

it, many Rohingya in recent decades preferred to be labelled simply as Arakan Muslims. In all formal and most informal discussions in Myanmar, the widely used term for the Rohingya is “Bengali Muslims” or “illegal Bangladeshis”. The key problem of legitimacy and citizenship is linked to this debate about what exactly to call these persecuted people. While all identity groups should have the right to name their own group, the Rohingya have been wiped out from the living memory of modern Myanmar through census programmes, textbook revisions and the systematic silencing of the Rohingya in broader public discourse.

A handful of academics who have until now explored the crisis of identity at the heart of the Rohingya “crisis” have analysed these exclusionary politics of citizenship through the lens of race vs ethnic group identity. Nick Cheesman argues that “National races” or *taingyintha* is among the pre-eminent political ideas in Myanmar today. Cheesman also notes that lexically and legally, national races trump citizenship. To talk of the political community of “Myanmar” is to talk of *taingyintha*, and to talk to that community is above all to address its members not as citizens but as national races. As such, the questions of how and why the Rohingya community is being systematically wiped out through certain genocidal and “ethnic cleansing”

There are eight major national ethnic groups that could be broken down into another 135 ethnic groups. Myanmar, through its 1982 Citizenship Law, recognises the Kaman and Bamar Muslims in its Muslim populations. Its population also includes Chinese Muslims and Indian Muslims. However, the largest Muslim population living in the Rakhine State, the Rohingyas are not recognised in the list—this has effectively rendered them stateless.

PHOTO: CATHAL MCNAUGHTON/REUTERS



PHOTO: RASHED SUMON



PHOTO: STAR FILE

Nearly half of the newly displaced are children. They narrated stories of violence that tell a tale of international crimes.

massive forced displacement the country is dealing with.

The Rohingya's erasure from Myanmar's state and societal memory also occurred against the backdrop of protracted conflicts that touched all ethnic groups in the country. Hundreds of thousands of people of diverse ethnicity, faith and cultures were killed, tortured, raped and displaced and were forced to seek refuge beyond Myanmar's borders. There are also more than half a million internally displaced people (IDPs) within Myanmar. Many of them, including children, work under slave labour conditions. In this context, citizenship status of the Rohingya has simply not been a priority issue for any unified human rights movement.

Myanmar has returned to some stability recently, but the situation for the Rohingya remains complex and vexed. This is due to the legacy of political, social and psychological trauma and persecution across Myanmar society. There is little or no unified civil society response, leading to a culture of impunity and the absence of a proposal for peaceful co-existence within Myanmar's multi-ethnic society. Myanmar's other

practices must also be explained through what kind of systematic processes an ethnic group legitimately belongs in modern day Myanmar. This argument cannot be won by suggesting that the Rohingya belonged to ancient Arakan that is part of modern Myanmar, but rather the “Myanmafication” of the state in which “Burma” became “Myanmar” (Gustaaf Houtman, 1999). What I am suggesting is that to understand and successfully resolve the plight of the Rohingya, the political history of intractable conflicts and militarisation of Burma/Myanmar must be considered. Bangladesh has very little understanding of Myanmar. This must be changed to figure out long-term solutions of the