The Rohingya Muslim in the Land of Pagoda

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Abstract

Regarding Southeast Asia as a multi-ethnic region, this paper attempts to examine about why Buddhist Community turns into religious violence against Rohingya people in the State of Rakhine (formerly known as Arakan). Through understanding the triggers of conflicts, this paper applies historical perspective to analyze why ethnic-religious conflict occur nowadays between Buddhist and Rohingya Muslim in Myanmar. This paper also discusses how history has influenced the construction of the government's policy under a military regime to exclude Rohingya. However, the ethno-religious conflict is either an indication of a weak state or failure state in managing diversity.

Key words: *ethnic-religion violence, Muslim Rohingya, Buddhist Rakhine, state's role*

Introduction

The challenges that newly independent state faces in the post-colonial period are not only on how to manage diversity but also how to maintain the stability of a nation-state based on nationalism. Southeast Asia is the portrayal of the "melting pot" with its mixed ethnic identity and religious diversity among them. It is the place where most of its unification is an agreement resulting after the colonial states left at the end of World War II. Meanwhile, the mixed community has also caused another problem, which revolves around minority and majority. Rather than examining the problem of diversity, this paper will focus on explaining why the Rohingya Muslim and Rakhine Buddhist often involve in these conflicts compared to other ethnic groups in Myanmar throughout its historical perspective.

Throughout history, the conflict between Rohingya Muslim in the north and Rakhine Buddhist in the South of Rakhine state are much influenced by their relationship in the past. Although it is classic, the history has created a pattern of a conflict which is accumulated in the society and has constructed their perspectives about the others. Moreover, this can also be used to analyze why the government leads the primordialist issue as a reason to maintain stability within the state. Thus, history is one main factor to construct the ethnic-religious conflict in Myanmar today. Even though, Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) won the elections in 2015 and her victory is a way to democracy, but in the case of the Rohingya, the task will not be easy.

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Many centuries ago, Hinduism is the most dominant religion in the Rakhine Kingdom and Buddhism took its place in the 500 BCE. After around 710 CE, Islam reached the state (Saw, 2011; Sakinada, 2005). According to Minahan (2012) in the book entitled *Ethnic Groups of South Asia and the Pacific: An Encyclopedia*, Islam's arrival has embraced many of the former Buddhist, Hindu, and animist population. When Bengal was under Muslim rule in 1213, Muslim's influence was greatly developed in Arakan (Minahan, 2012) one the other hand, Bamars or Burmans disposed the king of Arakan in 1404. During the same period, Buddhism became the most influential and ascertained religion which can be seen in the later period of Rakhine kings who were all Buddhists (Gibson, James, & Falvey, 2016). Another fact of Rakhine State is that for many centuries there has been relations made between the Muslims in Bengal and the Kingdom of Arakan. When Arakan was independent in the 15th and 16th century, this region was ruled by both Buddhists and Muslims (Ursula, 2014).

According to Minahan (2012), Rohingya was also known as Ruainggas, that is part of Indo-Aryan ethnic group. He stated that there are other Rohingya communities spreading out in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Thailand, Malaysia, Europe, North America, United Arab Emirates, Australia, and New Zealand. That is approximately 3.5 million of Rohingya people and about 800,000 has lived in the Rakhine State (Minahan, 2012). He also explained that Rohingya speaks an Indo-Aryan language which refers to Bengali or known as Chittagonian language that Southeastern Bangladesh uses and in the religion aspect, most of Rohingya has Muslims- Sunni. In his book, Minahan also stated that according to Bamar Historian *"…the term 'Rohingya' did not appear until the 1950s when it was coined by Bengali Muslim migrants who had settled in the Rakhine region during the colonial period…"* (Minahan, 2012). On the contrary, another literature claims that the Rohingya community has settled in that region for a long period before it was under the British colonial rule.

The historical background of Arakan seems close to the conflict. In 1785, Burman soldiers have attacked Arakan brutally resulting to the destruction of mosques, libraries, and cultural institutions (Jonassohn & Björnson, 1998). The Burman monarchy attempts to clean up those who were considered as "the other" or has non-Burmese origins. In the efforts to appall the memories of Burmese brutality, the Rohingya community welcomed the British in Arakan and it was during the colonial rule that they received political rights and economic autonomy. In 1937, the British separated Arakan from the Indian empire which causes the Rohingya community's regress into its previous situation; living in fear and insecurity.

