

“The **Muslims** in Rakhine and the political project of the Rohingyas”

{ Historical background of an unresolved communal conflict in contemporary Myanmar

Jacques P. Leider, *Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*

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Perception of the conflict

- Displacement of “Rohingya” and refugee crisis: humanitarian and human rights crisis
- Key words in reports and media: Human rights violations, “racism” ; harassment, extortion, “stateless people”; citizenship issue
 - Government failure to protect
- Recurrence of communal crises/persecution (1942, 1947-54, 1977-8, 1991-2)
- More recent aspects:
 - Presence of NGOs and UNHCR in Rakhine/ close observation
 - Media involvement (traditional news; web related social networks)
 - Andrew Selth: “Accurate and objective analyses tend to be drowned out by passionate interventions from activists and others, amplified by the internet.”
 - Internationalization :
 - Calls to the government of Myanmar to shoulder its responsibility
 - Involvement of Muslims countries and organizations (visits; donations)

Need for a broader approach

- Need for a more in-depth approach
 - **Greater awareness of the historical background**
 - Islam and Buddhism in Arakan/Rakhine
 - Greater awareness of cultural specificity and local sensitivity
 - Nationalism and quest for identities
- **Need for more information and transparency**
 - Statistical information (demography)
 - Access to information
 - Common ground of the debate (defining common terms of discussion)
- The **Rohingyas as a political movement** of Rakhine Muslims
 - Victimization vs. responsibility
 - The Rohingyas as social and political actors
- International and national dimensions of the conflict
 - NGOs/ UNHCR - From a treatment of the symptoms to an awareness of the causes
 - Political implications in the current Myanmar political context

Early Rakhine History

- The historical time-line during the pre-colonial period
 - Before 900 CE: Indianized urban culture in the Kaladan and Lemro valleys (archaeological evidence – Hindu-Buddhist)
 - Up to the 13th c. CE: various city states (little archaeological evidence; uncertain dynastic successions)
 - 13th – 14th c. CE Laung-grak period: emergence of an Arakanese kingship / Buddhist predominance
 - 15th-18th c. CE Mrauk-U kingdom: dominates the coast of the northeastern Bay of Bengal between 1580 and 1670.
- Early Muslim presence in Rakhine
 - Context: 13th c. Muslim conquest of Bengal; AD 1371: Muslim ruler in Chittagong; slow expansion of Islam in East Bengal countryside
 - 2nd half of the 15th century: cultural impact of the sultanate of Bengal (coins, royal titles); traders (Persian inscription of AD 1495 – Mrauk-U Archaeological Museum)

Emergence of the Rakhine kingdom as a regional power (16th to 17th c. CE)

- 1530-70 Chatigrama/**Chittagong**: a quasi autonomous Muslim port city
- expansion of the Rakhine kingdom towards the north (subjugation of the Chakma and inroads into sultanate territories)
- 1570-1630 constant **aggressive warfare of the expanding Rakhine kingdom** against Muslim and Hindu lords in East Bengal as well as Portuguese settlements:
 - Portuguese captains and sailors at the service of the Rakhine kings
- 1580-1612 **Mughal conquest of Bengal**:
 - Afghan (Pathan) soldiers of the sultanate said to take refuge in Arakan
 - Portuguese-Muslim political and commercial rivalry at the court of Rakhine
- **Economic pillars** of the Rakhine kingdom
 - Controlling the textile production of Chittagong and the flourishing port trade
 - Deportations of Bengalis for agricultural labor; capturing ships; literary activities and needs of the court elite
 - Rice and slave trade serving Portuguese and Dutch interests (Java)

Buddhist rulers and cultural diversity (17th to 18th c.)

