

Massacre in Myanmar's Rakhine State

Consequences of the Terrorism of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army?

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PICTURE

Armed security forces in Rakhine State.

Foto: Evangelos Petratos, Rakhine, Myanmar/Burma June 2014

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ABSTRACT

Is there a link between the insurgency of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army's (ARSA) occurrence and the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya ethnic minority by the state of Myanmar? Further, if so, why did the Defense Services respond to ARSA with these actions? The Rohingya conflict (2016 and 2017) is analyzed using an inductive process tracing analysis within a X-Y-centred research design. The empirical results show that in 2016 ethnic cleansing and in 2017, murderous ethnic cleansing emerged from counterterrorism campaigns in response to ARSA's terrorist activities. ARSA's terrorist acts against state institutions (independent variable) constitute a necessary condition for the occurrence of (murderous) ethnic cleansing (dependent variable). In combination with inter-ethnic tensions during a period of democratic transition, the Defense Services long-term weighing of the costs and benefits of suppressing the Rohingya minority led to the observed outcome.

KEYWORDS

Genocide, Terrorist Insurgencies, Myanmar, Rohingya

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of the Union of Myanmar has been the scene of armed conflicts between the Defense Services¹ – the national armed forces of Myanmar – and more than twenty ethnic insurgencies for over seventy years (cf. Gravers/Kyed 2015: 1). Since 2011, the autocratic state has been undergoing a process of democratization, which the 2008 constitutional reform had finally initiated. Before, a military junta was in power for over fifty years (Southwick 2018: 121). In 2016, the violent crisis between the Muslim Rohingya minority and the Buddhist majority in Rakhine State escalated into a limited war (HIIK 2017: 6-7; Trinn/Wencker 2018: 115) between the newly formed insurgency Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and the Defense Services (cf. HIIK 2017: 152). The case is of essential political importance. As long as the conflict remains unsolved, there are implications for Myanmar and the region (Gee 2017: 43-44; Bashir 2017: 5-6).

In the course of the conflict, the state of Myanmar undertook ethnic cleansing starting in August 2017 (Nebehay/Lewis 2017). Classical theories of Genocide Studies cannot sufficiently explain the timing and occurrence of such atrocities. Therefore, the epistemological interest of this article lies in examining the terrorist actions of the insurgency ARSA as a critical juncture for the occurrence of genocidal acts of the Myanmar Defense Services. The guiding research questions are: Is there a link between ARSA's occurrence and the ethnic cleansing

of the Rohingya ethnic minority by the Myanmar state? Further, if so, why did the Defense Services respond to ARSA with these actions? For the X-Y-centered, inductive analysis, a game-theoretic model of action-reaction relationships combined with the process tracing method proves useful. The results of the analysis show a relationship between the terrorist actions ARSA (independent variable) and the murderous ethnic cleansing by the Myanmar Defense Services (dependent variable) in the form of an action-response relationship. It is argued that the causal path operates through a strategic-rational mechanism.

The following section gives an overview of the existing body of research on genocide and terrorism. Chapter three first conceptualizes and operationalizes the dependent and independent variables. Then, the method process tracing is described, and the case selection is justified. Chapter four starts with an introduction to the conflict and then analyzes two periods, first the conflict period from 9 October to circa 13 November 2016, and then the period from 25 August to circa 15 September 2017. Subsequently, a theory is generated, and hypotheses are formed. Finally, a summary of the results and an outlook are presented.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent decades, Genocide Studies identified several conditions and triggers for murderous ethnic cleansing or genocide. Similarly, terrorism research generated find-

¹ In the following, the term Defense Services will be used to refer to the military (Tatmadaw), the police and the Border Guard Police Force (cf. Selth 2018: 6; Aung San Suu Kyi 2019).

ings on the links between terrorist activities and civil war². This chapter introduces different strands of research to link empirical findings back to the theoretical landscape.

The conceptual distinction between genocide – defined by the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide (Resolution 260-A III) – and (murderous) ethnic cleansing often remains blurred in academic literature. Straus points to the problem of proving the intent of these acts by distinguishing them from counterinsurgency:

Counterinsurgency indiscriminate violence [...] would be distinct from genocide. In that case, actors commit indiscriminate violence because they lack territorial control and information to be selective (Straus 2012: 553).

According to Browning (2001: 162), on the other hand, genocide is “atrocious by policy.” An inherent problem of most definitions lies in the remaining ambiguity about the intention of the perpetrators as it is difficult to prove the intent to commit genocide (Barth 2006: 19-20).

