

GLOBALIZATION, LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT & PROTRACTED STATELESSNESS/REFUGEEHOOD: THE PLIGHT OF THE ROHINGYAS

By Imtiaz Ahmed

September 11 has been an eye-opener for many. Let me share mine. When I first met Selim (obviously not his real name) I had no clue that I was meeting a Rohingya. I got a call from him the night before and found him eager to meet me the very next day. This was incidentally a year or two before 9/11. The meeting was brief but precise. The discussion went like this:

“Do you know that I am a Rohingya?”

“Not really.”

“Do you know anything about us?”

“A little.”

“How little?”

“Well, your traditional home is in the Arakan, and you have been driven out by the Myanmar military government several times into Bangladesh. And now, save 21,000, all of you have gone back to the Arakan.”

“Did you know that we are still stateless people, and the Myanmar government has refused to recognize us as citizens since 1948?”

“Well, yes, I heard something about that.”

“Do you think the people of Bangladesh know that?”

“I doubt.”

“Do you think the people of this region know that?”

“I doubt.”

“Do you think the world knows about our plight, about our statelessness?”

“I doubt.”

“Well, I have no doubts. No one knows anything about us. No one cares about us. Is this living? Have you any idea how difficult it is for a stateless person to live in this world, and that again for over fifty years, practically from birth to death?”

“What do you want me to do?”

“Write about us, speak about us. The younger generation is becoming violent everyday. They don't want to live like this. They want to change things. If nothing is done soon, it would be difficult to stop their rage!”

Selim left as he came, unnoticed but in appearance slightly disturbed. I must confess that I was moved by his plea and saw merit in his argument. But then, when the world came to know about the Rohingyas' "rage," albeit in bits and pieces, I never thought that it would be in relation to 9/11, or more precisely, in relation to the aftermath of 9/11. Soon after the US military got rid of the Taliban they came to



know that some Rohingya “fighters” made their way into Afghanistan and were trained by the Taliban.¹ Rohingyas in Afghanistan, how could that happen? How did they manage to cross 1,500 miles and that again, just to train themselves militarily? Who was paying for them? What weapons were they using? Were Bangladeshis culpable in their flight to Kabul? Or, were they helped by the Indians and Pakistanis to cross their respective borders and managed to arrive in Afghanistan via the land routes? Or, did they come via some Middle Eastern countries, shipped and smuggled by a global network of traffickers? Are we then witnessing newer global networks or a newer globalization beyond trade, investment and production?

In experiential terms, the scenario seems to suggest a complex relationship between the Rohingyas, Bangladeshis, Indians, Pakistanis, Arabs, Afghans, and now even the Americans. The list of people could be extended further. If we take the weapons in the hands of the Rohingya “fighters” (invariably all having illegal small arms), the relationship possibly would include the Europeans, the Chinese or even the North Koreans—that is, as makers of these weapons. But more importantly, a group of relatively “unknown people,” engaged in a conflict that is in military jargon “low-intensity,” found themselves categorized and tarnished overnight. The “plight” that they have been experiencing since birth became further entrenched, and this time not only nationally but also regionally and globally. If this requires reconceptualizing the relationship between globalization and low-intensity conflict (LIC) then there is all the more reason that the life and living of stateless people or refugees, as they have practically turned out to be,² are reconceptualized as well.

Two contentions are critical here. Firstly, globalization (understood here more in the economic sense) tends to *devalue* and *marginalize* conflicts (civil, political, and even national) if such conflicts have little or nothing to do with its reproduction. A conflict is otherwise graduated to “low-intensity” not so much for its lack of *intensity* (with respect to casualty, military involvement, cost of war, etc.) as for its relationship or lack of it with the globalized world. Secondly, insofar as LIC is devalued and marginalized, the resolution of LIC, including the refugee situation or as in some cases, statelessness, arising out of it, also tends to be *marginal* and *ad hoc*. As a result, the refugees or stateless people end up in a state of *protracted refugeehood*. But then, protracted refugeehood creates space for the refugees to get connected to what can be best labeled as *subaltern globalization*—that is, with forces and networks resisting (economic) globalization and also, more interestingly, with the globally organized “dubious groups” and “shadowy activities.” I will have more to say about this issue shortly.

LIC and subsequently protracted refugeehood in the age of globalization is otherwise set to increase the sufferings of the marginalized population, but then the latter makes effective use of globalization, often of the “subaltern” variant, to redress its plight. The current fate of the *stateless* Rohingyas and the frightening prospect it holds is but only one of the numerous cases worldwide. Before taking up the case of the Rohingyas, let me examine the multiple formations and understandings of globalization, explaining mainly the complex formation of subaltern globalization and how it is attractive to those who benefit almost little to nothing from the more formalized structure of economic globalization.

¹ Bertil Lintner, “Bangladesh: Championing Islamist Extremism,” *South Asia Intelligence Review: Weekly Assessments and Briefings* 1, no. 15 (September 16, 2002); Bertil Lintner, “Is religious extremism on the rise in Bangladesh?” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, May 2002.

² I have used “stateless people” and “refugees” somewhat synonymously, not because I find the legal distinction weak and lifeless (see Imtiaz Ahmed, “Globalization, State and Political Process in South Asia,” in *Globalization and Non-Traditional Security in South Asia*, ed. Abdur Rob Khan (Dhaka: Academic Press, 2001) but to highlight that in most cases one leads to the other, with the bulk of the stateless and refugees living in constant fear, uncertainty and immense poverty.

THE MULTIVERSITY OF GLOBALIZATION

Globalization, mainly because of its birth from a complex combination of multiple interactions, has given rise to a *multiversity*, or multiple universes, of knowledge and practices. Three precise modes could easily be identified. First is *economic globalization*, second is *reverse globalization*, and the third is *subaltern globalization*. A closer exposition will make them clear.

Economic Globalization

This has also been referred to as *globalization from the top or above*.³ Its meaning has been best captured by an OECD publication which, while crediting the term to Theodore Levitt, who first used it in 1985 in his book *The Globalization of Markets*, sees globalization as “a seamless or borderless, global economy.” More concretely, it is informed by precise sets of economic activities with precise characteristics on a world scale.

There exists a subtle difference between the “internationalization of economy” and “globalization” according to this perspective. While the former primarily refers to the internationalization of *trade* and later on, the internationalization of *finance* and *investment*, each coming in the wake of precise historical moments of capitalism, globalization refers to the complex combination of all these but more importantly one that is inclusive of a thoroughly transformed *production* structure. The latter can be best described as the organization and development of a *denationalized* form of production.

That is, multi-national, or rather, transnational companies now *collect* resources in several countries, *process* them in another several countries, and finally *export* the finished products to the rest of the world. A fully finished product, therefore, no longer has one single birthmark; it has multiple birthmarks since several countries have produced it. A Compaq computer, in that sense, is no longer entirely American, or a Toyota car fully Japanese. The final product of both these items will have components made in several countries of the world. Put differently, unlike the previous internationalization of things, in the globalization phase of capitalism the thing itself is the product of the international or global market. In this newer configuration, the non-state enterprises are often more critical than the state-oriented or state enterprises in the reproduction of capitalism. But then, this is only one mode with precise layer of activities that has come to fashion globalization.

Reverse Globalization

The second meaning of globalization is very much intrinsic to the developing country’s craze for modernity, principally the organization of the (post-colonial) nation-state in the image of the modern “Western” state. In some respects this has been well described by Nirad C. Chaudhuri as early as 1926 when he, while referring to “a clash of civilization” between the East and West, sarcastically noted that “the real cultural role of the [colonized Indians] is to assimilate *the ways of Europe*.”⁴ This is indeed a subtle way of viewing globalization from the standpoint of those who are at the receiving end and are not the pacesetters and real

³ Jeremy Brecher, Tim Costello and Brendan Smith, *Globalization From Below: The Power of Solidarity* (Cambridge, Mass: South End Press, 2002); Ahmed, “Globalization, State and Political Process in South Asia.”

⁴ Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The East is East And the West is West* (Calcutta: Mitra & Ghosh, 1996), 1, 5.

gainers of the global economy. The meaning here is as cultural and intellectual, as it is economic, with the global economy remaining intrinsically related to globalization.

