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## Rohingya: The History of a Muslim Identity in Myanmar



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### Summary and Keywords

The name *Rohingya* denotes an ethnoreligious identity of Muslims in North Rakhine State, Myanmar (formerly Burma). The term became part of public discourse in the late 1950s and spread widely following reports on human rights violations against Muslims in North Rakhine State during the 1990s, and again after 2012. Claims for regional Muslim autonomy emerged during World War II and led to the rise of a Rohingya ethnonationalist movement that drew on the local Muslim *imaginaire*, as well as regional history and archaeology. To explore the historical roots of distinctive identity claims and highlight Buddhist-Muslim tensions, one must reach back to the role of Muslims in the precolonial Buddhist kingdom of Arakan and their demographic growth during the colonial period. Civic exclusion and state harassment under Burma's authoritarian regimes (1962–2011) put a premature end to political hopes of ethnic recognition, and yet hastened a process of shared identity formation, both in the country and among the diaspora. Since the 1970s, refugees and migrants turned to Bangladesh, the Middle East, and Southeast Asian countries, forming a transnational body of Rohingya communities that reinvented their lives in various political and cultural contexts. A succession of Rohingya nationalist organizations—some of whom were armed—had negligible impact but kept the political struggle alive along the border with Bangladesh. Although Rohingya nationalists failed to gain recognition among ethnic and religious groups in Burma, they have attracted increasing international acknowledgment. For postdictatorial Myanmar (after 2011), the unresolved Rohingya issue became a huge international liability in 2017, when hundreds of thousands fled to Bangladesh following military operations widely interpreted as ethnic cleansing. In December 2017, the United Nations' high commissioner for human rights acknowledged that elements of genocide may be occurring.

Keywords: Arakan, Rakhine state, ethnonationalism, Rohingya, Burma, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Pakistan, state oppression, refugees

### Exploring the Discourse on Rohingyas

In the late 1950s, Muslim leaders and students in North Arakan (officially known as Rakhine State since 1989) began to use the term *Rohingya* to assert a distinct ethnoreligious identity for the region's Muslim community, as distinct from its majority Buddhist population, to which the term *Rakhine* usually refers.<sup>1</sup> In the early 1960s, Muslim authors of Rohingya pamphlets were keenly aware of how novel their chosen appellation was for the Burmese public at the time. The use of the name spread widely in the international media after riots in Rakhine State in 2012, when Rohingyas became widely known internationally as a state-oppressed Muslim minority.<sup>2</sup> The term *Rohingya* embodies an ongoing process of identity formation that has unified Muslim communities in the North Arakan region with a similar cultural profile, but a diverse historical background; at the same time, Myanmar officials reject *Rohingya* as an ethnic denomination, as they reject the legitimacy of the postcolonial Rohingya movement of political emancipation, aiming at the creation of an autonomous Muslim area in North Arakan.<sup>3</sup>

Following the Myanmar census of 2014, the number of Rohingyas has been estimated at more than 1 million, living mainly in the three townships of Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung situated along the border with Bangladesh, where they form a heavily concentrated third of Rakhine State's total population of more than 3 million. Another million live outside Myanmar. Migration backgrounds vary. Most are refugees and have lived with semilegal and illegal identities in Bangladesh and the Middle East. In Myanmar, they cannot refer to themselves as "Rohingyas"; yet in the diaspora, they may also be denied "Rohingya" as an official appellation, or rather, they choose to hide their origin to escape public attention.

The majority population of Rakhine State consists of Buddhist Rakhine (or Arakanese), who are ethnically close to the Bamar (Burmans). The ethnocultural tensions between the Arakanese and the Rohingya on the one hand, and state policies of exclusion on the other, have been drivers of a lasting and violent conflict that reaches back to the late colonial period. From the 1980s onward, Myanmar's military and authoritarian state governments have described Rohingyas as a political and demographic threat and have increasingly deprived Rohingyas of their civic rights.

Anthropological field work investigating the Rohingyas as a culturally distinctive Muslim community is rare, and the access to essential information and documentation is limited. Background information in the media after 2012 has been mainly based on Rohingya public presentations of their own identity, although extant sources suggest a history of multilayered communities and the formation of a Rohingya ethnopolitical movement as a response to political and social challenges after 1948. At its origins, the Rohingya identity claims can be understood in a narrative context that includes the simultaneous rise of Rakhine Buddhist nationalism in the 1950s, and later, the political oppression and impoverishment that constrained the lives of both Buddhists and Muslims between 1962

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and 2011. Like most terms denoting social identity, *Rohingya* is an unstable signifier, potentially pointing to various features of signification. Today, that term clearly operates inside a historical process of ethnification among Muslims in Rakhine State. In addition, in the early 21st century, worldwide media reports have signified the Rohingyas as being stateless victims of systematic oppression, whose refugee status and disenfranchisement are defining elements of their public identity.

Although the ethnoreligious tensions in Arakan had remained a marginal issue for decades, in the early 21st century, the worldwide media reports on the Rohingyas transformed the case of their de facto statelessness into a cause célèbre in both Western and Muslim countries. Descriptions of the Rohingyas, therefore, must take into account the global media image of the “plight of the stateless Rohingyas.”<sup>4</sup> Myanmar’s state security services have reinforced such an image through their disenfranchisement and systematic oppression of the Rohingya people. Nevertheless, there is a tendency in the media to present these matters as if they were the only acceptable way in which to discuss the group. Although legal approaches grounded in activist agendas are significant, other aspects of these important and complicated issues merit further investigation.

The article has five sections. The first, “Muslims in Early Modern and Colonial Arakan,” presents a historical background from the early modern to the colonial period, focusing on the role of Muslims at the time of the Buddhist monarchy and after the Burmese (1784) and British (1826) conquests. The second section, “The Rise of a Muslim Nationalist Movement,” presents the political awakening of the North Arakan Muslims after World War II and the rise of the Rohingyas as an ethnopolitical movement in the late 1950s. It is followed by “Muslim *Imaginaire* and Rohingya Ideology,” an examination of the Rohingya concepts and ideas drawn from a Muslim *imaginaire*, as well as local history and archaeology. The fourth section, “Toward a Regime of Civic Exclusion and State Harassment,” traces the record of Rohingya civic exclusion and state harassment under Burma’s authoritarian regimes. Following an increased awareness of the humanitarian crisis in Rakhine State, the globalization of the Rohingya cause after 2012 has cast new light on the worldwide Rohingya diaspora, as discussed in the fifth section, “Rohingya Diaspora and the Globalization of a Muslim Minority Cause.” Rather than a monolithic body of refugees, it appears as a transnational group of communities that have reinvented their lives in various geographical and political contexts. A final section, “Research Challenges,” will specify some of the issues concerning research hinted at in this introduction.

### Muslims in Early Modern and Colonial Arakan

Arakan is a strip of coastal plains, mangrove marshlands, and river valleys that connects Bangladesh to the deltaic landscape of Lower Myanmar. Shut off from the Irrawaddy Valley to the east by a hinterland of steep forest-covered hills, it runs in a north-south direction along the eastern Bay of Bengal. The early modern Buddhist kingdom of Arakan had its own independent history centered on Mrauk U, an inland urban site overlooking the fertile Kaladan and Lemro valleys. At the margins of South and Southeast Asia, it borders on Muslim Bengal and Buddhist Burma. The presence of more than a million Buddhists in Bangladesh's Chittagong Division and more than a million Muslims in North Rakhine State in the early 21st century underscores a complex ethnoreligious setting. Inner cultural and ethnic frontiers overlap but rarely converge with the political borders of the postcolonial nation-states.

History of Arakan/Rakhine State is at the heart of the ethnic claims that the Rohingya raised in the 1950s, but precolonial history did not predict the contemporary ethnocultural conflicts and economic rivalries. Sources testify to a patchwork of Muslim presence since the early modern period. In the 15th century, the use of Muslim titles by Arakanese kings and inscribed coins suggests that the Bengal sultanate had a cultural impact on the court elite of Mrauk U. The cult of Sufi saints, venerated as the protectors of sailors and a resident community of Muslim traders, is also attested. Arakan's territorial expansion in the 16th century led to the conquest of Chittagong, Bengal's prosperous port ruled by Muslim lords since the 14th century. Until 1666, Chittagong's Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist populations were part of the Arakanese realm and a pillar of its economic power.<sup>5</sup>

The systematic deportation of Bengali country folk supplied personnel for the court, notably to till the royal lands around Mrauk U. It also fed a thriving slave trade. Local men likely served in the royal navy, which successfully resisted Burmese and Mughal attempts to crush Arakan's coastal hegemony. The percentage of Muslims in the general population must have varied considerably. Western sources suggest a complex picture of the Muslim population, with privileged members serving at the court, a bigger group of bonded labor, and a community of Muslim merchants from around the Indian Ocean.<sup>6</sup> The linguistic traces of Arab and Persian in Arakan Muslims' eastern Bengali dialects point to these multifaceted contacts. With his works in Bengali embedding Persian narratives in Sanskrit poetic forms, the poet Alaol stands out as an eminent representative of the Muslim elite at the Arakanese court.<sup>7</sup>

When the kingdom's political star waned in the late 17th century, most of the traders left. Arakan became a regional backwater. Muslim guards were still playing a prominent role in removing and installing kings, but the region earned a dismal reputation as a pirates' nest.

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When the Burmese conquered Arakan in late 1784, they deported leading Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu families from Mrauk U and resettled them in the capital, Amarapura. An Arakanese Muslim was appointed head of the kingdom's Muslim community. Traces of Mrauk U's deported Muslim elite were lost in the late 19th century. In 1795, during a residence of several months in the Burmese capital, Francis Buchanan, a British physician, noted the peculiar language of the Arakanese Muslims, who referred to their place of origin and their own language as "Roonga," designating Arakan in their own tongue.<sup>8</sup> The term, an obvious forerunner of the modern word *Rohingya*, was never used as an ethnic category by British administrators, most likely because Muslims themselves did not use it as an ethnonym. Since the rediscovery of Buchanan's 1799 article in the early 21st century, however, his mention of "Roonga" has been quoted as proof of the existence of an indigenous Muslim ethnic community, to be referred to retrospectively as "Rohingya."<sup>9</sup> A more discerning approach is nonetheless advisable, taking into account the much later and specific postcolonial context.