- 1580-1670 Rakhine: a **Buddhist kingdom of the land and the sea**
- Political and military profile:
 - A **navy of several thousand ships and boats** controlling the seas and waterways of the northeastern Bay of Bengal
 - Foreign relations: "**anti-Mughal**"; resisting Mughal expansion towards the east (loss of Chittagong 1666)
 - "**anti-Pegu**" : defeating Burmese western expansion in the 16th c.
- Cultural profile
 - Sovereign power over **culturally diverse communities** (trilingual coins!)
 - Coexistence of Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Christians at the service of the Rakhine ruler
 - **Bengali poetry** on Persian literary models demonstrates integration of Arakan in a cultural network in the Bay of Bengal (Dawlat Qazi, Alaol)
- **1666-1785 Rakhine's marginalization**: Political and economic decline with intermittent resurgence of the central power of the king
 - Muslim officers remain embedded in political rivalries at the court
 - Persistence of a Persianized elite in northern Rakhine (?)
 - Marginal economic interest for Indian and local traders

Buddhists and Muslims in 19th c. Rakhine

- **1785–1825 Myanmar conquest and rule over Arakan**
 - **Decapitation of the Rakhine monarchy**, transport of the Mahamuni statue to Amarapura, deportation of the political and cultural elite
- Religious integration (Buddhist and Muslim)
 - 1797-99 deportations of Arakanese for forced labour to Upper Burma provoke a massive exodus to southeast Bengal (more than 80,000?)
- Becomes a **collective trauma of the Rakhine Buddhists**: “genocide”
 - Refugee problem creates border problems with the East India Company (rules Chittagong since 1761); foundation of Cox’ Bazaar.
 - Marma and Rakhaing settlements in the plains and the Chittagong Hill Tracts
 - Muslim (and Hindu) refugees integrated into Bengali society
- **1825–1852 Early administration of the East India Company**
 - Failed hope of a restoration of the Arakanese monarchy: local rebellions
 - Administrative failures, corruption, exploitative tax regime
 - Demographic recovery thanks to a progressive return of refugees
 - Attracts Bengali labour for a burgeoning export rice production

The pre-colonial Muslim community in Rakhine – a profile

- Who?

- Bengali agriculturalists deported and resettled by the Rakhine kings
- Bengali craftsmen and artists from Chittagong deported to Rakhine
- Traders from India (Gujarat, Coromandel, Bengal)
 - No clear evidence of Muslim trading settlements (Schouten 1661 says that there were no resident Indian traders)
- Mercenaries from Bengal at the service of the king (royal guards)
- Highly educated Persianized “cosmopolitan” Bengalis stranded, deported... and sponsored at the court
- The **northeast Coast of the Bay of Bengal** (Noakhali, Chittagong, Rakhine)
 - Progress of Islam thanks to Sufi saints (Badar Maqam)
 - Massive migrations were a constant feature of the history of the coast
 - Piracy and deportations were also a recurrent phenomenon
 - Cultural and religious coexistence were political imperatives
 - The Buddhist king praised as a protector of the Muslims (Alaol)
- **Cultural links of the educated Rakhine Muslim community with Muslim centers in India and Malayan Peninsula**

A demographic revolution (late 19th c.- early 20th c.)

- Source problem for the social history on early colonial Rakhine
- Massive increase of the population in Rakhine (mostly Akyab district) due to immigration
 - Considerable Burman migration to Rakhine (integrating local Buddhist society)
 - Dramatic increase of Bengali immigration in north Rakhine leading to the displacement of Rakhine Buddhists towards the south
- Increasing social imbalance after the First World War: risk of communal clashes
- Unrestricted immigration during the British regime (unlike Rangoon: restrictions to Indian immigration)
- High birthrate among Muslim families

Population - Akyab District (1872-1911)							
		1872	%	1901	%	1911	%
Hindoo		2,655	1%	14,455	3%	14,454	3%
Muslims		58,255	21%	154,887	32%	178,647	34%
Burmans		4,632	2%	35,751	7%	92,185	17%
Arakanese		171,612	62%	239,649	50%	209,432	40%
Shan		334	0%	80	0%	59	0%
Mountain tribes		38,577	14%	35,489	7%	34,020	6%
Others		606	0%	1,355	0%	1,146	0%
Total		276,671		481,666		529,943	
Percentage indicates percentage of total population							

Impact of the immigration from Chittagong: a colonial view of the early 1920s

“In the north-east portion of Akyab in the Buthidaung sub-division, the population now consists chiefly of permanent Chittagonian settlers. Large numbers of Chittagonians also spread over the country temporarily for the ploughing and reaping seasons.

