served in the Arakan courts as translators and bureaucrats, in the Arakan navy, and as merchants and seafarers.[56] Over the next century, with the support of a Bengali-trained navy and Portuguese mercenaries, the influence of the empire grew southward as they extended their territory to Lower Burma including Pathein and the port of Thanlyin.[57]

In the 17th century the influence of the Arakan empire waned as their former Portuguese allies turned against them and the Bengali sultanate grew more powerful.[58] In this context, Portuguese Filipe de Brito e Nicote, who the Arakanese had placed as governor of Thanlyin,

[52] Leider, "Tilling the Lord's Vineyard," 133.
[53] Man Raja-kri translates to "great king" while Thanlyin was previously known as Syriam.
[54] Leider, "Tilling the Lord's Vineyard."
[55] Leider, "Rohingya: The History of a Muslim."
[56] Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma*; Manrique, *Travels of Fray*.
[57] Pathein was previously known as Bassein.
[58] Charney, "Crisis and Reformation."

betrayed the Arakanese by revolting against their authority and taking over trade in Lower Burma.[59] De Brito maintained a blockade of ports in southern Arakan and Lower Burma, forcing all trade to go through his port of Thanlyin. Goa supported the move by providing ships and supplies, as well as commanding all Portuguese trade to go through Thanlyin. De Brito's efforts were ultimately in vain, however, as the constant attacks by Arakan, Prome, and Toungoo forces made trade in the area too dangerous. The Arakanese destroyed other Portuguese settlements near Chittagong in response to de Brito's actions, but this backfired as refugees from these massacres organized against the kingdom. Under the leadership of Sebastião Gonçalves y Tibao in 1609, refugees took the island of Sundiva just off the coast of Arakan. Gonçalves' forces succeeded at blockading all commerce into northern Arakan, thus halting the little sea trade that the kingdom had left. In an attempt to regain control over the region, Mrauk U organized a campaign against the Mogul Empire to the west in 1611. The campaign failed, however, after Portuguese forces seized the Mrauk U naval contingent and sold the crews into slavery. In 1615, the Portuguese raided Mrauk U itself while Burmese attacked Arakan's southern cities. While maritime trade was halted by the Portuguese, however, Mrauk U continued to raid nearby kingdoms and to expand its land trade routes in the region. Indeed, the blockade of maritime trade may have helped the empire consolidate power as other neighboring kingdoms were also blocked from naval trade.[60]

Muslim trade was revitalized in Arakan under the leadership of Min-kamaun (r. 1612-1622), but this prosperous era did not last long. After the Portuguese blockade finally ended in 1617, the Arakanese court sought to increase trade with Muslim and Dutch commerce.[61] The

[59] De Brito is known in Burmese chronicles as Nga Zinga.
[60] Charney, "Crisis and Reformation."
[61] Ibid.

Dutch required a steady supply of slaves and of rice for their projects in the region, and the Arakan kingdom was a willing supplier. Mrauk U amassed slaves through raids on Lower Burma and through their campaigns in the Bengali territories. The slaves were used as labor for the rice fields, in their courts, or as merchandise to be sold to the Dutch.[62] As the position of the Portuguese weakened due to their failed attempt at monopolizing trade in the region, the Arakan empire reclaimed control over the major port cities. In the 1660s, however, the Bengal sultanate, tired of the continuous raids on its territory by the Arakanese, threatened to remove their support of Dutch trade and their factories in their land unless they stopped trading with Mrauk U. The Dutch acquiesced and halted their trade with Arakan, which led to increasing desperation on the part of the Arakanese empire and a souring of relations with Bengal and Muslim traders.[63]

The desperation of the empire has been dramatically narrativized in a story about Prince Shah Shuja, the ousted brother of the Mogul Emperor Aurangzib of India, who fled to Arakan after a failed attempt at the throne. The details of this story are difficult to corroborate, but a British report on oral traditions in the region claims that the problems began as soon as Shah Shuja arrived in Arakan. King Sandathudhamma of Arakan is said to have been tempted by Shah Shuja's extreme wealth and plotted against him. The British report suggests that Sandathudhamma asked Shah Shuja for his daughter's hand in marriage, which Shah Shuja refused. In response to this rejection, Sandathudhamma claimed umbrage, expelled Shah Shuja, and then sent forces to murder Shah Shuja and claim his wealth. The story is recounted by Bengali sources as well and is an important narrative in the original nation-building process for

[62] Ibid; Manrique, *Travels of Fray*.
[63] Charney, "Crisis and Reformation."

that country.[64] This episode further exacerbated relations between the Arakan and Mughal Empires, which was sometimes expressed through violence against Muslim citizens in Mrauk-U. In 1663, for example, after a failed attempt by Bengal to free captives held by Arakan, the Arakanese king Sandathudhamma beheaded the captives and went on to massacre Bengalis and Muslims who lived in Mrauk-U.[65] The next few years saw the Arakanese Empire's resources further diminish, and its outlying regions began declaring their independence. In 1664, Bengal was able to take back the Empire's northern territory, including the vitally important port of Chittagong. The Arakan Empire fell in 1785 to attacks from the Konbaung Dynasty in central Myanmar, but the Burmese kingdom would only hold Arakan until 1824 when British forces invaded the region in the First Anglo-Burmese War.

2.3 British Colonial Era

While the specifics in the history of early Buddhist-Muslim relations are relatively unclear, the wealth of documents left by the bureaucrats in British Colonial Burma and their accessibility to Western academia have allowed for a more complete history during the colonial regime (1885-1948). This history begins in 1825 with the annexation of Rakhine State and reaches full force in 1885, after 61 years and three wars, when the British took the Konbaung Dynasty's capital in Mandalay and, the following year, officially annexed Myanmar to India. The annexation brought massive social changes through the restructuring of social hierarchies, the economy and, later, the polity. As Robert H. Taylor argues, the primary source of these

[64] Rishad Choudhury, "An Eventful Politics of Difference and Its Afterlife: Chittagong Frontier, Bengal, c. 1657–1757," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 52 (July 1, 2015): 271–96.
[65] Charney, "Crisis and Reformation."

changes was not so much the legalese and impersonal rule of the British, but rather their emphasis on trade and the imposition of a capitalist system in place of monarchical rule and relationships of patronage. [66] While this new economic structure allowed some social mobility, it overwhelmingly benefitted those new migrants, primarily from India, who had English language skills and were trained in British bureaucratic methods.[67] Indian migrants quickly filled most high-status positions in local government, law enforcement, and as landowners and moneylenders.[68] The vast rice fields that were the heart of the economy for previous empires were now owned by Indians and loaned to Burmese for farming at exorbitant rates. [69] Through these methods wealthier Indians became the economic and political elite of British-Burma.[70]

The political structure of the country changed through the implementation of policies and practices that had served the British well in their occupation of India. Indeed, as Mary Callahan argues, the British did not so much create a new colonial government in Myanmar, but instead they "merely packed up some components of administration in India and shipped them to the new territory."[71] During the first thirty or so years of colonial rule, the British relied heavily on Indian bureaucrats and police to govern Myanmar, without giving local systems of governance much credence. During the initial "pacification" of Burma (1886-1890), the Chief Commissioner

[66] Taylor, *The State*, 67-69.
[67] Ibid
[68] Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma* (Cornell University Press, 2003); James Warren, "The Rangoon Jail Riot of 1930 and the Prison Administration of British Burma," *South East Asia Research* 10, no. 1 (2002): 5–29.
[69] Khin Yi, *The Dobama Movement in Burma (1930-1938)* (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1988); Taylor, *The State*.
[70] Moshe Yegar, *Between Integration and Secession: The Muslim Communities of the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Western Burma/Myanmar* (Washington DC: Lexington Books, 2002).
[71] Callahan, *Making Enemies*, 23.

Charles Crosthwaite went so far as to dismantle local systems of governance through the Crosthwaite Village Act, replacing them with the village system used in India. This act was meant to dismantle local systems for organizing rebellion in favor of centralization and government control. Although they did eventually achieve their goal of centralization by the 1920's, this period also saw increased rates of banditry and rebellion, which may be due, in part, to the dismantling of local systems of control.[72] Throughout this period the British-led defense services, which were primarily made up of Indians, sought to establish their rule in the country by force, oftentimes resorting to severe punishment including burning villages, summary executions, and public flogging. These practices, as well as the status and wealth of the British-trained Indians, led to increased tension between the Burman and Indian population in the country, a tension with dramatic historical repercussions.

The Rise of Burmese Nationalism

The 1920s and 1930s saw Buddhist nationalism grow out of both lay and religious circles. According to Therevada Buddhism, Buddhist monks are barred from direct involvement in politics, but despite this, Myanmar has a long history of politically engaged monks. Long before the British even arrived, Buddhism had held a strong political position in Myanmar.[73] After British colonial rule began in the late 19th century, however, the political role of monks abruptly shifted. After the British defeated the Burmese armies in the Third Anglo-Burmese War, they took away many of the responsibilities traditionally given to the monkhood such as

[72] Ibid.
[73] The king was considered the dhammaraja, or righteous king and as the, "Defender of the Faith … who epitomized the exemplary Buddhist." Michael Aung-Thwin, "Those Men in Saffron Robes," *Journal of Burma Studies* 17, no. 2 (2013): 243–334, 261.

health care, conflict resolution, and education, reserving these responsibilities for the secular state as they did in India. The combination of colonial rule, a weakened leadership in the *thangha*, and the loss of status and income for monks, however, had the unforeseen consequence of giving rise to nationalistic, politically active, and anti-colonial monks.[74]

Buddhist monks were involved in insurrections against the British since at least 1831 and were in leadership positions during the uprisings of 1852 and 1886, but their role became especially important during the growing nationalist movements of the 1920's.[75] The first person jailed by the British for political speech was in fact a monk called U Ottama. Born in 1879 in current-day Sittwe, Rakhine State, Sayadaw U Ottama was educated in England, India, and Pakokku Myanmar, was then a professor of Pali and Buddhist scriptures in India and Japan, and returned to Myanmar in 1919 when he became an active proponent against British colonial rule.[76] After several failed attempts to mobilize a nationalist movement in Myanmar, U Ottama published an article in The Sun newspaper titled "Craddock get out of Burma!" The article was directed specifically against Sir Reginald Henry Craddock, the Governor of Burma, in an unprecedentedly public move against the sitting government. His courage and the fact that he was not immediately imprisoned gained him a great deal of popularity, finally allowing him to begin to organize local nationalist groups. After an initially lax response, the British government began to crack down on political dissidents, and jailed U Ottama for eighteen months in 1921. Over the next five years U Ottama would spend more time in prison than outside, but rather than

[74] Aung-Thwin, "Those Men in Saffron Robes."
[75] Robert L. Solomon, "Saya San and the Burmese Rebellion," *Modern Asian Studies* 3, no. 3 (May 1969): 209–23.
[76] Tin Maung Maung Than, "Sangha Reforms and Renewal of Sasana in Myanmar: Historical Trends and Contemporary Practice," in *Buddhist Trends in Southeast Asia*, ed. Trevor Ling (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993).

inhibit his movement, his bouts of imprisonment bolstered his popularity. U Ottama inspired others during this period including the young Thakin Party, discussed below, as well as U Wisara, another monk who would, like U Ottama, become a martyr in the independence movement.[77] In 1939 U Ottama passed away due to health conditions, likely spurred by his long stays in prison.

The lay nationalist movement grew in the 1930's through the creation of the Dobama Asiayone ("We Burmans Association"), also known as the Thakin movement or Thakin Party.[78] The Thakin Party would later include Aung San and his cadre of student leaders, known as the "Thirty Comrades," and be the foundation upon which Burmese Independence was attained almost twenty years later. The movement first gained public attention after the First Indo-Burmese Riot in 1930, which the organizers used in order to garner a public forum.[79] Their manifesto, which was dedicated to those who died during the 1930 vilence, focused on claiming "Burma for Burmans," and called for the country's independence from foreign rule. Over the first few years, the movement gained popularity through a song called "Till the End of the World, Burma," which they performed throughout the country along with a short explanation of the nationalist lyrics. The song would later become the country's national anthem. The organization was, at first, concerned only with performing this song to increasingly larger crowds and publishing a pamphlet outlining the main points from their manifesto.[80]

[77] U Wisara was encouraged by U Ottama's lectures and took to giving his own anti-colonial lectures around the country. He died in 1929 after a 166-day hunger strike during his second prison term.
[78] The group adopted the appellation "Thakin," which translates to "master" and was usually reserved for the British. Yi, *The Dobama Movement*.
[79] Yi, *The Dobama Movement*.
[80] Ibid.

While the Western-educated elite, like U Ottama and the Thakin Party, organized these nationalist movements around propaganda campaigns and peaceful protest, in rural areas a more symbolic and traditional movement was being organized. On October 28, 1930, in a context of earthquakes taken as prophesy, a former monk who came to be known as Saya San was crowned King of Burma. The British removed the last King of Burma from power when they took the imperial capital in Mandalay in 1886, sending him and his attaché to India. On December 21st, Saya San, crowned Thupannaka Galon Raja, moved to a makeshift palace in Tharawaddy, a relatively lawless region south of Yangon. He ceremoniously plotted out a new royal city and immediately declared war on the British. The rebellion started the day after, and over the next eighteen months 3,000 rebels were killed or wounded, 9,000 were captured and arrested, and 128 were hanged, with few British casualties.[81] The rebels attacked colonial troops without weaponry and relying instead on their "innate courage and the spirit of nationalism," or, according to the British, "incredible superstitiousness and tragic ignorance."[82] Central to this "ignorance" was the belief that the "King Golden Crow," as he was known in British press, was invulnerable and invisible to the British. This, coupled with the traditional belief that tattoos would protect the Burmese from all harm, drove many Burmese to attack the British with little fear of death. Unfortunately for the rebels, the superior weaponry of the British allowed them to quash the rebellion, although the rebellion did last for almost two years and required troops to be sent from India.

In 1935 the Dobama Asiayone organized their first annual conference, uniting representatives from districts around the country in order to prepare for the new national

[81] Solomon, "Saya San," 210.
[82] Ibid, 211.

elections that would be held in 1937. Their goal was to earn the popular vote in order to dismantle the new constitution the British had imposed on them, which they saw as extending the "slavery" of their people.[83] Although they were largely ignored at first, the incarceration of several of its members and government censorship of their meetings earned the attention and respect of other, more prominent, nationalist leaders; people like U Ottama. After the first annual conference the organization finally established a leadership and membership system, which matured by the second annual conference to include representatives from most districts in the country. The epitome of the Dobama Asiayone was their involved in a 1938 oil-workers strike, which would also prove to be their downfall.

The year 1938, 1300 in the Burmese Buddhist calendar, was known as the "Thirteen-hundredth Year of Strife." The Second Indo-Burmese Riots occurred that year, but there was also a large worker and student strike that culminated in the overthrow of the cabinet of the coalition government led by Prime Minister Ba Maw.[84] The strike began in the city of Chauk in central Burma on January 8, 1938, after the Burmah Oil Company announced it would be changing vacation days, extending them by seven, but removing several religious holidays associated with Buddhism. The workers strike in response was at first limited to oil workers, but it soon grew with the support of the Thakins from the Dobama Asiayone. Workers from around the country, including Burmese and Indians, supported the strike by pooling their resources and holding rallies in support. The original demand to reverse the proposed vacation day changes transformed over the months to demands for better working conditions as well as general anti-colonial

[83] Ibid.
[84] British Burma had officially separated from India in 1937, becoming an independent colony with its own elected legislative and executive government and subject to its own judicial branch.

demands such as the return of the last fifty years of taxes. On November 14, the oil-field workers announced a "glorious march" from Pegu to Rangoon, where they would make their demands to the government in person.[85]

On November 30, the glorious march began at the Dobama offices in Chauk as men marched four abreast behind the tricolor flag inlaid with a hammer and sickle. Their wives and children waved from the sidelines chanting "Victory to you!" and the marchers responded with "Burning torch! Burning torch! May its light shine throughout Burma!"[86] While the marchers were welcomed at every village by the people, they faced entrenched police and government opposition along their route. On December 6 in Magwe, the marchers faced stalwart government opposition as the Magwe leadership declared Section 144 to be in effect, blocking roads in and out of the city and barring the march from continuing onward. After four days of hunger strike, and with the support of the newly arrived Dobama leadership, the marchers decided to oppose Section 144 on December 11 and continue their march. The police responded by beating the marchers, surrounding them with police armed with guns, and charging them with mounted police. As the unarmed marchers were faced with this threat, they chanted:

> Failure means death and burial, yet the throne itself is reward for success and survival; To be born is to die; Show your valor when faced with danger; Victory shall be ours.[87]

At a nearby prison, Thakin Khin, a leader from the movement that was previously imprisoned, made his way to the rooftop to speak to a group of students who left the marchers to report the situation. He read aloud a message from another Dobama leader, Thakin Ba Tin:

> Dear Victorious Death-defying Comrades,
>
> It is your bounden duty to defy Section 144 and to set out at 6 a.m. and reach your destination. Everyone is mortal, and to be born and to die is nothing strange. No one is

[85] Yi, The Dobama Movement, 98.
[86] Ibid, 100.
[87] Ibid, 102.

> born twice. Death can come in many ways. Death can claim you in your own bed. You shall die as fate decrees. Of the various modes of meeting death, the most noble one is to die defying the imperialists who have taken away our King and have subjected is to slavery.
>
> Oh valiant ones, on this your day of battle, like true heroes may you be able to march without trepidation and attain the flower of victory.[88]

The workers continued their march to Rangoon and on January 8, 1939, they joined another group of marchers: 1000 peasant protestors who had begun their march to Rangoon on December 29 in opposition to new agriculture regulations. The combined workers and peasants marched together in Rangoon in solidarity. They were joined by student strikers and another 3500 workers from other groups, becoming a protest of some 10,000 people who marched together to Shwedagon Pagoda and established an encampment in the terraces surrounding Myanmar's most holy Buddhist site, said to house relics of the Buddha.

In the shadow of this most revered site, peasants and workers established national organizations and coordinated their actions in opposition to the colonial regime. The Dobama Asiayone published a new manifesto demanding the repeal of the 1935 Constitution and encouraging all current members of the House of Representatives to leave their posts and join them in organizing a new government on behalf of the peasants and the proletariat. On January 10, with a crowd of over 10,000 people, the leaders of the Dobama issued an ultimatum to the British government, threatening to coordinate a country-wide strike unless their demands were met by January 15.[89] The British did not acquiesce, leading to workers strikes throughout the country as well as student strikes and mass demonstrations. On January 23, the British sent in police to ransack the Dobama's offices, taking their equipment and hampering their efforts at organizing the general strike. The police invasion of Shwedagon Pagoda, with British and Indian

[88] Ibid, 102-103.
[89] Ibid, 118.

officers wearing shoes, however, enraged anti-imperialist sentiments and bolstered the movement that was now joined by influential Buddhist monks.

On February 10, after the government imprisoned a student leader and a Buddhist monk, a group of protestors in Mandalay, led by Buddhist monks, faced off against the police. After repeated attempts to disperse the crowd, the police fired upon the protestors, killing six Buddhist monks and wounding several others. In response, the Dobama used the unprecedented demonstration on February 12 to organize a protest of the parliament, which was set to start its session on February 16.[90] At the opening session at 9:00am, as protestors halted all work, banged tin cans, and burned effigies of coalition cabinet members throughout the country, the parliament passed a vote of no confidence, removing Ba Maw's coalition government from power. On February 20, however, the Dobama failed to halt the establishment of a new government by U Pu, whose first action was to break the student strike.[91] The student leaders voted to halt the strike after negotiations with the government, and so the movement began to falter. Over the next few months there would be renewed attempts to organize, and some successful workers strikes, but by July of 1939 the encampment at Shwedagon was empty and the country returned to normalcy. The Dobama Asiayone was riddled with infighting in response to the denouement as members accused others of working with the government or not being sufficiently invested in the cause of the proletariat. Soon afterward, several factions left the Dobama, splintering the organization.

[90] Ibid, 128.
[91] Ibid, 130.

WWII and the road to Independence

The rule of the British was shaken, as it was in many of their colonies, by the beginning of World War II in 1939. The British had to combat Japanese offensives in the region just as the nationalist organizations in Myanmar reached their strongest and most organized states. Several leaders from the old Dobama Asiayone allied themselves with the Japanese, as did many of the Burmese of central and southern Myanmar, viewing the Japanese army as fellow Asians coming to release them from foreign rule.[92] The British were still able to rally some local forces, however, by striking deals with minority ethnic groups who found the British rulers more favorable than the previous Burmese Empire. The polarization between ethnic minorities and the Burmese majority, spurred on by support from British and Japanese armies, led to clashes between Myanmar's ethnic groups around the country, with lasting consequences for the federal government built in the aftermath of independence.

The British secured the support of local minorities against the Burmese and Japanese allied forces through promises of increased autonomy. British colonial rule brought together many distinct ethnic groups, some of which had their own imperial histories, into a single administrative region. The Rakhine State was the home of the Arakan Empire, conquered by the Burmese Konbaung Dynasty only forty years before the First Anglo-Burmese War. The Shan State was home to nomadic tribes organized around a chieftain system, paying tribute to the Burmese empires in the south. These and other ethnic groups considered themselves ethnically and cultural distinct from the Burmese and hoped to retain the relative independence that the British had given them through their designation as "Frontier Areas." This was the case in the Rakhine State, where the British were able to convince Muslim leadership in northern Rakhine to

[92] Col. Ba Shin, *The Coming of Islam*.

organize a militia against the Buddhist majority in the south who had allied themselves with the Japanese. This polarization led to frequent battles in the Rakhine State between the nascent guerrilla organizations on each side, leading to a further north-south segregation of Muslims and Buddhists. This segregation continues today so that cities near the border with Bangladesh are majority Muslim while cities in the south of the state are majority Buddhist.[93]

Despite the combined efforts of the British and their allied local forces, the Japanese were able to take control of Burma in 1942, but their rule would not last long. After only a few years of Japanese rule, the leaders of the Dobama Asiayone realized that the Japanese were just as hostile toward the Burmese, if not more so, than the British. The allied Burmese and British forces thus fought together against a weakened Japanese army, regaining control of the country in 1945. Soon after the British were re-instated, Burmese leaders demanded their independence. This occurred primarily through the young and charismatic General Aung San, whose photograph now rests in almost every home and business in central Myanmar. Aung San organized a popular movement against the British and institutionalized it in a political party called the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL). His popular support and fast mobilization of urban Burmese pushed the colonial power to accept their demands for independence talks in 1946.[94]

Having secured an agreement for independence, General Aung San, as the head of the Provisional Government of Burma, met with leaders of the Shan, Kachin, and Chin ethnic groups in the historic Panglong Conference of 1947 in order to settle issues of regional independence. These minority groups were promised independent states by the British in exchange for their

[93] Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnic Conflict* (Dhaka: Zed Books, 1999).
[94] Ibid.

help in battling the Japanese, but the new government of Myanmar hoped to retain unity over the country. The signed agreement exchanged provisional unity for the country in exchange for the ability of minority states in the country to withdraw from the union at any time in the following ten years. The 1947 Constitution, however, produced an unequal system where two minority groups, the Shan and the Karenni, were not granted the right to secession.[95] In order to deal with some of these issues, the AFPFL chose a Shan as the country's first President and a Karen to head the army. That same year, shortly after securing the country's independence, General Aung San was assassinated during a cocktail party along with several members of his inner circle. One of the members of his inner circle, U Nu, was able to avoid Aung San's fate and was appointed head of the party and thus Prime Minister of the Provisional Government of Burma.

2.4 From Independence to Military Dictatorship

The early democratic period of the country was characterized by turmoil driven by the threat posed by ethnic armed groups as well as two communist insurgencies. Although the AFPFL had underlying communist and socialist ideals, there were many hardliners within the party that disagreed with the concessions made to the British colonial government.[96] In 1946, as negotiations over independence were underway, Thakin Soe labeled Aung San a collaborationist, arguing for a stronger revolutionary strategy against the British.[97] These divisions led Thakin Soe and his group, who became known as the Red Flag communists, to split from the AFPFL. Although originally supportive of the concessions to the British, the communists who remained

[95] Josef Silverstein, "Civil War and Rebellion in Burma," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 21, no. 1 (1990): 114–34.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Callahan, *Making Enemies*, 103.

in the AFPFL, known as the White Flag communists, left the AFPFL after the assassination of Aung San on July 19, 1947. Soon after, and only months after the declaration of independence, the Burmese Communist Party (BCP) declared an open revolt against the government. By the end of the first year of independence, the fledgling government faced armed opposition from both communist groups as well as growing ethnic-based insurgent groups in the Karen, Rakhine, and Mon States.