Several years after the conquest of Arakan, forced labor and deportations pushed tens of thousands of people, including local Muslims, into Bengal, crossing the Naf River, which had been the border since the time of Mughal rule and Rakhine kings. After 1799, the East India Company resettled many of the displaced in a location that took the name of its founder, Hiram Cox: Cox's Bazar, now a Bangladeshi seaside resort. Incursions led by Arakan's exiled chiefs provoked Burmese reprisals, which had a detrimental impact on British-Burmese relations between 1811 and 1815 and, among other reasons, led to the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824–1826). A 19th-century missionary described the Muslim refugees as a bilingual group that adopted Arakanese dress, food habits, and customs and differed from the Buddhists only by its religion and language. They integrated into the host society more easily than the Arakanese.<sup>10</sup>

The percentage of the Muslims in the total population of Arakan at the time of the British conquest has been discussed amid some controversy. Charles Paton's assessment, stating that 30 percent of the total population was Muslim when the British took control in 1825, was based on T. C. Robertson's preliminary inquiries.<sup>11</sup> This estimate is questionable because it could signify a decline of the Muslim population during the following decades. Census reports in 1869 and 1870 put the share of the Muslim population at 5 percent.<sup>12</sup> Paton's estimates most likely reflect the fact that Muslims had a strong presence in those places where British administrators became active (namely, North Arakan, Akyab, and Mrauk U). The context further suggests that Muslims proficient in several languages played a significant role as informers since 1823, when the British started to prepare for an invasion of Burma.<sup>13</sup> The theory that Buddhist-Muslim communalism became a driver of social disintegration in the country since the early 19th century seems doubtful as, unlike today, the precolonial sociopolitical order prioritized functional rather than ethnic belonging.<sup>14</sup>

Rapid demographic and economic changes took place after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The new maritime corridor acted as a powerful stimulus for the export of rice and conditioned a growing demand for labor. Chittagonians came massively for the

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seasonal work, but many settled permanently in the country. The seasonal moves were recorded only partially by the colonial administration, while the rapid increase of the newly resident Muslims was documented in the census reports of 1881, 1891, 1911, 1921, and 1931. Between 1881 and 1941, the percentage of the Muslim population grew steadily, reaching 27 percent of the total.<sup>15</sup>

Paying close attention to the linguistic, religious, and ethnic classifications in British census reports and their changes over the decades is essential to any discussion about the mixed Muslim population. The criteria that prevailed in the first reports were religious identity (“Muslim”) and linguistic group (“Bengali”). This division of the majority of the population into a predominantly Arakanese-speaking Buddhist group and a Bengali-speaking Muslim group fused the old (pre-1785) Arakan Muslim community with the post-1826 arrivals and the latest wave of new migrants from Chittagong Division. The 1921 and 1931 censuses, however, differentiated among these two (and other smaller) Muslim groups. Members of the reputedly old Muslim community were referred to as “Arakan Mahomedans,” according to their wish, and put into a newly created racial category of “Indo-Burman” (numbering 51,615 in 1931), while the larger, but relatively recent, Muslim community was called “Chittagonians” (numbering 252,152) and was racially classified as “Indians.”<sup>16</sup> Detailed information about how these two groups progressively merged is lacking, but regional and political differences persisted until the early 1960s, and probably beyond.

Chittagonian migrant labor and their descendants formed 80 percent of the total Muslim population. In 1931, three-quarters of them had already been born in Arakan, but they were perceived as foreigners, with no deep roots in the country.<sup>17</sup> The next section will describe how the political mobilization of the Muslims of North Arakan led to the birth of the Rohingya movement.

# Rise of a Muslim Nationalist Movement, 1942-1964

There is no available information on social, religious, or politically active Muslim organizations in North Arakan during the colonial period.<sup>18</sup> A council of religious teachers (*Jam'iyyat ul-Ulama*), created in Maungdaw in 1936, became politically active only in the aftermath of World War II. The date of its foundation was nonetheless a crucial moment, as Burma separated from India in 1937 and obtained its own constitution and greater political autonomy.

The political awakening of the Muslims of North Arakan took place during the war, following the Japanese invasion of Burma in 1942. The arrival of the Japanese triggered an exodus of more than 400,000 Indians fleeing from Burma to India, many of them crossing Arakan to reach Bengal. In Central Arakan, the collapse of the colonial order in late March and April 1942 included advances by troops of the anticolonial Burma Independence Army (BIA), who preceded Japanese troops. BIA cadres and Arakanese Buddhists attacked Muslim villages whose inhabitants were driven away or killed in Minbya, Myebon, Pauktaw, and other townships. Reportedly, 20,000 Muslims—with later sources stating much higher figures—fled to the north and farther on, to India. In retaliation, Arakanese Buddhists were attacked in the predominantly Muslim townships of Maungdaw and Buthidaung and fled south. These events, which were never thoroughly investigated, led to diverging stories of injustice and victimhood, and fueled bitterness. Efforts by local Arakanese and Muslim headmen and administrators to put an end to the violence were sidelined in later narratives.<sup>19</sup>

For three years (1942–1945), Burma's Arakan Division was partitioned, with the Japanese in control of the mainly Buddhist areas and the British army entrenched in the north with the support of local Muslim recruits. Rivaling Muslim township leaders acted as *de facto* political entrepreneurs and created so-called peace committees, which maintained their allegiance to the British. After Burma's independence in 1948, North Arakan Muslim leaders from Maungdaw stated that the Muslims of Arakan were an indigenous population and natives of the country. The purpose of this ethnic claim, made in requests to British and Burmese authorities in 1947 and 1948, was primarily to gain political autonomy. The British and the Burmese authorities dismissed the request, while the local Buddhist population resented the politically vocal Muslims.

The creation of the Pakistan-Burma border produced a new reality along the Naf River, where people had been moving back and forth with few restrictions for centuries. The North Arakan Muslim leaders were divided about the course that their community should take. Some favored joining Pakistan but failed to obtain the support of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Pakistan's first governor general, in 1946. Others put their hopes in the British government that they had supported against the Japanese. Informal promises for an



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exclusive Muslim zone, apparently made by military officers during the war, were never backed up by any official British commitments.<sup>20</sup>

In early 1947, the *Jam'iyyat ul-Ulama* of Maungdaw pleaded for recognition of North Arakan as a frontier zone, a request immediately denied on the grounds that there was no historical foundation for such a status. In 1948, the *Jam'iyyat ul-Ulama* also approached the Burmese government with a similar request for an autonomous Muslim zone, displaying a powerful sense of political self-confidence. They firmly stated that Muslims formed an indigenous group with historical roots, and yet also had a troubled relationship with their Arakanese Buddhist neighbors, so a split-up was necessary. Nonetheless, requests to introduce sharia law, as well as Urdu as a language of education, bolstered the reputation of North Arakan Muslims being separatists at heart, despite avowals of being law-abiding citizens devoted to the Union.<sup>21</sup> It is this line of thought and self-affirmation that marked the beginning of the peculiar form of Muslim subnationalism that characterized the Rohingya movement in the 1950s.

In 1949, Burma was in a state of civil war, with the government and the army besieged by ethnic rebels in Rangoon, Burma's capital, and threatened by more nationalist and communist insurrections throughout the country. In North Arakan, the outbreak of the Mujahid insurrection (1948–1961) can be attributed to the violent exactions of local militias, the dissatisfaction of local landlords, the unfair treatment of Muslims by Arakanese administrators, and murky business conflicts. The Mujahid allegedly claimed to fight for an autonomous Muslim area, but even modern Rohingyas have rarely invoked the Mujahids as model fighters for a national cause. Not only did they attack security forces, but they terrorized the local population, too. They were accused of bringing illegal migrants from East Pakistan to Arakan and controlling rice-smuggling networks. Annual campaigns by the army disabled their military capacity up to 1954, and yet the last rebels surrendered only in 1961.<sup>22</sup>

Conservative political leaders chose parliamentary politics to further their own ambitions and Muslim interests. Arakan Muslim candidates participated in the elections of 1947, 1951, 1956, and 1960. Four of five Arakan Muslim representatives at the Constituent Assembly of 1947 were elected as members of the *Jam'iyyat ul-Ulama*. In the 1951 Charter of the Constitutional Demands of the Arakani Muslims, Muslim leaders unsuccessfully reiterated their requests.<sup>23</sup> Yet the appointment of Sultan Mahmud, a wealthy town notable and head of the Arakan Muslim Association, as minister of health in 1956 appeared to be the result of pragmatic Muslim politics. Facing the strident calls of the Arakan National Union Organization (ANUO) for the creation of an ethnic Arakan state, Prime Minister U Nu allied himself with Sultan Mahmud against the Arakanese nationalists.<sup>24</sup>

At the same time, a younger generation of unsatisfied Arakan Muslims pushed for a more affirmative posture on their acclaimed identity and Muslim autonomy. The choice and widespread adoption of a common name, *Rohingya*, created a decisive but also

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contentious moment. Importantly, it gave Muslim nationalists a likeness of unity that they had lacked throughout the 1950s.<sup>25</sup>

The discussion of how to spell the name continued for years, coming to an end only around 1963. *Rwangya* had briefly circulated among members of the old Arakanese Muslim community in the late 1940s to distinguish themselves from the later migrants. Its use shifted ten years later, when Chittagonians were referred to as “Rwangyas” to differentiate them from illegal migrants from East Pakistan. In Burmese and English sources, one can find various spellings, such as *Rowannhyas*, *Rawengya*, *Royankya*, or *Rohinjas*, and *Ruhangya*.<sup>26</sup> In his early articles, Mohammed A. Tahir Ba Tha, the father of Rohingya Muslim history, preferred *Roewengyas*, using the now-orthodox *Rohingyas* only since 1963.<sup>27</sup>

Quoting these variants is not a superfluous point. They show that the term had not been put into writing previously, but rather was in oral use among people who pronounced it differently and still were unsure about how to spell it. Although historical linguistics can explain its derivation from *Ra(k)khanga*, a literary Pali term, nonscientific etymologies have flourished, linking *Rohingya* to Arabic words and even Arakanese expressions. Certainly, it was not an invention, but with its adoption by a group of tightly knit nationalists, it was instantly impregnated with the group’s political messages. Sultan Mahmud disagreed. He may have shared the political objectives of the younger nationalist generation, but he remained opposed to the choice of a distinctive yet divisive ethnonym to denote the Arakan Muslim community.

The *Jam’iyyat ul-Ulama*, based in Maungdaw adopted the name *Rohing[y]a* at an unspecified date, while five new organizations including the term in their name were founded between 1956 and 1960 in Rangoon (United Rohingya Organization, Rohingya Youth Organization, Rohingya Students Organization, Rohingya Labour Organization, and Rohingya Rangoon University Students Organization).<sup>28</sup> The early development of the Rohingyas as a movement of young educated Muslim nationalists was driven by the political requirements of the day. When U Nu won the 1960 parliamentary elections, he was prepared to grant Arakan statehood within the Union. This led to “frantic activities” by the Muslims around Sultan Mahmud and the Rohingya organizations.<sup>29</sup> Sultan Mahmud’s Arakan Muslim Organisation ultimately was ready to compromise and accept the creation of an Arakan state if the Muslims were given religious, cultural, economic, political, and educational guarantees.<sup>30</sup>

The *Jam’iyyat ul-Ulama* also gave detailed conditions under which it was ready to accept an Arakan state. But the creation of that state was still perceived by Rohingya leaders as a bad political option, as it implied the risk that North Arakan Muslims had to coexist with the Arakanese under an unsympathetic administration controlled by Buddhists. In 1960 and 1961, Rohingya speakers expressed widespread opposition. Yet it was not the Rohingyas, but rather the military putsch of March 2, 1962, that spoiled Arakanese Buddhist expectations. The Arakan state did not come into existence before 1974.