The Arakanese now tend to concentrate in the Sub-division of Kyauktaw. Some people think they must necessarily be submerged in time. Others believe that they will hold their own.

Fortunately they do not intermarry much with Chittagonians and though rather an indolent race have yet brains enough to be fairly prosperous and in a few individual cases even rich.”

Colonial ethnic and linguistic classification

SOURCE: *BURMA GAZETTEER AKYAB DISTRICT including Town and Village Census Tables 1912.*

Rangoon: Office of the Superintendent - Govt. Printing. vol. B.

“Tribe or Race”

Muslim tribes: 178,647

“Language”

Indian Vernaculars –

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Bengali: 181,509

Jacques P. Leider, EFEO 2012

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DISTRICT POPULATION ARRANGED BY RACE AND LANGUAGE.

Tribe or Race.			Number of persons.	Language.			Number of speakers.
1			2	1			2
<i>Indigenous Races—</i>							
Burmese	...	...	92,185	Burmese	...	...	93,480
Arakanese	...	...	209,432	Arakanese	...	...	208,527
Chin	...	...	33,381	Chin	...	...	33,292
Shan	...	...	39	Shan	...	...	45
Karen	...	...	31	Karen	...	...	30
Others	...	...	608				
<i>Hindu Castes—</i>				<i>Indian Vernaculars—</i>			
Brahman	...	...	678	Tamil	...	...	1,192
Chatri	...	...	136	Telugu	...	...	573
Chetty	...	...	157	Oriya	...	...	1,489
Kapu	...	...	103	Bengali	...	...	181,509
Mala	...	...	70	Hindi	...	...	8,144
Other Castes	...	...	13,310	Other Indian Vernaculars	...	...	102
<i>Muslim Tribes—</i>							
Shaik	...	...	151,037	...	...	...	...
Zerbadi	...	...	305	...	...	...	...
Others	...	...	27,305	...	...	...	...
Chinese	...	...	521	Chinese	...	...	501
European	...	...	237	European	...	...	418
Anglo-Indian	...	...	168	Others	...	...	641
Others	...	...	220				
Total			529,943	Total			529,943

IMMIGRATION AND EMIGRATION.

The following statement shows the Immigration into, and Emigration from, the Akyab District. The figures for the three districts contributing most largely to the immigration (Kyaukpyu, Rangoon and Chittagong) and for the three districts affording the main outlets for Emigration (Rangoon,

Japanese invasion, Allied Victory and the aftermath of World War II

- Flight of Indians towards India during the Japanese invasion (1942)
- Bloody communal clashes between Rakhine and Muslims, land confiscation, massacres of 1942
 - The claim of Muslim social and religious distinctiveness
 - The emergence of the Rohingya political movement
- **"Where do we belong?" A separate Islamic state (leaning towards Pakistan) or an independent Muslim state within the Union?**
 - Jinnah, Aung San and contested local ambitions
- The guerrilla war (and the failure) of the **Mujahedin (1947-1960)**
 - rice smuggling, refugees and illegal immigration from Chittagong
- 1950s: Signs of public recognition during the parliamentary period
 - (Student associations, radio programs, name recognition in public speech)
- Creation of an "Arakan State" in the Union (U Nu, Rakhine Buddhists) or separate autonomy for the Muslims ?
 - Creation of the **Mayu Frontier Administration** (1961-1964)

Cycles of repression and migration

- After Bangladesh's independence 1971 "... the extent of illegal immigration in Arakan was enormous" (M. Yegar 2002, 55)
 - 1974 Creation of "Arakan State"
- 1974 State's reaction against illegal immigration: Emergency Immigration Act
- 1975 Migration of several thousand Muslims to Bangladesh
- **1978** Operation Nagamin "scrutinize each individual living in the State, ... taking action against foreigners who have filtered into the country illegally"
- Arrests of illegal migrants creates unrest, involvement of the army and a **mass exodus to Bangladesh** (252,000 refugees)
- August 1978-December 1979 repatriation led by UNHCR
 - Law on citizenship 15 October 1982
- **1991-92** Forced relocation of Muslims and creation of new Buddhist settlements provoke another **mass exodus to Bangladesh** (270,000 refugees)
- 1993 repatriation under UNHCR authority (until 1997)