In the Rakhine State, Muslims that had expected the British to provide them a path for independence instead organized under the banner of the *Mujahid*.[98] The rebel group first asked for annexation by then East Pakistan, but Pakistan rejected the idea. The group then attempted to claim autonomous control of the region, centered on Maungdaw. Given the overextended military, the mujahideen rebels were able to maintain control over parts of northern Rakhine until 1954, when the Burmese military's Operation Monsoon captured many of their strongholds and killed most of their leadership. The skirmishes between the mujahideen and the Burmese government finally ended in 1961 through a ceasefire agreement, after which most of the mujahideen that were left surrendered to the government.[99]

In the Irrawaddy Delta, the democratic experiment was led by Prime Minister U Nu, a devout Buddhist and a Burmese nationalist. His government returned the political and economic power that the Buddhist monastic community had held before British occupation. During the 1959-1960 election campaign, U Nu promoted a constitutional amendment that would make Buddhism the state religion.[100] Although widely supported in central Myanmar, where most of

[98] Smith, "Burma: Insurgency," 64.
[99] Ibid, 194.
[100] Donald Eugene Smith, *Religion and Politics in Burma* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

the population is Burmese and Buddhist, demonstrations and agitation opposing the amendment occurred throughout the country. In a related attack on November 1961, Buddhist instigators set fire to and destroyed a mosque in Mandalay, killing four Muslims.[101] Communal violence was rare in Myanmar at the time, although violence between the army and the many armed groups around the country was ubiquitous. In 1958, U Nu willingly gave up power to General Ne Win as an emergency measure meant to protect the country from the ongoing insurgencies throughout the country, which were only getting stronger. After dealing with the imminent threat, General Ne Win gave power back to U Nu in 1960, but, using the 1961 communal violence in Mandalay as an excuse for action, General Ne Win led a military coup in 1962.[102]

Between 1962 and 1988, the Burmese military, called the *Tatmadaw*, led several military campaigns targeting ethnic minority armed groups around the country. In 1977, the Tatmadaw led a campaign to register citizens and identify foreigners living in the country prior to the national census, a campaign they called the Nagamin, or King Dragon, Operation. By 1978, some 200,000 Muslims from the Rakhine State had fled to Bangladesh, claiming persecution by the Burmese military because of this campaign. The refugees accused the military of forcibly evicting them as well as of wanton rape and murder.[103] These kinds of operations were not limited to the Rakhine State. In 1983, a military operation against armed groups in Mon State on the border with Thailand led to another refugee crisis. Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist refugees

[101] Andrew Huxley, "Positivists and Buddhists: The Rise and Fall of Anglo-Burmese Ecclesiastical Law," *Law and Social Inquiry* 26, no. 1 (2001): 113–42.
[102] The use of the communal violence as an excuse for the infamous coup provides some evidence of military interest in instigating violence. However, it is nearly impossible to know for sure whether the military in fact ignited that violence, whether they took the opportunity for change, or if the violence supported their belief that the country was in danger.
[103] Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma*.

in Thailand reported similar destruction by the Burmese military, including one report of the Burmese military working with local Buddhists to destroy a Muslim village and mosque.[104]

The socialist rule of General Ne Win lasted until 1988, when a mass social movement against single-party rule led by students and Buddhist monks ousted the government. On July 23rd, 1988, after three months of attempting to quell protesters using deadly force, and killing at least 250 students, General Ne Win stepped down from his role as president.[105] The violence, however, continued, culminating on August 8th, 1988 (giving the movement the name "8888 Uprising"), when hundreds of thousands of citizens took to the streets at 8am, protesting the authoritarian practices of the government.[106] In response to this mass mobilization, the military opened fire on the crowds killing or wounding thousands, and then proceeded to hunt down protesters and leaders over the following weeks. Estimated deaths from this attack range from the government's official figure of 516 to over 10,000.[107] On September 18th, 1988, General Saw Maung, the new head of the military, established a new political party called the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and then took control of the government through another military coup. The military continued to hunt down dissidents and quashed all protests by the end of the month. During the turmoil that accompanied the 1988 uprising, and in the face of reduced government control, there were scattered reports of communal violence, including reports of Buddhist-Muslim violence in the Bago region, just north of Yangon.

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[104] International Crisis Group, "The Dark Side of the Transition: Violence against Muslims in Myanmar," *Asia Report No. 251*, October 1, 2013, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/dark-side-transition-violence-against-muslims-myanmar.
[105] Taylor, *The State in Myanmar*, 385.
[106] Ibid, 386.
[107] Ibid, 388.

The 8888 Uprising is a key moment in Myanmar's history, marking a dramatic demand for democracy by the citizens. Although the military government was reinstated shortly after Ne Win stepped down, the uprising led to the formation of several pro-Democracy organizations including the militant All Burma Students Front (ABSF) and the democratic opposition party to the military, the National League for Democracy (NLD). In 1990 the military government held the first democratic elections since the 1962 coup but refused to accept the NLD's landslide victory (NLD won with 81% of the vote), instead jailing the NLD's leadership including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.[108]

General Than Shwe and the 1988 Aftermath

After regaining control of the government through the SLORC, later renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), the military stepped up its campaigns against armed ethnic minority groups in the country. As part of these efforts, the military confiscated land and forcibly settled ethnically Burmese people among the majority Muslim population in the Rakhine State.[109] The authorities furthermore reduced the freedom of movement of Muslims, introduced restrictions on marriage and birth registrations, and obstructed Muslim religious practices.[110] Over 1991-1992, 250,000 Muslims from Rakhine State fled these conditions into neighboring Bangladesh. In this same period, the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO), an armed group based in Bangladesh and along the border, stepped up its attacks on the Burmese military. In April 1994, the RSO crossed into Myanmar and detonated nine bombs in police and civilian infrastructure in Maungdaw, on the border with Bangladesh. The 1990s saw a large increase in

[108] Ibid, 406-416.
[109] Leider, "Rohingya: The History of a Muslim."
[110] Francis Wade and Linsey McGoey, *Myanmar's Enemy Within: Buddhist Violence and the Making of a Muslim Other* (Zed Books, 2019).

the number of reported incidents of this nature, but also saw a large growth in communal, non-military, violence.

On March 16, 1997, a large group that included hundreds of Buddhist monks and laypeople attacked a Muslim neighborhood in Mandalay, resulting in severe property damage and several deaths. The attack came after a famous statue of the Buddha held at the Maha Myatmuni pagoda was found desecrated. The statue, originally brought to Mandalay by King Bodawpaya after a military campaign against the Arakan Empire in 1784, was said to hold a precious ruby, called Padamya Myetshin, in its navel. This ruby was said to assure military success to any who possessed it.[111] The desecration was discovered the morning after the statue was scheduled to be renovated. The statue was found with a hole in its navel, where the legendary ruby was supposed to be held. In response to this discovery, a meeting of senior monks was held in a nearby monastery. Rumors circulated that the military had forced monks to allow the renovations, but after a whole day of discussion there was still no clear answer to what had occurred. During the meeting a Buddhist monk and a lay man are reported to have entered and announced that a Muslim man had raped a Buddhist woman.[112]

Reports by NGOs and international newspapers as well as foreigners working in the country (domestic media was tightly controlled by the government) suggest that the monks were driven by this claim to take to the streets and make their way to the man's house, seeking

[111] Gustaf Houtman, *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics: Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy* (Tokyo: Tokyo University of Foreign Studies Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1999), 137.
[112] Christina Fink, *Living Silence in Burma: Surviving under Military Rule* (London: Zed Books, 2013), 232.

justice.[113] During the procession, monks and lay people attacked nearby Muslim homes and businesses. Over the next few days, as news of the incident spread, other attacks on Muslim communities and mosques occurred in Mandalay and in other major cities. Some witnesses reported that the monks they saw attacking the Muslims were holding walkie-talkies, and that some of them could be seen wearing army shorts under their robes, although these reports are far from reliable.[114] There are also reports that anti-Muslim pamphlets were distributed before the incident, urging Buddhists to refrain from buying from Muslim owned businesses.[115] The precise reasons why the monks were driven to take action in this case are unclear, but some journalists and domestic as well as international observers suggest that the violence was orchestrated in order to distract attention away from the desecration of the statue.

2.5 Saffron Revolution, Communal Violence, and Democratization

In 2007, thousands of monks and lay people took to the streets in protest of the military government. This protest, the first of its kind since 1988, attracted worldwide attention as international observers watched thousands of laypeople and Buddhist monks march against military dictatorship, and ultimately face a brutal crackdown.[116] The protests began on August 15 in response to large increases in the price of government-controlled petroleum. The government

[113] Images Asia, "Report on the Situation for Muslims in Burma," June 26, 1997, *The Online Burma/Myanmar Library*, July 22, 2018, https://www.burmalibrary.org/reg.burma/archives/199706/msg00422.html.
[114] Ibid.
[115] International Crisis Group, "The Dark Side of the Transition."
[116] Seth Mydans, "Monks' Protest Is Challenging Burmese Junta," *The New York Times*, September 24, 2007, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/24/world/asia/24myanmar.html.

easily managed these protests by having police harass protestors and arresting its leaders.[117] On September 5, however, during a demonstration held in Pakkoku, police made the mistake of beating a small group of Buddhist monks. This attack outraged Buddhist monks around the country, who began to organize their own movement in response, coordinated in large part by the All Burma Monks Alliance (ABMA).[118] They demanded the government apologize for its mistreatment of the *thangha* and issued a *pattam nikkujana kamma*, "overturn the alms bowl," meaning that they would not allow the military to make donations to the *thangha* and thus barred them from gaining merit. This act not only gave the protests increased attention and legitimacy, it also threatened the legitimacy of the military government which saw itself as the inheritors of Buddhist monarchical rule. Soon, Buddhist monks from around the country joined the lay protestors in the streets demanding not only economic reform and an official apology, but also the overthrown of the military regime and reinstitution of democratic rule. On September 22, the protests gained new political legitimacy when a group of Buddhist monks and protestors met with democratic activist Aung San Suu Kyi, who was being held under house arrest in Yangon. Two days later, an estimated 50,000 people demonstrated in the streets of Yangon, in tandem with widespread demonstrations in other cities around the country.[119]

The protests were quickly dissipated on September 26th, however, when battalions opened fire on demonstrators in Yangon. The military simultaneously instituted a propaganda campaign suggesting that the protests were organized by foreign actors, and that their actions

[117] Human Rights Watch, "Crackdown on Burmese Muslims" (Washington D.C.: Human Rights Watch, 2002), https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder /asia/burmese_muslims.pdf.
[118] Matthew J. Walton, "Buddhism, Politics, and Political Change," in *Myanmar: The Dynamics of an Evolving Polity*, ed. David I. Steinberg (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2015), 119-120.
[119] Human Rights Watch, "Crackdown."

were necessary to safeguard the country from these foreign interests. The night of the 26th, Buddhist monasteries involved in the protests were also raided and the movement's leading figures were arrested. The protests stopped almost immediately as any other attempts at demonstrations were immediately faced with tear gas, batons, and in some cases, live ammunition.[120] After a few days the government announced that 10 people had been killed during the protests and 3000 people, including 1000 Buddhist monks, had been arrested.[121] While the military government was able to regain control, the Saffron Revolution pushed leadership to make concessions in order to maintain stability. Soon afterward, the military announced plans for reform including the institution of a path to a "disciplined democracy." In 2008, the military passed a new constitution that promised democratic reform, but it was largely seen as ineffective and unlikely to bring about any actual change. In fact, the NLD at first refused to take part in the new constitution's electoral system by boycotting the 2010 elections. The elections resulted in the unsurprising landslide victory of a political party made up of ex-military generals, called the Union and Solidarity Development of Party (USDP).

Liberalization, Democracy, and the Rohingya

The newly elected semi-civilian parliament selected Thein Sein, a former general, as president of Myanmar in 2010. In 2011, Thein Sein passed sweeping democratic reforms, fulfilling many of the promises made after the Saffron Revolution. By January of 2012, Thein Sein had released 651 of the country's political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi. In April, the NLD decided to take part in the upcoming by-elections and were able to secure 43 out of the

[120] Ibid.
[121] Estimates by the UN claim that the number killed was 31. See Human Rights Watch, "Crackdown."

45 parliamentary seats that they contested. In August, the censorship board was eliminated. President Thein Sein was also holding talks with Aung San Suu Kyi as well as holding talks and working toward ceasefire agreements with minority leaders from around the country. Western countries responded to these reforms by removing their crippling economic sanctions, increasing aid, and in November, then U.S. President Barack Obama became the first U.S. president to ever visit the country.[122] In 2012, Thein Sein went on to develop the country's administrative structure and began by targeting the rampant corruption. Investigations quickly led the Vice President to resign and removed many members of Thein Sein's own cabinet. Although reforms were undoubtedly a step forward for the country, the government's mistreatment of minorities and repressive action against protestors continued. On May 28th, 2012, shortly after the implementation of many of these democratic reforms, communal violence broke out in the Rakhine State when a Buddhist woman was allegedly raped and murdered by several Muslim men. Later that year, violence spread southward to the rest of Rakhine State and in 2013, communal violence erupted in central Myanmar and then throughout the country.[123]

The violence between 2012 and 2014 had dramatic consequences for Myanmar as it became a springboard for Buddhist nationalism just as Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) campaigned for the 2015 national elections. The NLD and USDP campaigns would have to deal with the anti-Muslim sentiment rampant throughout the country as well as the increasingly popular and strong organizations of nationalist Buddhist monks. The Association for the Protection of Race and Religion (MaBaTha), founded in 2014, led campaigns against the

[122] Ian Holliday, "Myanmar in 2012: Toward a Normal State," *Asian Survey* 53, no. 1 (2013), 93–100.
[123] Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Rakhine Inquiry Commission, *Final Report of Inquiry Commission on Sectarian Violence in Rakhine State*, Nay Pyi Taw, July 8, 2013.

NLD that suggested Aung San Suu Kyi cared more about the Muslim minority than it did about the country. Facebook posts called Aung San Suu Kyi a "kalar lover," meaning foreigner lover, and accused Aung San Suu Kyi of affiliating with foreign interests. In response to these campaigns, Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD party decided not to field any Muslim candidates for public office, barring several experienced publicly elected officials from retaining their seats in parliament.[124]

Whether because of their actions opposing this campaign or simply because of their broad popular support, the 2015 general elections resulted in a landslide victory for the NLD as 86% of the seats in the Assembly of the Union, including the House of Representatives and the House of Nationalities, shifted out of military control. Although most expected the USDP to disregard the results, as their predecessors in the SLORC had done in 1990, the USDP did in fact recognize the results and gave up their positions in government. The following February, both *hluttaw* (houses of parliament) were constituted by a NLD majority, allowing them to elect President Htin Kyaw, the first president not affiliated with the military since 1962. Aung San Suu Kyi, who was barred from becoming president by a clause in the constitution that disqualifies candidates with foreign spouses or children, was appointed to a position specifically created for her, State Councilor. In the years since the NLD's victory Myanmar has seen a growth in foreign investment and in the economy more generally. However, in 2016, only 6 months after the NLD took their positions in the *hluttaw*, a crisis unfolded in the Rakhine State which fundamentally changed their image in the international arena.

[124] Hanna Hindstrom, "NLD Blocked Muslim Candidates to Appease Ma Ba Tha: Party Member," *The Irrawaddy*, August 31, 2015, https://www.irrawaddy.com/election/news/nld-blocked-muslim-candidates-to-appease-ma-ba-tha-party-member.

The violence began on October 26, 2016 when a group of Muslim rebels simultaneously attacked several police outposts in western Myanmar, along the border with Bangladesh.[125] The rebels were later identified as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). Smaller attacks continued throughout the year as the ARSA grew by, in some cases, threatening to kill village and township leaders who identified them to the Tatmadaw. On August 25, 2017, a coordinated strike by ARSA soldiers, armed with stolen weaponry, attacked 30 outposts along the border with Bangladesh.[126] This attack led to a devastating military response. Over the next year, 750,000 Rohingya Muslims from northern Rakhine State, over half the Muslim population in the region, were forced to flee across the border as the military burned down entire villages, committed sexual violence, and killed children in what the United Nations has denounced as ethnic cleansing and the ICJ later tried as genocide.

On December 11 and 12, 2019, Aung San Suu Kyi spoke at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) where she argued against the case brought by Gambia by suggesting that the clearance operations in Rakhine could not be called genocide because the victims included Buddhists as well as Muslims.[127] Her testimony in the court is unprecedented. No other country accused of genocide has willingly, and out of their own initiative, sent a government official to defend the country against such claims. Aung San Suu Kyi argued that the violence in the Rakhine State has not been directed against Muslims but has instead occurred in a context of

[125] "Myanmar Policemen Killed in Rakhine Border Attack," *BBC News*, October 9, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37601928.
[126] Poppy McPherson, "Dozens Killed in Fighting between Myanmar Army and Rohingya Militants," *The Guardian*, August 25, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/25/rohingya-militants-blamed-as-attack-on-myanmar-border-kills-12.
[127] Wayne Hay, "Transcript: Aung San Suu Kyi's Speech at the ICJ in Full," *Al Jazeera Media Network*, December 13, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/transcript-aung-san-suu-kyi-speech-icj-full-191212085257384.html.

ongoing armed conflict between the military and various armed groups, including the ARSA. Muslims were not targeted, she argued, but instead suffered this ongoing violence to the same extent as other civilians in the region. Although she did not condone the violence, she argued that its lack of direct targeting of Muslims belies any claims of genocide or ethnic cleansing.

> The Arakan Army seeks autonomy or independence for Rakhine - or Arakan as it was called - finding inspiration in the memory of the historic Kingdom of Arakan. This conflict has led to the displacement of thousands of civilians in Rakhine. Standard security restrictions - such as curfew and checkpoints - are in place at present in the conflict zone and affect the situation of civilians there, regardless of their background.[128]

Aung San Suu Kyi further argued that the ICJ should not intervene in this case because the domestic government is already in the process of seeking justice for possible crimes. An Independent Commission of Inquiry was established to seek further evidence, which is chaired by a former Deputy Foreign Minister from the Philippines and includes other international members such as a former Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations from Japan.[129] The ICJ seemed to side with Aung San Suu Kyi in its preliminary decision, although a final decision on whether Myanmar was guilty of genocide could only be made after substantial evidence was gathered. For now, the ICJ called on Myanmar to defend the Rohingya, urging the country to '"take all measures within its power" to prevent the killing of the Rohingya or causing bodily or mental harm to the members of the group, including by the military or "any irregular armed units."'[130]

[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.
[130] United Nations, "Top UN Court Orders Myanmar to Protect Rohingya from Genocide." *UN News*, January 23, 2020, https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/01/1055841.

Aung San Suu Kyi's actions were celebrated in Myanmar as a defense against an ignorant and belligerent international community.[131] Her actions have also occurred in a context of upcoming elections, set to occur in November of this year, 2020. There is speculation that current attempts at amending the constitution will allow her to finally be selected as Myanmar's president. It is still unclear whether Aung San Suu Kyi truly believes that the military did not target Muslims, or whether she continues to walk the thin line between enforcing her vision of the country and acquiescing to the still-powerful military. What is undoubtedly true is that she has shunned Muslims in Myanmar and gained wide support of most Burmese in return.

[131] Kyaw Soe Htet, "Tens of Thousands March in Myanmar Ahead of ICJ Hearings," *The Myanmar Times*, December 10, 2019, https://www.mmtimes.com/news/tens-thousands-march-myanmar-ahead-icj-hearings.html.

CHAPTER 3

GROUP IDENTITY THROUGH VIOLENCE

3.1 Introduction

In Myanmar, Muslims are called *kalar*, a derogatory term that means "foreigner." To some, the term simply identifies an ethnicity or race, while to others it is a word that signifies as much hatred as pejoratives against African Americans in the United States. Unlike in the United States, however, the word is ubiquitous in the lives of Muslims in Myanmar. As a businessman in Yangon explained to me,

> We always hear the word, ever since the morning. I always hear the word. They use it in a negative sense too. When I go to the market I will hear it, when I go to the tea shop I will hear the word, when I take the bus I hear it, and even when I come back [home] and watch the TV, I hear the word.

Being Muslim in Myanmar means being a *kalar*, a foreigner, and they are reminded of their difference constantly. The association is not one of mere difference either; it implies that Muslims do not belong in the country, and that Muslims have interests more aligned with countries like Saudi Arabia or Pakistan than with Myanmar. This is true even though Muslims have lived in the country for centuries and have even played important roles in the development of Myanmar.[1]

The association between Muslims and foreignness is key to understanding the relationship between Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar. It is a defining feature of their relationship, expressed in most if not all contemporary incidents of conflict between them. This is true in the violence by the Myanmar military against the Rohingya in the Rakhine State, but it

[1] U Raschid, for example, was a close friend of Myanmar's independence leader General Aung San and served under several ministries in the first democratic regime.

also characterizes conflict between Buddhist and Muslims elsewhere. It is the defining feature of this inter-group conflict; foreignness is what makes Buddhist-Muslim violence distinct from the ongoing civil wars and armed conflicts around the country. Violence between Buddhists and Muslims is not violence between majority and minority ethnic groups claiming resources, a political voice, or territorial autonomy. Violence between Buddhists and Muslims is instead violence between domestic heroes and an invading, foreign force, intent on eliminating what it means to be Burmese. This chapter will trace the origins of the association between Muslim and foreignness from the British colonial period, showing the context of its development, and then identify specific moments in history where we can see how the association is challenged or reinforced.[2] In so doing, the chapter will argue that the construction of ethnic boundaries occurs in and through incidents of violence.

3.2 Becoming Muslim in Myanmar

In Myanmar, being Muslim means being seen as a foreigner. This is tied to the colonial history of the country, but it was not inevitable. While there was increased immigration of Muslims into the country during the colonial era, there was also a large growth in the Indian Hindu population and an exponential growth of Christian converts throughout the country. Furthermore, Muslims are not a monolithic group in Myanmar. There are Indian Muslims who are phenotypically different from Burmese Buddhists, but there are also Burmese Muslims who

[2] What it means to be Buddhist has undoubtedly changed throughout this period as well, and one could rightly argue that a focus on Muslims alone is one-sided. There are two reasons for a focus on Muslims. The first is the existence of scholarship on the development of Buddhism in Myanmar, and the relative dearth of such work on Islam. The second is the embattled position of Muslims. This position creates more opportunities for us to observe boundary work, and thus makes the best possible case for an analysis of change over time.

look, dress, and speak like Burmese Buddhists. Burmese Muslim women even wear the tight-fitted clothing associated with the Bamar, which is seen as too revealing for other Muslim groups.[3] At street markets in contemporary Yangon you can see this diversity as some women are wearing full Burqa, others are wearing hijab, and still others are wearing Burmese clothes. Some scholars argue in passing that Indian Hindus were not targeted by Buddhists because their religions are fairly close theologically, a dubious claim on its own, but this does not explain why Muslims were targeted over Christians.[4] Christians would theoretically be a better fit as representatives of the foreign invader intent on destroying Buddhism since the Christian population in the country is made up primarily of converts and Christian services are often held in English. While Muslims did indeed immigrate to Myanmar at an unprecedented rate during the colonial period, their selection as representative of the foreign other was anything but inevitable. This section will track the development of Islamic identity in the country by identifying the origins of Islamic "foreignness" and observing the way this attribute has been reproduced and challenged over time.

The enmity between Buddhist and Muslim in Myanmar, and the association of Muslim with "foreigner," is undoubtedly tied to colonial rule. While there was violence between Muslims and Buddhists before the colonial period, these were battles of conquest or riches, not ones based on identity. They were raids on Muslim villages by the Arakan Empire or Moghul invasions from the north. They had little, if anything, to do with religion.[5] While the Pagan

[3] Melissa Crouch, ed., *Islam and the State in Myanmar: Muslim-Buddhist Relations and the Politics of Belonging* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[4] There has been anti-Christian violence in Myanmar, particularly in the Kachin State where the Christian population is largest. However, the number of incidents and the damage they have caused are far fewer than anti-Muslim communal violence.
[5] Victor B. Lieberman, "Ethnic Politics in Eighteenth-Century Burma," *Modern Asian Studies* 12, (July 1978): 455–82.

empire may have encouraged a deep connection between being Bamar and being Buddhist, the association of Myanmar as a "nation" of Buddhists distinct from other religious groups did not come until late in the British occupation. In fact, during the time of the Burmese Kings, Muslims and members of other religious minorities were permitted to marry Buddhists and were also free to raise their children according to either set of beliefs.[6] There is also evidence of government sanctioned Muslim settlements even as late as King Mindon (1853-1878), the penultimate king of Myanmar, who used public funds to build a mosque for Panthay Muslims in Mandalay.[7] Although Buddhism was the state religion since the Pagan Empire, then, this did not mean that all its subjects had to be Buddhist. Muslims may have been at the "margins of Burmese life and society," as Stephen Keck argues, but they were accepted as the empire's constituents.[8] The creation of Myanmar as a nation of Buddhists did not occur in Pagan, but it can instead be traced to the 1920's and 1930's. It is the product of a colonized, Western-educated, Bamar elite, living in the urban centers of Myanmar during the final decades of colonial rule.

The Indo-Burmese Riots

The relationship between Indians and local Burmans was tense throughout the colonial period as the English speaking and British-trained Indian migrants were granted rights to own

[6] Chie Ikeya, *Refiguring Women, Colonialism, and Modernity in Burma* (University of Hawaii Press, 2011); Moshe Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma: A Study of a Minority Group* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1972), 27.
[7] King Mindon built a Mosque in Mandalay in order to serve a new constituency of Panthay Muslims who established themselves in Myanmar after the fall of the Panthay Empire in Yunnan.
[8] Stephen L. Keck, "Reconstructing Trajectories of Islam in British Burma," in *Islam and the State in Myanmar: Muslim-Buddhist Relations and the Politics of Belonging*, ed. Melissa Crouch (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016).

land, shared ownership of industrial operations, dominated positions in banking and foreign trade as well as transportation, and filled the ranks of the British military, police, and local government.[9] Indeed, while the British Empire was the ultimate colonial power, most day-to-day interactions that people in Myanmar had with colonial authorities were with British-trained Indians.[10] The subsequent tensions, which permeated central and southern Myanmar in particular, were most of the time expressed through discrimination and prejudice, but sometimes led to outright violence.[11]

There were at least three incidents of communal violence that included Muslims in the colonial period. The difference between these incidents allows us some insight into the changing identity of Muslims. The first incident occurred in 1893 in Yangon in response to the Cow Protectionist Movement in India. This incident was directed against Indian Muslims and included both Buddhists and Hindus, who acted together. In 1930, by contrast, the communal violence was directed against Indians generally as economic oppressors and representatives of colonial rule. These two incidents, although dramatically different from each other, are unique because they are so different from what we see today. The communal violence in 1938, on the other hand, were ignited by a perceived infraction on Buddhist identity, and specifically targeted Muslims. Since then, there has not been a single case of anti-Indian communal violence in Myanmar, but dozens of anti-Muslim incidents of communal violence. The 1938 communal violence furthermore shares startling similarities to the most recent cases of anti-Muslim conflict.

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[9] Robert H. Taylor, *The State in Myanmar* (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2009), 128-131.
[10] Taylor, *The State*.
[11] For example, Indian landowners were known to charge local Burmese exorbitant rates, leading to widespread poverty. This relationship led to constant conflict that often appears in the records of British bureaucrats. See Taylor, *The State*, 209.