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In the short run, the Muslims were the political winners. In early May 1961, following months of consultation, U Nu's government created the special Mayu Frontier Administration (MFA) to satisfy Muslim demands. It included the areas dominated by Muslims (i.e., Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and a part of Rathedaung township). The surrender of the last few hundred Mujahids in July and November 1961 hailed a return to political stability in the region, and it went with an official declaration by the deputy chief of defense, Brigadier General Aung Gyi, recognizing the Rohingyas as an ethnic group despite the relatively recent adoption of this name. The Rohingya leadership in Maungdaw saw the creation of the MFA as the beginning of a "new era" and an explicit recognition of Rohingya ethnic claims.<sup>31</sup>

Yet while the MFA, run by army officers in Rangoon, offered a separate status, it was hardly the type of self-administration for which the Muslims had fought. The MFA looked rather like an administrative refashioning of the Frontier Areas Administration (FAA), created by General Ne Win during his caretaker regime (1958–1960). The FAA should have improved the economic and social development of the region, but primarily it extended the army's sway over an ill-controlled border region seen as a hideout for rebels and smugglers and an open gate for migrants from Pakistan. The border agreement with Pakistan concluded in 1961 had a similar purpose. In 1964, two years after the putsch, the MFA was reintegrated into the Akyab (now Sittway) district by General Ne Win's administration.

Although the MFA died an early death, the ideas and motives of the Rohingya organizations did not. Having emerged as a group of political enthusiasts who competed with the pragmatism of the older generation of Muslim notables, the Rohingyas were nonetheless more than a radical movement. Unlike their predecessors, who had brought to mind historical nostalgia and war memories to demonstrate their Muslim roots and prowess, the Rohingyas stepped up efforts in English-language (and less so in Burmese-language) media to inspire their movement with a set of core beliefs. By fusing their ethnic identity claims with their political goals and a record of the past, they attempted to mirror the causes of other ethnic minority groups who were looking for recognition and a state of their own within the Union. Such was the case of the ethnic Mon, and more visibly the loathed Arakanese Buddhist nationalists, who struggled for increased rights and autonomy qua their ethnic status, too. Defining themselves as a distinctive ethnic group within the Union and transforming the local Muslim *imaginaire* into an exclusive ideology, the Rohingyas set the Muslims of North Arakan apart from other Muslim groups in the country.

### **Muslim *Imaginaire* and Rohingya Ideology**

North Arakan's Muslim leaders believed that the best way to escape a Buddhist-dominated administration would be to obtain a separate status for the area, in which Muslims would form a majority. Yet their vision of territorial autonomy and cultural self-expression was not inclusive, as it disregarded the voices of other Muslim communities in Arakan. They cut across this diversity by defining an encompassing Muslim identity called *Rohingya*, which included the majority of Muslims in past and present Arakan—with the sole exception of the tiny Kaman minority, which had its own genealogy harking to the 17th century. By drawing on colonial authors who referred to Portuguese and Dutch sources containing information about the economic and political roles of Muslims in the Mrauk U kingdom, the Bengali literary heritage of Mrauk U's 17th-century court, and legendary stories, Rohingya writers imagined a historical Muslim community that they tried to condense into a coherent historical account.

The novel Rohingya narrative was enabled by two instances of intellectual production: first, the appraisal of the Muslim heritage in Arakan by colonial authors; and second, the efforts of two Arakanese Muslims who endorsed Arakan's traditional Islam by embedding it into a historical Burmese context. In the late 1940s, Muhammad Khalilur Rahman's *Tarikh-i-Islam: Arakan aur Burma* (1944) and Azadi G. Hasan's *Qaum-i-halat-i-musulmanane Burma wa Rakhine* (1946), both written in Urdu, linked the Arakanese Muslims with the history of Burma's Muslims for the first time.<sup>32</sup>

The historical approach of the Rohingya was entirely different, as they promoted the Rohingya identity as one of Muslims in Arakan on the basis not of a shared culture, but of a localized ethnicity. To do so, citing proof of relatively late source material appeared to be insufficient. An arrival of Arab and Persian ancestors in the first millennium CE, therefore, was derived from legendary stories, Muslim lore, and Arakanese chronicles. Later Rohingya writers argued that Rohingyas qualify as the descendants of the early inhabitants of the country, who used Sanskrit for their inscriptions, thus preceding the arrival of the ethnically Tibeto-Burman Arakanese. Such assertions have provoked the ire of Buddhists, whose religious self-identity is rooted in similar beliefs about Aryan ancestors.

For the Muslims of Arakan, the originality of the Rohingya narrative lay in its streamlined account of the past. Such an account did away with regional ethnic and cultural connections while lending ideological support to the Rohingyas' ethnic claims, which were meant to make them acceptable in Burma. These claims ultimately failed—but, since the late 1950s, the historical narrative generated by the Rohingyas has contributed to a dynamics of ethnification that has furthered a Muslim group identity in the face of the authoritarian military rule, as well as in the diaspora.

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Defining Rohingyas as an ethnic group that existed since antiquity was problematic, but it was posited as a historical certainty and saturated with the thick cultural meanings of an imagined collective past. In the 1950s, the Rohingyas were not fighting to be acknowledged as citizens, as the 1947 constitution indeed offered them access; rather, they wanted to be accepted as a national race (*taingyintha*) so that they could claim their own territory. Only acceptance as a native community could pave the road to a constitutional recognition of ethnicity and national belonging. As Nick Cheesman argues in his analysis of how the Rohingyas failed to be included in national races, “the surpassing symbolic and juridical power of *taingyintha* [national race] is at once their problem and their solution.”<sup>33</sup> By arguing from early on that they were a *taingyintha* population, the Rohingyas conformed to Burma’s postindependence citizenship paradigm (the “solution”), but they faced an insurmountable challenge: to base their argument on historical claims, which were rejected by the authoritarian regime and were exceedingly difficult to prove.

Despite a show of acceptance during the brief MFA period, neither the authoritarian Burmese governments since 1962 nor any ethnic communities were ready to recognize the Rohingyas as a native community. In the early 21st century, the concept of *taingyintha* became even more entrenched in political parlance and a clear divider between “us” and “them.” The detrimental effects of this political essentialization of ethnicity will be dealt with in the next section. The rest of this section will survey Rohingya historical writings, from their approach toward local Muslim history to their increasingly dogmatic turn.

Mohammad A. Tahir Ba Tha’s seminal *Short History of the Rohingyas and Kamans of Burma* (1963) rooted Rohingya historical identity in the first-millennium Hindu-Buddhist culture by interpreting a reference to a shipwreck of people from the west (*kala*) in an Arakanese Buddhist chronicle as evidence of the arrival of Arab and Persian traders.<sup>34</sup> This was an original claim made independently of reliable external knowledge about the spread of Islam in the Bay of Bengal.<sup>35</sup> Ba Tha further linked this appearance of Muslims to the foundation of Vesali. Yet the dating of Vesali, an early urban site in Arakan’s Kaladan Valley, remains uncertain, with scholarly estimates varying between the 4th and the 8th centuries CE. As he situated Rohingya roots within a distant past, Ba Tha connected the local Muslims to a prestigious Middle Eastern background and a well-known historical site in Arakan.

In the same vein, the assertion that Rohingyas were a mix of early Arabs and Persians with Afghans, Bengalis, Mughals, and other Muslims from around the Indian Ocean became part of a mainstream narrative that created new and untested cultural certainties. However, Rohingya writers did not include the most likely ethnic mix—namely, Arakanese-Bengali intermarriage—a fact noted in the British census records to explain the origins of the old Arakanese Muslim community.

Colonial scholarship on Arakan, though quite limited in its scope, provided another important input for Muslims to discover past identities. Arthur P. Phayre’s early work on Arakanese history and D. G. E. Hall’s exploration of Dutch sources pioneered an

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understanding of the social, economic, and political roles of Muslims in Arakan.<sup>36</sup> It also led some authors to overstate the role of the Muslims. In his *History of Arakan—Past and Present* (1994), Mohammed Yunus expressed the idea that the Mrauk U kingdom had virtually been a sultanate and suggested that Muslims had outnumbered the local Buddhists before the Burmese conquest of 1785.<sup>37</sup>

Neither Ba Tha nor those who followed him discussed the more recent history of Muslim communities. They disregarded the Chittagonian labor migrations and ignored the British census records. This effort to de-Indianize their recent ethnic credentials for political reasons left a huge narrative gap in Rohingya accounts between the end of the Arakanese monarchy in 1785 and the ethnic violence in 1942.

The political movement of the 1960s lost its traction when many educated Rohingyas left or were pushed out of Arakan in the 1970s. Since that time, the project of Rohingya self-representation and political struggle has been taken up largely by the diaspora in Bangladesh. The foundation of the Arakan Historical Society in Chittagong in 1975 marked a key moment of this transition. The writings of Mohammed Yunus, A. F. K. Jilani, and Mohammed Ashraf, produced in Bangladesh, subordinated the interpretation of the past to the militants' goal of restoring an autonomous Muslim area. Like the Rohingya refugees, however, the Rohingya rebels remained internationally isolated until the late 1990s. Neither Libya, nor Saudi Arabia, nor the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has provided substantial support.

The Rohingya Muslim narrative, starved of intellectual innovation in the meantime, contributed to the Rohingya militants' often-hyperbolic discourse from the 1960s to the 1990s. As the Bangladeshi historian Abdul Karim stated in 2000, even the definition of the Rohingyas sounds like a terse and bloodless article of faith: "The Rohingyas ... are descendants of those who have been settling there in Arakan from a thousand years before ... and above all ... form a homogeneous group."<sup>38</sup> In Myanmar, on the other hand, U Kyaw Min (aka Abu Anin), a Rohingya political leader, has tried to bring interpretations of Rohingya identity in line with the current state of historical knowledge.<sup>39</sup>

Myanmar state harassment and persecution, described in the next section, have become increasingly prominent themes around the world in public discourse concerning Rohingyas, and also in Rohingya self-representations of their own identity, reflecting their experience of torment and exclusion by the Myanmar government and their isolation from other groups in the country. That isolation has been further aggravated by Rohingya political efforts to portray their own community as being more unified internally than seems justified historically based on the available records.<sup>40</sup>

# Toward a Regime of Civic Exclusion and State Harassment

Burma/Myanmar's leaders and most of its inhabitants see their country as a historically shaped body of diverse people whose ethnicity determines their civic belonging. The Union Citizenship Act of 1948 defined national races as those groups that lived permanently in the country before the First Anglo-Burmese War (i.e., before 1824). This ethnicization of civic status is generally taken for granted and has not been contested by multiethnic group members. It is the political hegemony of the majority-Burman (Bamar) ethnic group that has led to decades of civil war between the government and ethnic minorities, not the inflexible principle that ethnic belonging primarily determines civic rights. Unlike other groups with a hybrid historical or ethnic status in the country (e.g., the Chinese in Kokang), the Rohingyas have been singled out for increasingly inequitable treatment by the state.

In light of those who argue that the 1982 citizenship law made the Rohingyas de jure stateless, Cheesman has shown that hundreds of thousands of Muslims were rendered stateless by a "deliberate breach and selective application" of the law when it was applied after 1989.<sup>41</sup> The argument that their denationalization was the result of a deliberate state policy has been advanced by Rohingyas for many years. In the 1950s, National Registration Cards (NRCs) were widely used as de facto proof of citizenship or nationality, but in the 1970s, North Arakan Muslims were no longer issued NRCs, and many NRCs were allegedly seized by the authorities. When a new citizenship regime was applied in the late 1980s, people had to relinquish their identity papers to obtain color-coded Citizenship Scrutiny Cards (CSCs), but after 1995, most Rohingyas were merely given Temporary Registration Cards (TRCs), the so-called white cards, certifying that they were *not* full citizens. These TRCs were cancelled in February 2015. In June 2015, new green cards were distributed to those people who were ready to be scrutinized for citizenship under conditions that denied them self-identification as Rohingyas. This brief chronology illustrates both the arbitrary nature of the state's treatment of Rohingyas and their bureaucratic exclusion from citizenship.