Put differently, if OECD's definition could be referred to as *economic globalization*, the modernist aspirations of the developing or less developed countries could be referred to as *reverse globalization*. The global reach of Bollywood (India's film industry) and Indian restaurants are good examples of reverse globalization, where the non-state forces of the East or the South are no less critical in channelizing the development of the (culturally and intellectually colonized) less developed or developing countries.

Subaltern globalization

There is yet another type of interaction informing and reproducing globalization. This is a complex mode and therefore requires greater care in its exposition. Critics have already referred to the mushrooming of global networks *resisting* economic globalization, calling the globally organized resistance movements as "globalization from below." As Brecher pointed out:

Just as the corporate and political elites are reaching across national borders to further their agendas, people at the grassroots are connecting their struggles around the world to impose their needs and interests on the global economy. Globalization from above is generating worldwide movement of resistance: globalization from below.⁵

This is substantially different from the mode that has been referred to as *reverse globalization*. The latter has a precise economic dimension arising mainly out of cultural and intellectual domination, whereas *globalization from below*, as suggested by Brecher, refers mainly to the "resistance movements" against economic globalization. More concretely, *globalization from below* includes a diverse group of people—environmentalists, NGOs, religious groups, small farmers, labor unions (incidentally of both the developed and developing countries), women's movement, consumerists, African debt relief campaigners, anti-sweatshop activists, and the like, all one way or another either critical of or directly suffering from and struggling against the impact of economic globalization. Here the forces of the seemingly disempowered non-state have creatively joined hands to overcome the exploitation of the empowered non-state, i.e., the forces of economic globalization. The subaltern nature of the resistance movements, particularly the networking, can hardly be minimized.

But then, there is a further subaltern variant to the whole notion of *globalization from below*. This refers to the deepening of relationship between and amongst the "dubious groups" and "shadowy activities" ranging from smuggling of goods and people, illicit production and trading of small arms, money laundering, narco-production and trading, terrorism, and the like, across and beyond national, ethnic, racial, and even religious affiliations. The subalterns, particularly the poverty-ridden and marginalized population, become easy target of such groups and activities, but more importantly the state of being itself becomes a factor for certain groups of (relatively well off) people to rally support and even clandestinely work for their cause. A protracted nature of poverty and marginality and a lack of substantive global concern also push them to seek informal or even criminal means to reproduce their lives or redress the situation. The complex networking at this level and in combination with the resistance movements against economic globalization could be best referred to as *subaltern globalization*. Here the subalterns, including their ardent supporters

⁵ Brecher, *Globalization From Below*, 10.

and sympathizers, are no less creative and empowered when it comes to organizing and reproducing their activities at the global level, often by challenging the overly empowered forces of economic globalization.

Two things are worth pointing out here. First is the subtle connivance of the state machineries with the dubious forces in reproducing subaltern globalization. According to Mittelman:

The smuggling operations would not be possible...without the involvement of powerful and wealthy criminals, who have the resources to corrupt state officials. The corruption of political authorities is the crucible in which customs officers, police, and tax inspectors assist in alien smuggling, but also drug smuggling, intellectual property counterfeiting, illegal currency transactions, and other black- and gray-market activities. In this web of criminals, the rich, and politicians, the holders of public office provide "legal" protection for their partners....⁶

The state machineries in this case go on to empower the subaltern networks almost to their own peril, which brings us to the second point. Indeed, if economic globalization is in the business of weakening the power of the state, the practices of subaltern globalization are no less menacing and destructive to the state. To cite Mittelman again:

[Criminal] groups are alternative social organizations that, in some respects, challenge the power and authority of the state to impose its standards, codified as law. These groups constitute an alternative system by offering commerce and banking in black and gray markets that operate outside the regulatory framework of the state; buying, selling, and distributing controlled or prohibited commodities, such as narcotics; providing swift and usually discreet dispute resolution and debt collection without resorting to the courts; creating and maintaining cartels when state laws proscribe them; and arranging security for the so-called protection of businesses, as well as sheltering them from competitors, the state and rival criminals.⁷

There is therefore no reason to doubt the destructive potential of subaltern globalization. Even those resisting economic globalization and joining ranks with the subalterns may find themselves at risk if and when the destructive potential of subaltern globalization is played out with full ferocity and demonic intent. A quick look at some of the practices of subaltern globalization would provide credence to our contention.

SUBALTERN GLOBALIZATION IN PRACTICE

The element of subalternity in the resistance movements against economic globalization (and the case could also be stretched to reverse globalization) cannot be denied. The anti-globalization protests in Seattle, Rome, Prague or Washington all tend to indicate that the subalterns or marginalized forces have been put into a dire situation because of economic globalization. The protests are otherwise meant to highlight the grievances of the subalterns worldwide. Simple as this may sound, there is a complex process informing the subalternity of the resistance movements.

The movements are actually intended to unite the dispersed subaltern groups with precise objectives, mainly to overcome or more appropriately lessen the exploitation of the dominant or hegemonic

⁶ James H. Mittelman, *The Globalization Syndrome: Transformation and Resistance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 208.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 214.

forces. There is a precise Gramscian understanding of the issue here, particularly in impressing upon the subaltern groups to *organize* in order to overcome or reduce the power of the hegemons.⁸ Insofar as the task of organization is involved, the globally staged resistance movements tend to highlight not only the sufferings of the victims of economic globalization but also alternative policies and programs that these subalterns may find useful in their battle against economic globalization. But the universality in the resistance movements cannot be stretched very far.

It is true that the subaltern population of both the developed and developing countries have suffered from economic globalization, but the fact remains that there is less of universality when it comes to redressing their conditions. To cite one example, the garment workers of developing economies may be suffering from the post-globalization competition and therefore are likely to plead for more openness of the developed market for exporting their clothing, but the garment workers of the developed economies faced with the cheap labor and relatively cheaper clothing of the developing economies are likely to seek more protection of their domestic market and discourage the import of clothing. Put differently, the workers of both developed and developing countries could be complaining against the impact of economic globalization and even openly protesting against it, but interestingly they are doing so from quite opposite, almost contradictory, positions. The subaltern unity here is more tactical than strategic, and is therefore open to the possibility of the leadership and the campaign being co-opted by the forces of economic globalization with concessions of one type or another. Neo-protectionist measures of the developed economies are indeed of this nature.

The resistance movements, however, in and by themselves do not reproduce the life and living of the subalterns. Mittelman has already indicated that “where poverty is severe, criminal gangs flourish.”⁹ The link between poverty and criminality is less linear than what is seemingly suggested here. A state of subalternity in fact creates conditions that make people disinterested in the business of reproducing the power of the state. Misgovernance otherwise becomes the (dis)order of the day. People, particularly the subalterns, increasingly start depending on informal, often criminal, means for reproducing their livelihood. Even when requiring business or personal security they fall back on the power of the “godfathers,” hired goons, *mastans*, and the like, than on the otherwise inept, often corrupt, governmental machineries. A shadowy network of things and transactions get reproduced and in the process destabilize not only the power of the state but also the power of the subalterns, indeed, making them more vulnerable and disempowered. This further creates grounds for fresh recruits and creative but demonic ventures for organizing and reproducing subaltern globalization.

Smuggling, particularly human trafficking, across nations, regions and continents is a good indicator of the demonic venture found in subaltern globalization. According to a report filed by the Burmese American Democratic Alliance in March 2002:

Each year thousands of young girls are recruited from rural Burmese villages to work in the sex industry in neighboring Thailand. Held for years in debt bondage in illegal Thai brothels, they suffer extreme abuse by pimps, clients, and the police.... The trafficking of Burmese girls has soared in recent years as a direct result of political repression in Burma. Human rights abuses, war and ethnic discrimination has displaced hundreds of thousands of families, leaving families with no

⁸ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971); Imtiaz Ahmed, *State & Foreign Policy: India's Role in South Asia* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1993).

⁹ Mittelman, *The Globalization Syndrome*, 209.

means of livelihood. An offer of employment in Thailand is a rare chance for many families to escape extreme poverty.