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TALK WITH MR K.M. KAISER, BANGLADESH
AMBASSADOR IN RANGOON

5. Bangladesh and Burma. He admitted that there were upward of a million Bangalee trespassers in Arakan whom the Burmese had some right to eject. He had implored the Burmese authorities not to press this issue during Bangladesh's present troubles and had been pleased that the Burmese had not taken advantage of his country's misfortunes in this respect. He denied that there had been any fresh exodus into Burma of refugees from Bangladesh. The recent troubles had scarcely affected the ordinary Bangalee who was now happily anticipating a bumper rice crop. Mr

T.J. O'Brien, internal minute, British Embassy, Rangoon, 23 December 1975

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Cycles of repression and migration: international and local perception

- **Myanmar Government policy as seen by Amnesty International (2004)**
- "Rohingyas' **freedom of movement is severely restricted** and the vast majority of them have effectively been denied Burma citizenship. They are also subjected to various **forms of extortion and arbitrary taxation**; land confiscation; **forced eviction** and house destruction; and financial restrictions on marriage. Rohingyas continue to be used as **forced labourers** on roads and at military camps..."
- **Myanmar Government policy as seen by ARNO (2012):**
- "Junta's policy towards the Muslims of Burma: the ruling military junta practices two pronged **de-Islamisation** policy in Burma: physical extermination through **genocide and ethnic cleansing** of Rohingya Muslims of Arakan and **cultural assimilation of Muslims** living in other parts of Burma. Their main objective is to turn strategic Muslim Arakan into a Burmanised Buddhist region by reducing the Muslims into insignificant or manageable minorities."

The Rohingya political movement

- The fight of the Mujahedin (1947-1960): the fight for a Muslim state
- The military option: **from guerrilla tactics to military insignificance**
- Extremism and the terrorist option as a threat in the 1980s and 1990s
- A succession of **militant organizations (1947-2000)**
 - No political impact on events during the refugee crises
- After 2001: Towards a moderate political discourse:
 - self-determination, no more claim for an Islamic state, repatriation of refugees and peaceful co-existence with the Buddhists
- Since 2005: organizational support from Euro-Burma office, Brussels (Harn Yawngkhwe)
- 2012: Support from OIC in combination with Turkish backing

MAZLUMDER – The Association of Human Rights and Solidarity for Oppressed People “**International Conference on Arakan**” **Istanbul**, October 14th, 2012, Zeytinburnu Center for Culture and Arts, İstanbul

- 1947-1960 Guerrilla warfare of the Mujahedin
 - Failed British promises of an independent Muslim state (?)
 - Troops: 2000 or more; headquarters taken in 1954 by the Burmese army; increasing loss of popular support
- 1964 Suppression of the Mayu Frontier Zone
- 1964 *Rohingya Independent Force* (RIF), led by Jafar Habib (aka Muhammad Jafar)
- 1969 RIF united with *Rohingya Independent Army* (RIA), led by Jafar Habib
- 1973 (or 1975?) RIA becomes *Rohingya Patriotic Front* (RPF), led by Jafar Habib (or B.A. Jafar)
- 1982 *Rohingya Solidarity Organisation* (RSO), a new militant organisation

“The RSO and other Rakhine separatist groups have in the past engaged in armed guerrilla activity in Myanmar but **there have been no reports of such activity in recent years**. They aimed to gain de facto control of the Rakhine state and expel the Myanmar military through harassment and the classical tactics of guerrilla warfare... there is **evidence that some members of the RSO received training in Afghan facilities during the 1990's**.”

<http://www.janes.com/articles/Janes-World-Insurgency-and-Terrorism/Rohingya-Solidarity-Organisation-RSO-Bangladesh.html>

- 1987 *Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front* (ARIF), a unitary movement including several Rohingya organizations, including the RSO. Re-ignition of armed fight, but no military impact. ARIF militated also against the repatriation of refugees in the camps in Bangladesh. Obtained support by *Jamaat Islami* (Yegar)
- 2000 *Arakan Rohingya National Organisation* (ARNO), a new unitary organisation founded after the split of the RSO. Military wing: *Rohingya National Army*.
- Post Sept 11, 2001: ARNO holds a moderate political discourse, distancing itself from Muslim fundamentalists.