The difference between the early violence and the communal violence in 1938 suggests that something changed between 1930 and 1938, affecting the way that Muslims were perceived in relation to Buddhists.

The first reported conflict between immigrant Indians and Burman Buddhists occurred in 1893 in the colonial capital, Rangoon (now Yangon). The conflict was an extension of the Cow Protectionist Movement in India, which had gained popularity in the 1880s and 1890s.[12] The movement was opposed to the slaughter of cows and was largely directed against Muslim practices of animal sacrifice. Hindus believed the cow to be sacred, while Muslims had traditionally slaughtered cows, particularly during religious festivals. In 1893, shortly before the Muslim religious festival of Eid, communal violence broke out throughout the Indian subcontinent including Bombay, Basantpur, and also spread to Yangon.[13] The violence in Yangon led to the death of twenty Muslims, and the serious injury of many others.[14] The issue of cow slaughter continues to be sensitive for Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar as it is in similarly diverse countries like Sri Lanka and India. Although the violence in 1893 was directed particularly against Muslims, it was carried out by both immigrant Hindus from India and Buddhists. While the 1893 communal violence was based on religion, it did not conflate Indian and Muslim identities as is common today, nor was it conceived as a battle in protection of the

[12] Anand A. Yang, "Sacred Symbol and Sacred Space in Rural India: Community Mobilization in the 'Anti-Cow Killing' Riot of 1893," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22, no. 4 (October 1980), 576–96.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Stephen L. Keck, "The Making of an Invisible Minority: Muslims in Colonial Burma," in *Living on the Margins: Minorities and Borderlines in Cambodia and Southeast Asia*, ed. Peter J. Hammer (Siem Reap: Center for Khmer Studies, 2009).

country. In fact, the violence was based on an international conflict and was tied more closely to the independence movement of India than that of Myanmar.

The second incident of communal violence during the colonial period began on May 10, 1930, when 2000 Indian dock workers at the port of Rangoon (now Yangon) went on strike against the Scindia Steam Navigation Company (SSNC), objecting to low wages.[15] The strike occurred in a context of increased housing prices and a surge in rural to urban migration caused by the global depression.[16] This created a surplus of cheap and willing Burmese labor, which the SSNC used to quickly replace the Indian strikers in an attempt to end the strike. Almost two weeks later, on May 22, the SSNC finally acquiesced to the dock workers' demands and agreed to increase their wages. The strike ended on May 26 when Indian workers returned to their posts at the same time as the Burmese laborers were being laid off. As the Burmese laborers left the dock, the Indian laborers clapped and jeered, celebrating their victory.[17] The Indian workers were from Telugu, the majority of whom moved to Myanmar for work after their home suffered a severe drought.[18] As such, the Telugu were generally poor immigrants willing to do hard labor for cheap and were perceived as among the lowliest of Indian migrants living in Myanmar. Insults from them demanded retribution, in the eyes of the Burmese, and after insults were exchanged, a brawl broke out. The violence escalated as the nearby scavenging staff of the

[15] Walter Sadgun Desai, *India and Burma: A Study* (Bombay: Orient Longmans Limited, 1954); Khin Yi, *The Dobama Movement in Burma (1930-1938)* (Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1988), 4; Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma*.
[16] Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma*, 32.
[17] Walter Sadgun Desai, "Review of A History of Modern Burma, by John F. Cady," *India Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (1959), 405–7.
[18] Although the religious affiliation of these specific workers is unknown, most Indians from Telugu are Hindu.

Municipal Corporation, also South Indian, were attacked.[19] That night, a group of Burmans attacked an Indian neighborhood, including people from a variety of castes and creeds.[20] Sporadic attacks occurred throughout the city over the next four days, leaving an estimated 250 Indians and a few Burmans dead as well as over 2500 people wounded in what became known as the First Indo-Burmese Riots.[21] Peace was eventually restored through the concerted effort of the British government in coordination with community leaders and senior monks.[22]

The last of the three incidents of communal violence, known as the Second Indo-Burmese Riot, occurred almost a decade later, in 1938. The 1930 dock violence was primarily economic and directed toward Indians generally. It was like other communal violence in the period, such as the 1931 anti-Chinese communal violence in Rangoon. The 1938 incident, on the other hand, was of an entirely different character. While the reason for the 1930 dock violence was economic, the 1938 violence was based explicitly on race and religion. The immediate cause of the 1938 communal violence was the July 19 issue of The Sun newspaper, which re-printed excerpts from an inflammatory essay written by a Muslim man in 1931. Maung Shwe Hpi, the author's pseudonym, originally wrote "The Teachings of a Moulvi" in response to a Buddhist critique of Islam. The essay was considered anti-Buddhist from the start but attempts to publicize it after its original publication and again in 1936 had failed to garner much attention. The Sun's reprinting in 1938 achieved a very different result. The newspaper published excerpts as well as a critique written by a Buddhist monk, who condemned the essay as published in order to "disparage our religion, our Paya, our Community, and our Pagoda" and called for a meeting the

[19] Ibid.
[20] Desai, *India and Burma*.
[21] Official estimates at the time stated that there were 120 Indians killed and far fewer wounded.
[22] Yi, *The Dobama Movement*.

following week, on July 26, at Shwedagon Pagoda, the most important Buddhist site in the country.[23]

The meeting began in the morning as monk after monk took to the podium giving fiery speeches demanding government action against Maung Shwe Hpi as well as Muslims in general. They repeated the offensive language in the essay, calling on people to recognize the threat that Muslims posed to their lives. By late afternoon, the crowd numbered almost 10,000 onlookers.[24] After the speeches, the group marched from Shwedagon Pagoda to the Surti Bazaar at the heart of the Muslim neighborhood, chanting anti-Muslim slogans. As they made their way to the Muslim neighborhood protestors armed themselves with sticks and knives, some going so far as to strip a bus of sheet metal to use against their opponents. At the entrance to the Muslim neighborhood they were met by British police battalions, made up primarily of Indians, who dispersed the crowd after wounding two monks in the altercation. Over next months, communal violence would occur throughout central Myanmar as Buddhists targeted Muslim property and individuals. The communal violence began in Yangon, but spread throughout the country including Insein, Mandalay, Shwebo, Toungoo, Prome, Tharrawaddy, Pegu, Hanthawaddy, Pyapon, and Myaungmya.[25] The violence left an estimated 204 people dead and many thousands wounded.[26]

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[23] Martin J. Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (London: Zed Books, 1991); Moshe Yegar, *Between Integration and Secession: The Muslim Communities of the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Western Burma/Myanmar* (Lexington Books, 2002); Yi, The Dobama Movement; Human Rights Watch, "Crackdown on Burmese Muslims" (Washington D.C.: Human Rights Watch, 2002), https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/asia/burmese_muslims.pdf.

[24] Francis Wade and Linsey McGoey, *Myanmar's Enemy Within: Buddhist Violence and the Making of a Muslim Other* (London: Zed Books, 2019), 28.

[25] Government of Burma, Riot Inquiry Committee, *Final Report of The Riot Inquiry Committee*, Rangoon: Superintendent, Government Printing and Stationery, 1939.

[26] Yegar, *Between Integration and Secession*; Human Rights Watch, "Crackdown."

The Indo-Burmese Riots mark important moments in the evolution of the categories of Indian, Hindu, and Muslim during the 1930's. Although sharing a name, the two incidents were dramatically different in their targets. The 1930 violence targeted Indians generally, understanding them as representative of Myanmar's colonial oppressors. The 1938 violence, on the other hand, was specifically anti-Muslim. The protests that ignited it were spurred on by a perceived affront to Buddhism, were led by Buddhist monks, and they called for strict regulation of Muslims in the country. Meetings like that which ignited violence in Yangon were held over the months after the original incidents of communal violence, including one in Shwebo, central Myanmar, which was attended by R.C. Morris, the Inspector-General of Police in Burma. In his report, R.C. Morris wrote,

> A mass meeting of pongyis [Buddhist monks] was held in Shwebo and passed resolutions urging government to take action against U Shwe Hpi, and the publishers of his book, to introduce Buddhist Marriage Bills, to restrict entry of Indians into Burma and to burmanaise the Military Police.[27]

While in 1930 the category Indian included both Hindus and Muslims as representatives of British colonial rule, by 1938, Indian was conflated with Muslim alone and took on the character of a foreign invader, a characterization which persists to this day. Since 1938, there have not been any anti-Indian incidents of communal violence, but there have been dozens of anti-Muslim cases. The Indo-Burmese Riots and their legacy makes it clear that something happened between 1930 and 1938 that dramatically changed what it means to be Muslim in Myanmar.

[27] R.C. Morris, "Communal Troubles: Daily Situation Report" (Rangoon, August 7, 1938), *National Archives of Myanmar,* Defense Secretary's Office, 1938 Miscellaneous Dept., No. 8/5 D(M), Part I, 126.

Nationalism, Communism, and Buddhism

The 1930's were a time of dramatic change in Myanmar as nationalism grew and anti-colonial movements gained force. Before the 1930's, nationalist organizations worked primarily within the system in order to preserve Burmese rights and culture. The Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA), for example, was one of several organizations that made up the "cultural movement" for Buddhist revival in the early 1900's after the British eliminated many of the roles previously filled by monks and the monastery.[28] The YMBA first attracted attention over its condemnation over British officer's refusal to remove footwear at Buddhist holy sites, but grew in strength and popularity by sending delegations to Calcutta in 1917 to ask for Burma's separation from India, by organizing a boycott of elections to the Indian Legislative Assembly in 1920, and by joining students from Rangoon University in a strike later that same year. In 1920 the YMBA effectively dissolved by becoming part of the General Council of Burmese Associations (GCBA), which sought to create a national movement. The GCBA, although able to establish offices in several townships around the country, eventually dissolved due to infighting over the question of Burma's separation from India.[29]

The Dobama Asiayone (We Burmans Association), which would eventually lead the country to independence, gained national recognition after they published and distributed a manifesto called the Dobama Sadan in response to the First Indo-Burmese Riots.[30] The manifesto was written by this group of students and intellectuals, the majority of whom were Western

[28] Alicia Turner, David P. Chandler, and Rita Smith Kipp, *Saving Buddhism: The Impermanence of Religion in Colonial Burma* (University of Hawaii Press, 2017).
[29] Smith, *Burma: Insurgency,* 48-50.
[30] The Dobama Sadan is also known as Reform Series No. I. See Chapter 2 for more information on the Dobama Asiayone.

educated urban elites, who drew on comparisons with ancient Greece and condemned the capitalist system established by the British.[31] The manifesto explained that it was written in honor of those who died "for the national cause" during the communal violence. It called on Burmese to take back economic control, the "foundation of all power," by establishing Burmese owned small businesses, a field that was majority Indian at the time.[32] It also encouraged aggressive action against colonial rule, arguing that "non-aggression breeds more aggression" and by adopting the phrase "Let him who desires peace prepare for war."[33] It repeated its central theme of "Burman for the Burmans" throughout, but it also noted that the target of their ire should not be Indians, but the British; the manifesto argued that people ought "not to hate the Indians but to love one another more."[34] The blame for the violence was not on Indians, but instead on capitalist interests that thrived from division. The manifesto further noted that those of mixed blood, the "half castes," ought to be accepted as equals.[35] The goal of the manifesto was thus ultimately to unify the country against the British capitalist oppressors.

The association between Buddhism and the growing nationalist movement of the 1930's did not exclude other faiths. This was clear in the Dobama Asiayone's manifesto, and it was clear in 1938, as Indians and Burmese protested together against British oppression. That year included the Second Indo-Burmese Riots, but later that year there were large protests of British labor laws that included both Buddhists and Muslims. In fact, the ratio of oil-site workers at the time of the original strike was somewhere around 7 Burmese to 5 Indians, and the movement

[31] Smith, *Burma: Insurgency*, 54-55.
[32] Khin Yi, *The Dobama Movement in Burma (1930-1938)* (Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1988), 5.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid, 6.

was likely made up of a similar demographic. Still, the movement was organized with Buddhist symbols and using Buddhist spaces. The central rallies and meetings were held at Buddhist Monasteries and Pagodas, and Buddhist monks often gave sermons and led prayers during these meetings. The final demonstration was furthermore held at Shwedagon Pagoda, the most important cite for Buddhism in the country. Many of the chants and messages were similarly laden with Buddhist messages. The Dobama's difficult relationship with Indians is probably the reason for their lack of action during the communal violence in July of 1938, which ended less than two months before the "glorious march" began in November of that year. The Dobama may also have been overwhelmed in their work with the oil-strikers in central Myanmar. However, members of the Dobama are said to have been involved in the communal violence, even though they acted as individuals and not as representatives of the organization.[36]

Bamar Muslim or Kalar: Intra-Muslim Diversity

The growing nationalism of the 1920's and 1930's spurred action within the Muslim community, which strove to distinguish between new migrants and those who had been in the country for generations. Muslims arrived in Myanmar during different generations and from a variety of different origins. There were Muslim merchants from India but also refugees from the Middle East and merchants from China.[37] During colonial rule, however, this Muslim diversity shrunk as the demographic share of Indian Muslims grew exponentially. This demographic growth even outpaced indigenous populations in some places. In Yangon in 1931, for example, the Indian population was larger than that of the native Bamar.[38] The unprecedented growth in

[36] Yi, *The Dobama Movement*, 94.
[37] See previous chapter for a detailed account of these origins.
[38] Wade and McGoey, *Myanmar's Enemy Within*, 19.

the Indian Muslim population led to tension with Bamar Buddhists, but it also led to tension within the Muslim community. Muslims who had been in Myanmar for generations and had assimilated in all aspects, except where they prayed, were faced with newly arrived immigrants who retained the dress codes, language, and culture from their native regions. Furthermore, the newly arrived migrants tended to be wealthier and better integrated into the colonial system and the new immigrants used this privilege to establish Mosques, community organizations, and schools based on their native cultures.[39]

The assimilated Muslims fought to distinguish themselves from these newly arrived and foreign-born migrants by claiming an indigenous origin. This battle took place in several arenas. First, Burmese Muslims sought recognition for their identity from the British government. The British, scrupulous ethnologists as they were, had created several ethnic categories to which people in Myanmar could fall into. These categories followed the logic of the ethno-religious hierarchy of India, to which Myanmar was now incorporated. During the majority of British rule, Muslims in Myanmar either fell into one of the foreign-born categories, or into the Zebardee, or mixed race, category. This latter category was problematic for Burmese Muslims because the term was generally regarded negatively and because it was very broad; Zebardee included Burmese Muslims, but also anyone of mixed race and of any religion. The push to create a new census category, and thus claim political power, came from the Burma Moslem Society (BMS), the largest organization of Burmese Muslims, and the only such organization for many years.[40]

The category of Burmese Muslim was constructed in the 1900s through the concerted effort of the BMS. Originally, the category of Burmese Muslim was somewhat amorphous. In

[39] Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma*.
[40] Ibid.

1909, the BMS was founded as an association "of people known in Burma as Burman-Muslims, or, in other words, the Zebardees or Indian Burmans" and as the official representatives of their interests in the public sphere.[41] In 1929, amid growing nationalism in the country, the BMS clarified their intended constituents in a memorandum sent to the Simon Commission, a commission tasked with determining the best avenues for Indian Independence. In this memorandum the BMS defined Burmese Muslims as Muslims that were "(1) pure Burmese; or (2) offspring of mixed marriages; or (3) native Burmese both of whose parents were Indian Muslims; or (4) Indian Muslims who had settled in Burma permanently."[42] The term was supposed to distinguish them from non-Muslim people of mixed heritage, but also from the large group of Indian Muslims who maintained ties with India. In 1930, the BMS lobbied the government to legitimize their group and allow them political representation in parliament by including the Burmese Muslim category on the upcoming census. The British government rejected their appeal, however, noting that Myanmar was part of India and would therefore need to follow Indian census conventions. In 1937, Myanmar was officially split from India, and the BMS renewed their efforts at recognition. Although their claim was rejected for the 1931 census, the British government finally acquiesced in 1941 after 10 years of lobbying. Burmese Muslim would officially be considered an ethnic minority. In a tragic turn of events, however, the Japanese invaded Myanmar as the census was taking place, and the official records of this census were ultimately lost.

[41] Ibid, 57.
[42] Ibid, 58.

3.4 The Muslim Foreigner in the 21st Century

The contemporary situation of Muslims in Myanmar is attributable, at least in part, to a combination of political and cultural conditions brought to the fore by the democratization of 2008-2011. As Myanmar attempts to build itself as a nation, no longer strangled by a military dictatorship, it faces the difficult challenge of uniting a divided country. A central concern today, as it has been since 1948, is the allocation of power between the central government and the states. If federalism can be accomplished, it has the potential to resolve civil wars that have continued since British independence. This process is wrought with difficult political campaigns as each side accuses the other of manipulating the electorate or backing out on their promises. The process of democratization increased tension in the Rakhine State, for example, where a difficult electoral battle was fought in 2010 between the USDP and the Rakhine Party. The national elections of 2015 further increased tensions as President Thein Sein seemed poised to give Rohingya Muslims living in Rakhine State temporary citizenship, allowing them to complete the 2014 census and vote in the 2015 national elections.[43] Rakhine Buddhist politicians responded by merging political parties into the Arakan National Party (ANP), which campaigned on anti-Rohingya messages.[44] Muslims throughout Myanmar are in a precarious position in this nation-building process as they are not recognized as a single national group. Islam is a religion, they are told, and one's race is different from one's religion. While that may be true in some countries, in Myanmar the conflation between ethnicity, religion, and race makes any Muslim a *kalar,* regardless of their phenotype.

[43] Adam Burke, "New Political Space, Old Tensions: History, Identity and Violence in Rakhine State, Myanmar," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 38, no. 2 (2016): 258–83.
[44] "Arakan National Party (ANP)," *The Irrawaddy*, 2015, https://www.irrawaddy.com/election/party/arakan-national-party-anp.

With the military coup of 1962, the equation of Muslim with foreigner became entrenched government policy. Muslims were initially removed from the military and, in 1982, a citizenship law was passed that further discriminated against Muslims and others with mixed heritage.[45] The 1982 Citizenship Law, which is still in place, states that a citizen of Myanmar is someone of the eight recognized "national races," defined as any race present in the country before the beginning of the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1824. Those with parents who are both citizens are also considered citizens. Those not of the national races can apply for "associate citizen" status, which allows them all the same rights as a full citizen, except for being barred from running for office. The vagaries associated with the "associate citizen" status have led to different implementation over time. The clearest example of this abuse is the government's continued refusal to recognize the Rohingya as a Burmese ethnic minority.[46] The Myanmar government has continued to claim that the Rohingya are migrants who arrived illegally from Bangladesh, and thus cannot apply for Burmese citizenship. This claim has fueled the genocidal behavior of the Myanmar military in recent years, and there is no sign that the government is considering reversing its position.

While the worst discrimination is undoubtably against the Rohingya, Muslims throughout the country face prejudice in applying for citizenship. In Myanmar, people apply for their National Registration Cards (NRC), which identify them as full citizens, when they are 12 years old. The process involves a tracing of family lineage and verification of this lineage through paperwork and sometimes the physical presence of relatives. The process of obtaining a NRC is

[45] Nyi Nyi Kyaw, "Alienation, Discrimination, and Securitization: Legal Personhood and Cultural Personhood of Muslims in Myanmar," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 13, no. 4 (2015): 50–59.
[46] Ibid.

painstaking and expensive, often involving travel to other states in order to meet with distant relatives, and sometimes arranging for their travel to large cities. People in Myanmar generally delay acquiring a NRC card until they need one for work, education, or international travel. Although Muslims outside of the Rakhine State do often receive full citizenship rights, in recent years, NRC applicants that are Muslim must include some ancestral link to either Pakistan, India, or Bangladesh, whether such a heritage exists.[47] As a teacher from Thaketa township in Yangon explained,

> Mine says I am Bengali. I lost my NRC card a while back, it used to say Myanmar Muslim, but when I went to get a new one, they said I had to add Bengali if I wanted to get an NRC. Eventually I accepted, so mine says Bengali.

This identification with one of the *kalar* countries identifies them as at least partially foreign, although it does not in itself bar them from citizenship.[48] This trend is also not official, and people with knowledge of the law can still get NRC's that identify them as "Myanmar Muslim." As a community leader from Mandalay explained during our interview.

> The immigration office has this grand project. They are trying to link the Muslim population to certain countries. They don't want Muslims to have full citizenship. Even though we have the same color card as everyone else, if your religion is Islam, you cannot be Bama.[49] When you categorize the ID cards, Bama is the very top. Religions other than Buddhist become second class citizens in that hierarchy. I was released from prison in 2012, from Pudao, very far away. When I was released I planned to go on Hajj, to Saudi Arabia. At the time there was a lot of secret police around here, watching me. I lost my ID, which I needed if I wanted to travel. The ID I had stated that I was Burmese and Muslim. I got it many years ago. That was fine 20 or 30 years ago. After 2007 you would never be able to have both of those categories on your ID again. But I lost my ID, and when I went to the immigration office I told them that I needed the exact same ID as before. They said sure, that nothing would change.
>
> The next day the officer invited me back to the office, and told me that there did in fact have to be some small changes. What kind? He said, your father's name is Yusuf, a

[47] Thomas Manch, "For Muslims across Myanmar, Citizenship Rights a Legal Fiction," *Frontier Myanmar*, December 29, 2017, https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/for-muslims-across-myanmar-citizenship-rights-a-legal-fiction.
[48] Kyaw, "Alienation, Discrimination, and Securitization."
[49] In Myanmar, NRC's are printed in colors that identify the citizenship status of the holder.

> Muslim name. So it is not clear if you'll be able to get the same kind of ID as you had before. I asked him why, he said 'because that is not a Burmese name.' My father had both, a Burmese and a Muslim name. I talked back to him, asked him his name. I said, 'if you become a monk, you will get a different name, a religious name. If you're Christian, you will have a Christian name, apart from your given one.' We debated, and eventually the officer did give me the same ID as before, with Burmese and Muslim written on it. For others, they lack the knowledge and the skills for this kind of argumentation. They don't know how to demand their full rights. Not me though, I know my rights.

The vast majority, however, take the easier route and accept a foreign heritage in order to quicken the process. Although it does not bar them from citizenship, the implication that one is partially foreign has troubling implications for the place of Muslims in Myanmar in the future. She continued,

> This creates a situation where we have two terrible choices. It's like we say [in a Burmese saying], if you stay out at night, the police will catch you in the dark. You have two options, either go to jail or join the army. People think jail would lead to trouble, so they join the army. But that is a life-long prison sentence. As Muslims, we face a similar situation. If you don't want to accept that you have mixed heritage, it isn't possible to receive your ID card. You need that card though. If you want to travel, or go to school, or open a business, you'll have problems without it. So people just do it, accept some mixed heritage to get their ID card. So Muslims now, even though they were born and raised here, over several generations, now have "mixed blood" on their ID cards, marking them as foreigners.
>
> There was a case in Monywa. The police caught two men, who looked Bengali. Their ID said, Muslim and Bengali. They had to accept that in order to get their ID. They look Bangladeshi as well. So they are treated like foreginers [even though they had a NRC]. When you go to border areas, like in cities along the border with China, there are many people who are married across ethnic lines. There is intermarriage. People come and go across the border, so people like that will obviously exist. And that's fine. The problem is, on the border with Rakhine, those who have been in Myanmar for generations, if they are linked with Bangladesh at all, they are labeled foreigners. It is very dangerous for them. Local people are being called foreigners, called Bangladeshi.

While the situation is potentially dangerous for Muslims throughout the country, it is especially so for Muslims living along the borders of the country, and particularly the Rohingya Muslims of Rakhine State. Accepting “Bengali” on one’s NRC, even if it recognizes the holder as a citizen, is a dangerous gamble for those living in Rakhine that could lead to reduced citizenship status or the revoking of that status completely.

2012-2014 Buddhist-Muslim Communal Violence

The situation of Muslims in Myanmar can be observed most clearly through incidents of communal violence. The most recent cases of anti-Muslim violence, performed by citizens rather than the state, occurred in 2012-2014. The violence began on May 28, 2012, when Ma Thida Htwe, a 26-year-old Buddhist woman from Yanbye Township in the Rakhine State, was gang-raped and murdered by three Muslim men while on her way back home from work. A photograph of her mangled body, left under a tree by the side of the road leading into her village, spread over social media along with "incendiary remarks."[50] Two days later three suspects that were identified as "Bengali Muslim" or "Islam followers" by the state media were apprehended, found guilty, and sentenced to jail.[51] Although the government was quick to act, a crowd gathered at the police station where the suspects were being held and demanded the suspects be released to be dealt with by the people. The police refused and successfully dispersed the crowd, but rumors and hate speech continued to spread online. On June 3, a bus traveling from Thandwe to Yangon was attacked in the town of Taunggoke, west of Yanbye. The driver was repeatedly warned of the tension in Taunggoke, but he refused to turn away.[52] At the station, a crowd of some 300 people gathered around the bus. They were reportedly under the impression that the bus was transporting the convicted rapists from Yanbye. The crowd dragged 10 Muslim passengers from the bus and beat them to death with wooden poles and machetes. Over the next month, violence flared up around Rakhine State as majority Buddhist and majority Muslim villages attacked each other, leaving many in ruins.

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[50] Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Rakhine Inquiry Commission, *Final Report of Inquiry Commission on Sectarian Violence in Rakhine State*, Nay Pyi Taw, July 8, 2013, 8.
[51] Wade and McGoey, *Myanmar's Enemy Within*, 13.
[52] Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Rakhine Inquiry Commission, *Final Report*.