Genocide Studies follow three explanatory approaches for its initiation. The first approach explains genocides in terms of ideological paradigms and through the mechanism of othering. Harff (2003: 61) and Kiernan (2007: 34) highlight exclusionary ideological paradigms as the essential origin of genocides. In this context, ideology is the “binding agent” that ties security threats to the identity of groups (Sémelin 2007: 22). The social construction of collectivity – the categorization into in-group and out-group – forms the legitimizing basis for genocide and ethnic cleansing (Hagan/Rymond-Richmond 2009: 876). The Other is dehumanized through mechanisms of demonization, exclusion, and victimization (Kuper 1981: 322; Straus 2012: 548; Anwary 2020: 86-88). Sternberg (2003: 300) describes genocidal acts as “[...] planfully and carefully orchestrated hate translated into action.” The second approach draws on structural arguments. Levene (2000: 308-310) finds that ethnic cleansing is more likely to occur during processes of political transition. Transformation or democratization leads to insecurity and instability within the state. Further, (new) nations often define themselves along ethnic lines adding tensions (Mann 2005: 502-504). The third approach corresponds to a strategic or rationalist view concerning action and reaction behavior. It describes the causal mechanism of genocide as a relationship between insecurity in civil war and the (military) reaction with extreme violence (Midlarsky 2005: 87, 94; Ulfelder/Valentino 2008: 14). Fein (1999: 58) argues that genocide is a retaliatory response to (perceived or actual) threats. Midlarsky (2005: 9) notes that common conditions for genocides are a preceding loss of territory, population, or authority. Accordingly, genocides are actions within the framework of

“realpolitik (defined as policies designed to preserve and strengthen the state)” (ibid.: 4). The three explanatory approaches do not offer a complete explanation for what happened in the Rohingya conflict and why it happened at that time. Nevertheless, together they offer a starting point to determine which conditions are necessary and sufficient for the occurrence of (murderous) ethnic cleansing.

Terrorism is used as a tactic primarily in asymmetric warfare to intimidate and force a state response despite clear inferiority (Shapiro 2012: 6). The following literature review is limited to research regarding how states respond to terrorist acts by insurgents. “[L]eaders are expected to respond forcefully to terrorist attacks and show resolve to preempt further challenges by domestic and foreign enemies” (Mahoney 2015: 213). Stevenson (2004) describes three options in dealing with terrorism: surrender, confrontation, or a combination of preventive action, deterrence, and counteraction. Crelinsten (2009) takes a behaviorist approach and distinguishes between five types of counterterrorism: coercive, proactive, persuasive, defensive, and long-term counterterrorism.

Previous research has often found a link between civil war and genocide (Midlarsky 2005; Ulfelder/Valentino 2008). However, the link between terrorist actions of insurgencies and murderous ethnic cleansing in civil war is understudied. Consequently, this paper aims to derive theoretical mechanisms at the intersection of genocide and terrorism research from empirical findings. The next chapter presents the research design, including the conceptualization and operationalization of the variables under consideration, the case selection, and the methodological and analytical framework.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The dependent variable is coded ordinally with three ranks: ethnic cleansing, murderous ethnic cleansing, and genocide. The actions of all three ranks must be intentional, organized, systematic, planned, and group-targeted (Straus 2012: 552), as well as “state-sponsored” (Midlarsky 2005: 22). Mann (2005: 11) defines ethnic cleansing as the “removal by members of one such group of another such group from a locality they define as their own.” Indicators of ethnic cleansing include i) making living conditions extremely challenging – for example, through discriminatory legislation, surveillance, restriction of movement, confiscation or destruction of property – and ii) causing severe physical or psychological harm – for example, through disproportionate terrorization of the civilian population in the form of sexual violence, violence against minors, and abductions (OHCHR 2017: 9; Anwary 2020: 91). The essential characteristic of murderous ethnic cleansing and

² Civil war – following the concept by Fearon (2004: 278) – is defined as a violent involvement of at least two agents, a (claimant to a) state and a non-state armed group aiming to take control of a region/ government, leading to the death of a significant amount of people. Trinn and Wencker (2018: 115) further distinguish between limited war and war by intensity level.

genocide is a significant number of killings of civilians over time and space (Straus 2012: 552-554). The distinction, so Ther (2011: 259), between (murderous) ethnic cleansing and genocides is that the former is (partially) revisable. Murderous ethnic cleansing in the first place comprises forcible expulsion, resettlement, and deportation and only secondarily involved murder. Genocide is the complete extermination of a collective. Since explicit proof of "genocidal intent" (Anwary 2020: 91) remains difficult in the actions of Myanmar's armed forces and the extermination of the Rohingya minority was not carried out entirely, the following discussion will refer to the massive human rights violations against the Rohingya as murderous ethnic cleansing. This designation accords with the statement of former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, who called the situation "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing" (Nebehay/Lewis 2017).

Initial consideration of the case suggests that the occurrence of ARSA is critical to the murderous ethnic cleansing in northern Rakhine State. Although the observed changes in Myanmar's treatment of the Rohingya minority cannot be attributed solely to the emergence of the insurgents, the variable appears essential. Consequently, the independent variable considered is the terrorist actions of ARSA. The variable is operationalized metrically, as both the sum of the sites on which attacks were carried out and the attacks' scale are considered. This article applies the terrorism concept of the Global Terrorism Database (GTD). For an incident to be classified as terrorist, first, the perpetrators must be a subnational actor; second, the underlying intent must be clear; and third, there must be some level of violence or imminent threat of violence (GTD 2019: 10). Also, at least two of the following three criteria shall be met: The act must be related to a political, religious, economic, or social goal. The intent to reach or intimidate a larger audience than the immediate victims must be demonstrated. The act must go beyond the context of legitimate acts of warfare legitimized by international law (*ibid.*: 10-11). The ARSA terrorist attacks meet all three criteria of the first list and the first and second criteria of the second list.