In 1942, the Japanese forces have reached Rakhine and made that area as a front line until the end of the Second World War. During 1942-43, both Muslims and Rakhines were attacking each other mostly due to their different alliances; most Muslim communities were pro-British, and Rakhines were supporting the Japanese. With shellacking from both parties, Muslim communities fled to the north where they were a majority, and Rakhine moved to the south (Yegar, 1972, in Asia Report No. 26, International Crisis Group (ICG), 2014). This is reasonable in seeing why the largest Muslim groups were settled in the Rakhine State. In 1945, British

awarded the Rohingya community a civilian administration in Arakan because of their loyalty. Two years later in 1948, Arakan State was integrated into Burma according to the 1948 treaty and Burma granted its independence from Britain (Jonassohn & Björnson, 1998).

Although many evidences and historical reports prove that the Rohingya community is a native in that region, but Burma (now Myanmar) as well as the Burmese Kingdom still perceived them as foreigners or newcomers. Therefore, for the Muslims living as a minority in the Buddhists' land is difficult for Rohingya. The poor relationship between Muslims and Buddhists did not only happens today, but it has a heavy historical relation that result to the Burmese's reluctance to co-exist with the Rohingya Muslims since centuries ago.

Today the Rakhine State, like other states of Myanmar, is a diverse region. The Rakhine Buddhist is the largest group amongst the total population which is approximately 60 per cent of the 3.2 million. The Muslim communities, including Rohingya, are at least 30 per cent while the rest population is Chin (who are Buddhist, Christian or Animist), and other small minorities including the Kaman (also Muslim), Mro, Khami, Dainet and Maramagyi who have reached 10 per cent (International Crisis Group (ICG), 2014). In fact, the data of Rohingya population could not be accurately mentioned; it is because there are discrepancies of numbers from different sources.

Moreover, there are communities unregistered as citizens because they are unrecognized by the regime under the 1982 Citizenship Law. The military regime rejects Arakan Muslims (Rohingya) from their recognition as citizens, even though they have been settling in the land of Arakan since 1823 (Bayefsky, 2005). The Rohingya community was not only stateless but also endures military pressure; including highly restrictive policies. This situation is compounded by the fact that the military regime is the one to facilitate the movement against Rohingya (Dittmer, 2010). The goal of that movement is to reduce Rohingya's population, hence, there is no accurate documentation estimating the number of Muslim population in the Rakhine State. Meanwhile in 1982, there was about 56 per cent of the total population inhabitant in the district (Yegar, 2002). It is possible that the Rohingya community has the highest population at that time. A decade later in 1994, Burmese Muslim was estimated to be 3 per cent out of the total population of 45 million, but Muslim claimed that their number of population is around 7 million or 13 per cent out of the total population (Veen, 2005). According to the data, the Muslim population shows a small number in Myanmar, but the data of ICG in 2014 or other sources stated that Rohingya Muslims were the second largest group in the State of Rakhine; even though the number was under 50 per cent of the population. However, this imbalance number of population causes insecurity and fear to emerge.

Violence Against Rohingya: Problem with Ethnicity or Religiosity?

The violence against minority refers to "uncertainty" (Appadurai, 2006). The problem "came out" when they are among us and the boundaries are unclear between "them" and "us." Likewise, the minority group who has identified themselves as different, the majority needs them to determine what they call as "we." According to Appadurai (2006), the majority needs the "other" to define their own identity. He also argues that the

majority recognizes the minority group as an "impure" element in the national body. Meaning, they destroy an opportunity for self-definition in "understanding their own identity" (Sen, 2010).

In fact, the concept of "we" as the majority's argument poses as a difficult boundary to accept the "others." In the case of Rohingya, the Burma Kingdom for many centuries ago and Myanmar state today have continuously oppressed them because they are different. They are regarded as not a part of Myanmar nationality. Rohingya is perceived as different because they were pro-British in the Second World War and they have a different religious identity with the majorities of Myanmar. Rohingya was closely associated with Bengali, but on contrary, they are clearly different from Bengali; physically and politically.