The reasons why communal violence escalated in this care are unclear. Each side claimed that they were defending themselves while the attacks by the other were premeditated and coordinated for nefarious purposes. Interviews by the International Crisis Group suggest that tensions were high at the time of the conflict due to a pledge by the USDP to grant Rohingya people citizenship prior to the 2015 elections.[53] These interviews suggest that Buddhist Rakhine people in the area believed the USDP wanted to garner support from the Rohingya in order to limit the electoral success of the Rakhine party. The violence was therefore an attempt to stop this plot. Government reports, on the other hand, argue that the violence came after a traveling Islamic proselytization group had encouraged local Muslims to build a mosque in Rathetaung township, an incendiary tactic meant to ignite a response. Drawing on this evidence and the fact that violence had broken out almost simultaneously throughout the state, the Rakhine Inquiry Commission concluded that the attacks were a coordinated effort by Muslims to remove Buddhists from northern Rakhine State. The Rakhine Commission Report cites interview evidence from witnesses that claimed they saw "thousands" of Muslims shouting, "Kill all Rakhine and drive them out from this land!" as they burned down houses and attacked Buddhists.[54] In response to allegations from the international community that a genocide was occurring against Muslim Rohingya, U Zaw Aye Maung, the Rakhine Affairs Minister for Yangon Region, argued that if genocide was taking place in the Rakhine State, it was genocide against the ethnic Rakhine.[55]

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[53] International Crisis Group, "The Dark Side of the Transition: Violence against Muslims in Myanmar," *Asia Report No. 251*, October 1, 2013, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/dark-side-transition-violence-against-muslims-myanmar.
[54] Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Rakhine Inquiry Commission, *Final Report*, 9.
[55] Timothy McLaughlin and Aubrey Belford, "Corrected - Myanmar Says Persecution Not the Cause of Migrant Crisis," *Reuters*, June 5, 2015, https://www.reuters.com/article/asia-migrants-idINKBN0OK10V20150605.

Regardless of the original reasons, the violence that began in northern Rakhine spread southward on October 21, 2012, when a Muslim village was burned to the ground. Over the next week violence spread throughout the Rakhine State, affecting seven townships. The incidents of conflict during this second wave occurred primarily in southern Rakhine between the ethnic Rakhine population and the local Kaman Muslims, thus no longer limited to the Rohingya.[56] According to a speech on November 16 by the President of the Union of the Republic of Myanmar, U Thein Sein, 167 people died, 233 were injured, 111,000 homes were destroyed, and 10,100 people were displaced between May and October of 2012.[57] Estimates by international organizations of deaths and infrastructure damage are much larger.[58] In March 2013, communal violence began to spread outside of the Rakhine State, starting in a small city to the south of Mandalay in central Myanmar called Meikhtila. Some observers have claimed that the violence outside of the Rakhine State was not due to deep-seated antagonism between groups, but instead was orchestrated by the military government in order to halt the progress of the democratic transition.[59]

On March 20th, 2013 in Meikhtila, a Buddhist woman went to a Muslim-owned gold shop in order to sell a piece of jewelry. The owner looked the piece over and told the customer that he would have to have the jewelry more thoroughly inspected before giving the customer a price. The jewelry was taken outside of the store to be examined, and when it was returned, it

[56] Kaman Muslims are considered one of the national races by the Burmese government since they immigrated to the Rakhine State along with deposed Mughal prince Shah Shuja in 1660.
[57] Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Rakhine Inquiry Commission, *Final Report*.
[58] Human Rights Watch, "'All You Can Do Is Pray': Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Burma's Arakan State," (April 2013).
[59] Justice Trust, "Hidden Hands Behind Communal Violence in Myanmar: Case Study of the Mandalay Riots," *Policy Report* (New York, NY, March 2015).

was damaged. The owner gave the customer a low price due to the damages, but the customer claimed that the jewelry had not been damaged before it had been taken for inspection.[60] In retelling this story, a Buddhist monk suggested to me that the Buddhist customer was an older woman who was selling priceless family jewelry in order to donate the money to a monastery.[61] After seeing that the jewelry was damaged, a heated argument broke out between the customer and shop-owner, and passersby began to take notice. Soon there was a large group of people outside of the store, yelling at the shop owner. Onlookers began to throw stones at the store.

During the commotion, a rumor began to spread that a Buddhist monk had been killed in a street nearby. The rumor suggested that a mob of Muslims was roaming the streets armed with machetes. A Buddhist monk was said to be taking a motor-taxi to a monastery in order to deliver textbooks meant to help teach Buddhist children. A Muslim man supposedly hacked the head off of the monk as he drove by.[62] This rumor enraged the already agitated group of people in front of the gold shop, leading many to take up their own machetes and head toward the mosque where the Muslim perpetrators were supposed to have come from. Upon hearing of the violent mob approaching the mosque, Muslims gathered with weapons in front of the mosque in order to defend it.[63] The ensuing violence left 40 people dead and entire districts of the town in ruin. One

[60] The details of this story have been corroborated by several journalistic and NGO reports, but they come primarily from pilot interviews I conducted in Meikhtila three months after the violence took place.
[61] This is probably an embellishment. Although it is probably not true, it is a good example of the kind of narrative construction that takes place after violence occurs.
[62] Whether or not this occurred continues to be unknown. The death of a monk is a dramatic narrative tool used to support violent action in Myanmar. It was used against the military regime, just as it was used in this case. Since people know the severity of the backlash that can be expected from such an action, it seems unlikely to have occurred in this case.
[63] This narrative instead reflects the answers by Muslim respondents that were willing to speak with me. The communal violence, in their mind, was an unprovoked attack by an angry mob. By fighting back, they only hoped to protect themselves, their families, and their property.

Muslim neighborhood was burned entirely to the ground, including a Mosque and a Madrassa where some report that Muslim children had been studying.[64] Over the next months the violence spread south from Meikhtila to the Bago Region and near the capital of Nay Pyi Taw, even reaching as far south as the outskirts of Yangon. Violence also spread to other parts of the country, including Lashio near the Chinese border and Hpakant in southern Myanmar. In July of 2014, the final incident in this chain of communal violence erupted in Mandalay, leading to the deaths of two people.

The 2012-2014 communal violence served as a platform for the rise of Buddhist nationalist movements like 969 and, later, the Association for the Protection of Race and Religion (MaBaTha), in much the same way as the First Indo-Burmese Riots served to catapult the Dobama Asiayone to national recognition.[65] The conflict furthermore pushed the question of Islam to the forefront of political discourse, challenging the newly democratizing country to define who would be its citizens. In 2015, As Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy prepared to contest the national election, they faced a campaign that charged them as Muslim lovers who would leave Buddhism unprotected.[66] This campaign, which included protests and the distribution of leaflets claiming a close association between Islam and the NLD, came in a context of increased attention to Buddhist nationalism as the MaBaTha lobbied to pass legislation limiting the rights of Muslims in the country. The NLD fought this campaign by

[64] This, again, is not confirmed. It is likely an embellishment from Muslim respondents.
[65] For more information on the rise of 969 and the MaBaTha, see Chapter 4.
[66] Sebastian Strangio, "Uncertainty Looms for Myanmar's Muslims," *Al Jazeera Media Network,* November 15, 2015, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/11/uncertainty-looms-myanmar-muslims-151115101345438.html.

discouraging its Muslim members from running for public office, acquiescing to the MaBaTha.[67] Many of the Muslims barred from running were popular, previously elected officials. As a Muslim member of the NLD party in Yangon explained during our interview,

> In the past, during the 1990s election, there were a lot of Muslims involved in the election process and as members of parliament. But now, the MaBaTha and other nationalists are trying to attack the party. We need this restriction [barring Muslims from running for office] because of them. But only for a little while… [The main problem was because of] U Ko Ni in Yangon and Daw Win Mya Mya in Mandalay, who are both very popular Muslim figures. When the election ballots came out and neither of their names were listed as potential parliament members, people were confused and dissatisfied.

The NLD's landslide victory, in which they won 86% of the seats of parliament, thus excluded any Muslim representatives, further entrenching the perception that Muslims are not part of Myanmar. Of the 6074 candidates that took part in the election, 5130 were Buddhist, 903 were Christian, and 28, or 0.5%, were Muslim.[68] The NLD's decision to exclude Muslims from public office was seen by the media, and some members of the party, as a strategic decision in the face of growing anti-Muslim sentiment.[69] The NLD was therefore willing to marginalize the Muslim population in the country, if "only for a little while," but their gamble became further entrenched six months after the NLD took office, when attacks along the border with Bangladesh led to international condemnation and the largest refugee crisis the country has ever seen.

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[67] Hanna Hindstrom, "NLD Blocked Muslim Candidates to Appease Ma Ba Tha: Party Member," *The Irrawaddy*, August 31, 2015, https://www.irrawaddy.com/election/news/nld-blocked-muslim-candidates-to-appease-ma-ba-tha-party-member.
[68] Oliver Holmes, "Myanmar's Muslims Win No Seats in New Parliament," *The Guardian*, November 15, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/15/myanmars-muslims-win-no-seats-in-new-parliament.
[69] Hindstrom, "NLD Blocked Muslim."

The 2017 conflict in Rakhine and central Myanmar

The 2017 refugee crisis originated on October 9, 2016, when a group of rebels armed with slingshots and machetes attacked three police outposts in the Maungdaw Township in Rakhine State, along the border with Bangladesh, killing nine police officers.[70] As part of their attack, the rebels ransacked weapons caches, stealing some 50 guns and thousands of bullets. On October 12 and October 14, videos spread over social media by a Muslim armed group, calling itself the Al-Yaqin Mujahidin, claimed responsibility for the attack.[71] Soon after the October 9 attack, reports of human rights abuses by the Burmese military in response to the attack began to surface from local NGOs and community leaders. On October 27, Reuters published a report that included interviews with eight Rohingya women who claimed that their homes had been looted and burned down, and that they had been raped at gunpoint by the Burmese military.[72] On November 12, violence escalated as rebels armed with makeshift explosives, guns, slingshots, machetes, and spears attacked military convoys.[73] The military responded by calling in an air strike by two helicopters, which eliminated the threat, but may have killed civilians as well as the rebels.[74] By the end of the weekend, one soldier and 30 insurgents had been killed, including a

[70] "Myanmar Policemen Killed in Rakhine Border Attack," *BBC News*, October 9, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37601928.
[71] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar - A New Muslim Insurgency in Rakhine State," *Asia Report No. 283*, December 15, 2016, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/ south-east-asia/myanmar/283-myanmar-new-muslim-insurgency-rakhine-state.
[72] Wa Lone and Simon Lewis, "Exclusive: Rohingya Women Say Myanmar Soldiers Raped Them amid Crackdown on Militants," *Reuters*, October 27, 2016, https://www.reuters.com/ article/us-myanmar-rohingya-exclusive-idUSKCN12S0AP.
[73] "One Officer, One Soldier Dead, Several Injured in Fighting Continuously Erupts in Rakhine," *Global New Light of Myanmar*, November 12, 2016, https://www.globalnewlightofmyanmar. com/fighting-erupts-in-northern-rakhine-two-tatmadaw-soldiers-killed/.
[74] On November 12, government troops were ambushed by about 60 armed rebels. As the military responded, the rebels fled to Gwason village. In their search for the attackers, the military approached a different village where they were again fired upon. After returning fire, the

group of 22 men who had rushed a military convoy while wielding machetes. By December, 30,000 Rohingya Muslims had fled to Bangladesh seeking asylum, while Amnesty International accused the Tatmadaw of crimes against humanity.[75]

The beginning of 2017 saw tensions rise throughout Myanmar as the violence escalated and people awaited a response by the newly elected NLD government. Aung San Suu Kyi refused to give public comments on the issue for a long time, leaving many people wondering if she would protect the Muslim minority. The government instead responded to the conflict by barring journalists and aid workers, both domestic and international, from entering the region, thus giving the state control over the narrative. On, January 2, however, a video shot in Rakhine went viral. The video, shot by a police officer who stared into the camera while smoking a cigarette, showed a large group of detained Rohingya sitting with hands on their heads. A group of three Tatmadaw officers approached two Muslim men sitting at front and took turns beating them with batons and kicking them. [76] The government announced it would investigate the attacks, as well as the abuses more generally, but by January 6, the United Nations announced that the number of refugees in Bangladesh had more than doubled, reaching 65,000.[77] Without

attackers reportedly set fire to the village as they fled to Gwason to join the others. When the military approached Gwason, the government media reports that some 500 people were waiting to attack the military with the stolen guns as well as spears, slingshots, and machetes. Pinned and out gunned, the military called in helicopter support, which fired upon the village.

[75] Amnesty International, "'We Are at a Breaking Point' Rohingya: Persecuted in Myanmar, Neglected in Bangladesh," December 19, 2016, https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA1653622016ENGLISH.PDF.

[76] Oliver Holmes, "Myanmar to Investigate Video of Police Beating Rohingya Villagers," *The Guardian*, January 2, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/02/myanmar-to-investigate-video-of-police-beating-muslim-minority-rohingya-villagers.

[77] "65,000 Rohingya Flee from Myanmar to Bangladesh Following Crackdown: UN," *The Guardian*, January 10, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/10/65000-rohingya-flee-from-myanmar-to-bangladesh-following-crackdown-un.

access to the region, international NGOs and reporters relied on the stories told by refugees living in Bangladesh.

> An 11-year-old girl from Yae Khat Chaung Gwa Son explained: "After entering our house, the army apprehended us. They pushed my mother on the ground. They removed her clothes, and four officers raped her. They also slaughtered my father, a prayer leader, just before raping my mother. After a few minutes, they burnt the house with a rocket, with my mother inside. All this happened before my eyes."[78]

In their full report, the United Nations detailed responses by the 220 Muslim refugees they interviewed in Bangladesh in January who told of indiscriminate violence against them and their families including burning down villages, torture, sexual violence, and mass executions.[79] The international community responded with condemnation and by demanding a response from the democratic icon now at the head of government, Aung San Suu Kyi.

As the violence was escalating in Rakhine State, several incidents occurred elsewhere in the country that revealed growing anti-Muslim sentiment. On January 8, 2017, Buddhist monks in the city of Yangon and in the Bago Region protested several celebrations of the Prophet Muhammed's birthday. A Muslim community leader explained the situation during our interview.

> Permissions [for the celebration] were granted by the Chief Minister. We have to submit petitions for permission—you can't get it easily. It is a very tedious procedure. But we got it. At the Strand [Hotel], they were able to hold [the celebration]. Because those [monks] were across the street and they couldn't come up and stop [the event]. But in certain occassions they managed to stop [the celebration]. At the YMCA, the organizing committee chairman went out to negotiate with them. They said 'you have to stop in half an hour.' So they were allowed to do some activities for half an hour, then they had to stop.

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[78] United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Report of OHCHR Mission to Bangladesh: Interviews with Rohingyas Fleeing from Myanmar since 9 October 2016* (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, February 3, 2017), https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/AsiaRegion/Pages/MMIndex.aspx, 17.
[79] Ibid

I asked if the police were called to help disperse the protestors, and indeed they had been.

> Oh the police were there. A lot of them were there. They were just standing. When people asked them what are you all doing here, they said, "Nothing happened, what shall we do. We'll start taking action when people start killing each other." They said they're there to stop the violence. If nothing happens, we do nothing. They were just standing—a lot of them were there.

While the actions of these monks did not lead to communal violence, they increased tension in central Myanmar as people wondered whether the Rakhine violence would spread like it did in 2013.

On January 29, a beloved constitutional lawyer affiliated with the NLD and a renowned Muslim community leader, U Ko Ni, was assassinated just outside of Yangon International Airport as he returned from an international conference on conflict resolution in Indonesia.[80] He was assassinated as the NLD planned its targeted opposition to clauses in the 2008 constitution and proposed constitutional amendments. The assassin was immediately apprehended due to the actions of Ko Nay Win, a Buddhist taxi driver who saw the attacker fleeing and tackled him, but lost his life in the act. While the death of U Ko Ni was a blow to Muslims in Myanmar, the actions of Ko Nay Win helped unite the country. The assassin, U Kyi Lin, claimed that he was forced to assassinate U Ko Ni after his family had been threatened. Two of the alleged co-conspirators, U Zay Yar Phyo and U Aung Win Zaw, are former Tatmadaw officials, while U Aung Win Khaing, the alleged mastermind, hid from police in Naypyitaw, the small administrative city that serves as the country's capital and has the largest surveillance network in

[80] "Top Myanmar Lawyer Assassinated," *BBC News*, January 30, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-38788669.

the country.[81] U Kyi Lin, the hired gun, and U Zay Yar Phyo, one of the co-conspirators, were sentenced to death two years after the murder, on February 15, 2019, while former Lieutenant-Colonel Aung Win Khaing remains at large.[82]

On March 1, 2017, U Wirathu wrote a message on his Facebook profile thanking the assassin for killing U Ko Ni.[83] Shortly afterward, the NLD finally acted against the growing power of the MaBaTha and its affiliated Buddhist nationalist organizations. On March 12, U Wirathu was banned from giving public speeches for one year (public sermons are the main avenue for the accumulation of wealth by Buddhist monks).[84] Then, on May 23, the Sangha Mahanayaka Committee (MaHaNa), presumably under the direction of the central government, announced that the MaBaTha was an illegal organization and demanded the MaBaTha dismantle the organization by July 15.[85] While the MaBaTha generally acquiesced, closing all but two of their offices, the Buddhist monks that were members of this organization have since organized into other groups. The MaBaTha's main successor, the Buddha Dhamma Parahita Foundation,

[81] Hein Ko Soe, "Gunman Tells Yangon Court He Was 'Forced' to Assassinate U Ko Ni," *Frontier Myanmar*, June 29, 2018, https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/gunman-tells-yangon-court-he-was-forced-to-assassinate-u-ko-ni.
[82] "Two Sentenced to Death for Killing NLD Lawyer U Ko Ni," *The Irrawaddy*, February 15, 2019, https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/two-sentenced-death-killing-nld-lawyer-u-ko-ni.html.
[83] "U Wirathu Takes to Social Media to Thank Suspects in U Ko Ni's Murder," *The Irrawaddy*, March 1, 2017, https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/u-wirathu-takes-to-social-media-to-thank-suspects-in-u-ko-nis-murder.html.
[84] "Wirathu Banned from Sermons after Celebrating U Ko Ni Assassins," *Frontier Myanmar*, March 12, 2017, https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/wirathu-banned-from-sermons-after-celebrating-u-ko-ni-assassins.
[85] Mratt Kyaw Thu, "Ma Ba Tha Ordered to Cease All Activities by State Sangha Committee," *Frontier Myanmar*, May 23, 2017, https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/ma-ba-tha-ordered-to-cease-all-activities-by-state-sangha-committee.

was also declared illegal a year later by the MaHaNa but has continued to hold annual meetings and anti-NLD rallies despite the ruling.[86]

On August 25, 2017, the violence in Rakhine escalated when a coordinated strike by Muslim rebels in Rakhine State on 30 police outposts left 59 rebels and 12 security forces dead.[87] The Myanmar government identified the attackers as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), previously known as the Al-Yaqin Mujahidin, and labeled them a terrorist organization. In the next three weeks over a third of the entire Muslim population in Rakhine State, some 290,000 Rohingya, fled to Bangladesh as reports of indiscriminate violence by the Tatmadaw spread.[88] Mass graves were discovered in Rohingya villages where the atrocities reportedly took place, and satellite imagery from the Human Rights Watch proved that Muslim villages were specifically targeted and destroyed, while Rakhine Buddhist villages were left intact.[89] The Myanmar government claimed that it was the ARSA at fault because they were hiding among civilians. Aung San Suu Kyi has since defended the Myanmar Defense Service's actions by claiming that the violence was not directed against Muslims specifically, but that civilians were undoubtedly faced with violence as collateral damage in the clearance operations against the ARSA and the growing Arakan Army, a Buddhist Rakhine armed group also strong in the

[86] Aung Kyaw Min, "Nationalist Supporters Say They Will Protect Buddha Dhamma Parahita," *The Myanmar Times*, August 15, 2018, https://www.mmtimes.com/news/nationalist-supporters-say-they-will-protect-buddha-dhamma-parahita.html.
[87] Poppy McPherson, "Dozens Killed in Fighting between Myanmar Army and Rohingya Militants," *The Guardian*, August 25, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/25/rohingya-militants-blamed-as-attack-on-myanmar-border-kills-12.
[88] "Rohingya Crisis: UN Aid Call as '290,000 Flee' Myanmar," *BBC News*, September 9, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41214057.
[89] Human Rights Watch, "Burma: Satellite Imagery Shows Mass Destruction," September 19, 2017, https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/19/burma-satellite-imagery-shows-mass-destruction.

region.[90] Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reported that at least 6700 Rohingya, including 730 children under the age of five, were killed by the end of 2017.[91] As of March 2019, an estimated 745,000 Rohingya, including 400,000 children, fled the Rakhine State, leaving an estimated 909,000 refugees living in Bangladesh.[92]

3.5 Muslim Identity over Time and in response to Violence

In September 2017 tension in central Myanmar reached its height as the government substantiated rumors that the ARSA were targeting cities around the country and could strike at any moment.[93] In Mandalay, where I was living at the time, the streets were empty on September 9-12, as people expected violence to break out at any moment. The tea shop where I usually worked from, in a Muslim neighborhood, was mostly empty except for a table of police officers, the first such patrons I had seen in three months of field work. Amid this rising tension, over 100 civil society leaders met in a monastery to formally establish the Mandalay Peacekeeping Group and discuss how they would prepare for the possible spread of violence. In 2014, only three years before, the violence that began in Rakhine State spread quickly to the rest of the country, including Mandalay. The leaders present today would do everything they could to prevent that from happening again. They discussed tactics, including the development of an early alert

[90] Wayne Hay, "Transcript: Aung San Suu Kyi's Speech at the ICJ in Full," *Al Jazeera Media Network*, December 13, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/transcript-aung-san-suu-kyi-speech-icj-full-191212085257384.html.
[91] Médecins Sans Frontières International, "Myanmar/Bangladesh: MSF Surveys Estimate That at Least 6,700 Rohingya Were Killed during the Attacks in Myanmar," December 12, 2017, https://www.msf.org/myanmarbangladesh-msf-surveys-estimate-least-6700-rohingya-were-killed-during-attacks-myanmar.
[92] United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Rohingya Refugee Crisis," September 21, 2017, https://www.unocha.org/rohingya-refugee-crisis.
[93] "Army, Govt Warn of Militant Attacks on Cities," *The Irrawaddy*, September 5, 2017, https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/army-govt-warn-militant-attacks-cities.html.

network through Facebook, with local representatives in every township. They also discussed how they would include the local government, which was previously instrumental to stopping escalating violence but was also seen as deeply corrupt and untrustworthy. Throughout the discussion, which included NLD and community leaders, as well as representatives from NGOs, INGOs, and newspapers, no one ever mentioned the Rohingya. Or rather, no one used the word 'Rohingya.' During an interview with one of the executive committee members, I asked whether the newly formed organization considered the Rohingya Burmese citizens, a notion that I had discussed with a Muslim interfaith leader in a previous interview.

> Well as one of the founders and central members of the group I can tell you that we have never endorsed or had any discussion about Muslim people saying they [Rohingya] are Bamar. Not in the group, we've never had that discussion. You can take that on record. It may be a misunderstanding or misinformation or mistranslation or something. We can't have that discussion. The word Bamar is such a charged word. Only collectively, you know, Bamar is only one ethnic group one tribe, in this diversity of people. We've only talked about how the Rakhine event is political. It doesn't have anything to do with religion. So, for example, the slur Kalar is very rooted in language. During the colonial period it was used to identify the British as well as the Indians. Nowadays if you have dark skinned you are called Kalar. If you have light skinned you may be called Tayou, which means Chinese. Kalar being like Indian. We didn't talk about that at all, see you can look at my notes from the meeting. That wasn't discussed.
>
> Maybe the idea has been talked about outside of the group. We've meet three times, but we haven't really discussed that. Maybe it had to do with your interviewee too, their opinion. But it hasn't been discussed officially, whether we are going to call them Bengali or Rohingya. The group is called the Mandalay Peacekeeping Group, so we mainly want to focus on what happens in Mandalay. The Bamar issue is very sensitive. Within the group there are people who publish newspapers and magazines. One of them is about Muslim news, called Friday News. They've been publishing a lot about the Rohingya and similar topics. But we don't talk about that in the meetings because if you start talking about the Rohingya then it becomes an entirely different meeting. I remind those people to be careful about the words they use too because it is such a sensitive topic and people have different interpretations about what the word means.

The association between Muslims generally and Rohingya is a difficult and sensitive topic for Muslims outside of the Rakhine State. While some may sympathize with their plight, Burmese Muslims fight to dissociate themselves from foreignness as much as possible.

CHAPTER 4

ESTABLISHING ORGANIZATIONS OF COMMUNAL CONFLICT

4.1 Introduction

The establishment of organizations and their relationships in response to violence is a central mechanism through which past violence affects the rhythm of communal conflict. In Myanmar, as in many countries around the globe, incidents of communal violence spur action by governments and civil society as they seek explanations for the violence and a means of preventing its recurrence. Governments establish commissions and pass legislation while civil society develops new NGOs and revitalize existing ones. In some cases, civil society makes alliances with government officials, developing joint efforts at combating the 'source' of the strife. Likewise, people who are willing to commit violence in order to defend their threatened identity will establish organizations and networks of like-minded individuals who can be called upon when there is a credible threat. These actions fundamentally affect the form and likelihood of future conflict; they alter the rhythm of communal conflict.

Government plays the most important role in responding to cases of communal violence by determining whether police are sent to intervene in ongoing conflict, whether a state of emergency is declared, or if riot police or military should be called on for support.[1] The institutions and organizations that respond to such incidents include branches such as the police and local government, but also include the committees and commissions established with the specific goal of reducing ethnic conflict. Incidents of communal violence tend to change these organizations, albeit slowly, by altering mandates, reconfiguring their forms, suggesting specific

[1] Steven I. Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

projects, or even creating new organizations or branches. One of the central means that governments use to accomplish this are 'inquiry commissions' that are created after incidents of communal violence. These commissions are tasked with identifying the sources of the violence, and with suggesting a plan for maintaining peace.[2] The extent to which the suggestions of such commissions are enacted depends on each case, but they do, at the very least, contribute to the narrative interpretation of communal violence.[3] In response to their findings, for example, governments may act to reduce the likelihood of violence by passing legislation attempting to target the sources of discord, establish new committees or branches of local government in charge of responding to escalating violence, or alter the procedures that police and government bureaucrats are to follow in cases of recurrence.