As existing theories cannot comprehensively explain the causal mechanism in the present case, an inductive approach is taken (Bennett/Checkel 2015: 18; Trampusch/Palier 2016: 7). The within-case study is conducted based on a process tracing combined with a game-theoretical approach (cf. Mahoney 2007: 131-133). The method of process tracing fits, as a dynamical conceptualization of genocide generates more robust explanations (Straus 2012: 550-551) and within-case analyses can reliably identify causal processes and feedback mechanisms (Blatter/Haverland 2014: 19). Collier (2011: 824) describes the method process tracing as "an analytic tool for drawing descriptive and causal inferences from diagnostic pieces of evidence often understood as part of a temporal sequence of events or phenomena."

Combining a game-theoretical model with process tracing enables structuring the process in deep and small-scale observations (Kühn 2013: 61). In game theory, interactions between two or more actors are understood as decision-making situations, where their goal is to win the game (Behnke 2013: 10, 15, 19). The events in the Rohingya conflict can be depicted as a sequential negative-sum game with two actors (cf. McCarty/Meirowitz 2007: 171-172), whereby the state of Myanmar pursues a tit-for-tat strategy (cf. Kingston 2019: 149). Its moves are made according to the following scheme: "Cooperate in the first period and then in any subsequent period play the action that the other player chose in the previous period" (McCarty/Meirowitz 2007: 256). Unlike in zero-sum games, all involved actors lose in the game (Behnke 2013: 71; Selth 2018: 34-37). Moreover, it is a conflict that is "highly asymmetrical in terms of power, resources and military assets" (SIDA 2019: 2).

Guided by the analytical framework of game theory, the process tracing focuses mainly on two periods: The first period starts with ARSA's initial terrorist attacks on 9 October 2016 and ends after the first wave of violence on 13 November 2016. The second period marks the resurgence of the conflict between 25 August and 15 September 2017. The events on 9 October 2016 and 25 August 2017 can be considered as a critical juncture, a turning point, in the conflict. In the empirical analysis of the case, the conflict events are temporally and spatially differentiated, focusing on the connection between ARSA's terrorism and the ethnic cleansing by the Defense Services. The goal is to unfold the causal link between terrorism and murderous ethnic cleansing.

The degree of spatial and temporal correlation between ARSA's actions and the Defense Services' response is examined for each period. The observable implications are that the acts of murderous ethnic cleansing by the Defense Services occur within a few hours or days following the terrorist attacks and not equally before. For a clear spatial context, they should be carried out in the same Village Tracts as the attacks or in the immediate neighborhood. Here, a methodological limitation emerges, because for ethnic cleansing to be distinguished from counterterrorism, spatial expansion over a larger area must be established. However, if indiscriminate violence is used in counterinsurgency, it would constitute ethnic cleansing.

This study is drawing on a broad base of various primary and secondary sources. Numerous interviews with eyewitnesses and victims were conducted by the 2018 Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar and published by the United Nations Human Rights Council (A/HRC/39/CRP.2) and the Flash Report from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Mission in Bangladesh. Supplemented by newspaper reports, the data allows an in-depth analysis of events as collected in various conflict event datasets⁵. In addition, primary sources like press releases from AR-

SA or Myanmar's state institutions and academic literature were consulted.

MURDEROUS ETHNIC CLEANSING IN THE ROHINGYA CONFLICT

The formation of ARSA has changed the conflict dynamics between the Muslim minority and the Buddhist majority in northern Rakhine State. Rakhine State is home to numerous ethnic and religious collectives, with most of the population belonging to the Buddhist Rakhines. Muslims belong to different ethnic minorities, the largest being the ethnic Rohingya. The Muslim population lives primarily in northwestern Rakhine State in Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships (Olson Lounsbury 2015: 342; HRC 2018: 99; Anwary 2020: 85). Admittedly, there is some disagreement regarding membership in the Rohingya ethnic group⁴. According to Southwick (2018: 119), there are no clear studies on the origin of Rohingya culture. Fox (2018: 317) finds that many refer to themselves as "Rakhine Muslims" because etymologically, the term "Rohingya" derives from the word "Rohang," an ancient name of the Rakhine state (Washaly 2019: 3). Though, Rohingyas are not the only Muslim ethnic collective living in Rakhine State. External group perceptions are shaped by the designation of Rohingyas as "Bengalis" – as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh – a representation as foreigners constructed by the Myanmar government over decades (ICG 2016: 1; Wade 2017: 71; Anwary 2020: 97). The following section will provide an overview of the conflict history and the actors involved. Subsequently, the two conflict periods will be focused to show the degree and nature of the link between ARSA terrorist attacks and murderous ethnic cleansing.