Agents have now established networks reaching into the remote areas of Thailand's neighbors including Burma, Laos, Southern China and Cambodia. The children are mainly brought in through north and northeastern Thailand where they are then taken to other areas within the country. Although there are no exact figures available regarding the numbers of children being trafficked into Thailand for sexual exploitation, estimates nevertheless provide an indicative picture. From Burma, it was estimated in 1994 that as many as 20,000 to 30,000 women and girls had been trafficked primarily into brothels in Thailand, with 10,000 new recruits being added each year.¹⁰

Although Thailand is believed to be the primary destination of trafficked Burmese women and children, other destinations include China, India, Bangladesh, Taiwan, Pakistan, Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, and countries in the Middle East.¹¹ If this is the case, then it is quite understandable that, in the context of human trafficking from Burma (that is, Myanmar), a very vibrant regional cum global relations exist and it is being reproduced by none other than the dubious and shadowy forces of subaltern globalization. Indeed, for human trafficking to take place across regions and continents, there must be a demonic, yet creative, relationship amongst members of various sectors and professions, races and religions, countries and nationalities, almost paralleling the complex networks of economic globalization.

More importantly, however, poverty, vulnerability, and marginalization are the required conditions for large-scale human trafficking.¹² In fact, the vulnerability of the subalterns itself creates conditions for the latter to become an easy, often consenting, prey of the smugglers, not only in making the subalterns the subject of smuggling but also in making them available in the very operation of smuggling. In this context, it may be pointed out that there is a substantial difference between the *smugglers* and the *smuggling agents*, although both are in the business of criminalizing the society and the world.¹³ The former are the owners of capital invested in smuggling, while the latter are mere workers, paid in cash every time they successfully deliver the goodies to their destinations. In fact, it is the smuggling agent that does all the dirty work, including bribing security and other governmental officials at each stage of his/her journey, while the smugglers enjoy the big profit margin of the smuggled goods.¹⁴ Viewed from the standpoint of the smuggling agent it is just another occupation, somewhat desperately undertaken for a better rate of returns, required no less for reproducing the life and livelihood of the equally desperate subalterns.

Human trafficking, however, goes on to reflect more broadly disorder and misgovernance not only within the state but also in the relationship that goes in the name of interstate relations. Indeed, such disorder and misgovernance further empower the dubious and shadowy forces of subaltern globalization. They end up with networks and activities that are as menacing to the state and the interstate as they are to

¹⁰ Burma-American Democratic Alliance, "Burma: 40 Years of Dictatorship," leaflet, 2002, 2, <http://www.badasf.org/2002BHRD-flyer.htm>.

¹¹ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, US State Department, "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2001," (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, March 4, 2001), 60.

¹² Burma-American Democratic Alliance, "Burma: 40 Years of Dictatorship;" Louise Brown, *Sex Slaves: The Trafficking of Women in Asia* (London: Virago, 2000).

¹³ Intiaz Ahmed, "Travails of Refugees across Bangladesh-India Border," in *Regional Security in South Asia: The Ethno-Sectarian Dimensions*, ed. Nancy Jetly (New Delhi: Lancers Books, 1999), 439.

¹⁴ Christina Fink, *Living Silence: Burma under Military Rule* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 2001), 137.

the life and living of the subalterns. Such is the irony of subaltern globalization. The complex structure is somewhat demonically intriguing. I will limit myself to four areas, with particular reference to terrorism.

Narco-terrorism

Narco-production and trading is a lucrative business in this region. In 2001 Myanmar surpassed Afghanistan as the largest producer of illicit opium and heroin in the world. To provide some knowledge of the amount, 865 metric tons of opium was produced in Myanmar in 2001, almost all of which were processed into heroin and sold to the illicit market both within and outside the region.¹⁵ This is more than double the amount of illicit opium that is available in other heroin-producing countries, such as India, Columbia, Mexico, or Laos.¹⁶ It may be mentioned that there exists a vibrant but complex relationship between opium growers and heroin producers, drug dealers and consumers, security and custom officials, high-risk investors and money launderers, not only nationally but also regionally and globally. As the following US Drug Enforcement Agency report suggests:

Opium poppy cultivation and heroin refining take place in remote, mountainous border regions. Armed ethnic groups such as, the United States Army, the Kokang Chinese, and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army control the cultivation areas, refine opium into heroin, and also produce methamphetamine. Associates of these organizations from other Asian nations have shipped tons of heroin from Burma to the United States within the past decade. The largest single heroin seizure in the United States consisted of 486 kilograms of Burma-produced heroin that the U.S. Customs Service discovered in a containerized shipment of plastic bags from Southeast Asia, via Taiwan, en route to a warehouse in Hayward, California, in May 1991.¹⁷

But Myanmar, apart from being a member of the infamous “Golden Triangle,” is also close to yet another major narco-producing region, the “Golden Crescent.” In smuggling heroin from Myanmar beyond the region and the continent, both India and Bangladesh are used as transit points.¹⁸ This further exacerbates problems related to narco-terrorism in the region. In fact, one critical problem arising out of the confluence of two major narco-producing and trading regions is the cementing of a diabolic relationship between insurgent groups and narco-terrorism. Such a relationship is quite common in and around Thai-Myanmar, Indo-Myanmar and Bangladesh-Myanmar borders. Not that all the insurgent groups engage in narco-production or narco-trafficking, but it has been found that almost all of them have regularly taxed and exorted money from the traffickers while providing protection to the latter for conducting trafficking in drugs. There are several critical implications of this.

Firstly, the transnational narco-networks, now backed by armed insurgents, make anti-narco-production or anti-narco-trafficking drive immensely difficult. And given the terrain (both physical and topographical) in which the insurgents and the traffickers operate, there is now all the more reason to

¹⁵ DEA Intelligence Division, Office of International Intelligence, Europe, Asia Africa Strategic Unit, *Burma Country Brief*, Drug Intelligence Brief, Washington, D.C., May 2002, 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁷ DEA Intelligence Division, *Burma Country Brief*, 1; Shwe Lu Maung, *Burma: Nationalism and Ideology* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1989).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

believe that the *nationally-organized* military or coercive solutions may not be the correct way of overcoming the menace of narco-terrorism.

Secondly, weapons, particularly small arms, in the hands of both the insurgents and traffickers become more rampant, indeed, to the point of threatening the law and order situation in the vicinity. A large portion of the money received from taxing and extorting the narco-traffickers goes on to purchase small, at times sophisticated, arms for the insurgents. I will have more to say about this issue later.

Finally, subaltern aspirations get entwined between insurgency and narco-terrorism, almost to the point of blurring the distinction between the two. While this becomes handy for the state machineries in the strategy of depicting the insurgents as narco-traders and winning back the support of the members of the dissenting communities, it often leads them to quick-fix remedies with little or no results. As the World Bank-sponsored study on Indo-Bangladesh border smuggling once pointed out, "Ordinary men, women and even children participate in smuggling as couriers, porters and rickshaw pullers," which only indicates that the subalternity of smuggling or even narco-terrorism is far more complex than what is readily understood.¹⁹ There is therefore no guarantee that the narco-menace would discourage the subalterns from joining the trade.

Money Laundering

Narco-terrorism would not make much headway without the practice of money laundering.²⁰ It is the latter that provides the required funds for the production and later on, shipments of the narcotics across regions and continents. The weakness and corruption prevalent in the banking system of the region remain easily susceptible to money laundering. As Kaung maintains:

Burma's banks are more like a dubious "Ponzi" or pyramid scheme²¹ than well-run commercial banks. Between 1962 and 1988, the banks in Burma were all state-owned, and lent primarily to state owned enterprises. After 1988, the declaration of a so-called open market economy made way for private commercial banks, but they were never built on strong capital. These private commercial banks lent money to the newly enlarged private sector and managed to attract some private deposits too. But the performance of Burma's commercial banks has proved something of a mixed bag. It has been alleged that banks in Burma are money laundering facilities and not real banks. The ruling junta has never revealed the cash reserve ratio that banks legally need to operate, as inflation has continued to soar at around 20 to 25 percent each year.²²

In Myanmar's case this connivance between the banks, money launderers, and the state goes even deeper, with the narco-traffickers benefiting the most. In fact, it has been alleged that Khun Sa, a notorious drug trafficker, agreed to cease-fire conditions when the Government of Myanmar (GOM) allowed

¹⁹ Chandan Nandy, "World Bank Study Indicts BSF, Customs," *The Telegraph*, 21 January 1995.

²⁰ Money laundering here is understood as changing the form and ownership of monies generated from illegal sources. For a detailed exposition, see Giri Raj Shah, *Encyclopaedia of Narcotic Drugs & Psychotropic Substances 2* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1998), 491-511.