Although government actions on communal violence are likely the most effective, civil society can also contribute to de-escalating future violence or preventing it altogether by developing organizations and networks that ease collective action.[4] Indeed, after incidents of violence there are often international agencies, domestic companies, and wealthy patrons who are mobilized to contribute to existing NGOs or to establish new organizations. This process is part of what is known in the peace-studies literature as 'Post-Conflict Peacebuilding' (PCPB) and is a crucial component to any explanation of the rhythm of communal conflict. This is

[2] In the United States, for example, the federal government established inquiry commissions after the communal violence in the 1960s and in the 1990s. In Myanmar, governments established inquiry commissions during the colonial period and after the 2008 Constitution was passed. Internal inquiries were likely conducted for communal violence in the interim period, but these are not publicly available.
[3] Paul Brass, *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).
[4] Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

especially true when governments are unwilling or unable to develop the capacity to respond to communal violence effectively, as was the case in Myanmar during much of its modern history.[5] There are many concerns related to this process, such as the extent to which international organizations can adequately provide effective support.[6] Still, the development of NGOs and community organizations whose goal is the prevention of violence is an important part of any study of recurrent communal violence and will be analyzed in detail below.[7]

This chapter will argue that the establishment and reconfiguration of these governmental and non-governmental organizations after violence have the capacity to change the form that future violence takes and to affect the likelihood that the violence will recur. It will discuss the development of organizations built to ignite communal violence as well as organizations that are built to prevent violence from recurring. It will show how organizations built after conflict can work to prevent violence from recurring by, for example, enacting policies that reduce grievances or inequalities, or supporting projects developed by NGOs to help alleviate inequalities through training or aid. The establishment of these organizations also contributes to the ongoing narrative construction about the sources of conflict, as discussed in further detail in the previous chapter. The collaborative development of interfaith organizations by civil society

[5] Ashutosh Varhsney and Joshua Gubler, "The State and Civil Society in Communal Violence: Sparks and Fires," in *Routledge Handbook of Indian Politics*, eds. Atul Kohli and Prerna Singh (New York: Routledge, 2013).
[6] Béatrice Pouligny, "Civil Society and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: Ambiguities of International Programmes Aimed at Building 'New' Societies," *Security Dialogue* 36, no. 4 (December 1, 2005), 495–510; Oliver P. Richmond, "A Post-Liberal Peace: Eirenism and the Everyday," *Review of International Studies* 35, no. 3 (July 2009), 557–80.
[7] Although these kinds of organizations are discussed routinely by scholars of communal violence, their relationship to incidents of violence is generally treated unidirectionally. This chapter argues that such organizations are not only part of the system for responding to violence, they are also a consequence of incidents of violence.

and government bureaucrats, for example, can contribute to a narrative that attributes violence to misunderstandings across religious divides. Furthermore, the development of these organizations directly contributes to the 'groupness' of the conflicting people by attributing each 'group' with collective characteristics such as 'grievances.'[8] Finally, these organizations are also present during future cases of conflict, providing a head-start on resolving collective action problems. If violence does recur, members of these committees or organizations can immediately respond with prepared strategies and a group of like-minded individuals. This chapter begins with a discussion of a recent case of communal violence, using the details of this case to outline the role that organizations play during and after conflict.

4.2 Communal Violence in Mandalay, July 1st – 5th 2014

On Tuesday July 1st, 2014 the Muslim owner of Nay Cafe, a chapati shop, had a public dispute with another Muslim man.[9] Nay Cafe is in a Muslim majority township called

[8] Rogers Brubaker, "Ethnicity without Groups," *European Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 2 (2002): 163–189.

[9] The details of this case were gathered through interviews with dozens of people in Mandalay and corroborated by newspaper reports. The names of the locations and the people directly involved in the conflict, including the two victims, are included without censure as they are public knowledge. The names of interviewees, on the other hand, are pseudonyms used to protect their anonymity. The details of this case were cross-checked by one of my translators, who was living in Amyerthazan during the communal violence, and through comparison with trustworthy news sources including: Charlie Campbell, "Once Again, Racial Tensions in Burma Turn Deadly," *Time*, July 4, 2014, https://time.com/2956180/burma-mandalay-race-riots-sectarian-violence-buddhist-muslim/; "Anti-Muslim Riots Turn Deadly in Myanmar's Mandalay City," *Radio Free Asia*, 2014, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/riot-07022014164236.html; "Central Mandalay Calm After Heavy Police Deployment," *The Irrawaddy*, July 4, 2014, https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/central-mandalay-calm-heavy-police-deployment.html; Thomas Fuller and Wai Moe, "Buddhist-Muslim Mayhem Hits Myanmar's No. 2 City," *The New York Times*, July 3, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/04/world/asia/buddhist-muslim-mayhem-hits-myanmars-no-2-city.html.

Chanayetharzan, in Mandalay. The city was tense at the time of the conflict; devastating communal violence had broken out in a nearby town called Meikhtila the year before, and Buddhist-Muslim violence was still occurring sporadically around the country. The legislature was also set to debate whether to pass constitutional amendments that would curtail some powers of the military government.[10] As the dispute in the chapati shop escalated, a crowd began to gather. This began at around 7pm, just before the day's Ramadan prayers ended. As people exited the many nearby mosques, the streets quickly filled with people, and the crowd around the shop grew exponentially. As the crowd grew, people began to throw stones at the shop, and breaking the store's chairs on the sidewalk. Three police trucks arrived shortly afterward, and the large force was able to quickly disperse the crowd.

The incident would have stopped there were it not for a rumor that had been spreading over social media since the previous day. The rumor, which later proved to be a fabrication, suggested that the shop owner and his brother had sexually assaulted their Buddhist employee. Although the crowd around the shop dispersed, groups of Buddhist and Muslim men took to the streets of the city that night. Large groups gathered in Chanayetharzan and Amyethazan townships, both Muslim neighborhoods, and refused police demands to disperse. Groups walked the streets armed with *das* (machetes), bamboo sticks, and iron rods, some of them destroying

[10] The amendments would challenge sections 59(f) and 436 of the constitution. Section 59(f) states that presidential candidates must be full citizens, meaning that they are born of parents who are both Myanmar citizens and they do not have a foreign spouse or foreign children. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has a foreign-born spouse and children, and so was barred from running for president. Section 436 outlines the process for amending the constitution, and specifically requires a majority of 75% in order to pass any amendment. Since the military is allotted 25% of parliament by law and has allies in the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), constitutional amendments not supported by the military are all-but-impossible to pass. The amendment would reduce the required majority to 50% instead of 75%, thus opening space for democratic reform. Both amendments later failed in parliament.

property or attacking other groups. Businesses, homes, and a mosque were damaged by people throwing rocks and bricks, and several cars and motorcycles were set on fire or destroyed.

The following day, Wednesday July 3rd, the situation was very tense and most people remained indoors. Several Muslim families went to mosques, in order to better protect each other. U Tun Lwin,[11] a civic organizer in the city, explained that the Muslim community was doing this for self-defense. "[A monk] told me that there were people in the Mosque with weapons, not guns, but like sticks and swords. There were people there, a community, that could turn to violence as a last resort." This apparent mobilization increased tension, however, as Buddhist nationalists used this as evidence that Muslims were organizing in order to attack them. That night, a group of men on motorcycles drove around Chanayetharzan township, shouting anti-Muslim slogans. Several people were wounded, and more property was destroyed as violence continued throughout the night.

By the following morning, July 4th, there was extensive property damage, fourteen people were wounded, and two people were killed. The first person killed, a Buddhist man called U Tun Tun, was attacked at around one o'clock in the morning. U Tun Tun was driving his motorbike home with a friend of his, U Htwe, after helping drive wounded people to the hospital, when they were stopped by a group of men. The men demanded they hand over their phones and money, which they did, and then attacked U Tun Tun with a machete, knocking him off his bike. His friend, U Htwe, was severely beaten but managed to escape with his life. When he returned with help, he found that U Tun Tun had passed away and that the perpetrators were gone, along with the motorbike. The second man killed that night, a Muslim man called U Soe Min Htwe, had stayed up until two o'clock in the morning, diligently calling friends and community members

[11] This is a pseudonym used to protect the respondent's confidentiality.

about the communal violence. At about four in the morning, he left his house to attend morning prayers at a nearby mosque. On his way to the mosque, he was attacked by a group of men and was killed. Both victims were recognized members of Mandalay's civil society. U Tun Tun volunteered much of his time to a Buddhist funeral organization, while U Soe Min Htwe founded a charity organization after Cyclone Nargis devastated coastal communities in 2008. Later that day the government announced a night-time curfew for six townships in the city and deployed an estimated 400 riot police to re-establish peace. Groups organized again that night despite the curfew, but police successfully redirected crowds away from Muslim areas and fired rubber bullets at crowds after warning them to disperse.

On July 5th, the day after the two deaths, and amid an increasingly tense environment, the Buddhist funeral organization for which U Tun Tun had volunteered arranged a funeral procession in his honor. While the Muslim victim's funeral was conducted quickly and quietly hours after his death, the procession for the Buddhist victim led from his home township of Patheingyi on the northern edge of the city to a cemetery across town. Although the most direct route did not go through the city center, the procession went directly to Mandalay Palace at the center of the city and circled the moat around the palace several times. Groups of men on motorbikes joined the procession, yelling Muslim epithets and calling for revenge attacks on Muslims. As the procession made its way to the cemetery, a group of Buddhists destroyed an orphanage, a farm, and the house of a Muslim cemetery's caretaker.

Although there was quite a bit of property damage and two people lost their lives, the violence in this case was far tamer than in other places around the country. In Meikhtila, a small city about an hour away from Mandalay, communal violence in 2013 led to the death of at least forty-three people and the destruction of an entire Muslim neighborhood. There were reports of

brutal attacks and executions, and a cameraman from Reuters even reported seeing the charred remains of children.[12] The violence in Mandalay did not reach that extreme. This was in no small part due to the larger police presence in Mandalay, and their eventual willingness to intervene in the violence. Riot police are reported to have tried to keep Muslim and Buddhist groups separate during the conflict, while police are reported to have merely stood watch during the violence in Meikhtila. Police intervention, however, is not the whole story.

4.3 Protectors of Buddhism and The Hidden Hand

In Paul Brass' seminal work on communal violence in India he identified networks of individuals that acted as an 'institutionalized riot system' which could be mobilized to ignite violence.[13] These systems were made up of a network of 'riot professionals' that were prepared to ignite violence for politicians and political elites in exchange for resources or favors. There is some evidence of a similar system existing in Myanmar. In Kachin State, for example, there is some evidence that the military encouraged violence in order to retain control over the region even after the government was transferred to civilian rule.[14] The existence of such a system to ignite religious violence, and specifically Buddhist-Muslim violence, however, is anything but clear. While activists constantly discuss the involvement of high-profile military officials in orchestrating communal violence, there is little physical evidence of their involvement, at least outside of the Rakhine State. The clear instigators, whether they are in fact supported by the

[12] Jason Szep, "The War on the Rohingyas: Buddhist Monks Incite Muslim Killings in Myanmar," *Reuters,* April 8, 2013, https://www.pulitzer.org/files/2014/international-reporting/reuters/04reuters2014.pdf.
[13] Paul R. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003).
[14] Darin Christensen, Mai Nguyen, and Renard Sexton, "Strategic Violence during Democratization: Evidence from Myanmar," *World Politics* 71, no. 2 (April 2019): 332–66.

military regime or not, are nationalist Buddhist monks and their supporters. This section will therefore focus on the Buddhist nationalist monks as the "instigators" of communal violence in contemporary Myanmar.

Protecting Buddhism

On June 30, 2014, the day before the conflict, a notorious nationalist monk called U Wirathu shared a Facebook post, popularizing and legitimating the rumor that claimed a Buddhist woman had been sexually abused by the Muslim owner of the chapati shop. U Wirathu is widely cited by journalists and academics as one of the leading figures in spreading anti-Muslim hate speech in Myanmar.[15] In 2001, he gained notoriety by starting what became known as the 969 Movement. In 2003, after communal violence erupted in Mandalay, U Wirathu was sentenced to 25 years imprisonment for handing out anti-Muslim fliers before the violence, contributing to its ignition. He was imprisoned until 2012, when he was released along with other political prisoners. He quickly regained notoriety after his release, both domestically and internationally, due to his outspoken anti-Muslim attitudes. The rumor he spread in June 2014 escalated a conflict that may otherwise have remained between a business owner and his business partner. On July 4th, amid high tension, Wirathu wrote a post on his Facebook account blaming the violence on Muslims, and further escalating tension in the city.

> The rape of Ma Soe Soe on June 28, 2014 at the hands of Sun Cafe owners Nay Win and San Maung is not just a criminal offence but an offence aimed at instigating violence in our country. The July 1 and 2 incidents in Mandalay are not a clash of religions or races but a Jihad. They are gathering in mosques in Mandalay under the guise of Ramadan but in reality, they are recruiting and preparing for Jihad against us. The government of

[15] Matthew J Walton and Susan Hayward, "Contesting Buddhist Narratives: Democratization, Nationalism, and Communal Violence in Myanmar," *Policy Studies No. 71,* East-West Center, 2014, https://www.eastwestcenter.org/sites/default/files/private/ps071.pdf.

> Myanmar must deal with these Islamic extremists and raid all suspicious mosques and homes. All Burmans must be ready and not fall into these Muslims' traps.[16]

Attributing causality to speech is notoriously difficult, but many recent incidents of Buddhist-Muslim violence in the country do follow the same pattern of rumor leading to violence, suggesting some relationship.[17] U Wirathu himself vehemently opposes any notion that he encourages violence, as do other nationalist monks, claiming instead that they merely preach for the benefit and protection of Buddhism. Still, nationalist Buddhist monks have been accused of encouraging anti-Muslim sentiment, spreading hate speech, and instigating violence.[18]

U Wirathu's framing of the precipitating event as representative of a larger Muslim threat follows a widely popular framing in Myanmar that claims Buddhism is under threat and needs to be protected from this strong and cunning foe.[19] This frame is not new, drawing many of its claims from anti-colonial movements in the 1920s and 1930s.[20] Those who espouse this view argue that Muslims are attempting to take over the country and eradicate Buddhism, as they did in neighboring countries like Indonesia, through the tools of inter-religious marriage, forced conversion, high fertility rates, and by only supporting Muslim businesses.[21] This frame grew in popularity during the 2012-2014 violence as mobilized through the resurgence of the 969 Movement.

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[16] "Hidden Hands Behind Communal Violence in Myanmar: Case Study of the Mandalay Riots," *Policy Report*, Justice Trust, March 2015, *The Online Burma/Myanmar Library*, May 16, 2019, https://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/Justice_Trust-2015-03-Hidden_Hands-en-to-rev1-red.pdf.
[17] Walton and Hayward, "Contesting Buddhist Narratives."
[18] Ibid; Szep, "The War on the Rohingyas."
[19] Gerry van Klinken and Su Mon Thazin Aung, "The Contentious Politics of Anti-Muslim Scapegoating in Myanmar," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47, no. 3 (May 27, 2017): 353–75.
[20] Matt Schissler, Matthew J. Walton, and Phyu Phyu Thi, "Reconciling Contradictions: Buddhist-Muslim Violence, Narrative Making and Memory in Myanmar," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47, no. 3 (May 27, 2017): 376–95.
[21] Ibid.

969 Movement

The 969 Movement, originating in the early 2000s, called for a boycott of Muslim-owned businesses in response to a belief that Muslims would only buy from Muslim-owned businesses and were doing so in order to slowly impoverish Buddhists and eventually destroy Buddhism. The movement's name represents aspects of Buddhist belief: the 9 characteristics of the Buddha, the 6 regulations of the lay person, and the 9 rules of the sangha. But the name is also a counter to 786, a number used by Muslims throughout Southeast Asia to identify restaurants that serve food that is Halal. The numbers, 786, are numerical representation of the first letters of the words in the phrase Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Rahim in the Arabic alphabet, which means "In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful." This phrase is used as the introduction to most chapters in the Quran. The number is used instead of the phrase because many Muslims in the region do not read Arabic. A popular myth, which some still espouse, suggests that 786 represents a call for a Muslim invasion of Myanmar in the 21st century (7+8+6 = 21). In an interview I conducted in 2013 with U Wirathu, a central figure in Buddhist nationalism, he explained the movement as follows.

> I started to preach using 969 since the early 2000s, in 2001 2002 and 2003. I wanted people to know that we Burmese people do not distinguish between Muslim and Buddhist shops usually. We don't look for the number 786 and decide whether or not to buy there. We go and buy wherever; it doesn't matter who the shop belongs to. If we buy in their shops though, they get money, which they can use to oppress the Buddhist people. They are trying to use that money, that we paid them, to destroy the Buddhist religion. I've tried to preach 969 to stop this. I've preached it openly to everyone.
>
> When you see 969, you know that the shop belongs to a Buddhist. So, if you buy from a 969 shop, you are making the Burmese people rich. If Burmese people are rich, they will support their religion by building pagodas and donating. So, if you buy from things from a 786 shop, you are making Muslim people rich, and they will overwhelm the Buddhist people through business. Our religion would be destroyed, it would fade away. It is very dangerous for the nation, and for the religion. I try to tell Burmese people to buy from

> Buddhist shops, to prevent the erasure of our religion and our nation. That is the main point of 969.

I followed up by asking Wirathu to explain the relationship between buying from Muslim shops and the end of Buddhism. After a moment, Wirathu explained further.

> When you go to a 786 shop, you give them money and they become rich. With that money, they can convince poor Buddhist women to marry them. Then, they convince the woman to convert to Islam. Their children will also grow up Muslim. Some people [faced with this dilemma] can give up their religion, but others have too deep a belief in their own religion. Some of those who cannot give up their religion are beaten by their husbands just because they pay homage, pray, or offer rice to the Buddha. They are beaten for going to monasteries, for listening to sermons. If the husband finds out, they will be beaten. I've heard many of these stories, and I've already told you some of them. I don't want that to happen. If Burmese buy from Muslims, they can use that money to marry poor Buddhist girls and try to convert them. That is the main point of 969, to stop that from happening.

While the 969 movement began in the early 2000s, as Wirathu suggests, it only really became popular after communal violence erupted in 2012. During my early visits to Myanmar following the communal violence I found the 969 stickers everywhere ranging from stands selling electronics to restaurants to taxis. One could not get cigarettes or betel leaf without confronting the question of whether to buy from a Muslim or from a Buddhist. Sermons by 969 monks were also incredibly popular at this time and were distributed primarily through DVDs, sold on street corners. Despite the motivations of people like U Wirathu, the movement was generally seen as good for Buddhism and having little to do with Islam. It was also a highly decentralized movement, with various voices taking advantage of this historic occasion.[22]

As communal violence escalated in late 2012 and early 2013, however, the 969 movement came under increasing scrutiny. International observers and some domestic newspapers saw the movement as encouraging the violence, blaming it for the spread of violence

[22] Walton and Hayward, "Contesting Buddhist Narratives."

to central Myanmar. The devastating incident of violence that occurred in Meikhtila on March 13, 2013 became a crucial point of evidence. Wirathu had performed a sermon there shortly before the violence erupted, and there were reports of 969 being painted on cars during the communal violence. On July 1, 2013, Time Magazine published an article entitled "The Face of Buddhist Terror" that attributed the escalating conflict to the 969 movement and U Wirathu, who they called the "Burmese Bin Laden." The magazine was banned in Myanmar, but it became a symbol of international misunderstanding for those supporting the movement, and a symbol of vindication and support for those in opposition to the movement. On August 14th, 2013, shortly after the Mandalay violence, the Sangha Mahanayaka Committee officially banned the use of the 969 emblems in relation to Buddhism and barred monks from organizing around this symbol. The government followed suit, banning the use of 969 stickers.

Communal Violence in 2012 and the rise of the MaBaTha

After the severe violence that occurred in March of 2013 in Meikhtila, communal violence began to spread throughout the country and even internationally. By June of 2013, related incidents had occurred in Malaysia and Indonesia, and communal violence had affected most regions in Myanmar itself, including several towns in the region of Bago, just north of Yangon. On June 14, 2013, a group of 200 monks met at a monastery on the outskirts of Yangon to discuss how they would resolve the Buddhist-Muslim tension in the country. The monks met with an eye toward interfaith cooperation and hoping to formalize a plan of action that would bring peace to the country. U Wirathu, who attended the conference, used this opportunity the seek support for a draft law that would require any Buddhist woman who wants to marry a Muslim man to first gain permission from her family and from the local government. U

Dhammapiya, a senior monk and a spokesman for the conference, gave a tempered response to the proposal at the press conference following the event by saying, "To accept or not to accept the so-called restrictions on interfaith marriage will be decided in accordance with human rights [standards]. Anybody can marry at their own will."[23] After the press conference, the draft law was condemned by the media and a variety of NGOs including a powerful network of women's rights activist organizations.[24]

Undeterred, U Wirathu and his allies edited the draft law and sought support at another conference held in Yangon later that month, on June 27. The conference hosted an estimated 1500 Buddhist monks, triple the expected attendance of 500, becoming one of the largest meetings of the Buddhist sangha in recent decades. The conference included passionate speeches by Buddhist leaders from around the country who called for support for the newly named Law for the Protection of Race and Religion. The conference leadership announced that they would be submitting the law to legal experts, gathering lay signatures for its support, before finally submitting the legislation to parliament. During the press conference following the meeting, U Dhammapiya said that the new draft of the law protected "Buddhist women's rights" and that it did not violate human rights because, "There are different human rights conditions in different countries."[25] The conference also included discussions of establishing a more formal nationalist organization that would support similar actions in the future.

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[23] May Kha, "Monks Conference Calls for Harmony, Criticizes Interfaith Marriage Draft Law," *The Irrawaddy*, June 17, 2013, https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/monks-conference-calls-for-harmony-criticizes-interfaith-marriage-draft-law.html.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Lawi Weng, "Monks Rally Behind Bill That Would Restrict Interfaith Marriage," *The Irrawaddy*, June 28, 2013, https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/monks-rally-behind-bill-that-would-restrict-interfaith-marriage.html.

Invigorated by the international attention on Buddhist nationalism from the Time Magazine article, U Wirathu and allied monks distributed copies of the law to lay people in Mandalay, beginning a signature petition campaign in support of the now named Interfaith Law that accumulated 2.5 million signatures by the middle of the month. Three other laws were added to the first, culminating in the "Four Race and Religion Protection Laws." These included the Religious Conversion Law, a law that would require people who want to convert from their religion to get official permission from local government; the Monogamy Law, restricting marriage to two individuals; and the Population Control Law, which would allow the government to limit the number of children that minority women could bear. These laws were condemned by NGOs throughout the country including women's rights organizations, as well as the international community. Despite this opposition, the laws were submitted to parliament for review at the end of the month, along with the 2.5 million supporting signatures.[26]

On January 15, 2014, thousands of Buddhist monks, many of them affiliated with several different smaller nationalist organizations, met at a monastery in Mandalay in order to formally establish the Upper Myanmar chapter of the Association for the Protection of Race and Religion, known as the MaBaTha. The conference organizer Raza Dhamma announced the creation of the chapter by saying, "Forming this association makes us stronger, as if we have built a fortress in Upper Myanmar which people from different religions won't be able to destroy."[27] The organization, like its predecessor 969, held wide support by Buddhists in the country who saw it

[26] Matthew J. Walton, Melyn McKay, and Daw Khin Mar Mar Kyi, "Women and Myanmar's 'Religious Protection Laws,'" *Review of Faith & International Affairs* 13, no. 4 (December 2015): 36–49.
[27] "Myanmar Buddhist Monks Launch Group for 'Defending Religion,'" *Radio Free Asia*, January 15, 2014, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/buddhist-congress-01152014180734.html.

as a necessary measure to protect their religion. The organization also held some support from the government, although that was not made public. In a video released by the MaBaTha years later, the Minster of Religious Affairs at the time, U San Sint, is seen lauding the organization, comparing it to the government supported Sangha Mahanayaka Committee as, "father and son, with respect between senior and junior."[28] The founding of the organization led to renewed attention on the Four Race and Religious Protection Laws, which had thus far been largely ignored by Parliament. In February, President Thein Sein formally submitted the laws to Speaker of Parliament Thura Shwe Mann.[29] The four laws were passed by parliament at different points in 2015, ahead of the national elections at the end of the year.

As an organization, the MaBaTha was much more than a political body pushing for legislative reform. It was capillary, having a representative in an estimated 220 of the 330 Townships in the country.[30] Its structure mirrored the government-approved Sangha Mahanayaka Committee (MaHaNA), with local level representatives, regional offices, and a Central Committee. While the MaBaTha is best known internationally and in domestic urban centers for its role in pushing the Four Race and Religious Protection Laws, at the local level people recognized the MaBaTha as another Buddhist organization and a source for mobilizing and resources.[31] The MaBaTha serves this traditional role in community building by, for example, funding orphanages and schools. After my interview with the Upper Myanmar Chairman of the

[28] Aung Kyaw Min, "Ma Ba Tha Releases Video from Sangha Conference," *The Myanmar Times*, July 29, 2016, https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/21646-ma-ba-tha-releases-video-from-sangha-conference.html.
[29] Walton et al., "Women and Myanmar's."
[30] The actual number is difficult to corroborate. Still, I was able to identify a MaBaTha representative in most townships that I visited during my fieldwork. For the cited number, see Htet Min Lwin, "Politicized Religion as Social Movement in a Nascent Democracy: The MaBaTha Movement in Myanmar," Master of Arts, Central European University, 2016.
[31] Forthcoming work by Melyn McKay, PhD student at the University of Oxford.

MaBaTha in 2016, for example, he invited me to accompany him and a group of monks to a nearby town where they were delivering donations and checking in on a building project. He invited me and my translator to accompany him in his car, which had leather seats and, unique in Myanmar, an air conditioner. The school was obviously well funded as students were given a free education and many of them lived at the school. While the actions of the Central Committee were obviously nationalistic and often anti-Muslim, the lives of local representatives were much more akin to the teachers at this school for whom Islam was far from their minds.