When it is believed in 1990 that in accordance with the ending of Cold War, the world would return to a new hope of peacefulness and a more democratic world order, but the fact is showing the pathologies in the nationhood purification. Myanmar, since their political isolationism under the military's rule in 1962, is closed from outside world. There is not much information acknowledged by the international community regarding Myanmar's situation. There is no clear and obvious information on how Rohingya people becomes the object of perpetrator and the subject to brutal violence from the majorities. For example, in 1991-2, the army has arranged about 250,000 Rohingya communities to flee to Bangladesh, and they were repatriated without "given citizenship" by the state (Dittmer, 2010).

In addition, the data reported by Rianne ten Veen and the Islamic Human Rights Commission states that in 1991, Rohingya Muslims were targeted as object of abuse. While, the data has also shown that in 1994, at least 110,000 Karen and Mon people (some of Myanmar's ethnicities) as other minority groups in Myanmar fled to Thailand during the intense offensive act by the military of Rakhine (Burma Project, n.d.). Muslim Rohingya might not be the only minority group that is targeted in the violence. However, compared to the other groups, the issue of Rohingya Muslims is more complicated.

Meanwhile, according to the 2009 Human Right Watch Report, in 1995, the Bangladesh government has forced most of Rohingya Muslims to go back to the border with the UN supporting this repatriation process. Then, the government granted them a Temporary Registration Card (TRC), which gave them the limited freedom of movement and employment in the western part of Arakan.

The violence for anti-Muslim also occurred in 1996 in Shan state and Yangon. In 1997, SLORC initiated an anti-Muslim riot in Mandalay as well as other cities and the government is reported to be involved in the riot (Veen, 2005). The issue of anti-Muslim violence has since been happening in 2001 as well as in Sitwe which results to many Muslims and Buddhists killed and injured. Since that time, the Government decided for travel restriction on Muslims in the conflict area, particularly those who do travel between Sitwe and other towns. In these cases, there were no information on whether Muslim-Rohingya has been involved in the conflict or not. However, the issue of anti-Muslim (non-Rohingya) has also spreads out to the other Muslim communities. The data from Amnesty International reported that Karen Muslim community has also been victimized. A refugee from Muslim Karen Woman from Hpa'an Township Kayen State, said that

her village was destroyed by the soldiers in April 2004 - including their mosque.

Until in 2012, the conflict occurred between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine finally spreads out in international media, harvesting mass attention from the world. The trigger of this conflict is the rape and murder of a Buddhist woman by Rohingya Muslims which leads into violence and riot in the same year. The data report shows that dozens of people were killed, a hundred houses burned, and 75,000 people, mostly Rohingya, displaced (Caballero-Anthony, 2016).

The conflict between Muslim Rohingya and Buddhist Rakhine also spreads out of the Rakhine state. In March 2013, violence occurred in Meiktila, Mandalay region and 43 people were killed in this accidence. While in May 2013, a boarding school and a mosque were set on fire in Lashio, Shan State (Fuller, 2013). According to the data, extremist Buddhist groups known as 969 were suspected to initiate the anti-Muslim violence. This report is also written by Caballero (2016), but according to her, 40 people were killed because of these riots. She explained that a commotion in a gold shop in Meiktila, Central Myanmar has lead the violence between Buddhist and Muslims.

She also explicated that based on the UN claim and a BBC News report, in January 2014, more than 40 Rohingya men, women, and children were killed in Rakhine State after an issue that a Rohingya Muslim killed a Rakhine police. Seeing these cases, we can see how violence can be easily followed by another violence; even the reason behind the incident was unclear. The boundaries of conflict become unclear then, whether it is communal conflict between Rohingya and Rakhine or Rohingya Muslims and Rakhine Buddhists. Besides being Muslim, the physical appearance of Rohingya is very distinct from the descendant of Mongoloid. It seems to simplify the reason, "they are not like us; we cannot accept them" (Hurd, 2015).

The communal violence between Muslim Rohingya and Buddhist Rakhine was not only an issue in the Islamic world, but also in international level. It leads into strong international critic over military government of Myanmar neglecting the conflict in Rakhine state. However, the violence against Rohingya Muslim by the state is showing how state has significant rule in perceiving Rohingya as "the other." Thus, the discrimination was not only in, law, economic, or education, but also political and humanity right.