²¹ This refers to the notorious scheme of Charles Ponzi, an Italian migrant, who promised US investors on the east coast that he could double their money in just ninety days. This attracted 40,000 investors and a great deal of excitement, but soon it was found that it was a farce. The investors in the process lost millions of dollars See Kyi May Kaung, "Bank Crisis Reeks of a Ponzi Scheme," *Irrawaddy*, February 26, 2003.

²² Kaung, "Bank Crisis Reeks of a Ponzi Scheme."

Sa to invest his drug profits in the country's infrastructure and legitimate businesses.²³ The drug trafficker cum money launderer otherwise with the connivance of the bank and the state ended up running legal businesses! When such a structure comes into being it becomes impossible to eradicate narco-trafficking and all the corroborating agencies, including money laundering and terrorism, unless and until the state itself goes through a sustained period of reforms and restructuring.

At times certain other structural factors are also responsible in reproducing money laundering, as is the case with the *stateless* but relatively well off Rohingyas living abroad. As stateless and with few licit areas to invest, these Rohingyas have no option but to launder money to various Rohingya nationalist or insurgent groups, mainly to fulfill their subaltern aspirations in the northern Arakan region of Myanmar. That a part of this money would be used in purchasing arms and later on in insurgent or terrorist activities can never be ruled out.

One should not, however, make too much of a case with money laundering and its *ipso facto* relationship with terrorism. This is because the financial cost of contemporary terrorism has not been that great. Take the instance of 9/11, which, while requiring nineteen suicide attackers, had a financial input of only \$500,000.²⁴ But this was enough to kill more than 3,000 civilians and cause a material damage of at least \$40 billion, and this is exclusive of the hundreds of billions of dollars lost as a result of the slowing down of global economy immediately after the attack. If routing out terrorism is the objective, I guess a far more creative handling of the phenomenon is required, and this is true nationally, regionally, as well as globally.

Illegal Small Arms

If anything has empowered the terrorist groups lately it has been the proliferation and use of illegal small arms. In April 1996 the Bangladesh military seized the following weapons from the vessels off Cox's Bazar, a place incidentally not very far from the Bangladesh-Myanmar border:

List of Illegal Small Arms

1. AK-47 Rifles.....	500
2. Machine guns.....	80
3. Rocket launchers.....	50
4. Grenades.....	2000

Source: Binalakshmi Nepram, *South Asia's Fractured Frontier: Armed Conflict, Narcotics and Small Arms Proliferation in India's North East* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2002), 99.

It is difficult to imagine that these weapons, including many in the pipeline, enter Bangladesh without some connivance of the state machineries, particularly police and customs departments. But even the knowledge of possible "helpers" does not provide a clear picture as to who *received* the arms and, more importantly, who *supplied* them. The best we can do in this kind of circumstances is consult *Jane's Infantry Weapons*, a book of notable distinction, and find out the names of the countries manufacturing these weapons. According to *Jane's* 1996 edition, the following countries, both developed and developing, were

²³ DEA Intelligence Division, *Burma Country Brief*, 11.

²⁴ Georg Witschel, "Global Terrorism: Trends and Response," *RCSS* (Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Colombo) *Newsletter* 9, no. 1 (January 2003): 2.

listed as the main producers or suppliers of small arms: Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Britain, Chile, China, France, Germany, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, USA, Venezuela, and many more.

But this does not help much unless we identify the *birthmark* (i.e., the original manufacturer) of the small arms that are found and used in terrorist activities. But since the public had no access to the seized weapons mentioned above, there was no way to find out the birthmark of these weapons. But then a survey conducted at Dhaka University in 1995-1996, supplemented by various newspaper reports, helped to trace the type, birthmark, and cost of small arms found in the hands of student political cadres and in-campus *mastans* (gangsters).

Small Arms Used by Mastans in Dhaka University

Type	Birthmark/Manufacturer	Price (Taka, in Thousands)
Saddam Pistol	India	40-50
9 mm bore pistol	Italy	50-60
22 bore pistol	Spain, Italy, Brazil	30
7.65 mm bore pistol	Italy	60
Chinese rifle	China	80
303 cut rifle	Britain	25
.45 revolver	USA	60
German revolver	Germany	n.a.
.324 revolver	Pakistan	15-22
Pipe gun	Local	3-5
Shutter gun	India	n.a.

Source: Abdullah-al Shams, "Campus Terrorism." Research conducted under the supervision of the author, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, September 1996; Neila Husain, "Proliferation of Small Arms and Politics in South Asia: The Case of Bangladesh," *RCSS (Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Colombo) Policy Studies 7* (May 1999).

The type and birthmark of the small arms indicate that the bulk of them were produced in developed countries, but it does not tell us how they made it to the university. It is unlikely that these weapons were directly shipped or airlifted from the manufacturing countries to their destination in Dhaka. What is more likely is that these weapons entered Bangladesh from various border points (Bangladesh-Myanmar as well as Indo-Bangladesh) via a vibrant subaltern network (both dubious and political) that possibly included at various stages of their shipments members of both developed and developing countries.

On this issue, a national daily of Bangladesh reported:

Sixteen northern districts of the country, especially the frontier ones are flooded with illegal arms and ammunition, posing a threat to law and order situation. These arms are mostly possessed by

political activists, outlawed extremists, terrorists, extortionists and miscreants. The illegal arms include both foreign and local sten gun, SMG, sawed-off rifle, SLR, revolver and pipe gun. Most of the firearms are in the hands of activists of “three political parties” who have separate hideouts in different places in this region including frontiers of Natore, Pabna, Sirajganj and Bogra districts.²⁵

The subaltern nature of the network cannot be denied, although the flow of small arms has gone beyond those adhering to some form of subaltern aspirations. In fact, the flow has become so acute and extensive that even the former Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Deb Mukherjee, publicly noted that “It is possible that firearms are among the items *smuggled* from India into Bangladesh.”²⁶ Put differently, without an extensive subaltern network, it is impossible to imagine the flow of small arms, whether Cox’s Bazaar or Dhaka University. At times, however, not only the arms flow but also the network could prove deadly. Let me cite an example by quoting Singh:

A large number of terrorist groups are believed to be in possession of man-portable SAMs now.... The whereabouts of the unaccounted 560 Stinger missiles (out of the stock supplied to Afghan Mujahideen) are unknown, and all efforts to recover them have failed so far. A few had appeared in Iran, having been sold by the Mujahideen. Another 312 were reportedly sold in the open market at Landi Kotal (Pakistan) in January 1993. Earlier this year (1995) the LTTE shot down two Sri Lanka Air Force aircraft carrying passengers.²⁷

What we have here is a subaltern network consisting of Afghans, Iranians, Pakistanis, and missiles making it to the hands of the Tamil Tigers, Indians and Sri Lankans. But then, an American made weapon changing hands in Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, India, and finally reaching Sri Lanka can only make everyone culpable when the said weapon is finally used against the Sri Lankans. Similar is the case with the weapons that are used in Bombay, Karachi, Dhaka, Delhi, Colombo, or any other place in South Asia. Indeed, if there is an element of subaltern bonding among the users of small arms, there is also a bonding, albeit more social, among those killed by these weapons. This is because most of the victims turn out to be disempowered, marginalized subalterns!

If we take a critical and holistic stock of narco-terrorism, money laundering, and illegal small arms, it becomes easy to comprehend the changing nature of contemporary terrorism. When it comes to the issue of organizing and reproducing terrorism, the latter has ceased to remain “national” or “statist.” Instead, terrorism has now become “transnational,” making the best, if not creative, use of globalization, particularly of the subaltern variant. In this light, it is not difficult to see as to why *some* Rohingyas, lifelong stateless and somewhat perennially disempowered and marginalized, ended up taking arms and even seeking military training from the Taliban in Afghanistan. Put differently, the “low-intensity conflict” of the Rohingyas, while keeping them conflict-prone but in utterly miserable conditions, created a milieu for some to enter the network of subaltern globalization. While the intention possibly was to make a difference to their plight, the entry into the network of subaltern globalization further alienated and stigmatized the stateless Rohingyas. The plight of the latter, however, is multiformed and multilayered, with social, cultural, political as well as local and global dimensions.

²⁵ *The Daily Star* (Beirut), October 19, 2000, 10.

²⁶ *The Daily Star*, 12; Husain, “Armed & Dangerous: Small Arms and Explosives Trafficking in Bangladesh.”

