



CENTRE FOR ASIAN AND
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INSTITUTE



UNIVERSITÄT
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Lecture Series on Governance and Politics in South Asia

Department of Political Science

Explaining the Violent Expulsion of Rohingyas from Myanmar

Dynamics of Resistance to Ethno-Religious Discrimination and Dispossession

by

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The violent expulsion of Rohingyas from Arakan (Rakhine, Myanmar) since August 2017 calls for an explanation. Existing interpretations emphasize specific factors such as punitive measures against Rohingyas marked as illegal Bengali immigrants, or land grabs driven by neoliberal capitalism and foreign investments. Professor Adnan's research indicates that the expulsion of the Rohingyas had been prepared over the preceding decades by interlocking practices of exclusion, othering, discrimination, land grabs, and multiple restrictions—on movements, social activities, and livelihood options. Rohingyas were subjected to forms of direct and structural violence that embodied a 'negative biopolitics' concerned to 'make die' rather than 'let live'. The expulsion of Rohingyas through genocidal violence by the Myanmar regime makes sense as a desperate measure to destroy the peasant support-base of a growing militant resistance, followed by construction of border fences and other measures to prevent their possible return to Myanmar. Once the expulsion had taken place, the deserted Rohingya villages in northern Arakan became available for targeted land grabs by security forces and crony companies, as well as demographic engineering by bringing in ethnic Buddhist settlers. This multi-faceted exercise to wipe out Rohingya resistance was made possible by close collaboration between the powerful military (Tatmadaw), the elected NLD-led civilian government, crony capitalist companies making 'donations' to the concerned military and 'development' agencies (UEHRD), as well as influential Buddhist clerical movements (Ma Ba Tha and 969) with charismatic leaders providing religious endorsement and legitimacy.



Prof Dr Shapan Adnan has been a Professorial Research Associate with the Department of Development Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. Formerly, he was a Visiting Scholar and Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Oxford. He has taught at the National University of Singapore (NUS), the University of Chittagong, and the University of Dhaka. His teaching and research are in the fields of political economy, sociology, politics, and demography in South and Southeast Asia. He has published widely on the processes of ethnic conflict, dispossession and migration among agrarian and indigenous communities. Shapan Adnan is involved in civil and human rights activities as a member of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Commission and the Committee for Protection of Fundamental Rights (MOSC) in Bangladesh.

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