When Buddhists Turn to Violence

The historical explanation describes that Arakan State, for centuries, has been an area for territory struggle and symbol of power, respectively amongst Portugal, Britain and Japanese. The Rakhine Buddhist and Muslim, including Rohingya are claiming each other that Arakan is their own land, whether that is "the land of Muslims" or "the land of Buddhists." In terms of political phenomenon, there are two major factors in ethno-religious conflicts which are ethnicity and territory (Harris, 2009).

In her book, Erika Harris (2009) explained that homeland is a crucial place for the people:

> *"In the case of homeland, the appeal is that, in the first place, it belongs to people whose name it carries; what happens to others who may not have another homeland or who even think of it as their own is as secondary consideration, if a consideration of*

> *ethno-national movements at all… there is no potential for conflict anywhere without disputed territory, as there is no peace without territorial settlements. Homelands are spaces where national narratives are made, to which past struggles and dreams of the future belong. All homeland are "lands of hope and glory" but also, space of the nightmare of ethnic violence take place…."*

Nevertheless, the conflict in Rakhine state is not only about the clash of two ethnicities, but also identity, which Harris did not include it as an element of analysis. The identity could not be separated from homeland nor ethnicity. It can be seen from the Palestine conflict between Palestinian and Israeli who fights and claims that Palestine is their homeland. For Rohingya people or the Rakhine Buddhist, Rakhine state is the place where their ancestor lived in and they are emotionally engaged with. Arakan is the place where they find the memories of their identity. Although the oppressed government compels them to leave the land, they are returning with the consequence of being stateless. It is because they have no other place nor choice for both to stay and survive.

Historical homeland conflict also has its root when U Nu regime fulfilled their promise to give autonomy in Arakan and Mon in 1962. However, the Mujahidin in that time continue demanding its legal separation from Burma (Azizah in Yusuf, 2013). In the same year also, Burmese Army did coup d'état against U Nu regime, and Burma was under military junta. In 1989, the government changed the name of Arakan to Rakhine. Thus, when someone mentions "Arakanese Muslims," it refers to Muslim minorities that has already disappeared. It seems that the nomenclature of Rakhine was designed for Rakhine people or known as "the Buddhist land."

There are three core points contesting in this conflict; ethnicity, territory, and identity, which are all related to the historical background. These points are the main elements of why conflict happens in the world, particularly in Rakhine. According to Jack Snyder (2000), there are two kinds of nationalities in the world: ethnic nationalism and civic nationalism. Ethnic nationalism is based on the primordial sentiments such as ethnicity, culture, or religion. While, civic nationalism is based on national sentiments that overcome the distinction of ethnicity, religion, race, and social class within the society. Today, in the globalization era, the ethnic nationalism, which based on primordialism sentiment is being abandoned gradually, especially in the West. In contrary, the countries that faced diversity problems like Myanmar, the common structure of a conflict is constructed by the dominant power to marginalize the minorities with great oppression.

The question then is why the Buddhist community turns to violent measures against Rohingya Muslims. Firstly, it should be noted that religious violence can occur in all religions (Hansclever & Rittberger, 2000; Seul, 1999; Bartels, n.d.). Jeffrey Seul in his journal argued that the escalation of intergroup or inter-ethnicity conflict cannot be solely seen as identity competition, even economic and politics factors also play important roles in the conflict (Seul, 1999). By adopting Connor's idea about nationalism which refers to "us-them" (Seul, 1999), Seul explains that Connor's argument was based on a single cultural marker, including religion which can be

the root or reference for national identity construction. This argument could be examined in the context of Myanmar in which Buddhism was constructed as their national identity. In the other hand, Rohingya community is not reflected as a part of the Mongolian nation. Thus, there must be a logical argument to explain how intergroup conflicts in Rakhine occur.

Seul as well as Samuel Huntington are using the primordialist perspective. Huntington believes that the next pattern of conflict after the Cold War pattern was not only dominated by ideological or economical aspects, but it will involve religion-fed cultural "fault lines" (Ventura, 2014). The following statement is Huntington's most cited passage in *The Clash of Civilization*:

> *"It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be culture"* (Huntington, 1993).

According to the primordialists (Samuel Huntington, Gilles Kepel, Jeffrey Seul, and Bassam Tibi), they argue that the most important factor in the twenty-first century conflicts is the nations in civilization (Hasenclever & Rittberger, 2000). In their book, Hasenclever and Rittberger are also attempting to outline the three approaches to analyze the impact of faith and politics, before it can be used to measure the conflict.