²⁷ Jasjit Singh, “Light Weapons and Conflict in Southern Asia,” in *Light Weapons and International Security*, ed. Jasjit Singh (Delhi: Indian Pugwash Society, 1995), 59.

THE PLIGHT OF THE ROHINGYAS

According to *1997 Statistical Yearbook*, published by the Government of Myanmar, the “official” population of the Arakan or Rakhine State, where most Rohingyas reside, numbered around 2.6 million.²⁸ In addition to this 2.6 million (and this is according to some unofficial estimates made in 1991), another one to two million Rohingyas also reside in the Rakhine State.²⁹ This would imply that the overall population of the Rakhine State is around four or five million.³⁰ In government circles, however, the Rakhine State is the home of the officially designated majority—the Buddhist Rakhines.³¹ The distinction between “Rohingyas” and “Rakhines” here is a deliberate one, not so much for the sake of semantics as for the reason of the state. Let me explain.

The word “Rohingya” is a taboo in the capital city of Yangon and I would imagine in the rest of Myanmar. In both national (or more appropriately, governmental) and international circles within Myanmar, the word simply does not exist. Even the National Museum of Myanmar in Yangon, which has an excellent collection of materials of all sub-nationalities (labeled by the government as “national races” and categorized into seven in terms of their language—Shan, Mon, Karen, Kayah, Chin, Kachin, and Rakhine), makes no mention of the Rohingyas nor does it have any collection dedicated to them. Why this taboo? Why this deliberate attempt to shun and silence the Rohingyas? Before attempting to dwell on this issue, let me first reflect on the origins of the Rohingyas in Myanmar.

There are basically two theories. One theory suggests that the Rohingyas are descendents of Moorish, Arab and Persian traders, including Moghul, Turk, Pathan and Bengali soldiers cum migrants, who arrived between the ninth and fifteenth centuries, married local women, and settled in the region. Rohingyas are therefore a mixed group of people with many ethnic and racial connections. This position is mainly upheld by the political fronts of the Rohingyas, including most scholars sympathetic to their cause.³²

The second theory, on the other hand, suggests that the Muslim population of the Rakhine State is mostly Bengali migrants from the erstwhile East Pakistan and now Bangladesh, with some Indians coming during the British period. This theory is further premised on the fact that since most of them speak Bengali with a strong “Chittagong dialect,” they cannot but be illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. The government of Myanmar, including the majority Burman-Buddhist population of the country, subscribes to this position.³³

²⁸ This is, however, an estimated figure. See Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, The Government of the Union of Myanmar, *1997 Statistical Yearbook* (Yangon: Central Statistical Organization, 1997), 22.

²⁹ Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (London: Zed Books and Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1991), 30.

³⁰ Abdur Razzaque and Mahfuzul Haque, *A Tale of Refugees: Rohingyas in Bangladesh* (Dhaka: The Centre for Human Rights, 1995), 14; Maung, *Burma: Nationalism and Ideology*, 4.

³¹ Smith, *Burma*.

³² Razzaque and Haque, *A Tale of Refugees*; Tessa Piper, “Myanmar: Muslims from Rakhine State: Exit and Return,” *WRITENET*, Practical Management (U.K.), (December 1993): 2.

³³ As one governmental press release noted (U Ohn Gyaw, “Press Release,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Myanmar, Yangon, 21 February, 1992):

In actual fact, although there are 135 national races in Myanmar today, the so-called Rohingya people are not one of them. Historically, there has never been a “Rohingya” race in Myanmar. Since the first Anglo-American War in 1824, people of Muslim faith from the adjacent country illegally entered Myanmar Naing-Ngan, particularly Rakhine State. Being illegal immigrants they do not hold immigration papers like other nationals of the country.

There is probably an element of truth in both these theories, but before dwelling further on them let me reflect on the nature of identity in the Arakan. I shall begin with the conceptualization of Arakan itself. "Arakan" is a Bengali/Arabic/Portuguese version of the local term "Rakhine," which in turn becomes "Yakhine" in standard Burmese.³⁴ Critics suspect that the term Arakan/Rakhine has come from the Pali name "Rakkhapura," (in Sanskrit, "Raksapura"), which means "Land of Ogres," a name that was given to the region by Buddhist missionaries, indeed, with some pejorative, racist intent.³⁵ But the linguistic content had further transformation. In fact, more interestingly, in Chittagong dialect, Rakhine came to be pronounced as "Rohong" or "Rohang" and the people from this land, "Rohingyas."³⁶ The difference between the various terms or rather the identity arising out of them was not wholly linguistic in nature.

Although for many years the people of Arakan had been referred to as Rakhines and for reason of local dialect some of them later on referred to as Rohingyas, it did not take long for the two identities to be politicized, with the Arakanese Buddhists calling themselves "Rakhines" and the Arakanese Muslims calling themselves "Rohingyas." Religion alone, however, cannot be blamed for the refuge sought by the Arakanese Muslims in the term "Rohingya." A precise colonial legacy played a critical role in dividing the people of Arakan, indeed, contributing to a gradual refuge of the Arakanese Muslims in a newer identity.

The period between 1824 and World War II remained critical in the organization of the Rohingya identity. The former date refers to the annexation of the Arakan by the British, while the latter date refers to the expulsion of the British from the Arakan by the Japanese. In each of these two dates, the Arakanese Muslims played out in a way, which only resulted in an increased alienation between them and the Buddhist population of Arakan. Let me explain.

It has been alleged that the British annexed the Rakhine region in 1824 when the Burman military started pushing the Arakanese Muslims further west well inside the British Raj territories.³⁷ Whatever may have been the real reason, many of the Arakanese Muslims, particularly whose parents or grandparents had previously lived in Burma but left the place on the account of the Burmans conquest of Arakan towards the end of the eighteenth century, returned to the Arakan following its annexation by the British. Put differently, the British annexation of the Arakan encouraged a steady movement of population from the west to the east—that is, from Bengal or India to the Arakan. A testimony of this lies in the fact that the population of Maungdaw Township increased from 18,000 in 1831 to about 100,000 in 1911.

The fate and political position of the Arakanese Muslims otherwise became closely tied up with the British colonial power. Not surprisingly, therefore, when the Japanese occupied Burma in 1942 and expelled the British from the Arakan, a sizeable section of the Arakanese Muslims fled Burma and the Arakan and took shelter in Bengal. Indeed, it was during this period that the political affiliations of the Arakanese became clear, with the Arakanese Buddhists supporting the Japanese while the Arakanese Muslims supporting the British. Such political affiliation, however, proved fatal for the Arakanese Muslims, who increasingly sought refuge in a newer identity, *Rohingya*, not only to distance themselves from the Arakanese Buddhists but also to cement solidarity within their own ranks to overcome their position of vulnerability and despair. The fatal outcome could not be contained.

³⁴ Joe Cummings and Tony Wheeler, *Myanmar: A Lonely Planet Travel Survival Kit* (Hawthorn, Victoria: Lonely Planet Publications, 1996), 364.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Razzaque and Haque, *A Tale of Refugees*, 14.

³⁷ Cummings and Wheeler, *Myanmar*, 365.

According to some scholars favorable to the Myanmaran government, the latter cannot be blamed totally for the fate of the Rohingyas. This is because, as it is argued, at the time of Burma's independence, the Rohingyas not only formed their own army but also approached the "Father" of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, "asking him to incorporate Northern Arakan into East Pakistan."³⁸ The Rohingyas continued with their demands even in the 1950s. The new state of Burma had no other choice but to consider them as non-Burmese and dissidents who were bent on wrecking the territorial integrity of the country. Apart from subscribing to the argument of "original sin," such a position is ill disposed towards the task of resolving the issue and overcoming the plight of the Rohingyas. But then, that is not all.

With the possible exception of the pre-military days of early 1960s, the government of Myanmar at every stage of governance and national development has systematically denied providing the Rohingyas some kind of recognition, including the right to acquire citizenship. It may be mentioned that at one point of post-independence history the Rohingyas' claim of separate ethnic identity was *recognized* by the democratic government of Premier U Nu (1948-1958).³⁹ But subsequent governments denied this and the issue was completely stalled following the military takeover of the country in 1962. The currently practiced Citizenship Law of Myanmar, which incidentally was promulgated in 1982, bears testimony to all this. A quick look at some of the things arising from the provisions of the said Law will suffice here.