What forces have been driving this process on the side of the central state? Based on a long record of human rights violations, a plethora of motives, stretching from racism and Islamophobia over security concerns to accusations of illegal immigration, can be alleged to account for systematic discrimination. Yet although these factors definitely played into each other, none can explain the vicious turn of state policies by itself, and a response can only be tentative. As it was the army that assumed the task of supervising the border region after independence, a possible way to search for an answer is to try to understand army border policies. The foremost aim of the army was to establish efficient control of the border, prevent smuggling, and check cross-border movement. Friendship treaties and border demarcation agreements with Pakistan and Bangladesh were concluded over

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several decades to reach this objective. Neither Pakistan nor Bangladesh were perceived as strategic threats, and although there were occasionally serious tensions and violent incidents, efforts were made to settle border issues by negotiations.

Moreover, unlike in other regions at the country's periphery, the army did not face unsurmountable military challenges in Arakan. The Mujahids (1948–1961) and a succession of inconsequential Rohingya armed groups (1965–2005) did not drag the army into endless warfare as the Karen, Shan, and Kachin rebellions did. The political control of the region was eased by the presence of two rival groups, giving the state the opportunity to play the ambitions and interests of the Arakanese Buddhists against those of the Muslims. Arakan was an area of much lesser political concern for the army than the country's eastern periphery, bordering communist China. This situation at the western border prevailed until the mid-1970s. When the civil war in Bangladesh drove tens of thousands of refugees over the border, the Burmese government tolerated their presence at first, but it was wary that many would stay on, increasing the number of other illegal migrants that had reportedly settled in the rural countryside of North Arakan since independence.

In early 1978, shortly after the Burmese army's successful operations against Arakanese rebel groups, the government launched a campaign to arrest illegal migrants backed by security forces. It led to widespread panic in North Arakan's countryside and an exodus of nearly 200,000 people to Bangladesh. The Rohingya Patriotic Front (RPF), an armed organization, surmised that there was a premeditated plan to exterminate the Muslim community. Although most refugees were repatriated, thousands stayed in Bangladesh while many more moved to Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. There is little doubt that the experience at the country's western border had an impact on the formulation of the 1982 citizenship law, which enjoined people to apply once again for their citizenship. The law's anti-Arakan Muslim bias did not escape anyone's attention; shortly after, it led to the foundation of the Rohingya Solidarity Organization, an armed movement, in Bangladesh.<sup>42</sup>

In 1965, 300,000 Indians had left Burma following the nationalization of private businesses by General Ne Win, which entailed their exclusion from the country's economic and social life. The exodus had no direct impact on Arakan's mainly rural Muslim community. Nevertheless, Ne Win's socialist visions, which isolated the country economically and politically, along with his nationalist, Burman-centric state ideology and Buddhist rigidity, tilted public opinion toward anti-Indian prejudice. Already firmly anchored in the national consciousness since the late colonial period, the mistrust between the Buddhist and Muslim parts of the population was particularly deep in Arakan, offering state authorities the opportunity to exploit these tensions and resentment for their own advantage. Among the Burmese military, Bangladesh's population growth was perceived as a lasting threat to the thinly populated Arakan state.<sup>43</sup>



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In the early 1990s, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) regime, formerly the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), reasserted the presence of the army in the border region. Land confiscations for military camps, compulsory relocations, and the settlement of Burmese colonizers among the majority-Muslim population raised tensions that led to a massive exodus of 250,000 Rohingyas in 1991–1992. The repatriation efforts under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) faced resistance from many Rohingyas. Many ran away soon after their return because of forced labor and brutal violence, including rape and extortion. The verification procedures of the Burmese authorities were not facilitating the return of the refugees. The repatriation process slowed down after 1997 and came to an end in 2005. Two official Rohingya camps with more than 30,000 people existed in Bangladesh. In 1992, the Burmese government considered many of the refugees as illegal migrants from Bangladesh who had no right to claim an identity that did not exist officially. The term *Bengali* was increasingly used by the authorities to refer to the community as a whole.

Throughout the 1990s, the policies of harassment perpetrated by the Nasaka, a mixed unit of police, intelligence, and customs officers, created increasing hardship for the Muslim population. The authorities kept livelihood conditions low by failing to invest in economic development and infrastructure.<sup>44</sup> Reduced freedom of movement, the introduction of restrictions on marriage and birth registrations, and the obstruction of religious practices pushed many people out of the country. At the same time, a project of model villages was launched to repopulate North Arakan with Buddhist settlers, including former prisoners.<sup>45</sup> After 2012, against this increasingly well-documented background, a new generation of pro-Rohingya advocacy groups reiterated the accusation that the government intended the slow extermination of the Muslim population.<sup>46</sup>

The politics that motivated the harsh but ambiguous government policies in North Rakhine State have yet to be fully understood. Despite the disenfranchisement of Muslims, state authorities still resorted to the Muslim voting bloc at the constitutional referendum of May 2008 and in the general elections of November 2010, when Rohingya white-card holders were promised full citizenship. Three Rohingya members of Parliament (MPs) were affiliated with the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the government party, from 2010 to 2015.

President Thein Sein's reform policies did not bring an end to murky party politics, nor did the increasingly autonomous role played by the parliament and the courts break any new ground. Rather, it confirmed the high level of social and political exclusion of Rohingyas in Myanmar. In September 2014, white-card holders were barred from being members of a political party, but the proposal of giving white-card holders voting rights was reiterated by the ruling USDP in February 2015. Once it was approved by the parliament, however, it was rapidly invalidated by Myanmar's constitutional court. Rohingya political leaders who had been candidates or elected MPs at the 1990 and 2010 elections readied themselves for the free elections of November 2015, but the court's

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final decision coincided with a widespread anti-Rohingya backlash following the 2012 communal violence and, more generally, a tide of Buddhist nationalism that swept across Myanmar from 2013 to 2015.

The outbreak of violence in 2012, which marked the beginning of a series of humanitarian crises in Rakhine State, was triggered by the rape and killing of a Buddhist woman at the end of May, followed in early June by the killing of a group of Muslims who were visiting South Rakhine from another region. More violence erupted in the Muslim-majority area—Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung—in the north on June 8, followed by attacks in the capital, Sittway. A state of emergency was declared, but security forces were later accused not only of failing to stop the violence, but of being complicit in it. Until mid-July, more than 100,000 people were reportedly displaced and resettled in IDP camps. Eighty people were killed, and more than 4,000 houses were destroyed. A second wave of violence, in October, spread over a much wider area in central Rakhine and led to another 80 dead, with 22,000 people displaced and more homes destroyed. More than 80 percent of the victims were Muslims.<sup>47</sup>

Since the 1990s, the outside world has increasingly taken notice of the plight of the Rohingyas on both sides of the border due to greater international awareness of Myanmar's conflicts. In 1994, Rakhine State became accessible to individual travelers and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) like Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF; Doctors Without Borders) and Action Contre la Faim (ACF; Action Against Hunger), which launched humanitarian projects in Rohingya villages. The stream of Rohingya migrants crossing the Andaman Sea to reach South Thailand and Malaysia became a seasonal phenomenon after Malaysia started (though only briefly) to register Rohingyas for work permits in August 2006. It was poorly recorded at first, and this was perceived as a major regional problem only when news spread about the atrocious treatment of Rohingya refugees by the Thai navy in 2009, the scandals that broke out about official involvement in human trafficking, and finally the reluctant moves of Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia to accept desperate Rohingya boat people abandoned by their traffickers on the high seas in May 2015.

Taking stock of the migration of Muslim people from Arakan to the neighboring countries and beyond during many decades, the next section will provide an overview of the Rohingya diaspora, who have played a decisive role in the post-2012 globalization of the Rohingya cause.

## **The Rohingya Diaspora and the Globalization of a Muslim-Minority Cause**

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The number of Rohingyas in Rakhine State, as derived from the 2014 census, was indicated as fewer than 1.1 million, not including Muslims who would potentially identify as Rohingyas throughout the rest of Myanmar. But nearly half of the people who claim a Rohingya identity either do not live in Myanmar, have left Myanmar a long time ago, or have never lived there. More than 300,000 Rohingyas have lived in neighboring Bangladesh, but their number has been sometimes overestimated both by Rohingya organizations and the Bangladeshi authorities. The latest exodus culminated in the arrival of 672,700 Rohingyas in Bangladesh as of January 2018.<sup>48</sup>

In Saudi Arabia, a census done in 2013 by authorities in the Governorate of Mecca in cooperation with Rohingya associations revealed 230,000 people claiming a Rohingya identity. The actual number of Rohingyas in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states is likely to be at least 300,000. The number of resident Rohingyas in Pakistan has lately been estimated at 250,000.<sup>49</sup> This estimation does not include Rohingyas who hold Pakistani passports and reside outside of Pakistan. Rohingyas in Thailand and Malaysia number more than 100,000, while Rohingyas living in Western countries, including Japan, New Zealand, and Australia, may number a few tens of thousands. Substantial communities also exist in India (reportedly Jammu and Kashmir) and Indonesia.

The media have mainly focused on the Rohingya migrant movements and displacements at moments of acute crisis and massive outflows. This was the case in 1978 and 1991–1992, following the communal violence in June and October 2012, as well as since October 2016, when attacks by a new armed group called the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) triggered massive military operations that included the systematic destruction of hundreds of villages. The silent departure of smaller groups, families, or individuals who have kept a low profile, trying to escape official attention, were not tracked or recorded before 2006. The migrations of Muslims from Rakhine State to Lower Myanmar (Yangon Division) and other parts of the country (notably the border with Thailand), as well as to Pakistan and the Middle East, reach back to the late 1940s and 1950s, suggesting patterns and drivers of migration that differ from economic and political reasons during subsequent decades.

Several types of communities have developed in the host countries. Yet the primary or secondary function that the Rohingya identity has played in these countries is largely unclear. Migrant and human-trafficking networks that underpin the Rohingya diaspora remain poorly understood. Field studies have yet to examine Rohingya survival and coping strategies.<sup>50</sup> The structures of human trafficking and exploitation, as well as the networks of solidarity, that have created transregional bonds could be the starting points of such investigations.

Tracking Rohingya websites provides glimpses of social and linguistic adaptation (e.g., the written use of Arabic or Malay in addition to English, Urdu, and their own East Bengali dialect). The existence of diverse Rohingya diasporic communities also raises questions about contexts that favored or prohibited the spread of Rohingya identity. Changes in outsiders' usage of the name *Rohingya* have been perceptible over the past

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several years, especially since the 2012 violence.<sup>51</sup> Until recently, however, Muslims from Arakan and their descendants in Pakistan and the Middle East were commonly referred to as *Burmese Muslims*.<sup>52</sup>

North Arakan Muslim lives have evolved simultaneously in a number of countries under various conditions. Individual and group stories have been determined by different sets of pressures, motives, and strategies in states characterized by cultural, political, and social differences. Considering the diversity of places of refuge and relocation on at least four continents, the known unknowns of Rohingya migration do not suggest the existence of a monolithic block of worldwide Rohingya refugees, but rather of a diverse transnational community.