In the instrumentalist perspective, socio-economic are the basic of conflict and religion is only a spurious correlation in terms of intergroup conflict. The Instrumentalists believe that most of religious conflicts start from unequal growth between economic, social, political and nations (Hasenclever & Rittberger, 2000). Otherwise, in the constructivist perspective, religion is an intervening variable.

Marco Ventura (2014) mentions about the constructivist approach in his book in the following term:

> *"…ethnic identity is as fluid, changeable, and often actively contested. From such perspective, most of the emphasis of the analysis is on the strategic aim of collectivity framing ethnic membership and boundaries in a given manner than on individual motives to endorse a given ethnic affiliation. Consequently, elite and mass interests are not assumed to converge, nor are the interests of different ethnic group assumed to be intrinsically divergent: ethnic conflict and violence can serve elite interests beyond ethnic boundaries and can contradict the interests of the masses on all sides."*

This approach also described about how the elite plays a significant role in intergroup conflicts. Related to the Rohingya case, the elite Army plays a role to mobilize the violence through recognizing that Rohingya people are the "impure" community in the state. Here, the regime saw the issue of impurity as an opportunity to reduce population. Indeed, Buddhist-Muslim violence is nothing new in Myanmar, especially in Rakhine (Kingsbury, 2015). It can be seen from the government statement when other entities ask of the solution for refugee camps or deportation. President Thein Sein emphasizes that Rohingya people were unacceptable in Myanmar. His comments in Radio Free Asia (2013), states that they take responsibility for their own ethnics and because Rohingya were not authentically their ethnic, it was

impossible to endure them legally (Caballero-Anthony, 2015).

There are two approaches to understand the Buddhist in how they are involved in the violence; that are primordialists and constructivist perspective. But this hypothesis has also been influenced from the history of relationships between Buddhist and Rohingya just as how Burmese-Buddha has ruled for centuries imposing the Rohingya. Aside from the historical background, cultural reasons also play an important role. If cultural reasons cause the construction of "us and them," which is very clear to differentiate Rohingya Muslim and Rakhine Buddhist, then it is indeed an important factor that depicts and influences the course of history for Rohingya people in Myanmar continuously.

The Buddhist practices its religion as a Burmese religion for centuries so that it has a strong influence in the Burmese culture. Although the government changed the name of Burma into Myanmar, the identity was already embraced by the whole nation. Since there is an imbalance between majority and minority, the Buddhist culture becomes a reflection of their basic culture. They feel insecure and fearful that the minority will change the Buddhist culture.

On the other hand, according to the historical background in during the British colonial, Rohingya Muslims owns legal administration since they were loyal to the British colony. They have an opportunity in economic, social status, and education. They have a position in the government and this continues in the U Nu regime until coup d'état by the junta military in 1962. Historically, they came to Arakan as traders and soldiers, most are notably from Arab, Mongol, Turkish, Portuguese, and Bengali. When Arakan was Bengal's feudatory in the 15th century, Rohingya converted to Islam and developed their own distinct culture and art (Jonassohn & Björnson, 1998). The Rohingya community has the skills needed to develop their own economic ability or thorough education but because they are "stateless," they do not have the opportunity and are powerless. On the other hand, the Rakhine Buddhist already has an opportunity to restore their socio-economic because they have obtained official citizenship. However, when Rakhine Buddhists opted violence, it seems that they are defending their nationalism, but unfortunately Rohingya could not do the same way, because they have either no state or "nationalism."

An Overview: Islam in Myanmar

Muslim in Myanmar was not dominated by the ethnic of Rohingya, there some ethnics involved as well. However, the antagonistic relationship between Rohingya Muslim and Buddhist Rakhine has never been in peace. Serial conflicts record that ethnical conflict between Burmese with Buddhists as a majority and other immigrant, such as Indians, does happen. Sub-ethnics such as Mon and Karen, as mentioned previously, have also become victims in the Burmese conflict, and many among of them are Muslims.