The entire population of Myanmar is practically color-coded! Actually, following the launching of the "Operation *Nagamin*" (Dragon King) in 1977, which continued for over a decade, almost the whole of Myanmar's population was registered and provided with identity cards. These cards are all color-coded, mainly for the easy identification of the citizenship status of the bearer. Those residing lawfully in Myanmar can now be divided into four colors:

- Pink*: those who are full citizens;
- Blue*: those who are associate citizens;
- Green*: those who are naturalized citizens; and last,
- White*: for the foreigners!

The Rohingyas were quickly told that they do not fall under any of these four colors and that no such cards would be issued to them. Instead, a year after the Operation *Nagamin* began (that is, in 1978-1979) a huge number of Rohingyas, totaling around 250,000, was forcibly pushed into Bangladesh. But this was only the first major push in recent times. Another big push of the Rohingyas took place some twelve years later in 1991, when over 260,000 of them were pushed into Bangladesh. Save 21,000 documented camp refugees now,⁴⁰ all were made to go back, indeed, this time with the support of the UNHCR, although through a controversial mechanism. This refers to the change in the UNHCR policy from one of "individual interviewing" before ascertaining one's repatriation to the promotion of repatriation through "mass registration." Critics have already questioned the principle of voluntariness in such repatriation, including

³⁸ Smith, *Burma*, 41.

³⁹ A radio program in "Rohingya language" was also conducted during this period, but after the 1962 military coup it was stopped. This information is based on the author's discussion with some "researchers" in Yangon (Myanmar).

⁴⁰ There are also a large number of undocumented illegal refugees living outside the camps in the Cox's Bazar area of Bangladesh. No official statistics are found, although unofficially some puts the figure between 30,000 to 100,000. For the lower figure of 30,000, see Amnesty International, "Myanmar/Bangladesh: Rohingyas – The Search for Safety," International Secretariat, London, September 1997. The higher figure was cited to the author by an UNHCR official who wanted to remain anonymous.

the repatriation of the Rohingyas.⁴¹ It is not surprising that, given the *involuntary* nature of Rohingya repatriation, many of them are found returning and choosing the life of a refugee or illegal migrant in Bangladesh. Exodus, return, and conflict all are recycled and reproduced once again.

More important, in both these instances—1978 and 1991—the Rohingyas went back incidentally *not* as citizens of Myanmar but as “stateless” people. And then, after their return to the Arakan, they once again faced forced labor, lack of freedom of movement, periodic displacement, whimsical arrest and killing, and other forms of human rights violations, including torture and rape.⁴² If anything, this only helped to reproduce a dismal state of life for the Rohingyas—that is, within Myanmar as *stateless* and beyond the border as *refugees*.

One critical outcome of protracted statelessness and/or protracted refugeehood was the dispersion of the Rohingyas to different countries of the world. The following is a breakdown of the dispersed Rohingyas:

Bangladesh:	330,000*
Saudi Arabia:	500,000
Pakistan:	250,000
Gulf States:	55,000
Malaysia & Thailand:	43,000
Others: ⁴³	10,000
<hr/> Total:	<hr/> 1,188,000

Source: Arakan Historical Society, “Problem and Solution of Rohingya from Arakan,” unpublished report, Arakan Historical Society, Chittagong, August 2002, 14.

* The figure includes both camp and non-camp refugees, including those who have acquired Bangladeshi citizenship illegally.

In the light of this demographic diffusion, the Rohingyas have often been dubbed as Asia’s “new Palestinians,”⁴⁴ imbued with what could be referred to as local-global or *glocalized* identity. Indeed, as stateless and as refugees, within or beyond borders, the Rohingyas are as much local as they are global. There are not too many places for them to go, yet staying at one place puts them at risk if not in a serious

⁴¹ Medecins Sans Frontieres, for instance, noted (see “MSF’s concerns on the repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Burma,” MSF, Amsterdam/Paris, 1 May 1995, 2-5):

“In June 1994 the GOB gave permission to the UNHCR to start interviewing in all the camps. UNHCR found out in one test-run camp that 23% of the refugees wanted to be repatriated. In July 1994, UNHCR suddenly changed its policy. The agency changed from information sessions to promotion of repatriation, stating that the situation in Burma is ‘conducive for return.’ The willingness to repatriate allegedly increased to about 95%. UNHCR also abandoned the system of private interviewing and implemented a system of mass registration for voluntary repatriation....

MSF believes that the repatriation of Rohingyas is not voluntary and that the procedures set by the UNHCR do not guarantee that the refugees are able to take a decision out of free will. MSF is concerned that the UNHCR is trying out a new repatriation policy for countries *where a fundamental change of circumstances has not taken place*. MSF questions if this policy fits the statutory UNHCR-mandate of voluntary repatriation” (emphasis added).

⁴² Kirsten Young, “Mission Report – Bangladesh/Myanmar,” UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), in-house Circulation, 19-28 March 1995; Imtiaz Ahmed, “Refugees and Security: The Experience of Bangladesh” in *Refugees and Regional Security in South Asia*, eds. SD Muni and LR Baral (New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1996); Amnesty International, “Myanmar/Bangladesh: Rohingyas – The Search for Safety,” International Secretariat, London, September 1997.

⁴³ In other parts of the world, either with nationality of another or host country or simply as illegal migrant.

⁴⁴ Smith, *Burma*, 241.

state of uncertainty. The *glocalized* identity is of course in addition to their *social, cultural* and *political* identities, all of which were earned either one way or the other through systematic coercion, alienation and marginalization, within and outside Myanmar. With this precise kind of multiformed, multilayered identities, the stage is now set for some among the more desperate Rohingyas to enter into the network of subaltern globalization, including seeking military training from the Taliban and al Qaeda.

SUBALTERN GLOBALIZATION AND THE STATELESS MILITANT ROHINGYAS

Let me at this stage clarify two points. Firstly, if we take that some Rohingyas have ended up in Afghanistan through a complex network of subaltern globalization, there is no need to think that all those Rohingyas were living in a state of impoverishment. In fact, the general state of impoverishment of the community itself could be a cause for some relatively well-off Rohingyas to join the network, not solely for fulfilling the subaltern aspirations of the community but for the reason of profiting from the situation as well. Secondly, once the subaltern struggle at home takes a military or violent turn, it cannot escape from being linked to the various networks of subaltern globalization. This is because in order to sustain the subaltern movement through *military means*, there is a dire need for both cash and arms, over and above the committed recruits of fighters. Often the funds as well as the arms come via the network of dubious groups and shadowy activities.

In recent times, more so in the post-Cold War era, this has been the case practically with all the militant groups, including those directly involved in subaltern movements. The Tamil Tigers are a good instance, which, despite having been funded by the Tamil diaspora, did not hesitate to enter into the business of selling heroin and hashish for financing arms purchases.⁴⁵ Again, take the case of Kachin Independence Organization, a militant group fighting for the interests of the Kachin people within Myanmar, which with five thousand regular “armed” soldiers remains “heavily involved in the heroin trade.”⁴⁶ This is not something unexpected in view of the protracted nature of these movements and the cost that is involved in sustaining them.

Even a modest accounting will show that the need for cash is quite substantial. For instance, if we take that a militant group is made up of 3,000 fighters or terrorists and that each is paid a monthly allowance of Rs. 5,000, the need for cash just for paying the terrorists every month comes to Rs. 15,000,000 (or \$319,148 at the current exchange rate), which is quite substantial in local standards.⁴⁷ Often the militant groups, for the sake of maintaining their freedom—and this is more so in the aftermath of the Cold War shy away from a particular source of funding. Instead, they now prefer diversifying fund-raising, which at times includes money from taxing the narco-traders or even joining in the business of selling drugs and arms. The following report is a good indicator of the militant groups’ involvement in arms trafficking and making money from it:

Around 100 AK-47 rifles reached different gangs of criminals in the port city (of Chittagong) and its surrounding areas from the insurgents of Arakan state of Myanmar staying in deep forests across the Bangladesh border.... Arakan insurgents sold the rifles and some other sophisticated weapons

⁴⁵ Giri Raj Shah, *Encyclopaedia of Narcotic Drugs & Psychotropic Substances 2* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1998), 515.

⁴⁶ Federation of American Scientists, “Burmese Terrorist Groups,” 2003. <http://www.fas.org>.