Bangladesh presents an interesting and complex case as a host country. Its role in contemporary Rohingya history has been marked by cultural ambiguity, political constraints, and drivers of national self-interest. Looking back at the history of the Rohingya presence in East Pakistan and Bangladesh, however, one does not find confirmation of the current media cliché of Rohingyas as a cluster of refugees devoid of agency and solely depending on international caretakers.

North Arakan Muslims first fled to East Pakistan following violent clashes in 1949 that led to the creation of the Arakan Muslim Refugee Organization in Chittagong, which enjoyed the sympathy and the support of the local population. Little is known about these first refugees and subsequent migrants who left the region during the 1950s and 1960s, when only the activities of the Mujahid attracted public attention. Rohingyas trickled by the hundreds into Bangladesh in 1974 and 1975, and the country saw nearly two hundred thousand refugees following the search for illegal immigrants by the Burmese authorities in 1978. At that time, Bangladesh was a country of transition for thousands of these refugees heading for the Middle East countries that welcomed migrant labor, but it also became a country of permanent residence for many Muslims from Arakan who did not want to be repatriated.

For a long time, Bangladesh had a tradition of soft policy toward the Rohingyas and their militant groups based in Chittagong, but its official stance began to harden in 2002, when the Arakan Rohingya National Organization (ARNO) was pushed out of the country. The last armed rebels of the Rohingya Solidarity Organization were reputedly dislodged by the Bangladesh army in 2005. Nonetheless, Rohingyas in Bangladesh have been described in international reports as a vulnerable group, and their stay in the country has been marked by difficulty. Many have had to subsist as a marginalized and largely destitute community, referred to in mostly negative terms by the local media. While protesting and appealing to the international community for support when people crossed the border by the tens of thousands, Bangladesh has generally tolerated the arrival of refugees during moments of acute crisis. However, government plans announced in May 2015 to relocate thousands of Rohingyas to Hatiya Island in the Bay of Bengal were immediately criticized by both refugees and international organizations.<sup>53</sup>

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After the Myanmar military campaign in late 2016, 74,000 people fled from Rakhine State to Bangladesh as recently as February 2017.<sup>54</sup> They were followed at the end of August and early September 2017 by an exodus that totaled more than 500,000 following operations in Rakhine State by battle-hardened infantry troops. The Myanmar government rejected an international investigation of these events, which included the burning of hundreds of villages and were internationally perceived as a campaign of ethnic cleansing, but also made a commitment to repatriation and to the implementation of recommendations made by an advisory commission headed by former United Nations (UN) secretary general Kofi Annan.<sup>55</sup>

The increasing global attention for the Rohingya cause in Myanmar may lead to a greater awareness of the huge Rohingya communities in the Asian region as well. Long-held political stances and migratory policies toward the hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas in the diaspora may be further affected by the latest crisis outbreak. Bangladesh is a country that does not recognize Rohingyas as a self-identifying ethnic group (referring to them as “Myanmar nationals”), but at the same time, it is the country where many Rohingyas have successfully integrated, both socially and culturally. In 2011, an inquiry of the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) reported that “no distinctive physical features [existed] between Rohingya and Bangladeshis in the Cox’s Bazar area,” with “all the sources stat[ing] that the cultural and religious practices performed by the Rohingyas are similar to the local Bangla practices.”<sup>56</sup> However, the report also portrayed them as “an extremely fragmented group” that “does not speak with a unified voice.” A French field researcher has described middle-class Rohingyas as an “invisible” group in Chittagong’s urban landscape.<sup>57</sup> Security interest in the Rohingya diaspora has been limited to risk evaluations about Rohingyas being recruited by Islamist outfits in Bangladesh, India, or Pakistan.

The expanding international conversation on Myanmar’s democratic opening and discrimination against the Rohingyas has already powerfully affected the transnational Rohingya ecosystem. The Arakan Rohingya Union, founded in Jeddah in 2011 under the auspices of the OIC, resuscitated the project of a federation of competing Rohingya organizations. The European Rohingya Council was registered in the Netherlands in 2012.<sup>58</sup> Recent Rohingya self-representations have downplayed history-bound accounts of Rohingya identity and emphasized instead Rohingya victimization as Muslims. This shift in rhetorical strategy seems adapted to social media, where even sympathetic readers may find it difficult to disentangle traditional historical arguments, ethnic identity ideas, and cultural terminology.<sup>59</sup>

Together with a loose alliance of pro-Rohingya human rights defenders and legal experts, Rohingya organizations have dropped the communal aspects, representing the conflict mainly as a “state/army versus ethnic minority” issue. The reiteration of itemized root causes (xenophobia, Islamophobia, cultural dissimilarity, socioeconomic tensions, and systematic state discrimination) in media analysis powerfully underscores the discursive shift from a local and historicized issue to a global cause owned by non-Rohingya activists. As the globalization of the Rohingya cause has moved the political and moral

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debate on Rakhine State issues from the national to the international level, it has eased calls for international intervention while further sidelining Buddhist and Muslim voices in Myanmar itself.

For the Rohingyas themselves, the ethnic claim is a certainty, a source of pride, and a show of resistance to oppression as well. It is in line with principles that the international community has agreed upon, making clear that the Muslim community has a right to self-identify as Rohingyas. Rohingyas, therefore, should be fully recognized as Union citizens. In the eyes of the Rakhine Buddhists and among Myanmar's political decision-makers, the claim that Rohingyas are a unique ethnic group remains unacceptable. For them, the Rohingya identity stands out as the primary cause of the discontent, and the demographic threat looms large in their depictions. To be granted citizenship, people should undergo a process of verification in line with the 1982 law.

As things stand in early 2018, political realism suggests that social and political acceptance of Muslims identifying as Rohingyas remains at a far distance.

## Research Challenges

With widespread accusations of genocide, the international outrage about the military exactions in North Rakhine in 2017 had a strong impact on the prospect of political and economic relations with Myanmar's government. The resulting international concern has further contributed to an abundance of reports that focus on humanitarian aspects, the violation of human rights, and the statelessness of Rohingyas during the last four to five decades.

To appreciate the emergent Rohingya narrative from a contemporary vantage point, one must bear in mind that the early Rohingya writers were not aware of many facts brought to light since the 1980s by scholars who specialize in the Bay of Bengal's early modern period.<sup>60</sup> Apart from historical studies that include the early modern and contemporary history of Muslims, there have been few studies of this topic in the field of social sciences. The knowledge of cultural and religious practices is still limited to the description of Rohingya folklore. As mentioned previously, no research has been done on the East Bengali dialectology that would enlighten us on the regional linguistic variety. Writing about the Rohingyas remains, therefore, a challenging exploration of social, political, religious, economic, and cultural fields of inquiry, where no peer-certified academic discourse exists as yet. The small amount of academic work on Rohingya refugees leaves opportunities for anthropological research on the Rohingyas in their various national and political contexts. As Rohingya groups and organizations have been reticent to share information about themselves and their social, political, and organizational practices, the formation of an archive of documents and field observations is a major challenge by itself.

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The dynamics of Rohingya identity formation are a primary concern, as the dogmatic self-statements on the Rohingyas as a perennial group call for a critical approach to the contexts in which community-building processes took place. To explore the discontents in state-ethnicity and Buddhist-Muslim relations, there is a need to move beyond the events-based historical descriptions (which, for good reason, have taken up a large part of this article), as well as the dichotomous perpetrator-versus-victim perspective, by looking at each group as an entity empowered by various forms of agency.

There is a need not only to deepen, but also to broaden, the scope of investigation. One of the most neglected topics of research in Myanmar itself has been the life of Muslim communities and the experiences of coexisting Buddhists and Muslims. The Islamophobic urban violence in central Myanmar in 2013 and 2014 was superficially wrapped up in the media with the dissimilar situation in Rakhine State, blurring a clear understanding of both issues. Comparative studies of the socioeconomic situation of ethnically and culturally diverse Muslim communities in Myanmar should fill some of the gaps in our knowledge.

The Rohingyas are the biggest Muslim community in Myanmar. Since the late 1990s, their case as a persecuted minority in the country has been presented in a narrative of human rights violations and failed civic rights that has diminished the interest in the deterioration of relations and the stunning lack of communication between Buddhists and Muslims. As observers prioritized the dichotomy of failed state-minority relations, the fact that in 2012, members of the two communities went at each other's throats was soon lost to oblivion.

To pave the road toward the peaceful coexistence of the two estranged communities, legal approaches arguing for justice and in favor of Rohingya citizenship amount to one aspect of a larger challenge.<sup>61</sup> The 2016–2017 mass evictions have redrawn the borders of the Rohingya question itself, and the impact on national and international stances is such that it will never again be possible to treat the situation as just a national or regional issue. Applied research drawing on the expertise of peace and ethnic conflict studies, as well as the most recent geopolitical approaches, is therefore needed to address the contemporary complications of the Arakan/Rakhine State conundrum.

### Primary Sources

Primary sources considered for this article include published and unpublished documents in Burmese or Western languages. Urdu, Bengali, Arabic, and Malay sources may contain relevant information and call for further research. Burmese (including Arakanese/Rakhine) and Western (mainly English) sources may be divided into those that provide information on the historical presence of Muslims in precolonial and colonial Arakan, and those that are essential to understand the Rohingyas as a self-defining ethnic and politically active group after independence. Rohingya historiography has heavily drawn

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on the Buddhist chronicle tradition of Arakan, creatively embedding both mythical and historical Islamic elements.<sup>62</sup>

The travelogue of the Augustinian missionary Father Sebastião Manrique and the various descriptions relating to the Arakanese kingdom in the Dutch surgeon Wouter Schouten's account contain references to Muslim traders in the 17th century and are best read in conjunction with recent academic work on archival Portuguese and Dutch East India Company documents.<sup>63</sup>

Descriptions of the Muslim elite at the Arakanese court are found in Alaol's poetry in Sanskritized Bengali and are accessible in Thibaut d'Hubert's French and English translations.<sup>64</sup> British narratives and reports between the late 18th century and the second part of the 19th century, both printed and kept in the India Office collections, convey a checkered picture of the Muslim communities of Arakan before the Chittagonian immigrations.<sup>65</sup> At the time of writing this article, an entry point to engage with an array of British imperial sources (such as census reports), printed accounts relating to Arakan during World War II, and administrative correspondence of the early postwar and Burma's postindependence years is the archived website of **Network Myanmar**, which provides downloadable Portable Document Format (PDF) files of such documents.<sup>66</sup> Modern reprints of gazetteers produced in the early 20th century are still widely available in Myanmar and elsewhere, and provide access to valuable information and statistics.<sup>67</sup>

The foundational texts legitimizing a Rohingya identity on historical grounds were published during and around the early 1960s, when several Rohingya-denominated organizations engaged in campaigns to lobby for their political and ethnic claims in Burma. *Prañ thoñ cu i tuiñh ranh sãh lū myuih ta myuih phrac so "Ruihañgyã" lū myuih cu i rãjavañ akyañ: khyup* (A short history of "Rohingyas": An indigenous race of the Union of Burma), published by the United Rohingyas Organization in 1960, is an essential document for any in-depth study of Rohingya self-representation. It was the first in a succession of efforts to muster historical research to argue in favor of a Rohingya genealogy.<sup>68</sup> Simultaneously, Mohammed Tahir Ba Tha's cultural and historical publications in *The Guardian* and a few other magazines between 1959 and 1965 supported the political struggle of the Rohingyas.<sup>69</sup>

There are very few sources documenting relations between the Middle East diaspora and the refugee communities in Bangladesh on the one hand, and the North Arakan Muslims in Burma until the late 1980s on the other. Biographical sources are rare.<sup>70</sup> Only in the 1990s, following the impact of the 1982 citizenship law, did human rights issues (and the citizenship issue in particular) become overriding themes in international Rohingya publications. These developments, as well as political shifts among Rohingya exile organizations, can be partly followed in irregular publications by the ARNO after 1998.<sup>71</sup> Yet there is no single archive of the pamphlets and booklets of Rohingya militant



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movements from the 1960s to the 1990s. Some of these can occasionally be traced via private collections and Rakhine anthologies contesting Rohingya claims.