RISING INTER-ETHNIC TENSIONS IN RAKHINE STATE

The origins of the violent conflict between Muslim and Buddhist populations in Rakhine State date back to colonial times (Olson Lounsbury 2015: 344). Since independence in 1948, the conflict between the Rohingya, the Buddhist majority population, and the Tatmadaw has periodically flared up⁵ (UCDP 2020). Inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations are characterized by hostility and political marginalization of the Rohingya (Olson Lounsbury 2015: 341; Washaly 2019: 10). For decades,

Myanmar denied citizenship and thus civil rights to Muslims in Rakhine State. Discriminatory laws undermine fundamental human rights and enforce assimilation (Olson Lounsbury 2015: 345). Military crackdowns and (attempts of) ethnic cleansing recurrently occurred (ICG 2013: 2-3; Anwary 2020: 93-97). After years of mostly peaceful coexistence, riots broke out in 2012 in Rakhine State accompanied by violent clashes between Muslims and Buddhists (HIIK 2013: 87; Wade 2017: 98-122). In consequence, the Defense Services repressed the unrest violently (Olson Lounsbury 2015: 348). Rohingyas were relocated to so-called IDP camps, which they are not allowed to leave without permission (Wade 2017: 200; Southwick 2018: 120).

In the following process tracing analysis, consideration will be limited to the two main groups of actors – the Defense Services and ARSA. While tensions within the population contributed to the emergence of the conflict, civilians were not significantly involved in direct violent action against the Rohingya population in 2016 and 2017 (OHCHR 2017: 11-12; Selth 2018: 14-16; Anwary 2020: 95-97). Hence, other actors⁶ involved in the conflict will not be analyzed in detail due to the limited scope of the paper.

The counterterrorism offensives, the so-called Clearance Operations⁷, in 2016 and 2017 in northern Rakhine State involved the Tatmadaw – the military, literally "royal forces" (Selth 2018: 6) –, the People's Police Force as well as the Border Guard Police Force of Myanmar (BDP) (OHCHR 2017: 11). The troops primarily consist of Buddhists (Maung Aung Myoe 2009: 199). Rakhine State falls under the jurisdiction of the Western Command. The 15 Light Infantry Division, based in Buthidaung Township, took the lead in the 2017 Clearance Operations (Wade 2017). Following the Clearance Operations in Rakhine State, the Defence Services leadership and the Myanmar government stated they responded to the terrorist attacks to maintain Myanmar's security and stability (GNLM 2017b; Aung San Suu Kyi 2019). Their actions must be analyzed as grounded in an "informal set of rules that allows for considerable flexibility" (ibid.) on the one hand and formal structures and regulations connected to the self-image of the Defense Services on the other. They believe to have the duty to lead the country to a bright future while maintaining law and order

⁵Event data from GTD, ACLED, UCDP, and PRIO was matched in order to gain a comprehensive picture.

⁴For more on this, see Wade (2017) and Washaly (2019). Despite the possible ambiguity about the specific composition of the ethnic minority, here I count individuals as Rohingya as long as this corresponds with their self-identification (cf. UN CERD 1990: 5).

⁵Particularly, in 1948, 1954, 1978, 1982, 1991-1993 (Anwary 2020: 93-95).

⁶These include civilians and the nationalist movement of ethnic Rakhine Buddhists (see OHCHR 2017: 11-12; Selth 2018: 14-16; Anwary 2020: 95-97).

⁷In her speech before the ICJ, Aung San Suu Kyi (2019:) describes the term "clearance operation" as follows: "As early as the 1950s, this term has been used during military operations [...]. Since then, the military has used this expression in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations after attacks by insurgents or terrorists. In the Myanmar language, 'nae myay shin lin yeh' – literally 'clearing of locality' – simply means to clear an area of insurgents or terrorists."

⁸In Burmese there is no distinction between first and last name, as there are no family names. A name can consist of one to four syllables. In this paper the full name is given for Burmese names (see Daw Mi Mi Khaing 1958).

(Maung Aung Myoe 2014: 238; Atwood et al. 2021). “Many observers, however, believe the Tatmadaw’s long-term aim is to expel all Rohingyas from Rakhine State” (Selth 2018: 3).

The options for counterterrorism are surrender, negotiation, and military confrontation. Acts of murderous ethnic cleansing are to be distinguished from acts of other types. The former are considered non-cooperative acts in terms of game theory, and the latter are considered cooperative acts. This leads to the somewhat counterintuitive coding of targeted counterterrorism actions⁹ as a cooperative act since it is an act against ARSA but not against the entire Rohingya population.