In 2015, as the USDP-majority parliament discussed and passed the Four Race and Religious Protection Laws, the MaBaTha and other nationalist groups staged rallies and protests opposing Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy. Their rallies warned that if allowed to gain power in government, the NLD would support Muslims above Buddhists, and prove an existential threat to their religion. The opposition to the NLD proved to be a tactical mistake by the nationalist organization, however, who became increasingly associated with the old military regime. Rumors about collusion between the two were more commonly discussed, and the MaBaTha lost a great deal of its credibility. As a Buddhist taxi driver in Yangon explained to me, “At first I really liked them. They have a good name. But now no one supports them. Ever since they went against Aung San Suu Kyi.” A monk in Mandalay explained the situation in even more direct terms.

> The true citizens of this country are not saying anything against Aung San Suu Kyi or the NLD government. It is the USDP and the old military party that is running the protests and all of these demonstrations against the NLD. That is from the USDP side. The real people understand the whole situation and can think. It is understandable that what the NLD is doing is for the people. If you know enough of this country's history you will understand how they are trying to re-arrange the whole political system and the economy to support the people's desire. Those who are against these changes [including the MaBaTha] are obviously from the other side.

By supporting the USDP and opposing the NLD, the MaBaTha marked themselves as enemies of democracy, and thus enemies of most of the population. However, the MaBaTha still had strong supporters, especially in rural areas; Their protests and rallies often count participants in the thousands.

The MaBaTha came under direct attack by the MaHaNa after the NLD's electoral victory and the NLD's ascension to power in early 2016. While previously, members of the MaBaTha held appointments in the MaHaNa, suggesting a close link between the two, in 2016 the MaBaTha was declared an illegal organization by the MaHaNa and the MaHaNa demanded that they disband. Most chapters of the MaBaTha dutifully disbanded, except for two, one of which was the chapter in Mandalay. As the chairman explained to me during our interview, "." After its official dissolution, members of the MaBaTha decided to reorganize under a different banner. Today, many of the nationalist monks are affiliated with the Buddha Dhamma Parahita Foundation, an organization that is no longer associated specifically with the sangha but is instead a charity group.

The MaBaTha and the "Hidden Hand" in Mandalay, 2014

> It was only one day, when a lot of the mess happened. It was a very short period of time. Yes, people were throwing rocks, and crowds were marching and yelling, but that was all. The actual murders happened at night. It was completely unexpected. Somebody was behind all of this, and they made it seem like people were fighting over religious differences. But that wasn't true. In reality, it was someone behind the scenes, trying to make a mess out of this incident.[32]

The folk theory adopted by the majority of my interviewees in Yangon and Mandalay that is used to explain communal violence suggests that the previous regime is attempting to

[32] Interview with NLD official in Mandalay.

instigate ethnic violence around the country in an attempt to regain power, and that they do this through organizations like the MaBaTha. This folk understanding is common across religious and economic differences, and is even espoused by several members of the government.[33] The narrative suggests that the previous regime, the military, is acting as a "hidden hand" that is trying to instigate communal violence in Myanmar for political purposes. The narrative usually goes something like this: The military gave up power in 2010, not because they want to see the country become democratic and free, but because they were forced to by economic and geopolitical pressures. These included economic pressure from China and economic sanctions from the United States and other Western countries.[34] They also included the growing grassroots movement for democracy evidenced in the 2007 Saffron Revolution.[35] The military did not, however, relinquish power without a plan to regain it. They carefully crafted the 2008 constitution in such a way that the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi had little chance of successfully running the country. According to this narrative, they furthermore have attempted to instigate violence around the country, including the Buddhist-Muslim violence, in order to persuade the people that a military led government is necessary. One tool they used, according to this narrative, is religious nationalism. They fund monks like U Wirathu, an ultra-nationalist monk

[33] Many assume that Aung San Suu Kyi adopts this view as well and is thus very careful in her actions so that she does not fall into the "trap" set by the military. Several people from the NLD that I spoke to adopt this position as well and have been vocal about this position in interviews with NGOs and newspapers.
[34] The Burmese government has made several agreements with the Chinese government which exchange development for resources. This includes projects like a dam project halted by the incoming government, which promised to give 80% of the resources gathered by the dam to the Chinese government in exchange for their investment in building the dam.
[35] The Saffron Revolution was a popular protest against the then military government in response to rising gas prices. For more information, see Chapter 2.

who is infamous for his anti-Muslims stance and encourage the MaBaTha to take extreme actions that they hope will instigate communal violence.

We do not know whether Buddhist nationalist monks and the "hidden hand" were behind the violence in 2014. There is not enough evidence to prove this claim either way. However, there is a popular narrative about the conflict that is told in domestic circles that support the NLD, as well as in the international arena and in some scholarship. These narratives place the blame on a group from outside of the city that came into the city to try to instigate violence. This group was supposedly paid off by nefarious figures, likely associated with the "hidden hand." Daw Ahmar Ni, an influential interfaith leader in Mandalay that is associated with the NLD, attributed the violence to the coordination of U Wirathu.

> When the violence broke out it was between two Muslim men who had a serious personal problem. Business issues or something. But one of them had ties to Wirathu, and the other had close contacts with the divisional level government. They both had their own groups backing them, high ranking people. At night Wirathu tried to negotiate with his people, deciding to send a few monks to his shop to try to close it down. Even though they tried to cause the problem, one Muslim and one Buddhist died. And when you look at the two people that died, the Muslim was a social worker that was involved in interfaith work, while the Buddhist would literally help Muslims whenever conflicts happened. It doesn't look accidental to me. There is something strange happening there.

When asked to explain further, Daw Ahr Ma Ni continued.

> When you look at the period, it was very close to the political season. The other side was taking advantage of the conflict in order to win the results. When you look closely you can see the reason. The group of people came to monasteries to get them to come out, but no monk came out. These groups were from outside, not from Mandalay. How could people in Mandalay kill their own people? What kind of person would burn their own city? These are the people who killed them both. We lost two real people from Mandalay, who were working for humanitarian issues. The people who died were ones that worked for peace. Wirathu writes constant threats to me on facebook. Even up to now, threatening my life.

While international NGOs have reported the background actions of U Wirathu and the outside group as fact, the evidence comes primarily from interviews with people already prone to

blaming the military, like Daw Ahr Ma Ni. That is not to say that the military was not behind the violence, only that we should be careful in attributing blame.

4.4 Organizing for Peace and Prevention

While communal violence can be sparked through "institutionalized riot systems," these do not always succeed at starting communal violence. As Ashutosh Varshney found in India, communities that experience communal violence often respond by organizing their own networks, what he called "institutionalized peace systems."[36] Although Varshney focused primarily on pre-existing community organizations with people from both religions, these systems ought to be conceptualized in a broader sense. Communities that experience communal violence, especially those that see that violence occur repeatedly, develop organizations that are mobilized when violence seems imminent. This includes interfaith organizations, as was Varshney's focus, but can also include intra-faith organizations and the network between these civil society groups and the local government. The nature of the institutionalized peace system varies tremendously by city and even by neighborhood as different organizations and figures are relied upon more or less than others. While the government plays an important role in other cities, for example, interfaith organizations, particularly ones supported by revered Buddhist monks, tend to be the most immediate responders in Mandalay, leading even the government to rely on their support.

Government

The 2014 incident in Mandalay and its precursors occurred in a context of rapid

[36] Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*.

legislative and structural change for the Myanmar government. The 2008 Constitution began a process of liberalization as the government loosened censorship, opened government positions for popular election, and relaxed draconian laws such as those limiting freedom of speech and assembly. Although beginning the process of democratization, the constitution also limited that democratization by protecting certain areas of government from electoral control. The military, headed by the Commander in Chief, retains 25% of the seats in parliament, which gives it the ability to veto most legislation (including any changes to the constitution), and retains control over three important ministries deemed relevant to domestic security: the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Border Affairs, and the Ministry of Immigration. Furthermore, several positions in the judicial branch are lifelong appointments, meaning that the military appointees from the 2008-2015 governments will remain in those positions for the near future. While there has been dramatic progress toward democracy, Myanmar is still far from that ideal.

The constitution established a bifurcated power system in Myanmar, with implications for how communal violence is handled locally. The military's power over domestic issues comes primarily from their control of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA). The MoHA includes the police as well as the General Administration Department (GAD), the bureaucratic backbone of the government. Civilian power, on the other hand, comes primarily from the legitimacy and authority provided to elected representatives of parliament. The central job of Members of Parliament (MPs) is to take part in the legislatures of Nay Pyi Taw and in their regional parliaments. However, MPs are also physically present in their constituent townships, and they often serve as representatives in local government departments and ministries. This means that although MPs as MPs do not have an official role in managing local crises like communal violence, they often play some role through the other positions they hold or by simply drawing

on their authority as elected representatives.

Military, MoHA and GAD

Myanmar was under the control of various military figures for half a century, between 1962 and 2015.[37] Although the political party led by ex-generals, called the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), is no longer the majority party in Parliament, the military still maintains a great deal of governmental power, especially at the local level. Of the three ministries still under the control of the military, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) is particularly important during cases of communal violence. The MoHA oversees several branches of governance including the police, the Bureau of Special Investigation, the prison and fire services, and the General Administration Department (GAD). The GAD is the country's "vertical core," connecting all 36 ministries to each other as well as connecting the population to the government.[38] The GAD is the face of government for most of the population; citizens turn to GAD representatives for everything from complaints about electrical outages to disputes among neighbors. During cases of communal violence, the Chief of Police, along with the Township Administrator, a military official who governs the local neighborhood and is part of the GAD, are tasked with making many of the immediate decisions regarding the government's response. The Township Administrator, and the locally elected Ward Administrator that reports to the Township Administrator, figure prominently in all cases of communal violence.

[37] For more information on this period, see Chapter 2.
[38] Kyi Pyar Chit Saw and Matthew Arnold, "Administering the State in Myanmar: An Overview of the General Administration Department," *Subnational Governance in Myanmar Discussion Paper Series,* The Asia Foundation, 2014.

NLD and the Legislative Assembly

In 2015 the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of the famous independence hero General Aung San, gained a majority of the seats in parliament and thus control over the legislative and executive branches of government. The NLD is the largest opposition party to the military regime and is widely supported, especially in central Myanmar.[39] In 2016, the parliament elected the first civilian president since the 1960s, President Htin Kyaw.[40] Aung San Suu Kyi was also appointed "State Counselor," a position created especially for her because a clause in the 2008 constitution effectively bans her from being elected president.[41] With a majority of the seats in parliament, the NLD now has control over much of the government.

The NLD has local influence through their party offices at the Ward and Township levels, as well as through elected Members of Parliament who represent Townships in the regional parliament, called the *Regional Hluttaw*, and the national parliament, which is a bicameral legislature split into the *Amyotha Hluttaw* (House of Nationalities) and the *Pyithu Hluttaw* (House of Representatives). The local NLD offices exist primarily as recruitment

[39] Ethnic minorities who make up most of the population in the country's peripheral states and regions vary much more in their support of the NLD, since many see the NLD as representing the interest of the majority Bamar ethnicity. Many of these states and regions also have their own political parties, associated with ethnic groups, which serve in the regional and national parliaments.

[40] President Htin Kyaw resigned in March 2018 and was replaced by President Win Myint, the former Speaker of the Pyitthu Hluttaw (equivalent to the United States House of Representatives).

[41] According to Chapter 3, no 59f of the 2008 Constitution anyone with a spouse or children that owe allegiance to a foreign power cannot run for the office of the President. Aung San Suu Kyi's late husband, and two children, are British citizens. As well as being the State Councilor, Aung San Suu Kyi is also the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Minister for the Office of the President, Minister for Electric Power and Energy, and Minister for Education.

offices, although they do help the central party with local organizing during special events. Local offices of the NLD are not supposed to get involved in matters pertaining to actual governance, including issues of communal violence. Nonetheless, the members of these offices often do what they can to help as locally respected citizens, separate from their official positions.

> We're not an armed organization, we are not registered, we are just civilians. We do not have that much power. All we can do is appeal to the public, tell them that this is wrong and ask them to listen to us. The people do recognize us, and some of our people go wearing the party atire, so they immediately recognize them. In any case, these conflict resolution groups and the NLD, we have to constantly be in contact in case anything like this happens. We have to be ready to respond, always.[42]

The offices also generally put themselves at the disposal of local government, which sometimes uses their networks and resources during times of crisis. Members of Parliament, who are elected as representatives of the Townships, are expected to do much more than debate and pass legislation at the regional or national level, and therefore they are much more important than local NLD offices when it comes to preventing communal violence. MPs vary a great deal in their local involvement, but they are generally expected to work with local government officials on a variety of development projects and otherwise help maintain peace and stability in their township. MPs can be of any party affiliation, but, due to the recent elections, the majority of them in central Myanmar are associated with the NLD.

Civil Society Organizations

Mandalay's civil society is run by Buddhist monks. Whether the organizations are secular, inter-faith, or intra-faith, all organizations in Mandalay seek the support of revered

[42] NLD Official in Mandalay.

Buddhist monks. As a leader of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Mandalay explained after I asked about the role of monks in the city,

> We know that in Mandalay the monks are very important and very powerful. We, the other interfaith leaders, just collaborate. We have no power. We just show our unity and our cooperation together with them—we request for senior monks, 'please, help here with the community.' If the people see the monk robes, the people will calm down.

In Mandalay, Buddhist monks are heavily influential and so, any organizations that they are a part of tends to be important during crises. While government action is undoubtedly important in all cases of communal violence, Mandalay's response to these cases tends to focus first and foremost on Buddhist monks and the organizations that they are part of. As a member of the regional parliament noted during our interview when I asked how Mandalay was preparing for potential communal violence in 2017.

> Yes, we are preparing. In Mandalay the most important group for this issue is the Mandalay Conflict Prevention and Resolution Group. If anything were to happen we would get in contact with them to help resolve the issue. There's also the Interfaith Conflict Prevention Group. They also do work on this issue. Like, for example, if there is a rumor going around that a child was kidnapped or that Muslims were going around with swords and axes or something then they would show up and try to see what is happening. Many CSOs are also helpful. We're also doing a training of government officials to help them respond if an issue happens. But it's like what happened in Meikhtila, that issue was contained because of these groups.

Institutionalized peace systems vary tremendously by city, especially when we study the role of civil society organizations. While Mandalay depended heavily on these interfaith organizations and the role of influential Buddhist monks, this does not mean that it is the same everywhere in the world, or even in Myanmar. In Yangon, for example, the primary response to communal violence centers on locally elected government representatives, the Ward Administrators. However, in Mandalay, and particularly in 2014, Buddhist monks were vital to preventing the escalation of violence.

Buddhist Monks and Intra-faith Organizing

Although the monk U Wirathu escalated the conflict in Mandalay in 2014 by spreading false rumors, other Buddhist monks played a vital role in stopping violence from escalating further. U Kawira, known as the Galone Ni Sayadaw, was a principal figure in this process. Due to his involvement in the 1988 Student Uprising against the military regime, U Kawira is a well-known figure in Mandalay. After the uprising ultimately failed, the military government imprisoned U Kawira for almost twenty years, releasing him along with other political prisoners in 2007, and has been an active member of Mandalay's civil society since then. In July 2014, a Muslim community leader contacted U Kawira shortly after the conflict at the chapati store began. His friend warned the Galone Ni Sayadaw that both sides seemed to be mobilizing for a fight and asked him to help. The Galone Ni Sayadaw made contact with several Buddhist monk organizations, including one he had established the year before, after the violence in Meikhtila, called the "Thangha Dhamaka Apuezi," which translates to The Monastic Community Dhamma Organization. At first, few went along with his plan, but using trucks borrowed from a wealthy Muslim contact, the Galone Ni Sayadaw eventually convinced an estimated 200 monks to help de-escalate conflict in the city.[43]

Over the next few nights, Buddhist monks associated with the Thangha Dhamaka Apuezi and other Buddhist organizations drove around the city trying to de-escalate the conflict. The goal of this mobilization was to re-frame the conflict from an attack on Buddhism to an external

[43] This estimate comes from my interview with U Kawira. I was skeptical at first, but other community and religious leaders in the city repeated similar figures during our interviews. The head of the YMCA in Mandalay, for example, said, "If the people see the monk robes, the people will calm down. So, if we get support from the senior monks--even in 2014 conflict, the Galone Ni Sayadaw played a very important role. He brought hundreds of monks together to control [the situation], with the Muslim leaders. Together they took control of both communities."

attempt to hurt the community. Buddhist monks are in an especially strong position to make this claim. One of the senior monks associated with the Upper Myanmar Sangha Union, for example, explained that their goal was to convince people to return to their homes by telling people that violence would play into the hands of their mutual enemy, the military regime.

> As we all know, [the conflict in 2014] was all about politics. A certain group of people tried to take advantage of marginalized communities for political gain. All we could do is raise people's awareness of this and make people understand the nature of it. So, if people understand what they are dealing with, then violence won't happen in the first place. We encouraged people to criticize what they see, to recognize that it is wrong.

The monks drove in small groups around the city, encouraging Buddhists and Muslims alike to return to their homes. U Kawira and other senior monks also visited the larger Mosques in the Muslim neighborhood. Rumors were spreading over social media that Muslims were gathering there, amassing guns and knives, in preparation for violence. Monks like U Kawira as well as other community leaders went to these mosques to investigate and to challenge these rumors.

> Over social media there were people spreading fake news saying that there were Muslims in certain mosques who were organizing in order to attack Buddhists. That night, whenever that kind of news broke out, we would go and see what was happening. But whenever we went, there was never anything going on… [That] night we were even able to preach inside the mosques, telling them that they should not worry and that we would take responsibility of their safety and lives. We told them not to use violence or weapons. And they listened.

The work of these Buddhist monks was particularly influential in de-escalating communal violence in Mandalay. U Kawira, with support from Muslim leaders and other influential Buddhist monks, were instrumental in preventing further death.

At least two abbots of monasteries in Mandalay also contributed to the prevention of violence that night by closing the gates of their monasteries and refusing the mobilization attempts of instigators. During the second night of violence, a group of men on motorcycles drove to several monasteries in Mandalay and asked the monks to join them in combating

Muslim aggression. This group of young men on motorbikes is attributed with having committed much of the violence that night. Daw Ahmar Ni, a community organizer, explained that, "The group of young drunk guys went to monasteries and demanded that they come out saying that 'Muslims are burning Buddhists alive!' But they all refused. They were drunk, stupid guys." The abbots of the monasteries instead demanded the group leave their monasteries, and at least one monk reportedly blocked the entrance to the monastery, ensuring the younger monks inside could not leave to join in the violence. U Tun Lwin, community organizer, explained the importance of this action.

> If Muslims had started killing monks—if monk blood had hit the ground, it would be over for the whole country. It was a very smart move, by [these monks] to not get involved … If the monks came into the streets it would be thousands of monks. You wouldn't even need that many. Even if it was just hundreds of monks, it would have been way worse than what happened in Meikhtila. So, it was very wise, this control by the head monks, to stop that from happening.

A Buddhist monk was killed during the communal violence in Meikhtila in 2013, which led to mass mobilization by Buddhist lay people and the eventual destruction of the entire Muslim quarter.[44] Through the efforts of certain monks and civil society leaders, and the eventual collaboration of the police, the situation in Mandalay did not escalate to that extreme.

Interfaith Organizations and Community Leaders

Buddhist monks were quickest to mobilize in response to the 2014 conflict, but other community leaders also contributed to de-escalation. These community leaders included religious leaders from other faiths as well as locally recognized figures who oppose the military regime. Together, these leaders had already formed a network of activists and long-time

[44] Szep, "The War on the Rohingyas."

community leaders on Facebook, connecting people who attend conferences together, worked as board members of each other's organizations, and coordinated to organize political action in the past. Most attempts to mobilize civil society, establish community organizations, or mobilize interfaith movements since the 1990s all occurred through this same network of individuals. Before the violence even reached Mandalay, several of these figures established an interfaith organization as a means of preventing violence in their city. After witnessing the violence in Meikhtila, Daw Ahmar Ni, community organizer, coordinated with other leaders to establish the Mandalay Peace Committee.

> After Meikhtila, hate speech also spread in Mandalay. So, Mandalay had a lot of potential to become violent… I called the interfaith leaders who are working on the ground. Imams and Hindu leaders as well as [Buddhist] monks. We met at the monastery and tried to plan what we would do in Mandalay. I called the government too, and the NLD party. At that time, the NLD had a representative in every quarter. That is why I called the NLD. Some of my friends are also NLD members, so I called them. We had more than 60 people, from every corner of the city [at the inaugural meeting]. I also called [military-affiliated] government officials, but they all refused to take part in the meeting.

The Mandalay Peace Committee responded to several cases of inter-group conflict before the incident at the chapati shop and gained popularity as an effective interfaith organization. Shortly after its founding, for example, the organization responded to rumors, again spread by U Wirathu, that Muslims were mobilizing to attack a school. Daw Ahmar Ni explained,

> The rumor said that Muslims were going to try to burn down the school. It spread throughout all of Mandalay. It wasn't true though. Obviously, because the school was in the Muslim quarter so there were many Muslims attending. But people were spreading hate and rumors, saying that people were going to die. When the Buddhist people heard, they took up knives and sticks and went to the school.

In that case, the organization challenged U Wirathu to go to the school himself, along with the community organizers, in order to prevent violence from erupting.

> We asked Wirathu to come, we said, "The Muslims are going to do jihad! You need to come!" That was our strategy; if he came then the violence would not happen… He is the

> real reason--he spread the rumor and that misinformation. We took him there and kept him until 7pm, since his rumors said it would happen at 5pm.

That strategy would not work again, but the Mandalay Peace Committee remained active in the area over the following years. Due to the status of many of its members, and their connections with government, this organization grew in popularity and was influential in preventing violence in many cities surrounding Mandalay.

In 2014, the members of the Mandalay Peace Committee met the day after the violence erupted and coordinated their work to prevent further escalation. In order to resolve the situation, the members of this group sought to show a united front against violence with leaders from the major religious groups in the city. These civil society leaders also confronted the city-government, demanding police intervention and a curfew. By confronting the government directly and challenging them to act, with the support of Buddhist monks, these civil society leaders hoped to cut short the military's attempts to ignite violence in their city.

> I demanded that the minister, a high-ranking officer from the divisional ministry, institute a curfew. He didn't do it, but, then I called religious leaders and we met together at a Buddhist prayer hall. We lobbied for them to announce a curfew. Together, we talked to the minister and demanded he announce a curfew, but still he refused. But right after the meeting, a police officer came to the hall and announced that there was now a curfew in place.

Reports of the first few nights of conflict suggest that the police were slow to respond, often not intervening in ongoing violence. This trend is common in Myanmar, and is at least part of why the violence between 2012 and 2014 reached those extremes.[45] Drawing on the assumption that the military did not want to intervene in the conflict, civil society leaders like Daw Ahmar Ni thus made it their priority to force the city government to either act or reveal themselves as

[45] Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Rakhine Inquiry Commission, *Final Report of Inquiry Commission on Sectarian Violence in Rakhine State*, Nay Pyi Taw, July 8, 2013.

corrupt. Indeed, if the military manipulation arguments are in fact true and the military government wanted the violence to escalate, mirroring cases of communal violence in India, then getting the police to intervene was crucial to de-escalating the conflict.[46]

4.5 Organizing for Communal Conflict

The fact that communal violence recurs means that incidents of communal violence, like that in Mandalay in 2014, are shaped by organizations built on these legacies of conflict. Mandalay has experienced communal violence dozens of times since the British Colonial period and its residents have developed organizations and strategies to respond to its recurrence.[47] On the side of the instigators, the legacy of conflict beginning in the anti-Muslim violence of 2003 fueled the rise of the 969 Movement through the local nationalist monk U Wirathu. The rising violence in 2012 and 2013 then led to the establishment of a formal organization to combat this Muslim threat, the Association for the Protection of Race and Religion (MaBaTha). While this "institutionalized riot system" was established and honed, however, there was also a substantial "institutionalized peace system" built in its wake. The 2013 communal violence in Meikhtila mobilized community leaders in the nearby city of Mandalay, encouraging the establishment of organizations like the Mandalay Peace Committee and the Monastic Community Dhamma Organization. Leaders experienced in responding to similar threats coordinated their activities, were able to respond to escalating conflict, and effectively de-escalated the situation. This chapter showed how understanding the causes of communal violence in cases like Mandalay requires more than identifying the incentives of political elites or the civic ties among its

[46] Klinken and Aung, "The Contentious Politics"; Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence*.
[47] See Appendix A for a complete list of these incidents.

residents. It requires a recognition of past conflict and its consequences for the institutional and organizational structures mobilized when violence seems imminent.

CHAPTER 5

EVOLVING REPERTOIRES OF COMMUNAL CONFLICT

5.1 Introduction

Communal violence encourages the development of organizations and networks that can be mobilized in future cases of potential communal violence. The organizations themselves, however, are not enough. Developing organizations and networks facilitates mobilization, but the actual prevention or instigation is based on learned repertoires of action. This chapter will show that as communal violence recurs, actors learn what works in escalating or de-escalating conflict, and that they use that knowledge to develop strategies for affecting the likelihood of violence in the future. The strategies, whether they are used to instigate or de-escalate conflict, are based on specific beliefs about the reasons why the violence happened and the shape that it took. The combination of the beliefs and narratives that people adopt to explain violence and the strategies that follow such beliefs make up the repertoires of action that are mobilized when violence seems imminent.

In following Tilly's conceptualization of repertoires of contention, a repertoire of action in the context of communal violence is understood here as including the factors that help define the field as well as the strategic tools that actors have available.[1] The frames at the heart of repertoires of action allow actors to predict when violence might happen, and to prepare for the strategies and behavior of the other actors involved. The content of these frames is obviously unique to each case of recurrent communal violence, but they tend to follow many of the same patterns. The framings used by instigators, for example, tend to target the other as an existential

[1] Charles Tilly, *Regimes and Repertoires* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

threat, intent on destroying their livelihoods, families, and their own lives. This framing will encourage the interpretation of quotidian conflicts as representatives of this larger threat, and thus as moments when protection from the vile other is necessary.[2] On the other hand, framings mobilized by peacekeepers may lay the blame on hidden figures who are manipulation each side toward violence. Instead of inter-group antagonism, what really lies behind the violence, according to this framing, is a manipulative political regime or elites who want violence for material benefit. Depending on which framing is mobilized by actors, different sets of strategies and behaviors will seem effective. For example, if one believes that the other is intent on destroying one's family, then the only recourse may be to take up arms to defend your home against attackers. On the other hand, if you believe that this other group does not in fact hate you but instead is being manipulated toward violence, then you might seek to sever their ties with political elites or you may choose not to play their game at all and instead stay at home.

