

INTRODUCTION

Most of the voices present in the simulation of the Rohingyas at Risk, as well as the media outlets reporting on the conflict, are very critical towards Myanmar for considering its military actions with genocidal intent. However, those actions are widely supported by the Myanmar's civil society, that has a very different reading of the facts. I consider that in order to better understand the conflict and paths towards peace, Myanmar's civil society views, and the reasons why they have these views; should not be dismissed, no matter how controversial they can be.

Within the simulation, beside Myanmar's State Counsellor and the Myanmar Ambassador in Bangladesh, no one is frontally contesting the genocide discourse, even less defending the military actions. My character, the Chinese ambassador to Bangladesh is also not interested in either rising criticism or being too accommodating, but limiting to provide financial aid and act as mediator.

A piece is missing to better understand the puzzle. The voices in the simulation are too polarized and there's no representation that explains the popular support for the actions that lead to the genocide.

PRE-ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

Large demonstrations at Myanmar's capital in support of Aung San Suu Kyi's stand to defend Myanmar's actions in Rakhine State, has exhibited that a good portion of Myanmar's civil society sees the international negative assessment of the conflict as out of context and unfairly measured (Beech, and Nang, 2019).

Hence, the military actions in Rakhine State are understood as counter-terrorism actions that are being carried out not only against the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), but also against other ethnic armed groups (Bynum, 2018). Little attention is given on the press to the fact that Myanmar has lived under civil war for over 60 years during which the military has fought 15 ethnic armed groups, that despite of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) signed in late 2015, regional conflicts between these groups and and/or with the military are still much alive to this day (Radio Free Asia, 2018).

It is easy to foresee that a position that supports the idea that the military actions are legitimate, and part of a nation-building process, would be widely criticized by being selfish, genocidal, historically inaccurate and categorized as crimes against humanity. Nonetheless, these voices should not be ignored as they play, perhaps, the most important reason why the atrocities were committed and continue today.

When Aung San Suu Kyi announced she would head the effort to defend Myanmar from genocide accusations at the International Court of Justice, her domestic popularity increased greatly and helped to strengthen the position of her political party, the National League of Democracy (NLD) (Beech, and Nang, 2019). Her defense of Myanmar's actions at the ICJ seems to be a simple political maneuver seeking the party's reelection in November 2020.

In one hand, the international community has been very critical towards the State Counsellor presence in the ICJ. While in the other, the NLD appears to have accurately read the domestic environment and the

POPULAR DISCOURSE

As to why the military has been able to commit all the atrocities against the Rohingya, the anti-Muslim sentiment grants popular support and plays a decisive role. Buddhism in Myanmar was a popular

stronghold during the 3 decades of brutal military rule (Matthews, 1993: 408) and remains playing a part in the political life. As the religious leaders count with vast popular support, the paranoid fear and hate of speech justifies and normalizes violence against Muslims.

Part of the criticism over Suu Kyi is precisely on the fact that she and her party have remained (strategically) silent about the hate speech. Being careful not to criticize abuses committed against the Muslim community, as this would irritate the leaders of the 969 Movement (Perria, 2015), has been useful to maintain and increase their political capital in a sort of unspoken alliance.

CONCLUSION

The discrimination, abuses and killings that Rohingyas have suffered are unquestionable and there's an inevitable debt to them. The continued pain is very much alive as well. Their exclusion from society, (not unique to Rakhine State nor to the Rohingyas), is a wound that needs to heal as part of the nation building process of Myanmar.

At a personal level, I find difficult to hear those voices that preach and support hatred, but these must be present in the debate, nonetheless. Peace making is a struggle and as international society we cannot ignore the domestic dimension of the situation and focus only on the international community, where all is about good intentions.

I find the representation of the conflict in the media too one-sided, which makes difficult the process of grasping the conflict, its origins and most importantly, its possible solutions. It is the voice and sentiments of the Burmese people and its leaders that seems underrepresented at the international discourse.

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