ARSA is an ethno-nationalist insurgency with a “strong Muslim identity as a Rohingya group” (HRC 2018: 243) around leader Ataullah Abu Amar Jununi, a Rohingya born outside Myanmar who previously lived in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan and returned to Myanmar between 2012 and 2016 (ICG 2016: 13; Winchester 2017). The group formed in the wake of the 2012 unrest and first came to public attention with the terrorist attacks on 9 October 2016, claiming responsibility under the name Harakah-al-Yaqin (Faith Movement) (ICG 2016: 12). As of March 2017, the group appeared under the name Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (HRC 2018: 242). Myanmar’s Anti-Terrorism Central Committee declared ARSA a terrorist group on 25 August 2017 (GNLM 2017a). Although ARSA has a relatively low level of organization and is hardly equipped with firearms or financial resources, they have been able to carry out coordinated, simultaneous attacks at various locations in a tightly controlled area¹⁰ on several occasions (Head 2017:1; HRC 2018: 18, 246-247). There is no reliable information regarding the group’s size. While only a small group carried out the attacks in October 2016, several hundred militants joined the following year (Lintner 2017; HRC 2018: 244). Its objective initially was “loosely organized around the principle of seeking justice for the Rohingya Muslim community” (HRC 2018: 242; see also ICG 2016: 13). In several official statements via Twitter and Youtube, the insurgents declared that they would fight specifically against the Tatmadaw and for the rescue and self-defense of the Rohingya minority (ARSA 2017; UCDP 2020). They first announced their demands in a Youtube video on 17 October 2016 (The Arakan Times Rohingya News 2016): First, the 1982 Citizenship Law, according to which the minority cannot obtain citizenship rights in Myanmar, shall be amended. Second, freedom and property rights are to be recognized. Third, religiously and ethnically motivated discrimination by the state and military offensives against minorities is to be ended (see also Singh/Jani 2016: 2).

ARSA has terrorist and non-terrorist action alternatives. (Unilateral) ceasefires or offers of political dialogue

would be considered cooperative and non-terrorist. Direct combat actions with the Defense Forces are also classified as non-terrorist. Ambushes on troops and military or police bases as well as attacks on civilians are considered terrorist actions.

Particularly, in 1948, 1954, 1978, 1982, 1991-1993 (Anwary 2020: 93-95).

These include civilians and the nationalist movement of ethnic Rakhine Buddhists (see OHCHR 2017: 11-12; Selth 2018: 14-16; Anwary 2020: 95-97).

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In this case targeted counterterrorism actions are limited in space and time and directed at potential supporters of ARSA.

In 2012, checkpoints for surveillance were installed in every village and curfews continue to this day (HRC 2018: 121).

EMERGENCE OF ARSA AND COUNTERTERRORISM

In the early morning of 9 October 2016, ARSA fighters attacked three BGP posts in NgaKhuYa, KyeeKanPyin, and KoeTanKauk (GTD 2019). According to military statements, several hundred fighters were involved (GNLM 2017b; OHCHR 2017: 7). However, the attacks were probably planned and carried out by a comparatively small group (Lintner 2017). In October, sporadic ARSA attacks on the Defense Services followed, as did killings, rape, and the burning of Rohingya villages in Maungdaw Township by the Defense Services. On 12 November, ARSA and the Defense Services fought in PwintPhyuChaung. The next day, the Defense Services reacted with counterterrorism measures involving rape, displacement, and at least 70 killings in PwintPhyuChaung and the neighboring villages Myaw-Taung and DarGyiSar. Afterward, the villages were burned to the ground (BROUK 2016: 3-7; UCDP/PRIO 2019). On 12 November, ARSA attacked the Tatmadaw in YaeKhatChaungGwaSon (ACLED 2020). A few hours later, disproportionate atrocities against Rohingya in the village followed, involving widespread violence against minors, rape, and at least 34 executions. Non-Rohingya civilians were not attacked (BROUK 2016: 7; UCDP/PRIO

⁹ In this case targeted counterterrorism actions are limited in space and time and directed at potential supporters of ARSA.

¹⁰ In 2012, checkpoints for surveillance were installed in every village and curfews continue to this day (HRC 2018: 121).

2019). Above, the Defense Services burned down several other villages, leading to the displacement of hundreds in Maungdaw Township between October and November (Rahman/Safi 2016). In the state-run newspaper *The Global New Light of Myanmar* the Clearance Operations are described as only targeting terrorists and attackers. The harm done to civilians is not fully recognized by the Tatmadaw (GNLM 2017c). Anyway, Aung San Suu Kyi requested the establishment of an international, neutral Advisory Commission on Rakhine State in September 2016. The aim was to “propose concrete measures for improving the welfare of all people in Rakhine state” (Rakhine Commission 2016).

RECURRENCE OF ARSA AND MURDEROUS ETHNIC CLEANSING

On 25 August 2017, ARSA carried out simultaneous terrorist attacks on over 30 police stations, BGP guard posts, and military bases in the three townships Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung in the early morning hours¹¹ (Aung San Suu Kyi 2019). On 26 August, ARSA carried out terrorist attacks on police stations in ChutPyin and WetKyein and ambushed Defense Services vehicles in MyoThuGyi, followed by a gun battle. On 27 August, ARSA attacked the BGP site in ChutPyin (GTD 2020; ACLED 2020). The Defense Services response was immediate, within hours, and with a high level of force (HRC 2018: 178). ARSA's terrorist actions in WetKyein and MinGyi (TuLarTuLi) were followed by Defense Services' actions against civilians in MinGyi on 30 August. This Clearance Operation used indiscriminate violence against civilians and exceeded an appropriate level of counterterrorism. It cannot be justified as “counterinsurgency indiscriminate violence” (Straus 2012: 553). All men and boys were systematically executed (HRC 2018: 181-183). Women and girls were gathered, raped, and killed, leading to at least 750 deaths through the Defense Services that day. The village was subsequently destroyed. ARSA's attacks in MaungNu and HpaungTawPyin in ChinThaMar Village Tract were followed by Defense Services massacres in surrounding Rohingya villages two days later, on 27 August. In the morning, a large group of Tatmadaw soldiers (ibid.: 190) came to MaungNu opening fire (ibid.: 189). As described in the MinGyi case, they separated men from women and children, targeting specifically the Rohingya population. After humiliation and torture, between dozens were executed (HRW 2017; HRC 2018: 190; UCDP/PRIO 2019; ACLED 2020). In the days that followed, the villages of MaungNu and HpaungTawPyin were burned down. Simi-