Year	Rohingya in Myanmar	Source
2009	729,000	UN estimate
2012	800,000	UNHCR, NGOs, et al.
2012	More than 1 million	Abu Anin, Yangon
2012	1,2 million	Abu Tahay, Yangon
2010	1,3 million	Moh. Ashraf Alam
2012	1,5 million	Wakar Udin, BRANA
2012	1,5 million	BRO-UK website
2012	Not yet 2 million	Akbar Ahmed
2003	Up to 2 million	Andrew Selth
2012	2 million	www.rohingya.org

“Rohingya” inside Myanmar

“The Rohingya are a majority community in Arakan”
(Nurul Islam, ARNO)

Country	Rohingya outside Myanmar	Source
Bangladesh	600,000	www.rohingya.org
	300,000	Wikipedia (cit. AFP 2012)
Pakistan	350,000	www.rohingya.org
	200,000	Wikipedia (cit. AHS 2003)
Saudi-Arabia	400,000	www.rohingya.org
	500,000	Wikipedia (cit. BCN 2003)
UAE, Thailand, Malaysia	100,000	www.rohingya.org
Thailand	100,000	Wikipedia (source indicated)
Malaysia	24,000	Wikipedia (source indicated)

“Rohingya” outside Myanmar

Total population of Rakhine State estimated at 3,83 million (2010)

Rohingya refugees and advocacy

- Rohingya community and advocacy organizations:
 - BRAT, Burmese Rohingya Association in Thailand
 - BROUK, Burmese Rohingya Organisation United Kingdom
 - BRCA, Burmese Rohingya Community in Australia
 - BRJA, Burmese Rohingya Association in Japan
 - BRA-UAE, Burmese Rohingya Association in United Arab Emirates
 - Rohingya Human Rights Council, Norway
 - Union of Rohingya Communities in Europe, Denmark-Norway
 - Arakan Rohingya Refugee Committee, Malaysia
- 2010 BRANA (Burmese Rohingya Association of North America) “advocacy organization with a primary mission of closely working with the US Government, Canadian Government, and various NGOs in **legislation, policy formulation, and humanitarian support** for issues facing the Rohingya people in Burma and other countries around the world. ... Additionally BRANA maintains strong ties with various NGOs around the world to **advance the cause of Rohingya**... (education, professional development, social welfare, and community life)”.

Rohingya refugees and advocacy

- 30-31 May 2011 Convention of senior Rohingya leaders under OIC patronage in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia)
- Foundation of the **Arakan Rohingya Union (ARU)**
 - to seek a political solution to the problems faced by the Rohingya people.
 - formed on the agreed principles of an indivisible Arakan State, Peaceful Co-existence, Democracy and Human Rights, and Federalism.
 - agreed upon the establishment of an ARU Congress which is currently composed of 25 organizations.
 - will seek to include representatives of all Rohingya organizations.
- **Leadership:** ARU Council members: Mr. Abul Faiz Jilani, Bangladesh, Mr. Imum Ahmad, KSA, Mr. Ko Ko Lin (Mohammed Kalim), Bangladesh, Dr. Mohammed Yunus, Bangladesh, Mr. Nurul Islam, UK, Ustaz Salim Ullah, KSA, Mr. Reza Uddin, USA, Mr. Sayed Hussein, Norway, Mr. Zaw Min Htut, Japan, Dr. Muhammed Eyup Han, Turkey.
- Dr. Wakar Uddin, USA, Director General of the Secretariat.

Who are the Rohingyas?