The texts of Burma's constitutions of 1947, 1974, and 2008 are searchable on the Internet, and yet internal documents relating to Burmese/Myanmar policies in Rakhine State remain hard to access. An overview of reports on human rights violations in Rakhine State would call for a systematic study of publications by human rights organizations that have taken an interest in Rohingya refugee issues.<sup>72</sup> The UNHCR archives in Geneva contain primary evidence on the refugee crises of 1978 and 1991–1992, although not all these materials will be available for consultation.

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*Rui hañ gyā mvat ca lañ ñī ñhvāt reḥ tap poñ cu aphvè. khyup/. Prañ t[h]oñ cum (read: cu) sāḥ rui hañ gyā lū myuiḥ cu sui. rājavan akuiḥ akāḥ nhañ. pan krā: acī rañ kham khyak (Rohangya Muslim United Front of Burma. Report submitted and historical references regarding the Rohangyas, an ethnic group of the Union). Rangoon: Pali Pitaka Publishing Press, 1961.*

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### Notes:

(1.) The terms *Arakanese* and *Arakan* are still commonly used by Buddhists and Muslims alike, as well as by people writing about the region. The official names *Rakhine State* and *Myanmar* (formerly *Burma*) are used in this article when referring to the country after 1989. No political bias is linked to the use of either term. Nonetheless, it is relevant to note linguistic differences. *Rakhine* is an adjective rather than a noun (corresponding with *Arakanese*, and usually designating the ethnic group of the majority-Buddhist population), while *Arakan* as a noun signifies a territorial and political entity that has changed over time, such as the kingdom of Arakan (before 1785), *Arakan division* (during the colonial period), or *Arakan state* (since 1974). The old denominations *Burma* and *Arakan* are preferred when talking about the history and geography of the region. Similarly, *Bengal* and *Bengali* (rather than *Bangla* or *Bangladeshi*) have been used when a broadly cultural or historical sense is applied. The term *Bengali* to denote the Rohingyas has been used in official parlance in Myanmar since the 1980s and became extremely controversial after 2012, as it implied the nonnative character of the Muslim community.

(2.) Benjamin Zawacki, "Defining Myanmar's "Rohingya Problem," *Human Rights Brief* 20, no. 3 (2013): 18–25, ; Human Rights Watch, "*The Government Could Have Stopped This*": *Sectarian Violence and Ensuing Abuses in Burma's Arakan State* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2012); Human Rights Watch, "*All You Can Do Is Pray*": *Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Burma's Arakan State* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2013); Insani Yardim Vakfi, *Arakan Report* (Istanbul: IHH—The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief, 2013); David Dapice, "A Fatal Distraction from Federalism—Religious Conflict in Rakhine,"

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*Proximity Reports* 14 (2014), Harvard Kennedy School—Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation.

(3.) For a general historical overview, see Jacques P. Leider, “Rohingya: The Name, the Movement, the Quest for Identity,” in *Nation Building in Myanmar*, 204–255 (Yangon: Myanmar EGRESS/Myanmar Peace Center, 2013). After 1948, issues of separatism, federalism, and autonomy loomed large amid the armed struggles of the Rakhine Buddhist and Muslim Rohingya groups. Pending more detailed studies, one may note a recent statement by an authorized Rohingya spokesperson, saying that “we Rohingya are NOT demanding a separate state” (tweet by Tun Khin @tunkhin80, president of Burmese Rohingya Organization UK, February 26, 2018). This statement aligns with the foundational declaration of the ARNO of December 13, 1998, which espouses the “peaceful co-existence” of “two sister communities” and the right to “self-determination.” Available at <http://rohingya.webs.com/arakanhistory.htm>.

(4.) The expression has been used widely in the media. It is also found in the title of the book by Imtiaz Ahmed, *The Plight of the Stateless Rohingyas: Responses of the State, Society, & the International Community* (Dhaka: Dhaka University Press, 2010).

(5.) Jacques Leider, “On Arakanese Territorial Expansion: Origins, Context, Means, and Practice,” in *The Maritime Frontier of Burma—Exploring Political, Cultural, and Commercial Interaction in the Indian Ocean World, 1200–1800*, ed. Jos Gommans and Jacques Leider, 127–150 (Amsterdam and Leiden, Netherlands: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen/KITLV Press, 2002).

(6.) Stephan Egbert Arie van Galen, *Arakan and Bengal: The Rise and Decline of the Mrauk United Kingdom (Burma) from the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Century AD*, PhD diss., Leiden University, 2008.

(7.) Thibaut d’Hubert, “Pirates, Poets, and Merchants: Bengali Language and Literature in Seventeenth-Century Mrauk-U,” in *Culture and Circulation: Literature in Motion in Early Modern India*, ed. Thomas de Bruijn and Allison Busch (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2014); Thibaut d’Hubert and Jacques P. Leider, “Traders and Poets at the Mrauk-U Court—On Commerce and Cultural Links in Seventeenth-Century Arakan,” in *Pelagic Passageways: The Northern Bay of Bengal Before Colonialism*, ed. Rila Mukherjee, 77–111 (Delhi: Primus Books, 2011).

(8.) Francis Buchanan, “A Comparative Vocabulary of Some of the Languages Spoken in the Burma Empire,” *Asiatick Researches* 5 (1799), 219–240.

(9.) Francis Buchanan, “A Comparative Vocabulary of Some of the Languages Spoken in the Burma Empire,” *Asiatick Researches* 5 (1799), 223. Rohingya historian Aman Ullah cites Buchanan as implicit proof in “Dr Francis Buchanan MD and Rohingya,” March 15, 2016, available at <http://www.thestateless.com/2016/03/dr-francis-buchanan-md-and-rohingya.html>). Gregory B. Poling is inclined to accept Buchanan’s testimonial as sufficient proof in “Separating Fact from Fiction About Myanmar’s Rohingya,” *Critical*

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*Questions*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 13, 2014. The Japanese Myanmar scholar Kei Nemoto treats this as an open question in “The Rohingya Issue in Myanmar,” *Asia Peace Building Initiatives*, October 10, 2015. For a balanced assessment of the identity issue in general, with a reference to Buchanan, see Carlos Sardiña Galache, “The True Origins of Myanmar’s Rohingya,” December 4, 2017. For an interpretation of the term as a “geographic locator,” see Derek Tonkin, “The Rohingya Conundrum,” October 2, 2017.

(10.) Robert Robinson, *Among the Mughs or Memorials of the Rev. J. C. Fink, Missionary in Arracan* (Calcutta: Light Press, 1871).

(11.) Charles Paton, “Historical and Statistical Sketch of Arakan,” *Asiatick Researches* 16 (1828), 353–381. T. C. Robertson was a town magistrate closely associated with the British invasion; Paton was an assistant commissioner.

(12.) British Burma/Foreign Department, *Administration Report for 1869–1870* (Rangoon: Secretariat Press, 1871). British colonial archives are silent on the evolution of the Muslim community in the middle of the 19th century. The modest growth of the general population was mainly due to the return of the exiled Arakanese. An American missionary source refers to the presence of Bengali people besides local Muslims; G. S. Comstock, “Notes on Arakan,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* I (1847), 3. An Arakanese chief in the Maungdaw region is known to have actively promoted the settlement of Bengali agriculturists.

(13.) The historical annals presented in Paton’s sketch of Arakan contain peculiar Muslim spellings of the titles and names of kings that are rarely, if ever, found in contemporary Arakanese manuscripts.

(14.) Michael Walter Charney, *Where Jambudipa and Islamdom Converged: Religious Change and the Emergence of Buddhist Communalism in Early Modern Arakan (15th to 19th C.)*, PhD diss., University of Michigan, Department of History, 1999.

(15.) James Baxter, *Report on Indian Immigration* (Rangoon: Government Printing and Stationery, 1941); *Burma Gazetteer Akyab District Including Town and Village Census Tables* (Rangoon: Government Printing. vol. B, 1912); R. B. Smart, ed., *Burma Gazetteer Akyab District* (Rangoon: Government Printing and Stationery, vol. A, 1917). In 2014, the total percentage of Muslims was estimated at 34 percent (Ministry of Immigration and Population, *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census—The Union Report Census Report*, vol. 2 (Yangon: Ministry of Immigration and Population, Department of Population, 2015).

(16.) One must note that Indians in Burma, independent of their historical presence in the country, were classified as “foreigners” in the census reports. Chittagonian migrants who spread throughout Burma during the colonial period did not adopt the name *Rohingya*

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after independence. British census 1921 and 1931. Leider, "Rohingya: The Name, the Movement, the Quest for Identity."

(17.) A relevant source for this issue is James Baxter's *Report on Indian Immigration* (Rangoon: Government Printing and Stationery, 1940), an investigation meant to address the "widespread uneasiness about Indian penetration into Burma" (p. 6). For an early indication of ethnoreligious tensions, see Major C. M. Enriquez, *A Burmese Wonderland: A Tale of Travel in Lower and Upper Burma* (Calcutta/Shimla: Thacker, Spink, and Co., 1922), 58; see also Moshe Yegar, *Between Integration and Secession: The Muslim Communities of the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Western Burma/Myanmar* (Lanham/Oxford, UK: Lexington Books, 2002).

(18.) The author of this article hypothesizes that such organizations existed at a local level, and that the absence of information does not mean they did not.

(19.) Jacques Leider, "Conflict and Mass Violence in Arakan (Rakine State): The 1942 Events and Political Identity Formation," in *Citizenship in Myanmar: Ways of Being in and from Burma*, ed. Ashley South and Marie Lall (ISEAS/ CMU, 2017), *passim*. The article lists the sparse available sources.

(20.) An exact written source is hard to come by for the allegation that the British had promised a "Muslim National Area," which is an expression currently found in Rohingya-related entries on Wikipedia. The allegation is made, for example, in the "Rohingya People" article, but without a precise source. Aman Ullah, a Rohingya historian, has repeated the same without providing any source ("The Traditional Demand of the Muslim Rohingya of North Arakan." There is a faint hint of such in Anthony Irwin, *Burmese Outpost* (London: Collins, 1946), 25, a British officer who wanted to see that the Arakan Muslims who had fought for the British were rewarded. The 1947 petition of Muslim elders ("Representation by the Muslims of North Arakan Claiming for an Autonomous State in the Buthidaung and Maungdaw Areas," February 24, 1947, Government of Burma Home Department), while referring to the *de facto* recognition of local "peace committees" as an "administrative body," concludes: "And this Administrative Body was given many pledges towards self-determination, on the model of autonomous Muslim State, in New Burma." As the petitioners made reference to D. C. P. Phelps, the military administrator, and A. A. Shah, the civil advisor to Phelps, one may surmise that oral promises had been made, but without any written commitment by their superiors.