lar events occurred in the nearby Village Tracts NgaYant-Chaung, KoeTanKauk, AlelThanKyaw, and other villages where ARSA carried out attacks (HRC 2018: 189, 191; Wa Lone et al. 2018; UCDP/PRIO 2019;).

The GuDarPyin (GudamPara) case – the “main settlement of the Rohingya population” (HRC 2018: 192) – is particularly interesting. Although the Tatmadaw justified the Clearance Operation between 26 and 28 August with an alleged previous ARSA attack, there are neither eyewitness accounts on such an event nor confessed ARSA to it (ibid.: 192-193). The Defense Services carried out systematic mass killings of Rohingya civilians, destroyed the village, and built mass graves (ibid.: 192-196; Klug 2018).

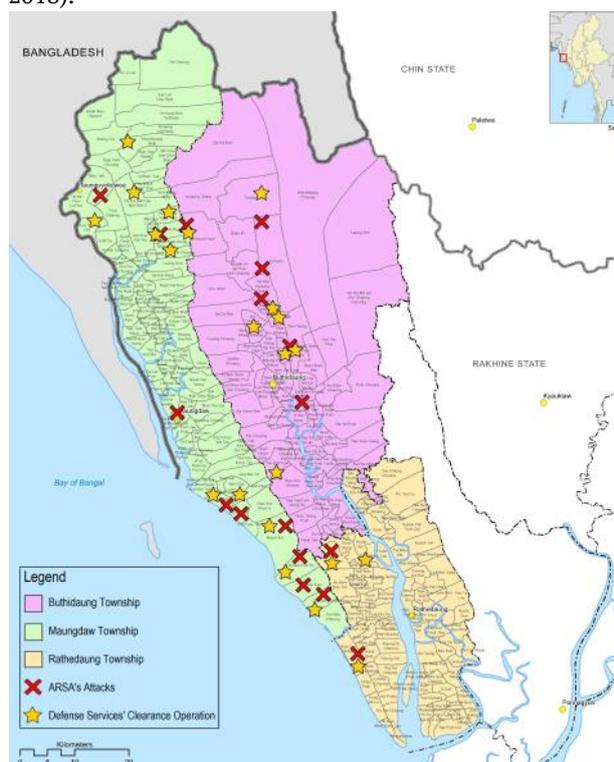


Figure 1: Events of the Rohingya Conflict in August and September 2017 in Northern Rakhine State (Own representation based on MIMU 2017).

The conflict events which happened between August and September 2017 are illustrated in figure 1. In the next section, the results of the process analysis will be discussed to allow the generation of a theory in Chapter 5.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Unlike other insurgencies in Myanmar, ARSA resorts to terrorist acts and guerrilla strategies (Olson Lounsbury 2015: 347; Anwary 2020: 86). Furthermore, ARSA combatants wore civilian clothing according to eyewitness accounts (Lintner 2017; HRC 2018: 243). Both factors

¹¹ In On 25 August 2017 ARSA attacked police stations in NanthaTaung, ThinBawKwe, KyeeKyun, MeeTaik-Chaungwa, NetChaung, Laungdon, Maungdaw, Thihokyun, Zinpaingnyar, Kyaukpyinseik, Padinkaung, Panyaungky, Shweyinaye, Zeepin-Chaungwa, Myinlut, Alelthankyaw, Udaung (Natala), Hnarkaungto, KoeTanKauk, ThaWinChaung, Tamantha, KuntheepinChaungwa and Tharaykonboug. Other attacks targeted police stations and BGP camps in KyaukPanDu and HpaungTawPyin Village, as well as the BGP outpost in Nantthataung-Chaungwa and two BGP sites in the AhHtetPyuMa Village Tract. In NgaYantChaung Village Tract (also called Taung Bazar) and MaungNu Village, police stations and Army Bases were attacked. In CheinHkarLi, ARSA attacked the Tatmadaw. In addition, in Maungdaw, attackers who may have been associated with ARSA killed the village chief and two officials (GTD 2020; ACLED 2020).

make it difficult for the Defense Services to combat this group and to distinguish combatants from civilians, making indiscriminate violence more likely.