The strategies that are mobilized based on these divergent framings will be organized in this chapter into three phases, for ease of presentation: (1) before, (2) during, and (3) after communal violence. During each of these phases, actors mobilize strategies to either escalate or de-escalate conflict. Before violence occurs, for example, residents may avoid people of the different group, and any spaces where they would be forced to interact. In extreme cases, residents may choose to stay in their homes, avoiding any possible contact with the other group for fear of violence. Instigators may in turn prepare for escalation by developing relationships with political leaders, or through hate speech disseminated over social media or in person. Peacekeepers may organize their own networks and associations, establishing neighborhood

[2] Veena Das, "Specificities: Official Narratives, Rumour, and the Social Production of Hate," *Social Identities* 4, no. 1 (1998): 109–30.

watch groups, or may try to stop hate speech and rumors from spreading. In the second phase, as communal violence escalates, actors will draw on available evidence and their expectations to determine the most effective strategies to achieve their goals. This may mean, for example, building barricades along streets to stop people from entering, or mobilizing official relationships in order to bring the police to bear on the case. Finally, in the third phase after violence has occurred, a period of de-escalation usually follows, along with the development of a narrative around the causes of the conflict and attempts to prevent any further escalation based on that narrative. The repertoire mobilized before, during, and after incidents of communal violence are shaped by the expectations and experiences of the actors involved, and their actions further shape their future behavior. This chapter will present this conceptualization of repertoires of action using a case of communal violence that occurred in Mingalar Taung Nyunt, a township in Yangon, in 2017. It will focus particularly on the peacekeepers, those who sought to prevent the violence from escalating, after a relatively short discussion of what we know of the strategies used by the instigators.

5.2 Communal Conflict in Mingalar Taung Nyunt

At 9:30pm on May 10, 2017, a group of nationalist monks and laypersons arrived in Mingalar Taung Nyunt, a busy township with a large Muslim population just north of downtown Yangon. The nationalists, affiliated with the Patriotic Monks Union (PMU), arrived along with police officers, claiming that illegal migrants were living in an apartment building on the corner of a busy street. The police officers checked the documents of the members of that household but found no evidence of illegal migrants. Everyone in the apartment had citizenship papers and the number of people living in the house was fewer than was reported to the government. As the

search dragged on, a large crowd began to gather around the house. The PMU nationalists were not satisfied with the police's conclusions. They yelled and argued with them, saying that the police were not doing their job and may even be protecting these illegal migrants. They demanded the police take the house owner to the station, a demand the police rejected. As the crowd grew larger, tensions rose.[3]

Buddhists yelled epithets at Muslims gathered around the area. When the four or five PMU nationalists that were accompanying the police during the search finally exited the building, someone in the crowd grabbed an iron pipe and struck a Muslim man on the head, injuring him. The wounded man was quickly taken to the hospital, as the crowd ran home to prepare for communal violence. Ko Aung Thu, a Muslim Betel shop owner that works nearby said that,

> As soon as the [nationalist] monks were in the car they [the nationalist lay people] shouted 'Beat them all!' Their people that were in the middle [of the crowd] were mad because the police didn't do anything. So they started beating the people around the building. All the people, monks and the people around there and the police ran away immediately.[4]

Ko Win Sein, a Muslim businessman who lives nearby and was there at the time of the incident, told me that he ran home and grabbed a weapon, a stick, and stood guard in front of his house along with his neighbors, ready for the nationalists to come, "If they ever came into the street we would attack them."

[3] The narrative of this event as told here is the combination of several narrative responses from interviewees. What is reported here is the shared narrative; the details that most of the interviewees reported in common. When there are events or comments that are unique to one particular interviewee or type of interviewee it will be noted in the text.
[4] All names are pseudonyms, unless otherwise noted. Occupations and other individually identifying information have also been changed.

The group of nationalists, angered by the lack of support from the Chief of Police and the police officers, gathered around the police station down the street. Ko Myo Zarni Kyaw, an activist that drove to the area after reading about the incident on Facebook said that when he arrived: “It was like... The police were there, and I saw a lot of blood. There was blood on the car. The [attacked man] was sent to the hospital. But there was blood. And I saw a lot of people from the extremist group, maybe 100 people. They were standing just in front of the police station. The police, they were just covering the line, making a line in front of the police station.” Soon afterward nationalists used slingshots to shoot pieces of bicycle chains at the police station, after which the police responded by firing two warning shots into the air. The crowd quickly dispersed. Residents took their places on their street with swords and rods to protect their neighborhood, as they did after violence broke out in Meikhtila four years ago.

Tensions were high and there was a real possibility that the situation could become much worse. Rumors were spreading over social media that the Muslim man who had been injured earlier was already dead. Angry residents walked down the streets of the Ward, calling on their neighbors to arm themselves and help defend their neighborhood. According to a Buddhist businesswoman who works nearby and was hiding at her house, some men were walking down the street shouting “Kill all the Buddhists! Kill anyone not wearing a skullcap!” Two or three streets away a car driven by nationalists raced down the streets of the Ward as the occupants yelled epithets out the window. Neighbors grabbed weapons and ran at the car, scared that the nationalists would attack the nearby Mosque as they did four years ago. All around the Ward, Muslim and Buddhist neighbors stood side-by-side guarding their streets, holding machetes and rods to fend off any nationalists who might try to attack.

5.3 Instigating Violence: The Patriotic Monks Union

The repertoire that the PMU drew upon in Mingalar Taung Nyunt was shaped by the successes of the far larger and more influential Association for the Protection of Race and Religion (MaBaTha).[5] In particular, the MaBaTha's success in approaching government directly for change and focusing on the law established a new form of claims making mirrored by the PMU. Rather than protest, as was common under military rule, the nationalist organizations in this period instead focused on making direct legal claims to government officials. In this case, rather than protest the presence of illegal migrants in Yangon, the PMU found a case of illegal activity and went directly to the government for action. This strategy, which grew out of the MaBaTha's response to the 2012-2014 violence, was adopted as a useful technique under the new regime brought into being by President U Thein Sein's liberalizing policies. In this new age of direct appeals to a representative government, claims-making could take a direct and legal approach.

The actions of the PMU were not, however, exactly like to those of the MaBaTha. While the MaBaTha prided itself on being a law-abiding organization and opposed to any violence, the PMU was a less reputable group of monks unafraid of violence. The PMU had in fact been involved in a few cases of conflict over the past year before this incident. The organization first reached popular attention on April 17, 2016, when several monks affiliated with the PMU confronted Muslim vendors who were selling goods near the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon, one of the most important religious destinations for Buddhism in the country. The monks reportedly demanded that the vendors write letters to the police and local government agreeing never to sell goods near the pagoda again, then took the Muslim vendors' goods and removed the vendors

[5] For more details about the MaBaTha and their strategies of action see Chapter 4.

from the area by force. In an interview with a local Muslim news agency, one of the vendors reported that, "They hit my face and attacked [with] knee and took me into the monastery for a beating."[6] The secretary of the PMU, U Thu Seikkta, admitted to hitting the Muslim man and explained his actions in an interview by saying that they had watched over the past five years without intervening, "Gradually, Muslims are occupying this pagoda as vendors, who can guarantee that they will not bomb the pagoda one day?" Police response was lackluster, leading to an online petition demanding the city minister to intervene. Although the petition garnered some popular attention, no official action was taken. In July of the same year, the PMU again hassled a vendor in Shwedagon Pagoda, this time because the vendor was supposed to have purchased their goods from a non-Buddhist distributor.[7]

On April 28, 2017, two weeks before the incident in Mingalar Taung Nyunt, the Patriotic Monks Union was involved in yet another scuffle. This one occurred in Thaketa, a township on the outskirts of Yangon. While their activities in 2016 were limited primarily to the member monks, in 2017 their organization had apparently grown in influence and were able to mobilize a group of an estimated 50 lay people. The incident in Thaketa focused on two Madrassas, Islamic education centers, which the monks argued were being illegally used as Mosques.[8] A smaller group of monks visited the Madrassas the week previous in order to corroborate the information that they received from their network. After seeing that the Madrassas were operating illegally,

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[6] "Activist Urges Response after Treatment of Muslim Vendors at Shwedagon Pagoda," *Coconuts Yangon*, April 20, 2016, https://coconuts.co/yangon/news/activist-urges-response-after-treatment-muslim-vendors-shwedagon-pagoda/.
[7] "'Patriotic Monks Union' Interrogates Shwedagon Vendor Over Origin of Goods," *The Irrawaddy*, July 22, 2016, https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/patriotic-monks-union-interrogates-shwedagon-vendor-over-origin-of-goods.html.
[8] Human Rights Watch, "Burma: Two Islamic Schools Shuttered in Rangoon," *News*, May 8, 2017, https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/05/08/burma-two-islamic-schools-shuttered-rangoon.

they notified the leadership that they would return with the support of the people and with police. Indeed, the following week the nationalists arrived with the estimated 50 people in vans, demonstrating in front of one the Madrassas. The situation was tense, and there were reports of at least one attack on a journalist, but the situation was de-escalated when the township administrator officially closed the Madrassas for investigation.

In Mingalar Taung Nyunt, the PMU drew on the strategy built by the MaBaTha and tested by them in Thaketa to challenge the government to act. They approached the police directly based on a rumor that illegal migrants were being housed in Mingalar Taung Nyunt. With the support of the government, and mobilizing their own status as Buddhist monks, they arrived at the scene and demanded action. In Thaketa, this strategy had led to the local government de-escalating the conflict by acquiescing to the nationalists' demands. They did this even though the Maddrassas in Thaketa did in fact have permission to act as Mosques, a permission that was granted by a previous government due to the lack of Mosques in the area. The Maddrassas remained closed for months after the incident, in order to avoid escalating conflict. In Mingalar Taung Nyunt, however, the Chief of Police and local government refused to bow to the nationalists' claims, leading to the escalating situation on May 10th.

5.4 Preventing Violence Phase One: Preparation

This incident was not unlike many other such incidents that occur regularly around Myanmar. Most of the time, the incidents do not reach this level of intensity, and only rarely do they escalate into communal violence. A substantial number of people worked to prevent violence from escalating in MTN that night. These included members of the military-controlled government in the GAD and the police, elected and appointed members of the civilian

government, leaders and members of religious organizations, other local leaders and activists, and the local residents. These actors worked to prevent the violence in their neighborhood by (1) preparing for the possibility of communal violence in advance of any particular trigger, (2) actively responding to the threat of violence, and (3) ensuring that the conflict would not recur through continued surveillance and by controlling the narrative of the conflict.

Before the incident even took place, MTN community leaders and community members used a variety of strategies to reduce the likelihood of such incidents. First, the GAD and police monitored for suspicious activity in their neighborhood. Second, the GAD and Members of Parliament developed a working relationship that allowed for quick information-sharing and division of labor during the incident. Third, Members of Parliament and other local leaders in the community adopted a narrative of the recurrent communal violence that blamed violence on the manipulation of people from the previous government regime, instead of on hatred between community members. These tactics were employed before the incident occurred and have continued to be in place since the incident.

Monitoring Muslims and Foreigners

Myanmar's military government has a long history of monitoring its citizens, and although much of the government is now led by civilians, the security apparatus used by the military regime is likely still in place. Throughout my time in Myanmar, the shadow of the government's monitoring apparatus loomed large. Respondents and I carefully picked locations for the interviews, making sure they would be conducted away from others. Although people were much more willing to speak with foreign researchers like myself in 2017 compared to in 2013, most remained very cautious about openly discussing communal violence. Often people

would only accept interviews once I mentioned I had interviewed a respected and trusted figure of their community. Although there is no direct evidence that the government was monitoring citizens in MTN, many interviewees, particularly Muslim interviewees, acknowledged that this was still the case and behaved accordingly.

Indeed, I was subject to GAD monitoring in the course of my fieldwork. In early 2017, I visited a mosque in the outskirts of Yangon. The Imam was forthcoming to my interview and research questions but avoided me during a follow-up visit a week later. A staff member explained that the "secret police" had questioned the Imam and the staff shortly after my initial interviews. The staff member promptly asked me to leave. Some weeks later I interviewed the Township Administrator in that neighborhood. In an apparent attempt at intimidation, a second man sitting next to the administrator told me that he was the officer who had been following me in the neighborhood. "[When you visited the mosque] I was behind you. I know that you were there." When I asked him why he questioned the Imam and staff at the mosque, the Administrator responded that the officer had done it to maintain peace in the neighborhood:

> There might be people trying to start problems in this township. This township is very quiet and peaceful, from a religious point of view. But we need to know who is coming in and going out in order to protect the township. If something happens, we have to follow the cause. So if someone asks us to tell them who did what, we need to know everything that happens in this township … What happened in other townships might be connected with some kind of organizing from behind, by unseen people … This township borders other townships that have had conflict, so we have to be very careful.

Although this encounter, and the notion of an always-watching government, was particularly intimidating to me and my translator, the township administrator's argument for the role of monitoring to maintain peace should be taken seriously. Monitoring the activity of individuals deemed suspicious may not be ideal, particularly since Muslims are most likely profiled as suspicious, but it may help to prevent communal violence. When I attempted to approach MTN

Imams at their mosques or through connections after the incident took place, the vast majority understandably refused to be interviewed.

Political Trust and Relationship-building

The response that a community expects from the state when faced with potential communal violence is crucial for explaining the form and likelihood of that violence. Due to Myanmar's history and the military's continued control over the police, residents in MTN and around Yangon tend to avoid contact with authorities whenever possible. As a Muslim businessman from Yangon explained, "Both sides [Buddhists and Muslims] don't really trust the police. To be frank … the police only work whenever they are bribed." Instead of going to the police, people tend to attempt to resolve issues on their own. While some avoid the police due to concerns over fairness or honesty, others distrust the police because they believe that they are working with the previous military regime. This "hidden hand" theory suggests that the police and local government are in league with a shadowy clique of former and current military officers who attempt to spark conflict between Buddhists and Muslims for their own benefit.

People in MTN do, however, trust the Ward Administrator, who is the highest-ranking popularly elected individual in the GAD, and they also trust the popularly-elected civilian government, particularly the Members of Parliament. These leaders are therefore in the unique situation of having both the trust of the community as well as a relationship with or influence over the military-appointed GAD and the police. They are, in effect, brokers between the military regime and residents. During incidents of communal violence, community members are unlikely to trust the police or local government unless they are supported by people like U Ye Naung Thein, the MTN Ward Administrator, or Daw Phyu Phyu Thin, one of four MPs

representing MTN.

The Ward Administrator's unique position is a result of the 2008 Constitution, which gives the military the right to appoint officials to the State, District, and Township levels of the GAD, while the Ward level and below are popularly elected. As an elected representative of the people, the Ward Administrator is at least known to the constituents, if not actively supported. In May 2017, the Ward Administrator, U Ye Naung Thein, was in his second three-year term. Given the structure of the GAD, Ward Administrators have a close relationship with the Township Administrator and the police department in their Ward. U Ye Naung Thein met with the Township Administrator of MTN about once every 20 days and made regular reports to him. Although elected and civilian, the Ward Administrator has a direct relationship with the Township Administrator and the police, and thus has a connection to the military and to the information available to that network.

Although not part of the military-controlled government like the Ward Administrator, Members of Parliament are also in a uniquely influential position because they can use their status to exert pressure on the military-appointed GAD. The source of this authority for MPs is not only their rank, but also the fact that MPs can report the ineptitude of local authorities and police to their military colleagues in Parliament. As a MP in the Regional Hluttaw explained,

> We don't have direct control over the police or the administrators, but on the other hand we can present and submit our point of view in Parliament, and say publicly whatever we think is wrong … The minister in the Yangon Regional Government [who is part of the GAD] also attends Parliament … we can ask [him] questions in Parliament and he has to answer. In this way, we have some control.

Although the MPs do not have direct authority over the GAD, their position in the government structure gives them the authority, like Ward Administrators, to bridge the gap between the military and people.

Narratives of Violence

The narrative that residents, government officials, and non-state actors adopt affects incidents of violence by changing the way various actors respond to potential conflict, and by affecting the likelihood of these incidents occurring in the first place. Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar today understand violence through two competing narratives of conflict: first, that Muslims and Buddhists hate each other, and violence can therefore break out at any moment; or that the violence is orchestrated by the *lat mae gyi,* or "hidden hand." Each narrative produces different responses.[9] For example, if civic organizations and the state view conflict as a product of inter-group hatred, they might encourage interfaith engagement; while if they see conflict as instigated by a third party, they might focus instead on monitoring nationalist groups or potentially corrupt government officials and police.

The two narratives are adopted by people that are Buddhist and Muslim, as well as residents and government officials. From a Buddhist perspective, the first narrative suggests that Muslims are inherently violent and exploitative. At its extreme, it claims that Muslims are attempting to take over the country and destroy Buddhism.[10] This narrative has garnered a great deal of attention domestically and internationally in media, government, and academia. The Muslim perspective on this narrative sees Buddhists as blind devotees of manipulative monks. This narrative, with both Buddhist and Muslim interpretations, foments mutual fear and distrust, such that misunderstandings and otherwise quotidian arguments are more likely to turn into cases

[9] Matt Schissler, Matthew J. Walton, and Phyu Phyu Thi, "Reconciling Contradictions: Buddhist-Muslim Violence, Narrative Making and Memory in Myanmar," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47 (May 27, 2017): 376–95.
[10] Mikael Gravers, "Anti-Muslim Buddhist Nationalism in Burma and Sri Lanka: Religious Violence and Globalized Imaginaries of Endangered Identities," *Contemporary Buddhism* 16, no. 1 (2015): 1–27.

of communal violence. The second narrative is more common among educated residents, as well as among civic organizers and members of the NLD. This narrative usually blames the conflict on the machinations of anti-democratic hidden figures rather than on inter-group antagonisms, thus de-escalating conflict from both the Buddhist and Muslim sides.

This second narrative draws on evidence from the history of draconian governance in the country, and the extensive surveillance system in place during the military regime, to argue that shadowy figures in the military deliberately incite violence between communities in order to distract attention away from important issues or to divide the population.[11] Peacekeepers in Yangon rejected the notion that there is any antagonism between Buddhists and Muslims, claiming instead that outside forces, usually referred to as *lat mae gyi*, or hidden hand, are to blame. A Muslim community leader I spoke to explained that these hidden figures exploit those with low education in order to manipulate people into conflict.

> Wirathu and all the radicals, they are only a handful of people. Nevertheless, they have a wide network, across the country. Whenever they want to spark a conflict, they can ignite it. They use poor and unemployed people to do their work by paying them to destroy madrassas, Muslim homes, and mosques. They are trying to make the country unstable. They claim that it is patriotic. That is how they pull on the heartstrings of the poor and uneducated, 'We have to protect our country! We have to stop Muslims from taking it over!' They present themselves as patriots to pull people to their movement. However, as I said, if you look closely, it is all about politics. They are using this language to manipulate people.

Political scientists have similarly explained the anti-Muslim violence of Myanmar by pointing to the allegiances between Buddhist nationalists and the military regime, claiming that they are coordinating for political and economic gain.[12] As this chapter shows, however, people in

[11] Christina Fink, *Living Silence in Burma: Surviving under Military Rule* (London: Zed Books, 2013); Sean Turnell, "Myanmar's Fifty-Year Authoritarian Trap," *Journal of International Affairs* 65, no. 1 (2011): 79–92.
[12] Gerry van Klinken and Su Mon Thazin Aung, "The Contentious Politics of Anti-Muslim Scapegoating in Myanmar," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47, no. 3 (May 27, 2017): 353–75.

Myanmar also recognize this pattern, and they use this framing to mobilize against violence. Political manipulation arguments implicitly assume that people in the targeted communities are easily manipulated toward violence, but a closer analysis reveals that many in these communities see these patterns of manipulation and actively try to de-escalate conflict by drawing on the same causal arguments as these academics.

The dominance of this narrative in MTN, among its MPs, NGOs, and residents, encouraged specific forms of civic engagement and preventative measures. Instead of developing interfaith networks or events, local intra-communal organizations and activists in Yangon coordinated their activity by focusing on eliminating rumors and otherwise hampering nationalist groups and others who are perceived to be instigating violence. For instance, one board member of a Muslim intra-communal organization explained, “We release a statement whenever a rumor occurs. But right now, we don’t have to solve the issues like we used to because it is very clear who is on which side. The public knows who is doing what. So sometimes we don't even need to solve it, people can figure it out by themselves.” Whether or not the nationalists are working with the previous regime to attempt to instigate violence, the belief that they are undoubtedly reduces the likelihood of violence.

5.5 Preventing Violence Phase Two: Response

As police searched the building and the crowd gathered outside, community leaders contacted each other for information and to organize a response. The Ward Administrator and MPs acted quickly, organizing from afar and arriving at the scene as soon as possible to help de-escalate the situation. When the situation worsened, many of the residents armed themselves and barricaded the entrance to the streets of their neighborhood. Neighborhood leaders tried to

restore calm by organizing and leading street patrols, and by encouraging residents at the barricades to trust in the police and the authorities to keep them and their families safe.

Mobilizing Networks and Organizing a Response

Both Ward Administrator U Ye Naung Thein and national MP Daw Phyu Phyu Thin were out of town when the incident occurred, but they worked through the night and over the next few days to de-escalate the conflict and restore the peace. U Ye Naung Thein was the first leader outside of the military-controlled branches of government to learn about the incident. He was preparing to sleep after a long drive to the beach for a short holiday with friends and family when he received a phone call from the Township Administrator at about 10:30pm. He quickly gathered everyone together in the car to return to Yangon. U Ye Naung Thein's driver, a Street Administrator from the Ward, lent him his phone, as did U Ye Naung Thein's wife, giving him a total of five cell phones, including his own three phones, to use on his way back to the city.

> The whole night I was calling people and answering phone calls from everyone I know. I had to call every 10 Household and 100 Household Head that I know to go there and help calm the people down. I also called the three Parliament Members… I also tried to call all of my friends to go there and see what's happening and try to help. I wasn't just calling though, I also received a lot of phone calls because many people wanted to know what was happening. The whole way back I was on the phone.

He talked to religious leaders, organizations, government officials, friends, and even the local secretary of the NLD, who assured him, like everyone else, that they would go there and stop the violence from escalating.

Among the first people U Ye Naung Thein called was national MP Daw Phyu Phyu Thin. She was in Nay Pyi Taw and could not reach Yangon until the next morning, but she called the two regional MPs representing MTN and began to organize a response. "When I picked up the phone during the riot I couldn't put it down, because everybody was calling me. The public was

reporting to me what was happening, and I needed to direct my people to their respective areas." After the group of nationalists around the police station had dispersed, Daw Phyu Phyu Thin sent a "mole" into the nationalist group in order to get inside information on their plans. She learned that they were planning on moving to Bahan Township after they failed in MTN, so she alerted one of the Bahan Township MPs. Later, when the MP called back to warn her the nationalists were planning on returning to MTN, she passed on the notice to her friends and contacts in the area. Daw Phyu Phyu Thin and her colleagues monitored the situation until around 3am, an hour after the nationalists finally dispersed near Bahan Township.

Barricading the Streets

After the Muslim man was wounded most of the residents of MTN dispersed, returning to their homes. Both Buddhists and Muslims recognized the possibility of violent attacks by the nationalists, and they knew from incidents of communal violence in Meikhtila and Rakhine State in 2012 and 2013 that police might stand by as homes were destroyed. Residents therefore took the safety of their homes and families into their own hands. A local garment worker who stood watch in the street that night explained,

> I went back outside and sat, along with all the people in the neighborhood. For security. … One man from each household came out … We didn't leave the street, we just waited here. If they [the nationalists] ever came into the street we would attack them … It's just like what happened in 2013 after the Meikhtila violence broke out ….

Ko Aung Thu, a betel shop owner, emphasized the police's slow response:

> In my Ward there is no security. To protect my street and to protect my house is my responsibility. It is our responsibility. The police came after … Once they arrived we put our weapons away, our knives and rods and swords … We were a bit relieved when the security force and the police car arrived. But we were still aware that we have to take care of our own security.

MTN residents' responses were tied to the history of military rule in Myanmar and particularly

to police inaction during previous incidents of communal violence.

In addition to arming themselves and monitoring their streets, many residents barricaded the entrance to their streets. Streets in the neighborhood are generally one-way and connected to the main street on only one side. Residents therefore barricaded the exits to the main street with whatever they could find, including chairs and bamboo rods, creating makeshift checkpoints. They questioned anyone who wished to enter, ensuring that they lived on the street or were at least friends with someone on that street. When Ko Aung Lay, a Buddhist activist from outside of the township, tried to enter the neighborhood in order to follow a truck filled with suspected nationalists, he needed help to maneuver around these barricades.

> Once [my Muslim friend and I] came into the street, the Muslim people surrounded us and asked us who we were. My friend, his name is Ali, he said "I am Ali, I am Muslim," and he went out! He left me alone in the car! I said no, I'm with you guys, I'm here to help. One guy asked me to just go back, because the mob just came in and—because it was near the mosque. … I was scared so I did go back. But then I took a wrong turn and went into the street again, but the wrong way. It was a one-way street, but I went in the opposite way. Then, I was alone, and all the Muslim people came down from their houses with swords! I was alone in the car, driving, and in the end—I thought the street was connected to the main road, but it was clearly not. So I had to turn again! One guy had a sword on the corner, so I closed my car's window and turned again, and escaped.

Neither the local police nor many of the local leaders endorsed these barricades, but they were the primary means through which the community sought to defend themselves.