- The diverse historical **background**
 - An old Muslim community of regional origins emerging during the pre-colonial period (early modern era)
 - Ongoing Bengali migration from Chittagong since the colonial period
- The **awareness** of a distinctive Muslim identity
 - A cultural legacy and a collective memory
 - Linguistic specificity and historical roots
- The **building** of a modern “Rohingya” identity
 - Re-interpretation and re-writing of history
 - Invention of history and outdated claims

Identities: the awareness of a local Muslim identity



- The charisma of an old name: "Rohingya"
- 1936 Creation of the *Rohingya Jam'iyat al Ulama*
- Distinct language: **derived from Chittagonian**, itself a Bengali dialect, strong admixture of Arabic and Urdu.
- "The people of southern Bangladesh spoke a **dialect** known as Chittagonian that is somewhat mutually intelligible with the Rohingya's language." (D. Flood, 2008)
- "Under the British occupation, **Urdu** was introduced to Rohingyas. As Urdu is a sweet language rich with melodious songs, the influence of kawali crept in among the Rohingya students and educated class." (AFK Jilani, 2001)
- Collective memory of the Muslim historical and cultural heritage in Rakhine
 - Seasonal songs, dramatic plays ...
 - (AFK Jilani, *A cultural History of Rohingya*)

Identities: the invention of a Rohingya identity

- Name: “Rohingya” spread widely after Burma’s independence 1948 by Muslims from Maungdaw and Buthidaung identifying themselves with the heritage of the precolonial Muslim community in Arakan
- “Rohingya” identity sets a predominantly ‘Indian’ Muslim community apart from other ‘Indian’ Muslim communities in Myanmar
- Confusing myths of ancient origins
 - Conflicting Rohingya historical explanations
 - Confusing definitions of ethnicity
- History matters:
 - Re-interpreting Rakhine history as a predominantly Muslim history
 - Stressing the role of Muslims in Rakhine history
 - Emphasizing elite roles – disregarding the social picture as a whole
 - Muslim cultural superiority (Civilization flowing from the West, barbarity from the East)
- Writing the “Rohingya” back into history (Muslim/Bengali et al. = Rohingya!)

Conflicting accounts of Muslim/Rohingya origins

Descendants of ship-wrecked Arab sailors (7th, 8th or 9th century?)

“... there is no doubt that the Arabs had contact with Arakan during the 8th to 10th centuries of the Christian era. Apart from the general statements of the Arab geographers, there is positive local evidence of the early Arab contact with Arakan. In the Arakanese traditional history, it is stated that in the reign of Mahatoing Tsandaya (788-810 A.D) several Arab ships wrecked off the coast of Rambi Island (Ramree), the Muslim sailors somehow escaped and swam into the shore. In the Arakanese history they are called *kula*-s or foreigners.”

(Prof. Dr Abdul Karim, Chittagong, 1995)

Descendants of Indo-Aryan people: the link to Vesali (7th to 9th c. urban culture)

“The fact that in the light of racial and linguistic affinity with Wethali people, Rohingya of Arakan today are to be designated as the descendants of those early Indo-Aryan people of Arakan.”

(Abu Anin, Yangon, 2002)

Mixed ethnic origins

“Rohingyas have been living in Arakan from time immemorial. They trace their ancestry to Arabs, Moors, Pathans, Moghuls, Bengalis and some Indo-Mongoloid people. Early Muslim settlements in Arakan date back to 7th century AD.”

(Nurul Islam, ARNO website)

“The Muslims in Arakan are the direct progeny of the early Muslim as an ethnic race. They are the descendants of the Muslim Arabs, Moors, Persians, Turks, Mughals and Bengalis who came mostly as traders, warriors and saints through overland and sea-route. Many settled in Arakan and mixing with the local people developed the present stock of people known as "Rohingyas".

(Mohammed Ali Chowdhury, Chittagong, 1995)

“The Muslims from Rakhine state are descendants of Moorish, Arab and Persian traders who arrived between the 9th and 15th centuries, married local women, and settled in the region.”

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(UNHCR report 1993)

The rejection of Bengali roots

“They are neither Chittagonians nor are they Bengalis [Bangladeshis]. ... [They are] therefore an amalgam of new migrants - Shaikhs, Syeds, Qazis, Mollahs, Alims, Fakirs, Arabs, Rumis (Turks), Moghuls, Pathans - from various parts of the Muslim world that settled during and before the Mrauk-U dynasty, including the captives (the so-called Kolas) brought in from various parts of Bengal and India, and the indigenous Muslims (the children of Bhumiputras who had converted to Islam over the centuries).”