In October 2016, no counterterrorism operation took place in the three locations following the initial ARSA attacks. Direct action-response behavior with a direct temporal and spatial connection is not evident. Only in November, the Defense Services' response is immediate and vigorous. The example of the reaction in PwintPhyuChaung shows that the Defense Services react equally to terrorist and non-terrorist acts of ARSA. Due to the limited area of operations to primarily five Village Tracts and considering everyday human rights violations in other regions of Myanmar (see HRC 2018), the outcome for 2016 is determined to be ethnic cleansing. It is noteworthy that ARSA experienced a significant increase in members and supporters (backfire mechanism) after the Clearance Operation in the wake of the attacks on 9 October 2016 (HRC 2018: 244).

The Clearance Operation in 2017 resulted in "the largest and fastest exodus of people since the 1994 Rwandan genocide" (Southwick 2018: 122). Over 700,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh (UNFPA 2019). From August 2017, an evident spatial and temporal expansion of the military response can be determined. The tit-for-tat action-reaction relationship of conflict actions is evident from August 2017 onward. Moreover, a direct causal relationship can be highlighted by official statements. According to the official state news agency of the Myanmar government, the Tatmadaw denies all human rights violations (Myanmar News Agency 2018). Aung San Suu Kyi further called ARSA's actions "a calculated attempt to undermine the efforts of those seeking to build peace and harmony [...]" referring to the efforts of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State (Irrawaddy 2017). This political endeavor gives a hint regarding the timing of the conflict recurrence and the strong counterterrorism reaction, as its final report was presented on 25 August 2017 (Rakhine Commission 2016). Still, the Defense Services' Clearance Operation is a disproportionate response relative to the low threat from ARSA (due to poor equipment and low success).

The Tatmadaw's preparation for the Clearance Operation started long before October 2016; this can be observed in development of troop deployment in northern Rakhine State (HRC 2018: 178). The human rights violations against Rohingya civilians by the Defense Services are not acceptable collateral damages in the course of counterterrorism, but systematic crimes aimed at causing physical and psychological harm to the Rohingya minority¹². Hence, the 2017 period is classified as murderous ethnic cleansing. Regarding the subsequent theory gen-

eration, this period of time is considered the dependent variable.

Three observable implications were found in the analysis. First, there was a spatial context. The systematic murderous ethnic cleansing of Muslims in 2017 occurred in Rakhine State only and not throughout Myanmar. Second, a significant temporal link can be demonstrated. The murderous ethnic cleansing occurred in the days and weeks following the ARSA attacks beginning on 25 August 2017, not before. Third, while government and military officials deny that ethnic cleansing took place, their official press statements justify the response to the ARSA attacks in terms of the pursuit of state security and stability. This justification is in line with the Tatmadaw's self-perception. Thus, the empirical analysis shows that murderous ethnic cleansing can emerge as a reaction to terrorist activities by insurgents (triggers). Accordingly, the findings regarding the period from August to September 2017 support the established proto-hypothesis. Since no murderous ethnic cleansing was identified in the 2016 period, the theory presented in the following chapter relates to events from August 2017.

While this article has focused on the relation between terrorism by ARSA and the Defense Services reaction, several other and related factors play a role in the murderous ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya. Since internet access became available in Myanmar in the 2010s, Buddhist ultranationalists have effectively used Facebook to spread hate speech against Muslims, stoking historical tensions and fears among the population (Fink 2018: 44). As civilians were not significantly involved in direct violent action against the Rohingya population in 2016 and 2017 this variable cannot sufficiently explain the observed outcome. Perhaps the most important alternative explanation – independent from the occurrence of ARSA – is Myanmar's transformation to a democratic federal political system, beginning with the elections in November 2010. It led to the recurrence of conflicts in different parts of the country due to the opening of a window of opportunity for self-administration and rights in the ethnic regions. In the case of northern Rakhine state, the appearance of ARSA and the murderous ethnic cleansing were preceded by a spiral of escalation from 2012 onward¹⁵.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS GENERATION

Previous research finds a connection between the occurrence of civil wars and genocides. However, the triggering events of genocides are understudied. The following section will generate a theory demonstrating a connection between terrorist actions by insurgencies and state-sponsored murderous ethnic cleansing. It aims to explain

¹² In comparison, the crackdown on the Rohingya minority was significantly harsher than the crackdown on civilians during the war with the insurgency Karen National Union, even though it was "the most significant of Burma's ethnic and political insurgent groups" (Anwary 2020: 86).

¹⁵ In For more on this, see Anwary 2020.

the puzzle of the Defense Services' behavior in the case of the Rohingya conflict.

The dependent variable is the occurrence of murderous ethnic cleansing by the Defense Services in 2017. The independent variable is ARSA's terrorist acts against state institutions. Being atypical, it is a necessary but not a sufficient condition (Mahoney 2015: 214). Three contextual variables must be considered: First, the ideological paradigms that trigger processes of stigmatization and othering that generate hatred (Anwary 2020); second, the democratization process at the national level (Hussain 2017); and third, the ongoing conflicts in other parts of the country (Gravers/Kyed 2015). Without those, the outcome would not have occurred at the given moment. The hatred of the Buddhist majority towards the Rohingya minority, which substantially originated from ultranationalist Buddhist monks' public hate speech, enabled justification of the military's decisions (see Sternberg 2003: 308). Additionally, Levene's (2000: 308-310) theoretical argument that ethnic cleansing is more likely to occur during political transition processes due to building a nation by excluding others is observable in Myanmar. However, both mechanisms have no comprehensive explanatory capacity for the occurrence of the events at a specific point in time. A trigger must have led to a critical juncture in order to start the escalation process from the previous stable situation.