⁴⁷ Praveen Swami, “APHC: The Nexus with Terror,” *South Asia Intelligence Review: Weekly Assessments and Briefings* 1, no. 31 (February 17, 2003): 7.

to these gangs through a clandestine channel of local kingpins of arms dealers and smugglers on various occasions in the past few years.⁴⁸

Things could hardly be different for the militant groups fighting for the subaltern aspirations of the Rohingyas, including the Rohingya Solidarity Organization. One could identify at least three sources from which some form of support (financial as well as material) for the militant Rohingyas could materialize. First is the local network within Bangladesh. In fact, both religion and language (with more *Islam* and less *Bengali*)⁴⁹ had been central in organizing a sympathetic posture towards the Rohingya refugees since their arrival into Bangladesh. It got shifted to a considerable extent when the presence of the Rohingya refugees contributed to the polarization and criminalization of civil society,⁵⁰ but this shift remained limited within the general population without affecting much the “political forces” otherwise sympathetic to the Rohingya cause. On the latter, the list included mainly the Islamic political groups, namely the Rabita Al Alam Islami, the Jaamat-e-Islam, supporters of the Afghan-based Hizbe-Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyer, and the like.⁵¹ It is quite likely that these Islamic groups would come forward and help the cause of the Muslim Rohingyas, including supporting the Rohingya Solidarity Organization and/or the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front both financially and materially.

The second source is external to the region, including support from the Middle Eastern countries and/or from the Rohingya diaspora. It may be mentioned that Khalid bin Sultan bin Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia, after visiting the Rohingya camps in Cox’s Bazaar (Bangladesh) in May 1992, remarked:

The Rohingya tragedy is the darkest chapter in the proud history of the people of Arakan. The United Nations should do in Myanmar what it has done for the liberation of Kuwait.⁵²

Aziz’s statement corroborated with the sentiments prevailing among the Islamic population, particularly the Rohingyas resident in Pakistan, Malaysia, or some Middle Eastern Islamic countries. The likelihood of the latter in providing funds for the cause of the Rohingyas, although it may be limited to the well being of the refugees, cannot be ruled out. But then funds from the first and second sources could bind the Rohingya groups to some of the more sober demands and political positions of the providers, and this may not go along with the strategy opted by the militant groups in fulfilling the subaltern aspirations of the Rohingyas.

It is in this context that the third source of linking the movement with “dubious groups” and “shadowy activities” worldwide takes a momentum. The third source could indeed provide more freedom to the militant groups in carrying out their strategy of violence and militancy, but then it also has the potential of bringing greater opposition, regionally as well as globally, to the otherwise justified demands of the

⁴⁸ *The Daily Star* (Beirut), November 30, 2002, p. 12.

⁴⁹ It could not forge Bengali nationalism based on language mainly because the Rohingyas speak Bengali with a strong Chittagonian dialect. The Bengali language that is central to the *bhadrasantan* or the bourgeois tongue and Bengali nationalism is relatively elitist and markedly different from the Chittagonian dialect.

⁵⁰ Imtiaz Ahmed, “Limits of Civil Society: Rohingya Refugees, Locals and the Passage to Unsettledness,” *South Asian Refugee Watch* (Colombo and Dhaka) 1, no. 1, July 1999.

⁵¹ *The Daily Star* (Beirut), February 7, 1992; *The Daily Aker Kagoj* (Dhaka), August 25, 1992; *India Today* (New Delhi), September 12, 1992.

⁵² *Pakistan Times*, May 22, 1992.

Rohingyas. The global spotlight on the Rohingya Solidarity Organization is precisely an outcome of short-sighted calculation on the part of the latter. The report filed by Lintner is a telling one:

Among the more than 60 video tapes that the American cable television network CNN obtained from the al Qaeda's archives in Afghanistan in August this year, one is marked "Burma" (Myanmar), and purports to show Muslim "allies" training in that country. While the group shown, the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO), was founded by Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar's Rakhine State and claims to be fighting for autonomy or independence for its people, the tape was, in fact, shot in Bangladesh. The RSO, and other Rohingya factions, have never had any camps inside Myanmar, only across the border in Bangladesh. The camp in the video is located near the town of Ukhia, southeast of Cox's Bazaar, and not all of the RSO's "fighters" are Rohingyas from Myanmar.⁵³

Although the report falls short in identifying the main reason for RSO's militancy—that is, protracted statelessness of the Rohingyas within Myanmar—it raised one issue that merits some attention: *locating the Rohingya militants and the RSO within Bangladesh*. The refutation of the report by the Burmese Muslim dissidents provides further credence to the issue raised here. When asked to react to the allegation of Rohingyas' al Qaeda connection, U Kyaw Hla, chairman of the Muslim Liberation Organization of Burma, commented:

That is impossible.... If the Taliban trained and supported the Rohingya exiles, they would be much stronger and much larger. We know *some Rohingya from Bangladesh*, but we have no special connection to that group (emphasis added).⁵⁴

This is not difficult to understand. The Rohingya refugees residing legally or illegally in Bangladesh suffer doubly, that is, from protracted statelessness as well as protracted refugeehood. It may be mentioned that over a decade has passed but, as indicated earlier, some 21,000 refugees are still living in refugee camps and there is no indication as to when their refugeehood would end. Moreover, another 30,000 to 100,000⁵⁵ Rohingyas reside outside the camps as illegal refugees and their plight, mainly for lack of documentation and legality, is even greater. The sense of hopelessness does not end there. Even those who have been repatriated with the support of the UNHCR complain that their repatriation was far from being "voluntary" and that they continue to remain stateless.⁵⁶ It is in these circumstances that some of the Rohingya refugees residing in Bangladesh probably found convenient to join the networks of subaltern globalization and make a difference to their hopeless situation. But this further sealed their fate.

In fact, by joining the more militant networks of subaltern globalization, the Rohingya "fighters" found themselves trapped to the place they were brought in, namely Afghanistan. As Lintner maintains:

Many of the recruits were given the most dangerous tasks in the battlefield, clearing mines and portering. According to Asian intelligence sources, recruits were paid Taka 30,000 (\$525) on joining and then Taka 10,000 (\$175) per month. The families of recruits killed in action were offered

⁵³ Lintner, "Bangladesh: Championing Islamist Extremism."

⁵⁴ Naw Seng, "Exiled Muslims Deny Taliban Connections," *Irrawaddy*, August 9, 2002.

⁵⁵ See Footnote 40.

⁵⁶ Medecins Sans Frontieres, "MSF's concerns on the repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Burma."

Taka 100,000 (\$1750). Recruits were taken mostly via Nepal to Pakistan, where they were trained and sent to military camps in Afghanistan.⁵⁷

More importantly, however, following the disclosure of RSO's links with the Taliban and al Qaeda networks, the Rohingyas as a whole found themselves stigmatized, and governments of different countries became fearful of their presence irrespective of their position as stateless, refugees, migrants, or honest workers. Even the government that was responsible for their plight went public denouncing the Rohingyas and through its spokesman declared:

There has been a Muslim separatist armed terrorist group calling themselves Rohingya which issued a unilateral "Declaration of Independence" from the Union of Myanmar. We then subsequently learned that some of these individuals were actually trained by the Taleban in Afghanistan, as well as in the terrorist camps in the Middle East....

The State Peace and Development Council [of Myanmar] would cooperate with the US to annihilate terrorism in Burma and put to rest all threats to national and regional security through its "zero tolerance" policy. While the governments of Myanmar and the US have had differences in years past, we are pragmatically in full agreement that terrorists must be given no sanctuary.⁵⁸

This position almost suggests that far from resolving the problem of statelessness of the Rohingyas, the state of Myanmar is possibly looking for another opportunity to push out the Rohingyas into Bangladesh as it did in 1978 and 1991, may be this time far more ruthlessly and in greater number! Indeed, the post-9/11 stigmatization of the Rohingyas, apart from reproducing their statelessness and refugeehood, puts them in a more desperate situation. The new sense of plight could make the Rohingyas more committed militants and push them further in the business of creatively but demonically using the networks of subaltern globalization.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

The most obvious solution lies in providing *citizenship* to the stateless Rohingyas. But can that stop terrorism in the region and beyond, particularly the ones involving the Rohingyas? There is no simple answer to that, although a point can be made that much of the solution lies in *delinking* the Rohingyas from the networks of subaltern globalization, and providing citizenship in this context would go a long way in doing precisely that. But then, any delinking with subaltern globalization would require a far more creative intervention than banging simply on the issue of providing citizenship to the stateless. After all, we have numerous people throughout the world with proper citizenship engaged actively in the organization and reproduction of subaltern globalization. Moreover, providing citizenship to the stateless is more easily said than done. Any move towards enfranchising the Rohingyas could also set a violent reaction from the mainstream political groups and even the citizens, and that itself could create a space for the forces of subaltern globalization to enter and profit from it. What is required therefore is nurturing of options that would be acceptable as much to the stateless Rohingyas as to the state of Myanmar. In this context, let me highlight four areas where such acceptance on the part of the state and the stateless could materialize and

⁵⁷ Lintner, "Is religious extremism on the rise in Bangladesh?"