(21.) For a discussion of the secessionist aspects of the contemporary conflict, see Anthony Ware, "Secessionist Aspects to the Buddhist-Muslim Conflict in Rakhine State, Myanmar," in *Territorial Separatism and Global Politics: Claims, Methods, and Problems*, ed. Damien Kingsbury and Costas Laoutides (London: Routledge, 2015).

(22.) Moshe Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 1972).

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(23.) Arakan Muslim Conference, "Open Letter to the Leaders of the Burmese Government and the Democracies. Charter of the Constitutional Demands of the Arakani Muslims," 1951.

(24.) Robert H. Taylor, *The State in Myanmar* (Honolulu: Hawai'i Press, 2009), 269.

(25.) The search for unity was a matter of political concern (Mohamed Akram Ali, "Unity Among Ourselves," *The Guardian* 1960, 31–32). Therefore, the newly found unity was demonstrated in the names chosen by Rohingya organizations, such as the Rohangya Muslim United Front of Burma, United Rohingya National League, and United Rohingyas Organization, which published booklets (in Burmese) to explain the indigenous character of the Rohingya population during the early phase of the Mayu Frontier Administration (1961–1964).

(26.) Moshe Yegar, an Israeli diplomat posted in Burma in the 1960s, used *Rohinga* in his authoritative *The Muslims of Burma*. Prime Minister U Nu used the term in a speech broadcast on September 25, 1954, when he pleaded for the political support of moderate Rakhine Muslims in Buthidaung and Maungdaw against the Mujahids and the Rakhine nationalists.

(27.) Mohammed A. Tahir Ba Tha, "Shah Shujah in Arakan (Origin of Muslims in Arakan)," *The Guardian* 6, no. 9 (1959): 26–28; Ba Tha, "Roewengyas in Arakan," *The Guardian* 7, no. 5 (1960): 33–36; and Ba Tha, "Muslims in Arakan (Burma): A Brief Study of the Rohingyas, a Muslim Racial Group of Arab Descent in Arakan," *Islamic Review* (April 1966), 25–30, are a few examples of his work.

(28.) Yegar notes that "as a matter of fact, the same group is active in all of them" (Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma* 102). A contemporary observer of Burma Muslim affairs, Yegar used only the spelling *Rohinga*.

(29.) Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma*, 102.

(30.) Mohammad Yunus, *A History of Arakan Past and Present* (Chittagong, Bangladesh: Magenta Colour, 1994), 71.

(31.) "The immediate effect of the creation of the Mayu Frontier District is the eradication of insurgency, and of suppression of smuggling etc. by effective and efficient Administration offering the Rohingyas varied opportunities in life to improve their lots in consonance with the spirit of Burmese Way to Socialism. The object for which the Mayu Frontier District is created is manifested in all round activities of the Frontier Administration and it is hoped that a new Era of the Rohingyas with new life and new outlook will usher in no distant future." Extract from "Address Presented to Professor Dr. Luce by the United Rohingya Organisation of Mayu District," May 3, 1963 (National Library of Australia, MSS Collection, Papers of Gordon Luce, MS6574/1/37).

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(32.) Both Urdu works were never published and exist only in manuscript form. They have been quoted by Rohingya and Bangladeshi authors. For Hasan's work, see Mohammed Akhtaruzzaman, "Introduction to an Unpublished Manuscript on Myanmar," in *Myanmar Two Millennia: Proceedings of the Myanmar Two Millennia Conference 15-17 December 1999*, Part III. Yangon: Universities Historical Research, 94-103.

(33.) Nick Cheesman, "How in Myanmar 'National Races' Came to Surpass Citizenship and Exclude Rohingya," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47 (2017), 3.

(34.) Mohammed Tahir Ba Tha, *Rohingyas and Kamans* (Myitkyina, Myanmar: United Rohingya National League, 1963).

(35.) On the expansion of Islam in Bengal, see Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

(36.) Daniel G. E. Hall, "Studies in Dutch Relations with Arakan in the Seventeenth Century," *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 26 (1937), 1-31; Arthur P. Phayre, "Account of Arakan," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 2 (1841), 679-712; for recent scholarly insights, see d'Hubert and Leider, "Traders and Poets."

(37.) Yunus, *History of Arakan*. Yunus was the founder of the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (1982).

(38.) Abdul Karim, *The Rohingyas: A Short Account of Their History and Culture* (Chittagong: Arakan Historical Society, 2000), 5.

(39.) Most of this work is in Burmese and has been self-published. Abu Anin (U Kyaw Min), "Towards Understanding Arakan History (A Study on the Issue of Ethnicity in Arakan, Myanmar)," Yangon 2002 (unpublished manuscript); U Kyaw Min, *A Glimpse into the Hidden Chapters of Arakan History* (Yangon: Khin Ma Khyo, 2013); U Kyaw Min, *Rui hañ gyā samuiñ kui chan. cac khrañḥ* (Examination of Rohingya History) (Yangon: Kyaw So Aung, 2015).

(40.) Jacques P. Leider, "Competing Identities and the Hybridized History of the Rohingyas," in *Metamorphosis: Studies in Social and Political Change in Myanmar*, ed. Renaud Egreteau and Francois Robinne (Singapore: NUS Press, 2015).

(41.) Cheesman, "How in Myanmar 'National Races' Came to Surpass Citizenship," 14. The concept of "national race" (*taingyintha*) became the benchmark for membership of the political community during the Ne Win regime (1962-1988) and led to the civic exclusion of the Rohingyas under the subsequent SLORC/SPDC rule (1988-2012).

(42.) Andrew Selth, *Burma's Muslims: Terrorists or Terrorised?* (Canberra: Australian National University, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, 2003).



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(43.) Bohmu Hla Myaing, *Taṅ pra khyak Nuiṅṅaṁ khyāḥ sāḥ myāḥ vaṅ rok hmu nhaṅ. rakhuṅ praṅṅay mha phrac rap akhre ane akhyui* (Report on the Arrival of Foreigners and Certain Events in Rakhine State). November 1, 1983. . The perception of a migratory threat persisted over the following decades. Plans announced in 2002 to build a road between Dhaka and Yangon were shelved because of fears that development could trigger a further increase in the Muslim population, which has frustrated Bangladesh's desire to expand its economic relations with Myanmar. See also Helal Mohammed Khan, "Threat Perceptions in the Myanmar-Bangladesh Borderlands," *Conflict in Myanmar War, Politics, Religion*, ed. by Nick Cheesman and Nicholas Farrelly, 333-352 (Singapore: ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, 2016).

(44.) Mohamed Saflullah Munsoor's study, "A Qualitative Assessment of Successful Local Organizations (LOs): A Critical Study of Northern Rakhine State (NRS), Myanmar" (Reading, UK: University of Reading, Department of International and Rural Development, Faculty of Life Sciences, PhD diss., 2003), provides rare insights into local Muslim social hierarchies.

(45.) Francis Wade, *Myanmar's Enemy Within* (London: ZED Books, 2017), 69-97.

(46.) Alice Cowley and Maung Zarni, "The Slow-Burning Genocide of Myanmar's Rohingya," *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal* 23, no. 3 (2014): 681-752; Fortify Rights and Allard K. Lowenstein International Rights Clinic, Yale Law School, *Persecution of the Rohingya Muslims: Is Genocide Occurring in Myanmar's Rakhine State? A Legal Analysis* (2014),

(47.) The monthly Burma bulletins of ALTSEAN offer detailed figures with references. Different numbers of internally displaced persons were quoted over the months as figures changed according to the movement or relocation of people.

(48.) This figure was quoted in Bangladesh media: <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2018/01/09/number-rohingyas-leave-camps-work-illegally-across-bangladesh/>.

(49.) Nausheen H. Anwar, "Negotiating New Conjunctures of Citizenship: Experiences of 'Illegality' in Burmese-Rohingya and Bangladeshi Migrant Enclaves in Karachi," *Citizenship Studies* 17, nos. 3-4 (2013), 415.

(50.) Kazi Fahmida Farzana, "Forced Migration and Statelessness: Voices and Memories of Burmese Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh" (Singapore: National University of Singapore, PhD diss., 2011), has explored refugee accounts.

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(51.) One fascinating source to track the adaptive change of names in recent years is the log of revisions attached to Wikipedia entries. The following example concerns the page on Rohingyas in Pakistan. A page called “Burmese People in Pakistan” was created in January 2010, and the first author noted that “a lot of the Burmese immigrants to Pakistan are Rohingya Muslims from western Burma.” On September 13, 2012, another contributor changed the expression “Burmese people in Pakistan” to “Pakistan Burmese” in the page content. Then, on December 31, 2017, the page “Burmese People in Pakistan” was changed to “Rohingya People in Pakistan”; the category “Pakistani people of Burmese descent” was switched to “Pakistani people of Rohingya descent”; and the expression “Pakistan Burmese” became “Rohingya people in Pakistan.” Nonetheless, to conclude that the descriptor “Burmese Muslims” has only functioned as an exonym would be misguided because there is actually a Muslim community in Pakistan that hails from Burma proper, not from Rakhine State, which claims the appellation “Burmese Muslims” (see Faiza Rahman, “Invisible Pakistanis Neither Here nor There,” *Express Tribune*, August 20, 2013).

(52.) In his famous article on “Burma’s exiled Muslims” in Saudi-Arabia, Syed Neaz Ahmad uses the phrase “thousands of Burmese Muslims from Arakan—often called Rohingyas ...” (*The Guardian*, October 12, 2009, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/oct/12/burma-muslims-rohingya-saudi-prisons>). Such complementary expressions are also not infrequently found in human rights and UN reports before 2012. Although the name *Rohingya* has come increasingly into use, the local legacy of “Burma/Burmese” may live on in toponyms such as “Burmees Colony,” in Landhi Town (Karachi).

(53.) See “Bangladesh Plans to Move Rohingya Refugees to Island in the South,” *The Guardian*, May 27, 2015.

(54.) UNHCR statement for the period between October 9, 2016 and February 2017, quoted by Oliver Snow (“‘Perplexed’ Dhaka Wants Closer Cooperation on Security and Refugees,” *Frontier Myanmar*, May 18, 2017).

(55.) Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Mission Report of OHCHR Rapid Response Mission to Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, 13–24 September 2017*. The document states that 519,000 people fled to Bangladesh between August 25 and October 8, 2017 (2), but at the time of the report’s release, on October 30, that number had grown to more than 600,000. By orders 75/2017 (September 12, 2017) and 83/2017 (October 9, 2017), the Office of the President established a fifteen-member Committee for Implementation of the Recommendations (of the Kofi Annan Advisory Commission) on Rakhine State (“Establishment of the Committee for Implementation of the Recommendations on Rakhine State,” *The Global New Light of Myanmar*, October 12, 2017). Regarding the Rohingya refugees, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, in a speech on September 19, linked their repatriation to a verification process. In another move linked to the situation in Rakhine State, the government formed the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement, and Development in Rakhine (UEHRD) to further

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the cooperation between national organizations and the international community for Rakhine's recovery ("Military Sanction 'Very Specific'," *Myanmar Times*, October 19, 2017).