(Habib Siddiqui, 2012)

The recognition of Bengali roots

“Rohingya is a mixed race, where the culture of native Bengali has a major influence, because Arakan has historically close intercourses with East Bengal and Arakan Kings encouraged Muslims to preserve the culture, language and literature of Bengali”

(Abu Anin, Yangon, 2002)

Buddhist identity and the voiceless Rakhine

- Strong identification with Buddhist roots and traditions
 - Emblematic importance of the statue of the Mahamuni
 - Arakan/Rakhine = a cherished land of Buddha's teaching
- Collective memory: strong emotional orientation towards the "great past":
 - Pride of the early urban culture (Vesali, Kaladan valley)
 - Pride of the glorious kingdom of Mrauk-U
- Culturally close to the Myanmar: Shared written language, shared religion
- Self-isolation, mistrust and xenophobia : no national mythology shared with the Myanmar
- Historical trauma following the Burmese conquest of 1785
 - Deportations, massive exodus to Chittagong area after 1798; rebellions
 - Failure to resurrect the monarchy (after 1825) and social disorder
 - Late 19th century: wide spread opium addiction
 - Prophetic literature: inexorable decline of the Arakanese monarchy
- Failure to resist Chittagonian Muslim penetration (after 1870)
 - Feeling of losing their country, threat of higher Muslim fertility
 - Rejection of a parallel Muslim society that refuses social integration with majority community ("Rohingya hoax")
 - "Siege mentality" – lack of compromise and radical nationalism

Competing identities: an ongoing debate

- A parochial debate
 - Publications by leaders and intellectuals of both communities (mostly in Burmese language)
 - Mutually exclusive narratives: Buddhist authors write the Muslims out of history, Muslim authors marginalize the Buddhist character of Rakhine
- Demonstrates relevance of history telling in the minds of both communities
- The writing of sectarian history ignores academic research and fact finding
- Unbalanced use of facts and figures
- Constant extrapolations from uncertain data
- The battle to rule the historical narrative largely ignored by foreigners
 - Uncritical reception of Rohingya accounts in Western media
 - Unqualified and predominant citation of Muslim claims
- Muslim “Rohingya” writing: writing history and historical claims are part of a strategy to earn recognition as an ethnic minority
- Ascertainable historical data: a strong Buddhist epigraphic, literary, iconographic, architectural record, but a limited historical archive for the past of the Muslims in Rakhine.
- **A debate no community can win within the narrowness of nationalist mindsets!**

Current issues

- The political priorities of the Rohingya Muslims (inside the country)
 - Safe living conditions; basic human rights; humanitarian principles
 - Ethnicity: an outdated debate?
 - Citizenship: the rule of the sovereign state
- The role of the media in Myanmar
 - Current crisis has provoked a formerly unknown wave of Myanmar sympathy for the Rakhine thanks to the media reports
- Western, regional and international delusions
 - Potentially erroneous belief that welfare work and technical reconstruction will lay the basis to an end of the conflict
 - Mistaken conception that the government can solve the crisis
- Involving the Rakhine Buddhists
 - Deep-seated frustration, anxiety and the sense of injustice
 - Solidarity, “coaching” for compromise, role of the monkhood

Perspectives

- Internationalization
 - Is internationalization a strategic support for Muslims in Rakhine or further isolating them in the national forum?
- Who has a mandate to speak for the Rohingya? Inside/Outside
 - Muslim communities in political exile or economic emigration?
- Potential for radicalization and future violence
 - Is the debate about the Rakhine communal issue going to further antagonize Muslims and Buddhists in Myanmar?
- Negotiating the political future: looking out for a consensus
 - A persistent lack of trust and confidence-building measures
 - Dialogue: Is there a potential to mediate communal relations?
- Education and the social and economic development in Rakhine
 - Sharing the wealth of the country for the benefit of all
 - ... and progress taking hold at the grass-roots level?