It is significant since Buddhists in Myanmar has not been in the conflict with other Muslim community with Chinese descendant –Chinese Muslim that comes from Yunan, a border area between China and Myanmar in the west. Most of them come to Burma as traders, breeders and refugees in the post-Panthay revolution (1856-1873). Under the Manchu government in Myanmar, this Chinese Muslims then are well-known as *Panthay*

or Hui in the Chinese language. According to Naw Lily Kadoe in her writing entitled *Ulama, State, and Politics in Myanmar*, as cited in Yegar (1972), this tribe easily assimilates with the local community and is be able to keep their identity as Muslims.

On the other hand, the arrival of Indians under the British government had caused an increasing number of Muslim population in Myanmar. Previously, the Muslim population in this state is small, passive and loyal to the king of Burma. Yet, the coming of Indian immigrants have doubled the population and with the increasing number of mosque and school based on Islamic education constructions (Yegar, 1972). The scale of ethnical conflict between Indian Muslims and Burmese Buddhists increases in the post-World War I, that is in the 1930 and 1938 which happens due to the fight for jobs in Rangoon (Yangon) (Kadou, 2015).

Analyzing conflict in Myanmar is not an easy task, but serial historical factors with violence over Muslim Rohingya is showing that ethical conflict is not new, it was rooted on their historical relationship. Through short explanation, we can analyze what Buddhists' relationship with the Muslim minority in Myanmar looks like. However, it cannot be generally concluded that the Buddhist-Muslim relationship in Myanmar is worse because, in several cases, anti-Muslim sentiment happens in Rakhine due the ethnicity of Rohingya, and the conflict has also happened outside Rakhine.

There are some hypotheses that can be drawn by looking at this problem; first is that conflicts happening between Buddhist Rakhine and Muslim Rohingya is motivated through economic-politic and social variables. Second, is that the conflict between the two had created bigger religious conflicts crossing ethnicity. It had happened due to fear over wide distribution of Muslim power and the possibility of a scrapped Buddhist position, which still needs to be proved. Third is that conflict over Buddhist Rakhine and Muslim Rohingya is considered completely as an ethnical conflict, but it has much to do with a religion. For the example, their rejection over Rohingya without mentioning Islam as the religious attribute. Fourth is the limited information of conflict regarding the relationship between Buddhist Burmese and ethnic Hui (Panthay) as minority. Meaning the closeness between Rakhine and Hui could be viewed as ethnical intimacy, both of which came from Mongoloid race. Yet, it could be also interpreted that the ethnic of Hui could adopt the local culture better compared with Bengali Muslim (Rohingya) and Indians.

Path for Harmony

Although it is not easy and there is still no win-win solution acquired between Buddhist Rakhine and Muslim Rohingya, many efforts had already been shown to reconcile the parties. Indeed, this issue had grabbed international attention, either from the Muslim countries or non-Muslim countries. International respond over the conflicts in Myanmar, especially in the northern Rakhine State is a movement for global humanitarian crisis.

Since the crisis happened in the 2012, 57 counties affiliated in the Organization of Islam Cooperation (OIC) condemned genocide over Rohingya Muslim in Myanmar, as what happened in the summit meeting in Mecca, Augusts 2012 (Kadoe, 2015). In the other side, Myanmar government invited the state representatives and UN to see the actual reality that is happening in the Rakhine

State. Indeed, this decision also emerges a serial of protests especially from Buddhists in several areas of conflicts, such as Yanggon, Meiktila, Lashio in the northern Shan State.

A couple years before in 2011, Adli Abdullah, the leader of the International Concern Group on Rohingya (ICGR) in Malaysia, hoped that the Rohingya issue could be discussed in the ASEAN Summit while several parliaments from Southeast Asian countries still intensively conducted the dialogue to solve the issue of Rohingya. They urge ASEAN to include this issue as the main agenda of the ASEAN summit in Malaysia on 26-27 April 2015. However, this effort still has an obstacle, because Myanmar considers the issue of Rohingya as a domestic matter and ASEAN has no right to interfere this issue. Even if there are many Rohingya refugees residing in ASEAN countries, particularly in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand.

Later, on 20th of May 2015, the Foreign Ministers of three ASEAN countries, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand conducts a meeting in Kuala Lumpur to discuss joint solutions and the resolving of regional issues (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). This Meeting also aims to find a comprehensive solution involving the country of origin, transit, and goals through the principle of burden sharing and shared responsibility. This is necessary to prevent the issue of irregular migrants for it not to evolve into a humanitarian crisis in Southeast Asia.