(56.) Danish Immigration Service (DIS), *Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh and Thailand. Fact-Finding Mission to Bangladesh and Thailand* (Copenhagen: Danish Immigration Service, 2011), 12.

(57.) Samuel Berthet, "Les Rohingya à Chittagong (Bangladesh): Enjeux d'une invisibilité," *Moussons* 22, no. 2 (2013), 75–86.

(58.) For a detailed review of these developments, see Jacques P. Leider, "Transmutations of the Rohingya Movement in the Post-2012 Rakhine State Crisis," in *Ethnic and Religious Identities and Integration in Southeast Asia*, eds. Ooi Keat Gin and Volker Grabowski (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2017), 191–239.

(59.) The shift from historical accounts is evident by comparing the content columns of Rohingya websites. Websites that were set up before 2011 frequently contain historical articles, sometimes from the colonial period—for example, the "Scholar's Column" of [www.kaladanpress.org](http://www.kaladanpress.org), a Rohingya news agency founded in 2001. Although post-2012 websites may still have a "History" section (for instance, the popular [www.rohingyablogger.com](http://www.rohingyablogger.com), founded in 2013), they tend to feature little historical content.

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(60.) Broadly speaking, Rohingya writers laid claim to an Islamic and Islamicized heritage. In the 17th century, several Bengali poets flourished at the court of Mrauk U. The most famous was Alaol, taken prisoner during an Arakanese naval raid and deported to Mrauk U. Alaol's poetry forms part of the canon of classic Bengali literature that educated people would have been familiar with. During the early 20th century, interest in this cross-cultural heritage seems to have been limited to Bengali or Burmese writers. An exception was Bisvesuar Bhattacharya ["Bengali Influence in Arakan," *Bengal Past and Present* 33 (1927), 139-144]. The authors mostly quoted by Rohingya writers after World War II were D. G. E. Hall, Arthur Phayre, G. E. Harvey, and Maurice C. Collis. Both Phayre and Harvey had published what were seen as "national" histories of Burma based on the chronicle accounts and on Western sources; Arthur P. Phayre, *History of Burma* (London: Trübner, 1883) and Geoffrey E. Harvey, *History of Burma* (London: Frank Cass, 1925). By explaining the legend of King Min Saw Mwan's exile in Bengal during the early 15th century in a rational way, Phayre and Harvey lay the groundwork for the generally accepted belief in Myanmar that Muslim mercenaries settled in Mrauk U when the capital was founded (1430 CE). For a criticism of this belief, see Jacques Leider and Kyaw Minn Htin, "King Man Co Mvan's Exile in Bengal: Legend, History, and Context," *Journal of Burma Studies*, 19.2 (December 2015), 371-405. Maurice Collis, a judge and prolific writer who brought chapters of regional history to a broad public by romanticizing fact and fiction, had a lasting influence on both Buddhist and Muslim minds. His popular book *The Land of the Great Image, Being Experiences of Friar Manrique in Arakan* (London: Faber and Faber, 1943) transformed the apologetic account of an Augustinian monk into a seemingly objective description of Arakan in the middle of the 17th century. Collis's influential academic paper "Arakan's Place in the Civilization of the Bay (A Study of Coinage and Foreign Relations)," *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 15 (1925), 34-52, praised the Muslim influence on Arakan as a marker of cultural progress.

(61.) Cresa L. Pugh, "Is Citizenship the Answer? Constructions of Belonging and Exclusion for the Stateless Rohingya of Burma," *Compas Working Paper* 107 (2013), 4-24.

(62.) Candamālālaṅkāra, *Rakhuñ rājavan̄ sac* (New Chronicle of Arakan) (Mandalay: Hamsavati Pitakat, 1931-1932). *Ña Mañ rājavan̄*, British Library (Arthur P. Phayre Collection), OR 3465A. A critical discussion of arguments related to the Muslim presence in 15th-century Arakan is found in Leider and Htin, "King Man Co Mvan's Exile in Bengal," 371-405.

(63.) Sebastião Manrique, *Travels of Fray Sebastien Manrique 1629-1643* (vol. 1, *Arakan*) (Oxford, UK: Hakluyt Society, 1927). A critical discussion of Manrique and other Portuguese sources is found in Ana Marques Guedes, *Interferência e Integração dos Portugueses na Birmânia, c. 1580-1630* (Lisbon: Fundação Oriente: 1994). *De Oost-Indische voyage van Wouter Schouten*, ed. Michael Breet (Zutphen, Netherlands: Walburg Pers B.V., 2003). Schouten is best read against the background of Arakan-Bengal relations presented by van Galen, *Arakan and Bengal*.

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(64.) Thibaut d'Hubert's *Histoire culturelle et poétique de la traduction—Alaol et la tradition littéraire bengali au XVIIe siècle à Mrauk-U, capitale du royaume d'Arakan*, thèse de doctorat (Paris: Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes, 2010) contains an appendix of more than 400 pages of translations from Alaol's poetic work. A eulogy of the Buddhist court is found in d'Hubert and Leider, "Traders and Poets," 108–111.

(65.) Four of the most widely quoted sources for this period are Francis Hamilton, "A Comparative Vocabulary of Some of the Languages Spoken in the Burma Empire," *Asiatick Researches*, 5 (1799): 219–240; Paton, "Historical and Statistical Sketch of Arakan"; Phayre, "Account of Arakan"; and Comstock, "Notes on Arakan," 219–258.

(66.) The collection contains key documents such as "Representation by the Muslims of North Arakan Claiming for an Autonomous State in the Buthidaung and Maungdaw Areas," February 24, 1947, Government of Burma Home Department; "Address Presented by Jamiat Ul Ulema North Arakan on Behalf of the People of North Arakan to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of the Union of Burma on the Occasion of His Visit to Maungdaw on the 25th October 1948," Government of the Union of Burma, Foreign Office; "Open Letter to the Leaders of the Burmese Government and the Democracies. Charter of the Constitutional Demands of the Arakani Muslims," Arakan Muslim Conference of 1951; Reginald B. Pearn, "The Mujahid Revolt in Arakan. 31 December 1952," National Archives, British Foreign Office, FO 371/101002—FB 1015/63; and "Brigadier General Aung Gyi's Speech, 4th July 1961." *Khit Yay Journal*, 12, no. 6 (1961), 9–26.

(67.) *East Pakistan District Gazetteers, Chittagong*, ed. S. N. H. Rizvi (Dacca: Government of East Pakistan, 1970); *Report on the Progress Made in the Arakan Division from 1826 to 1869* (Rangoon: Government Stationery, 1870); British Burma/Foreign Department, *Administration Report for 1869–1870* (Rangoon: Secretariat Press. 1871); *Report on the Progress Made in the Arakan Division from 1865/66 to 1874/75* (Rangoon: Government Stationery, 1876); *British Burma Gazetteer* (Rangoon: Government Printing and Stationery, 1879); *Imperial Gazetteer of India (Provincial Series) 1908, Burma* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government, 1908); *Burma Gazetteer, Akyab District Including Town and Village Census Tables* (Rangoon: Office of the Superintendent, 1912); *Burma Gazetteer, Hill District of Arakan Including Town and Village Census Tables* (Rangoon: Office of the Superintendent, 1912); *Burma Gazetteer, Kyaukpyu District Including Town and Village Census Tables* (Rangoon: Office of the Superintendent, 1912); Smart, *Burma Gazetteer, Akyab District*; W. B. Tydd, ed., *Burma Gazetteer Sandoway District* (Rangoon: Government Printing and Stationery, 1921); G. E. R. Grant-Brown, ed., *Burma Gazetteer Northern Arakan District (or Arakan Hill Tracts)* (Rangoon: Government and Printing Stationery, vol. A, 1960); James Baxter, *Report on Indian Immigration* (Rangoon: Government Printing and Stationery, 1941).

(68.) United Rohingyas Organization Headquarters, *Prañ thoñ cu I tuiñh ranh sãh lū myuih ta myuih phrac so "Ruihañgyā" lū myuih cu i rājavañ akyañ: khyup* (A Short History of "Rohingyas": An Indigenous Race of the Union of Burma) (Rangoon, 1960). Two other seminal documents are *Rui hañ gyā mvat ca lanñ ñi ñhvāt reh tap poñ cu aphañ. khyup/*

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*Rohangya Muslim United Front of Burma. Prañ t[h]oñ cūm* (read: *cu*) *sāḥ rui hañ gyā lū myuiḥ cu sui. rājavan akuiḥ akāḥ nhañ. pan krā: acī rañ kham khyak* (Report Submitted and Historical References Regarding the Rohangyas, an Ethnic Group of the Union) (Rangoon: Pali Pitaka Publishing Press, 1961); and M. A. Tahir Ba Tha's *Rui hañ gyā nhañ. Kaman lū myuiḥ cu myāḥ* (Rohingyas and Kamans) (Myitkyina, Myanmar: United Rohingya National League, 1963). Ba Tha's work was translated into English by Ahmed F. K. Jilani, *A Short History of Rohingyas and Kamans of Burma* (Chittagong, Bangladesh: Institute of Arakan Studies, 1999). The next generation of Rohingya historiography is represented by Mohammad Yunus, the founder of the Rohingya Solidarity Organization, who published *A History of Arakan Past and Present*. The most important recent author is U Kyaw Min, a prominent political leader since the 1990 elections. His works include "Towards Understanding Arakan History," written in English under his pen name Abu Aneen, as well as *A Glimpse into the Hidden Chapters of Arakan History* and *Rui hañ gyā samuiḥ kui chan. cac khrañḥ* (Examination of Rohingya History), both written in Burmese. Zaw Min Htut's *The Union of Burma and Ethnic Rohingyas* (Tokyo: Maruyama, 2001) merits a special mention because it provoked the strongest reactions among educated Rakhine.

(69.) Among his articles, the following are of particular relevance for Rohingya historiography: Tahir Ba Tha, "Roewengyas in Arakan"; "The Coming of Islam to Arakan (A Brief Study of Islamic Civilization in Arakan)," *The Guardian* 12, no. 3 (March 1965), 9–13; and Ba Tha, "Muslims in Arakan."

(70.) Muhammad Noor, Barrak Adams, and Diana Wong, *The Exodus: A True Story from a Child of a Forgotten People* (Kuala Lumpur, self-published: 2012); Robert Mole, *The Temple Bells Are Calling—A Personal Record of the Last Years of British Rule in Burma* (Bishop Auckland, UK: Pentland Books, 2001).

(71.) A few of ARNO's *Monthly Arakan—News and Analysis of the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation* issues from 2009 and 2010 are downloadable as PDF files on the Web under various addresses; for example, [burmalibrary.org/docs08/mag\\_arakan01-05.pdf](http://burmalibrary.org/docs08/mag_arakan01-05.pdf).

(72.) Unlike numerous reports written after the violence in 2012, which display a poor understanding of the Rohingya refugee context, a DIS delegation produced a report of lasting interest about the Rohingya refugees: *Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh and Thailand. Fact-Finding Mission to Bangladesh and Thailand 4 to 17 February 2011* (Copenhagen, Danish Immigration Service: May 2011).

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