⁵⁸ Myanmar Information Committee, "Burma Committed to Work with ASEAN, US on 'All Forms of Terrorism,'" August 9, 2002, <http://www.burmanet.org>; Seng, "Exiled Muslims Deny Taliban Connections."

create the necessary grounds for delinking subaltern globalization with the stateless Rohingyas. Needless to say, this would make fresh Rohingya recruits to dubious groups and shadowy activities not only unattractive but also devoid of relevance.

Reinventing Nationality Laws

There is an element of truth in Mahatma Gandhi's remark that "Law is but the convenience of the powerful." Nationality laws, for that matter, are tilted towards those having citizenship and frown upon those that are circumstantially or structurally marginalized. Even countries that allow "dual citizenship," like Bangladesh, Pakistan, and now India, do so selectively, limiting the option to those residing in the "developed" countries. No such option is available to those residing in underdeveloped or less developed countries. Indeed, if there were such a thing between Bangladesh and Myanmar, the Rohingya issue could be resolved within the framework of dual citizenship. The option, although politically unsaleable at this stage, is worth meriting some consideration in the future.

Moreover, when forces of localization and globalization are increasingly and inextricably intertwined and when the power of national sovereignty has receded considerably in recent times, the identification of "nationality" with "citizenship" has become less meaningful and practical. That is, if we take "nationality" to mean *membership of the nation* and therefore a member of civil society and "citizenship" to mean *membership of the state* and therefore a member of political society, there exists the possibility of nurturing the former without necessarily having the latter. Mexico is a good instance in this respect, as Gribbin pointed out:

Mexicans keep, or can regain, "nationality," which bestows property rights and other benefits but withholds the right to vote. Mexico distinguishes between "citizenship" and "nationality." Voting there is a prerogative of citizenship.⁵⁹

Stateless persons can definitely settle for a "nationality" that bestows property rights, the right to work and other benefits, without however having the right to vote. But this must not mean that they will remain non-voters forever and be barred from acquiring "citizenship" of the state. People falling under this category, if they desire so, can change their status in several ways. Completing stipulated number of years as resident and duly submitting tax returns could be one. The second could be buying one's citizenship. If the resident is without a vote and is keen to vote, s/he might as well spend some money. This is quite common in some developed countries, particularly in getting migration certificates. Some countries even openly sell "citizenship." Belize, for instance, sells citizenship for \$25,000 per person, while the islands of St. Kitts and Nevis charge \$200,000 per person.⁶⁰ A price could easily be calculated for Myanmar and updated annually in the light of its economic performance and overall development. Donors could also come forward and provide funds to those unable to pay for their citizenship.

⁵⁹ August Gribbin, *The Washington Times*, November 14, 1999.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Reusing National Borders

Imaginative interventions are required in border areas. The illegal flow of people will continue if one side of the border remains weak and poor, while the other side remains relatively better off. It is important, therefore, that identical socio-economic, environmental, and even educational projects are undertaken on both sides of the border to meet the demands of the people residing there. Binational or joint border development schemes could prove helpful. On this matter, non-governmental organizations on both sides of the border must participate freely, for the chances of their success are more than the highly structured governmental interventions.

Moreover, a system of “dual voting,” particularly in local elections, can be arranged for those living in the border districts with family and tax obligations on both sides of the border. This is basically to acknowledge the reality that is otherwise present in the context of population movement in the border areas. Moreover, the practice of those having dual citizenship voting in two countries is already there. In fact, in Bangladesh there is already a demand for enrolling the Bangladeshis living abroad as voters under a “separate category of residency.”⁶¹ Dominican Republic has gone even further. It is presently debating the feasibility of allotting two seats in its legislature for representatives of New York’s Dominican-American population. If this is the trend worldwide, of redefining constituency and residency of the people, there is no reason why newer approaches cannot be devised with respect to the stateless Rohingyas living within the proximity of Bangladesh-Myanmar border.

Democratizing the Senses

Set to reproduce the power of nations and nationalities, modern education tends to reproduce violence and conflicts, even considering them acceptable so long they are directed against *alien* communities, cultures or even countries. Much of the problem, apart from illiteracy, lies with the kind of education that we have been providing to our children in schools, colleges, and universities. In fact, children of this region are literally brought up as “nationalist,” *tutored* to fall in love only with their own nation while disliking or even hating the non-conforming others. The task therefore is to come up with an education that will be less alienating and communal or sectarian.

The stateless are even more dismally placed for they are structurally outside the very imagination of the state. Moreover, “national curriculum,” to the extent it tends to reproduce the power of majoritarianism and the nation, remains intrinsically statist and consequently apathetic of the stateless. Generation after generation is brought up with concrete knowledge of the state but little or no knowledge of the stateless. Indeed, very little can be expected from such schooling because when the time comes to delegate official responsibilities, the disciplined pupils tend to see more of the state and less of the stateless. It is this state of schooling that needs to be changed in favor of the one that remains sensitive to the making and remaking of the stateless. The earlier the children are exposed to this problem the greater is the chance of them participating and rectifying the things as adults.

Furthermore, “national curriculum” and the system of schooling are not only statist but also highly *governmentalized*—that is, organized, shaped and reproduced by the government. Unless the sphere of

⁶¹ Intiaz Ahmed, “Electoral Process in Bangladesh: Rationales for Reforms,” in *Comparative Electoral Processes in South Asia*, eds. Devendra Raj Panday, et al. (Kathmandu: Nepal South Asia Centre, 1999): 24.

schooling is thoroughly *degovernmentalized* and the age-old role of civil society in this sector clearly restored, there is little likelihood of statelessness being researched and deliberated upon, particularly on the scale that is required. A modest beginning could be made by commissioning newer textbooks and training materials on the issue of statelessness and then delivering them at various levels of schooling, all under the active participation of civil society.

Depolicing Global Responsibility

Global responsibility has thus far been limited to the task of *policing* the refugees and the stateless, often to the point of confining them or shunning them off as criminals and terrorists. Similar has been the case with many of the victims of women trafficking, narco-consumption, or even those who have been engaged in informal financial transactions in the wake of inefficient and corrupt formal banking system. And lately terrorism itself has become priority number one in the list of global responsibilities, controlled and delivered by none other than the coercive forces of the state. Such policing of things and people has far reaching implications insofar as the task of overcoming protracted refugeehood/statelessness or even suppressing the terrorists is concerned. Two could easily be identified.

Firstly, in the wake of policing the refugees and the terrorists, the bulk of the people become alienated from those carrying out the task of policing—namely, the government and the security forces. Since the issues get translated into “law and order” situations, the common people in the street become less interested in getting themselves involved in resolving problems related to refugees and terrorists. Often this becomes ideal for the latter to hide and work amongst the apathetic, alienated people.

Secondly, policing requires resources, but often in the name of policing the refugees and the terrorists there takes place a systematic drainage of resources. When this is done on a global scale it tends to further impoverish the life and livelihood of the people nationally, regionally, and globally, which is a welcome situation for those engaged in the reproduction of subaltern globalization. Policing otherwise helps create conditions against which it is policing. Such is the irony.

Global responsibility otherwise needs to be *depoliced*—that is, rescued from the hands of the police and the state. A globalized network of civil bodies, engaged in the task of both *conflict prevention* and *post-conflict resolution*, has the potential of being more relevant and useful in resolving issues related to protracted statelessness/refugeehood and dismantling the dubious networks of subaltern globalization. Save creative thought and action, nothing can now change the fate of the Rohingyas. The only fear is that postponing the change could make the world fated as well.

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