Street Patrols

Most of the crowd dispersed after the police fired warning shots, but several people remained to help de-escalate the situation and to organize street patrols. The two regional MPs mobilized by Ward Administrator U Ye Naung Thein and national MP Daw Phyu Phyu Thin remained on the scene, as did members of local religious organizations and other local leaders. They reassured residents that the police would handle the situation and protect them from the

nationalists. Yet convincing people in Myanmar that the police are on their side is often very difficult. As the chairman of a local NGO told me,

> When I got there, they were swearing at the policemen. If you see them [these angry residents] with sympathy, they are not wrong. All the incidents that occurred like Rakhine and Meikthila, everything happened right before the eyes of policemen. Houses are burning and people are being killed right in front of the police … On that night people … said things like, "This is your job, if you do not stop it you are responsible." When we speak to them they listen, they know me and they know my position. So maybe it's because of this respect that they accepted [what I had to say].

To spread their message more quickly, he and other local leaders organized small patrols composed of trusted community members like Street Administrators, 10 Household Heads, regional MPs, and members of the Five Muslim Organizations. The patrols used their status to encourage residents to return to their homes, to put down their weapons, and trust the police for protection.

Buddhist residents stood by their Muslim neighbors in protecting MTN, even though Buddhist organizations, other than the PMU, were absent that night. The chairman of the Sangha Mahanayaka Committee for MTN, where there are several large and important monasteries, told me that he would have gotten involved, but that the Chief of Police never informed him of the conflict. He only learned about the incident the next day by reading the newspaper. Individual Buddhist monks and residents helped de-escalate the conflict, however. The local chairman for the Islamic Religious Affairs Council remembered,

> There is [a mosque], which is not far from this area. There is not a single Muslim household around that mosque. The building next to it is a monastery. When [our patrol] went there, the monks told us, "You can go back home, don't worry, we'll protect the mosque."

Buddhist residents and monks worked together with their Muslim neighbors by joining the street patrols, helping barricade the streets, and by otherwise doing what they could to protect their Muslim neighbors.

5.6 Preventing Violence Phase Three: Maintaining Peace

No more injuries occurred that night, but tension lingered in the days after. In the early hours of May 10, U Wirathu wrote on Facebook that he was not satisfied with how the police had dealt with the situation. He declared that he would return to MTN on May 15 to "turn the township upside down" looking for illegal migrants. Throughout the next week the local government scrambled to arrest the instigators responsible and to deter any further attacks, and community leaders worked to re-frame the incident as one related to the greed of malicious people instigating violence, rather than to communal hatred. The Five Muslim Organizations, a group of intra-communal organizations united by the government in order to represent Muslim interests, also issued a statement on the incident, encouraging calm and trust in the police. These efforts culminated in a Town Hall meeting organized by U Ye Naung Thein for the evening of May 14, where community leaders and NGOs disseminated accurate information, encouraged residents to trust the police, and demonstrated community solidarity.

Catching the Instigators and Re-framing the Incident

Through discussions with police and informants the day after the incident, the township administrator's office gathered evidence suggesting that the case had little to do with illegal immigration but was instead the result of a dispute over money. According to the police, the conflict started when the woman who owned the apartment building under question, Daw Win, had asked her neighbor for loan using her house as collateral. Her neighbor's wife, Aye Per Tun, acted as the broker. Daw Win was a construction contractor, and her business was not doing well. After seeing that she would never be able to pay back the loan, Daw Win sold the house and used that money to pay back the loan. When Aye Per Tun learned that Daw Win had sold the

house for more than the loan, she demanded that Daw Win pay her a fee. The feud escalated when Aye Per Tun was contacted by a famous couple associated with the growing nationalist movement. They told Aye Per Tun that she should demand more money and paying the nationalist couple a fee in exchange for their help. Aye Per Tun agreed, and after Daw Win again refused to pay, the couple mobilized the group of nationalist monks and laypersons to pressure the police to arrest Daw Win on charges of harboring illegal Muslim migrants from the Rakhine State.

For the next two weeks after the incident, the local government and Members of Parliament coordinated their efforts in order to find Aye Per Tun and the nationalists responsible. The day after the incident, Ward Administrator U Ye Naung Thein worked with the police and the Township Administrator's office to clear Daw Win's name and to officially begin their investigation of the nationalists. That same morning, national MP Daw Phyu Phyu Thin, who had returned to MTN, met with members of the GAD to compare information about the case. She also spoke with the police to inquire why they had not acted earlier that night. "They said they didn't because they didn't receive a command from the higher level. So, I told them that if they are not going to arrest [the inciters], the next time this happens I would arrest them [the police]." That night, with the information from the GAD, Daw Phyu Phyu Thin sent a letter to the Chief Minister of the Yangon Regional Hluttaw and to the Ministry of Religion and Culture, demanding the arrest of the nationalists. According to another local activist, it was Daw Phyu Phyu Thin's efforts that resulted in the eventual arrest of the nationalists. "She forced the government to arrest all of those people. Without her it would not had happened. This was the first time that the government took action on those extremist groups—because of her." Indeed, that same evening, arrest warrants were issued for seven people, including two monks. The

nationalist couple was arrested quickly, and the three other lay people turned themselves in once the arrest warrants were issued. The two monks, however, were not apprehended.

In the weeks after the incident, the role of Aye Per Tun and the nationalists working with her to ignite violence was spread quickly through traditional and social media platforms. A Township Administrator that I spoke to even suggested that a news journal would be sued because it published an article linking the violence to communal hatred. In response to these accusations of incitement, the Association for the Protection of Race and Religion (MaBaTha), of which U Wirathu is a prominent member, held a press conference where they claimed no connection to the nationalists involved in the incident in Mingalar Taung Nyunt. They claimed that the PMU, of which the nationalists arrested for the incident were members, had no official relationship with the MaBaTha, and that although their ideals might be aligned, their strategies were different. The re-framing of the incident as one related to greed rather than ideology thus played an important role in making sure the conflict did not reignite or could be used by other nationalists to further their agenda. This narrative was reinforced on May 14th, during a Town Hall meeting organized by the Ward Administrator.

Intra-communal Organizing

Al-Hajj Karim, a leader in the Islamic Religious Affairs Council (IRAC), one of the Five Muslim Organizations, spent the night of the incident monitoring the streets along with the police. Karim returned home and slept about three hours before organizing a meeting of the local branch of the IRAC. The organization decided its strategy for the next few days. According to Karim,

> First of all, we wanted to release a statement. There were lots of rumors already on Facebook and other social media. So first of all the statement said not to believe those

> rumors spreading on social media. At the same time we had to work with the authorities, police, and the representatives. If they would like to know anything, we would provide the information … After that we went to [the] offices of our parliamentary representatives and spoke with them, built trust with them. All three representatives are very engaged with the community. We told them what we can provide and asked them what they needed.

Karim made his network available to local authorities and made it known that the IRAC was willing to help in any way the authorities deemed appropriate. But other than inviting the Five Muslim Organizations to the Town Hall meeting on May 14, local authorities and the MPs mostly ignored their offers of help. When I asked about their involvement, the Ward Administrator said, "I didn't work with them or anything, but they came here to ask me questions and to get some information." The IRAC helped de-escalate the situation during the incident, and they published their statement, but were otherwise underutilized by the GAD and the MPs.

Although Buddhist organizations could have helped respond to the violence in MTN, they did not do so in this case. Since Buddhist monks have been involved in many cases of communal violence in the past, the MaHaNa has a very important role in de-escalating conflict and punishing transgressors. During that night in MTN, however, the township chairman of the MaHaNa was completely absent, and did not even learn about the incident until the following morning. Without a call from the GAD, MPs, or the Chief of Police, the MaHaNa was completely disconnected from the incident. As the chairman told me, "If they had called me I would've resolved it right away. It was like that another time, when I helped, but that was with the previous Chief of Police. This Chief of Police is new, he should've called me, but we don't have much of a relationship." It is unclear whether or not the chairman's involvement would have resolved the situation as easily as he suggests. The MaHaNa does have the authority to curb the activities of monks, but given the reluctance of most Buddhist monks to get involved in anything related to the lay world, the power, influence, and authority of monks like the chairman

of the MaHaNa is usually restricted to responding to others' requests, rather than proactively engaging in the situation.

5.7 Generalizing from Mingalar Taung Nyunt

The repertoires of communal violence prevention mobilized in Mingalar Taung Nyunt are specific to that case, but the conceptual framework developed in this chapter is useful more generally. The chapter has shown that the way that communities attempt to prevent violence, the way they respond as violence escalates, and the strategies mobilized afterward are all shaped by their beliefs and expectations of how violence happens. The leadership and actions of Daw Phyu Phyu Thin, for example, were shaped by her firm belief in the *lat mae gyi*'s role in orchestrating the conflict; she suspected the involvement of the military and responded to the lack of police intervention by publicly demanding action on the suspected instigators. Furthermore, the residents of Mingalar Taunt Nyunt drew on their past experiences with conflict in 2012 and 2013 to quickly respond to the escalating conflict by barricading their streets and arming themselves to protect their homes. In other words, their experience with similar scuffles, and their knowledge of these in other cities around the country, led them to swift action based on an expectation of imminent escalation. If we fail to recognize the vital role that legacies of violence have in shaping communal violence, then, we run the risk of misunderstanding the way that violence was prevented in places like Mingalar Taung Nyunt.

The incident in Mingalar Taung Nyunt also reveals the importance of identifying cases where violence seemed imminent but was ultimately de-escalated. The spark that led to the incident in MTN was not unlike the sparks that occur throughout Myanmar. Some of these do escalate to deadly communal violence, as demonstrated by the long history of communal

violence in Myanmar. Yet this pattern obscures the far more common occurrence of incidents that are, like the one in MTN, de-escalated before they become cases of communal violence. In order to understand when and why quotidian conflicts escalate to communal violence, we must also understand the existence and efficacy of measures that communities use to prepare for potential violence and how they respond when violence seems imminent This chapter has focused on a particular incident that occurred within very unique circumstances, but systems of violence prevention like the one in MTN are undoubtedly more widespread. The changing political structure in Myanmar has created unique relationships of power between the military-controlled GAD, the civilian-elected representatives, local organizations, and the residents. But these particularities aside, alliances between communities, local government, and civil society are not unique to Myanmar. Similar systems are in place in India, for example, as well as the United States.[13] Recognizing the important role that systems of violence prevention play in determining where and when violence occurs will not only help us build better theoretical models of communal violence, but also recognizes the important role that community members already play in maintaining peace in their communities.

[13] There is some evidence that similar systems in cities across the United States in the 1960s, for example. The preponderance of communal violence in that period led many cities to organize groups of "counter-rioters," ranging from small grassroots mobilizations of some 20 people to government-sponsored patrols of over 500, which would work with local government officials to prevent the escalation of violence. For more on this topic, see William A. Anderson, Russell R. Dynes, and E. L. Quarantelli, "Urban Counterrioters," *Society* 11, no. 3 (March 1974): 50–55; Terry Ann Knopf, *Youth Patrols: An Experiment in Community Participation* (Waltham: Brandeis University, Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence, 1969); Donald I. Warren, "Neighborhood Structure and Riot Behavior in Detroit: Some Exploratory Findings," *Social Problems* 16, no. 4 (April 1969): 464–84.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Communal Violence in Myanmar

Communal violence is not a one-off incident for most communities. Instead, it recurs in those communities many times over, sometimes over several generations. This dissertation has argued that countries and cities that face this recurrence are both shaped by that violence and in turn have a part in shaping the patterns of conflict that we observe. Recognizing this broader pattern of conflict has important implications for how we understand communal violence and for how we can prevent them from recurring. The dissertation has argued that eliminating the broader pattern of communal violence recurrence does not only require addressing the immediate political or economic grievances that sparked the conflict, but it also means recognizing the institutions that have been built around the conflict. It means recognizing the laws, organizations, culture, and repertoires that conflict over time has established in these communities. In short, it means recognizing that these communities have been living in violence, and that they have developed and established means of addressing conflict.

Myanmar has seen communal violence between Buddhists and Muslims since at least the British colonial period. This conflict has been shaped over the years as racial and ethnic lines were drawn and re-drawn by the colonial government, the early democracy, the socialist republic, and the military regime. Today, that conflict continues to recur in the Rakhine State, where hundreds of thousands of Muslims have fled their homes, pursued by a military adamant in its belief that they are not Burmese, and cannot be, because of their religion. By recognizing the long pattern of conflict that has led to this situation, and the specific institutions that have

been built through recurrence, we can come closer to a true understanding of the causes of communal violence and reach a lasting peace.

6.2 Communal Conflict over Time

When we analyze the role that past cases of violence have on later cases of violence, we run the risk of essentializing both the conflict and the groups involved. This is the central tension that needs to be addressed by theoretical work on communal violence. If we want to argue that a conflict in 1930 has an impact on future cases of violence, for example, then it seems that we must assume that the conflict has been continuous in that period and that the groups involved have been the same over that time. Doing so apparently feeds into narratives of the conflict that call it intractable and inherent to the groups. We know, on the other hand, that while Buddhist-Muslim violence recurs, it is interspersed with long periods of peace, and we know that the two groups involved, Buddhists and Muslims, have changed dramatically in the past century. Muslims in Myanmar in the 1930's, for example, were viewed by the Buddhist nationalist movement in terms of their relationship to India and the ruling colonial government. Today, Muslims are instead understood through an international lens that equates terrorist organizations with assimilated Muslim families. Arguing that Islam, and Buddhism, mean the same thing over time, then, is untenable. But if the groups are different, and constantly shifting, how are we to conceptualize patterns of conflict over time?

Two principle theories, primordialism and instrumentalism, have competed to answer this problem in contemporary Myanmar. Primordialists believe that the conflict between Buddhism and Islam is one tied to theology and is thus irreconcilable. Islam is a violent religion at its core, they believe, and its leaders and members have acted selfishly in order to advance themselves at the expense of their generous and sometimes naive hosts, the Buddhists. As evidence, these

actors will point to the Muslim-led violence around the world, the long history of Buddhist-Muslim violence in the country, and to the victims of domestic abuse that come to them for support. They will show you videos of Muslims killing Buddhist monks, and pictures of the dead or mutilated bodies of women and other victims of their violence. Instrumentalists, on the other hand, argue that the conflict between Buddhism and Islam has nothing to do with the religions themselves, but is instead a consequence of manipulation by nefarious actors. According to these individuals, extremist Buddhism and evil Islam are merely masks that are donned in order to aggravate the population and manipulate them to act in accordance to the elite's machinations. As evidence of their argument, these actors will point you to the patterns of where violence happened, mapping these on to national economic projects such as the introduction of a new pipeline project or the construction of a new dam. They argue that the Buddhist-Muslim violence we see now is only one instantiation of the same kind of thing that can be seen since the military took control of the government in 1962. They show you pictures of 'fake' monks instigating violence while wearing military boots beneath their robes, videos of instigators that are supposed to be local but are taking wrong turns and looking at maps on their way to Muslim neighborhoods, or show you pictures of the drug-addled and poor who are said to have been paid to instigate violence.

These two competing theories for why violence recurs in Myanmar are mirrored in academic work on the subject. While few academics would support a purely primordialist perspective, the two religions are often assumed to be incompatible. This argument focuses on the differences between Muslims and Buddhists, point out that Islam is monotheistic and intolerant of religious diversity in many ways, including marriage, and that this explains, at least in part, why violence is more likely between these religions as opposed to others. Such an

argument will suggest that Hinduism is not the target of violence, for example, because it aligns closely with the tenants of Buddhism. Instrumentalist arguments by academics are far more common. Following in the footsteps of political scientists studying India and Indonesia, scholars argue that the violence we see now is a consequence of rapid political and economic change in the country, which has in turn incentivized elites to mobilize nationalist language in order to garner popular support. Even Aung San Suu Kyi, it seems, has had to swallow her humanity and call Muslims illegal migrants, supporting military action against the citizens the world thought she would protect.

While both positions do have evidence in support of their argument, in both cases, that evidence fits some incidents and not others. Primordialists see Muslim terrorism and call it natural, but forget the Christian terrorism in Indonesia, anti-Jewish terrorism around the world, and the Buddhist terrorism in Sri Lanka and in their own country. Likewise, primordialists ignore the vastly more common incidence of inter-communal harmony everywhere in the world. Instrumentalists, on the other hand, ignore the recurring pattern of anti-Muslim violence in their country. Violence occurred under a colonial regime, a democratic one, a socialist one, a military dictatorship, and now again under democracy. Furthermore, if military elites were indeed behind the observed pattern of communal conflict, and had been for the past fifty years, we would expect to see mistakes or defections that more clearly evidence their involvement. In short, while instrumentalism and primordialism can tell us something about an incident of violence, they have little to say about the general pattern of conflict.

This dissertation has proposed an alternative explanation for the observed pattern of violence: institutionalized systems of communal conflict. When we turn our attention to the relationship between incidents of violence, and to the space that lies between them, we find

actors building narratives to explain the violence, organizations created based on those explanations, and a slew of repertoires of action based on these narratives and structures. These institutions shape the way that communal conflict is expressed in communities, affecting the form and likelihood of communal violence. The dissertation has shown that past conflict has a dramatic and important impact on observed patterns of conflict. People do not stand idly by in the face of recurrent communal violence, but instead mobilize and organize, either on their own or with their governments. In fulfilling their visions for why the violence recurs, they build the foundations for how that violence will play out in the future. If we ever hope to explain the causes of communal violence, then, we must look to these consequences of recurrent violence.

6.3 Institutionalizing Communal Conflict

This dissertation has argued that taking recurrence seriously, and therefore recognizing the role that past cases of violence have in creating patterns of conflict, we come closer to understanding why certain neighborhoods, cities, and countries continue to experience recurring communal violence. It argued that communal violence recurs because it is institutionalized, built into the fabric of the community. It showed how communities living in recurrent conflict develop beliefs about the reasons for conflict, establish organizations based on those beliefs, and evolve repertoires of action to respond to the patterns of recurrence that they experience. These institutions, together, determine the form and likelihood of future incidents of conflict by de-escalating conflict in places like Mingalar Taung Nyunt in Yangon, or by contributing to rising violence in places like Mandalay. Thus, these "institutionalized riot systems" and "institutionalized peace systems" together construct the patterns of communal conflict that we observe. The established beliefs about the other can turn quotidian conflicts into assaults on

one's group, with the real possibility of leading to violence that will destroy one's business or target one's family. Physical assault, sexual assault, or rape are no longer just crimes in these communities, but are instead deeply understood attacks on groups that require retribution.

In developing this theoretical framework, the dissertation has relied on the dichotomy of "institutionalized riot systems" and "institutionalized peace systems," embodied through people like nationalist monk U Wirathu on the one hand, and community leaders like Daw Phyu Phyu Thin on the other. While this conceptualization makes the presentation of information easier, it is not entirely accurate. In truth, the 'good' and the 'bad' are far more muddled, with many actors lying somewhere in between. Those who would be called instigators by some recognize themselves as guardians of peace and justice, while those who would be called peacekeepers are sometimes ill equipped to contribute toward de-escalation when violence does in fact break out. While scholars have labeled the racist and nationalistic monks affiliated with the MaBaTha as instigators, for example, there is little evidence that they in fact wanted to ignite communal violence. Most of the time, these monks lamented violence, calling it an unfortunate consequence of the existing tension and blaming it instead on an inept government and an uneducated population. This is not to say that they do not contribute toward escalating conflict, for they undoubtedly do, but only that it is not enough to label them an "institutionalized riot system" constructed for the purpose of igniting communal violence in support of a nefarious puppet-master. While there is evidence in India and in Indonesia that such machinations do occur, the evidence in this case points to something more complicated.

Thus, while the dissertation used the terms "instigators" and "peace-keepers," it has also pushed for a broader understanding of communal conflict that focuses on the institutions that are built in communities that see recurrent violence, rather than on the individuals. It has argued that

people living in these communities learn from their experiences with conflict, recognizing patterns of escalation and acting in response to rising tension. People learn, for example, to stay at home, if they can, after rumors of rape circulate in their community. If they must go out, they know not to talk to their friends from different faiths, and to stay away from certain areas and neighborhoods. Certain neighborhoods go further and develop informal networks for creating barricades or a neighborhood watch system that can be mobilized when violence seems imminent. These behaviors, based on beliefs about the other and on beliefs about the conflict, establish the blueprint for communal conflict in those communities. When we look at the complexity of their lived experience, it is difficult to draw a clear line between instigators and peacekeepers, especially over time, in such communities. Regardless, the institutions constructed in response to conflict remain, and they should be our focus.

6.4 Building a Lasting Peace

This dissertation has shown that the seemingly intractable, long-lasting, conflict between people in Myanmar is not due to some inherent evil in either group or to inherent incompatibilities between them. Neither is the violence attributable simply to some puppet master behind the scenes. Instead, the evidence suggests that group conflicts are built over time, learned, and practiced by the communities in which they recur. These group conflicts are built around the institutions we establish, the stories we tell to understand why the other appears so inherently violent or illogical, and the infrastructure that we construct based on those beliefs. Like group violence, then, peace must be built through long-lasting institutions with strong narratives and a collective capacity to respond to escalating tension.

The dissertation has shown how people living in violence are already creating peace in their communities by mobilizing similar strategies. The work of U Kawira in Mandalay and Daw Phyu Phyu Thin in Yangon show the importance of relationships, networks, and organizations. They also show the importance of having convincing narratives of the conflict that can return people to their homes and encourage them to lay down their weapons. Often, the peace built by such institutions is invisible to us, since a lack of violence is never reported by the government or the media, and rarely studied by academia. As the case in Mingalar Taung Nyunt showed, however, people are ready to respond when violence seems imminent and they often do so successfully. They have built their own institutions for peace and are already halting the escalation of violence.

If we want to build a lasting peace, then, we need to study the narratives that lead to conflict and those that lead to peace and identify the organizations and structures that mobilize groups of people in either direction. We also need to support those people on the ground who already know how to make peace and help ensure that their narratives and organizations are influential to the community, and that they are built to last. The evidence presented here, and the theory built around it, should thus provide us hope for peace in seemingly intractable conflicts. If peace is already being achieved in Myanmar, where violence has recurred for almost a century, then it is possible elsewhere and is likely already happening. Thus, by taking communal violence recurrence seriously we have seen that the pattern of conflict is not due to some inherent incompatibly or an unseen mastermind. Violence is built, so peace can be built in its stead.

APPENDIX

Appendix A. History of Buddhist-Muslim Violence in Myanmar

Date	Description
1893	Cow protectionist movement started in India leads to anti-Muslim violence in Yangon, ending in 30 deaths.
1930	Conflict at docks in Yangon after dispute over pay ignites communal violence that spreads northward.
1938	Conflict over publication of anti-Buddhist book by Muslim ignites communal violence in cities throughout Myanmar.
1942	Rohingya and Rakhine use weapons proved by British and Japanese to attack each other in Rakhine State.
1961	Anti-Muslim violence in Mandalay provides an excuse for the 1962 military coup.
1978	Nagamin Operation in Rakhine State leads Rohingya to flee for Bangladesh.
1983	Anti-Muslim violence in Mon State leads to refugees fleeing across the Thai border.
1988	Anti-Muslim violence during tumultuous anti-government protests is ignited when Muslim youth insulted a young Buddhist girl outside of a café. This conflict escalated into street battles in many cities in Myanmar.
1991	Anti-Muslim violence in Rakhine State leads to refugee crisis in Bangladesh.
1993	Anti-Muslim violence ignited in Mandalay and some reports of incidents in Bago and Yangon.
1996	Anti-Muslim violence after pamphlets are distributed in four towns in Shan State. Similar leaflets are distributed in Yangon and Mandalay, urging Buddhists to boycott Muslim stores and not to marry Muslims.
1997	During offensive against Karen National Union, SLORC soldiers attack Karen Muslims, executing some, destroying their mosques, and their property. SLORC are reported to demand conversions. Karen Muslims flee to Thailand.
1997	Sexual harassment case involving a Buddhist woman and a Muslim man in Mandalay occurs as scandal over missing jewels threatens anti-government mobilization. Large mob attack Muslim shops, homes, and mosques in Mandalay resulting in several deaths. Violence escalates over the next few days, spreading to many cities throughout the country.
1997	Buddhist monks are reportedly seen attacking mosques, usually at night. Soldiers respond by surrounding monasteries, refusing to allow monks to leave.

Appendix A cont. History of Buddhist-Muslim Violence in Myanmar

	Monks deny involvement, point to soldiers disguised as monks. Attacks continue, even as military presence increases. When mosques are guarded, schools and shops are attacked.
2001	Communal violence is ignited in Sittwe. Seven Arakan politicians are jailed for inciting the violence.
2001	Communal violence is ignited again in Sittwe, this time after the destruction of Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban. Violence spreads to many cities around the country. Property damage and nine deaths are reported.
2001	Attack by al-Qaeda on the World Trade Center in the United States ignites anti-Muslim violence around Myanmar.
2002	Unverified reports of burning of Muslim homes in Karen State.
2003	Anti-Muslim violence occurs after U Wirathu distributes leaflets warning of Muslim threat. U Wirathu is sentenced for 25 years imprisonment for inciting violence.
2003	Unverified reports of anti-Muslim violence in Irrawaddy Division.
2012 - 2014	Communal violence ignites in Rakhine State after a Buddhist woman is raped by three Muslim men. A series of incidents beginning in the Rakhine State lead to violence throughout the country over the next two years, including incidents in Mandalay, Bago, and Yangon.
2016	Fight breaks out in Bago between a Buddhist man and a Muslim man, drawing a crowd. The crowd then destroys the Muslim individual's home, other Muslim households, a mosque, and a warehouse.
2016	A mosque is destroyed by a crowd in Hpakant following a dispute over its expansion.
2016 - 2017	Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) attacks security forces in Rakhine. Military response leads thousands of deaths, destruction of entire villages, and over 750,000 refugees fleeing into Bangladesh over the next year.
2017	Two madrassas are closed in Yangon after a mob claims prayer is being conducted there illegally.
2017	Muslim man is injured in Yangon after police investigate a home for allegedly harboring illegal migrants from Bangladesh. Several people are arrested for inciting the conflict, including two monks.

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