Furthermore, in the meeting with the Ministry of External Affair of ASEAN in Yangon December 2016, the Minister from Malaysia, Anifah Aman, demands for full humanitarian access in the conflict area. It made Malaysia as the ASEAN country that initiates involvement into the issue. Indeed, Malaysia also reports to give emergency support for Rohingya Muslim refugees in February 2017. It is recorded that since the humanitarian crisis happened in 2012, many Rohingya refugees have been escaping to Southern Malaysia.

Likewise, Malaysia and Indonesia as the largest Muslim populations in Asia have also been supporting the refugees in the same way. Recently, refugees of Rohingya community receives accommodation and hospitality in Aceh before they depart to Australia to gain asylum. Indonesia is also the only state allowed by the Myanmar government to enter the Rakhine region to provide humanitarian assistance to Rohingya refugees when the crisis still occurred. The Indonesian government through the Ministry for External Affairs has been doing diplomacy in resolving conflict as well as giving humanitarian aids for Rohingya Muslims. Thus, international demand for harmony cannot be well-achieved without internal effort from Myanmar government per se.

The wining of National League for Democracy (NLD), pioneered by Aung San Suu Kyi in the general election 2015 had previously seen as bringing a hope for religious freedom and sectarian conflict. In contrary, wining does not give a significant contribution to religion harmony. Indeed, Aung San Suu Kyi intents to limit international intervene for resolving the problem of Rohingya Muslim and Buddhist Rakhine. Furthermore, the appointment of Htin Kyaw in the parliament (2016) gives no significant changes due to his loyalty towards Aung San Suu Kyi. Thus, the harmony is located on the government's ability in handling militaristic regime. At least, the president from civil society could be a new hope for

Myanmar after many years of militaristic controlling regime.

While, international sympathy over this case is still going on. In the prior December 2016, there are fourteen countries, among them are Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, and the United States. These countries imposed Myanmar government in allowing them to give aids for Rohingya Muslims (The New York Times, 2016). It is related to the UN report portraying the increasing number of humanitarian crisis in that area. However, the amount of aid especially in food is still limited. There are 20,000 people from 150,000 refugees who got food. This tragedy was reported by Pierre Péron, a spokesperson of UN for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Basically, the problem of Rohingya Muslim is not an easy task to be solved, it is due to historical complexity that has been happening for a long while. In other words, a conflict between Rohingya Muslim and Buddhist Rakhine is not merely a temporary response; it is rooted happened many years, across generation and remaining into the present.

Conclusion

It is believed that Rohingya is a legacy from British colonial policies that are trapped in a misfortunate situation. Historically, Rohingya were leaving their ancestors to migrate into Rakhine State during the British colonial period and was called by most non-Rohingya people as Bengali Muslim. The official view of the Myanmar Government is that all Rohingya people are illegal immigrants from Bengal (present day Bangladesh) and the government does not address Muslim migration under British rule (Gibson, 2016). Otherwise, according to historian and it is mostly believed by Rohingya people, they argued that their ancestors were not only coming from East Bengal, but also from different Muslim countries. They were not coming to Rakhine State during the British colonial period but over hundred years earlier before. Rohingya people has heavily rooted in Rakhine, the definition of Rohingya people identity seems difficult to be explained. Hence, the Rohingya people itself as an ethnic identity is still debatable.

The conflict in Rakhine based on the primordialists and constructivist perspectives also could be explained based on historical context which states that for centuries the Burma Kingdom did invade Rohingya to get Arakan. After Arakan was a part of Burma Kingdom, this land since then belongs to them. In the 17th century, when Arakan was under the British rule, Rohingya was protected until the Britain colony left the country in 1948. Post-British rule, the Muslims' peacefulness in Arakan changes into conflict with the Buddhists. Indeed, since 1962, the junta military has oppressed Rohingya Muslims and played a significant role in the movement to expel Rohingya from the Myanmar state. The case of Rohingya currently has found a new stage and it is a concerned as an issue related to humanitarian disaster in Southeast Asia. This issue becomes more complex because the conflict involves not only ethnic-religious, but also economic, social and political aspects. However, the conflict between the Buddhist and Rohingya community is very complicated and its resolution is not easy. The international communities are continuing their efforts to negotiate with junta military to give more accesses to Rohingya and to know about what happened in Rakhine as a part of humanitarian activities.

About the Author

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