The theory presented is a strategic-rational approach examining the relationship between insecurity in civil war situations and extremely violent responses to insurgencies. Guided by the assumption that an action-reaction relationship following the game-theoretic strategy tit-for-tat provides a useful analytical framework, the mechanism of the causal path is presented below. ARSA's terrorist attacks triggered a military counterterrorism campaign. Combined with inter-ethnic hatred, Tatmadaw's long-term weighting of costs and benefits of oppressing the Rohingya minority led to the development of counterterrorism measures legitimate under international law to murderous ethnic cleansing.

Decades of repression have been steadily accompanied by the risk of insurgency. On the cost side, there is, for example, the ensuing international punishment, the potential endangerment of the peace process with other minorities, or losses of approval by the Buddhist majority vis-à-vis state institutions. On the benefit side is securing the Bamar-predominance and state stability using repression (see Gerschewski 2013: 21). The ARSA terrorist attacks in October 2016 and August 2017 shift this previously stable cost-benefit balance of the state. The potential risk of an insurgency is now no longer on the cost side but a real threat to the state's stability. Moreover, the formation of ARSA increases the cost of repressing the Rohingya minority for the state. To restore the desired stability, the Defense Services responded with counterterrorism measures accompanied by ethnic

cleansing. The ARSA attacks in August 2017 again pose an acute threat to the region's stability and demonstrate that counterinsurgency measures in October and November 2016 were not sustainably successful. Therefore, the Defense Services counterterrorism measures result in murderous ethnic cleansing. The Tatmadaw's quest for ethnic predominance and security led to a more aggressive response (see Mitzen 2006: 355). The perceived threat is evident in the national media coverage and through the state's press releases. First, ARSA is ascribed an unrealistic high number of combatants (Selth 2018: 13). Second, there have been reports of ARSA assassinations in locations that ARSA itself has not claimed responsibility for and for which there are neither evidence nor eyewitness accounts (see HRC 2018: 192). Therefore, it can be concluded that the Defense Services' goal is the expulsion or destruction of the ethnic minority. Based on the generated theory, three hypotheses are derived:

H1: If terroristic insurgency occurs due to prolonged repression, then the likelihood of murderous ethnic cleansing increases.

H2a: If it is difficult for national security forces to distinguish ethnic insurgents from civilians, then the likelihood of ethnic civilians being targets of ethnic cleansing increases.

H2b: If ethnic insurgencies have a low level of organization, the likelihood that murderous ethnic cleansing will result from counterinsurgency military operations increases.

H3a: The more national forces' troops or bases are attacked simultaneously by an insurgency, the more violent the response is.

H3b: The greater the losses (personnel, equipment, buildings) recorded by the national armed forces through ethnic insurgencies is, the more violent the response towards ethnic communities.

The question of whether the Defense Services' response to ARSA's terroristic attacks could have been fundamentally different can almost certainly be denied. ARSA's emergence represents a backfire mechanism of decades of repression of the Rohingya minority (Earl 2011: 268). Findings of conflict research point to the interdependence of Rohingya marginalization and conflict reemergence. Increasing discrimination against the Rohingya is a major cause of the outbreak of conflict and the founding of ARSA (Goraya/Mazhar 2016: 32-34). However, this is a structural variable that cannot explain the timing of the murderous ethnic cleansing. The formation of ARSA is a critical juncture, a necessary variable, in the ongoing repression, marginalization, and assimilation. It triggered mass killings and the use of disproportionate violence against the civilian population. It becomes clear that "[...] while genocide may not be the initial choice of perpetrators and while it may be self-defeating as a strategy, at some point in time, it becomes a deliberate policy, a strategy [...]" (Straus 2012: 554).

CONCLUSION

The findings presented in this article contribute to a better understanding of the events in northern Rakhine State. The insurgents' terrorist actions affected the studied outcome. Conducting murderous ethnic cleansing as part of the states' counterterrorism campaign was provoked through a strategic-rational mechanism via a shift in the cost-benefit ratio of repression. The process tracing shows that murderous ethnic cleansing in 2017 occurred primarily because ARSA had a significant increase in supporters and combatants following the Defense Services response to the terrorist attacks beginning on 9 October 2016. The research design shows a conceptual limitation related to whether what occurred in the Rohingya conflict between 2016 and 2017 is genocide. The so-called 'genocidal intent' can hardly be proven. The government and the Tatmadaw dismiss the accusations that the Defense Services responded with disproportionate force and downplay the events by emphasizing that the operations were spatially highly limited (Aung San Suu Kyi 2019).

For the study of genocide and related concepts, consistent definitions and related observable implications are needed. Theoretically, this paper extends genocide research to include explanations for the occurrence of crimes against humanity in response to terroristic insurgencies. This inductive process analysis could provide a starting point for a statistical cross-sectional analysis based on the theory generated.

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