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From Aracan Mahomedans to Muslim Rohingyas – Towards an archive of naming practices

Jacques P. Leider

Author

Jacques P. Leider has been the head of the research centers of the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO, French Institute of Asian Studies) in Yangon and Bangkok since 2017. As a historian of Southeast Asia, he has specialized in the study of the early modern and modern history of Myanmar (Burma) and has published widely on the kingdom of Arakan and the historical background of the contemporary Rakhine State crisis. He taught at Chulalongkorn University in the 1990s and has overseen building the research library of the EFEO in Chiang Mai (2009-2011). As the scientific coordinator of CRISEA (Competing Regional Integrations in Southeast Asia), he is at present in charge of an EU-supported project which includes partners in ten European and Southeast Asian countries, including Thailand.

Abstract

The present essay contributes to the investigation of the historical background of the Rakhine State crisis which, since 2012, has attracted wide international attention about the Muslim community of North Rakhine State, which self-identifies as Rohingyas. The global perception and their latest mass flight to Bangladesh in 2017 has led to a continuing crisis in Myanmar's international relations. However, the historical complexity behind the conflict has been imperfectly understood, because its study

has not attracted much interest. Arguing that the changes in names used by and for Muslims in the frontier region of Bengal/Bangladesh and Burma/Myanmar reflect the political, social and demographic development, the essay calls for an archive of naming practices as a pool of references and information to be included in the ongoing debate.

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"Rohingya" is the name chosen by the biggest Muslim community in Myanmar to self-identify as an ethno-religious group living in North Rakhine State. The name means 'Arakanese' or 'Rakhine' in their East Bengali dialect.[1] It was chosen by politically active Muslims from Maungdaw in the 1950s to stress claims of indigeneity, twenty years before the creation of Arakan State (today Rakhine State) in 1974.[2] Muslim leaders and students

strongly endorsed its use and strenuous efforts were made to defend its adoption on historical grounds in print media during the early 1960s when the Burmese government had created the Mayu Frontier Administration, a military-ruled majority Muslim zone along the border with East Pakistan. The name and the ethnic claims associated with the political ambitions of the North Arakan Muslims were not accepted by the Buddhist majority. But it does not seem that the adoption of the name "Rohingya" ran into any wide-spread public opposition at that time. This is not surprising because the ideological clash between Muslim and Buddhist nationalists in Arakan in the 1950s was a competition among educated members of two political elites; it was not an issue that moved the masses. Moreover, the political leverage of both communities was limited.

From the 1960s to the 1990s, the Rohingyas and other ethno-political issues related to Arakan (called Rakhine State after 1989) remained a marginal issue in international reporting on Burma/Myanmar so that the name was known only to people familiar with the contentious history of the region. It spread internationally with world-wide reporting on the communal violence that exploded in Rakhine State in 2012 and much more so with the mass flight of hundreds of thousands of Muslims to Bangladesh in 2016-17, a succession of events that corroborated accusations of genocidal intentions. In the early 21st century, the name "Rohingya" conflates therefore records of a humanitarian tragedy, state-persecution, exclusion from civic rights and an extended process of Muslim discrimination in Myanmar. Its rapid and wide acceptance after 2012 signaled an

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[1] The present essay uses both Arakan (Arakanese) and Rakhine to refer to Myanmar's westernmost province on the Bay of Bengal. Rakhine is a term closer to the actual pronunciation of the name of the ethnic majority people and a spelling which has been officially used since the 1980s. Until then "Arakan" was the most widely used word used in English and other Western languages. For political reasons, as a demonstration of an anti-junta stance, there are Rohingya and Rakhine writers who have rejected the spelling "Rakhine" in favor of the traditional "Arakan". "Rakhine" is both an ethnonym and an adjective, but not a noun. For that reason, the expression "Rakhine state" has to be preferred when the administrative unit is meant.

[2] The present essay builds on the author's research note "Rohingya – the Name and its Living Archive," *ASEANFocus* 2 (2018), 16-17. I am particularly indebted to Ambassador (rtd.) Derek Tonkin whose indefatigable efforts to make archival documents available to a wider public have proved so fruitful to historical studies.

international recognition of the ethnic self-identification of the Rohingyas and an acknowledgement of what the media described as the "plight of the Rohingyas," an expression that wraps up the process of persecution and victimhood. The impact of sheer humanitarian urgency further coated the name with a resistance to questions on its genesis which was internationally encapsulated in the same set of beliefs that Rohingyas themselves had nourished for many years.

The other side of the medal has been the persistence of the country's authorities to deny the ethnic claims and hold on to a counter-narrative which similarly does not make concessions to the complexity of the group's cultural, ethnic, religious and political entanglements in the region. From an investigative perspective, the name "Rohingya" is not only the expression of an ethno-religious self-affirmation whose origins need to be contextualized, but also a constituting part of a lingering political conflict that has opposed the Muslims of North Rakhine to the Buddhist Rakhine majority as well as the Burmese/Myanmar state.

Since the 1970s, Rohingyas claimed that they had gained administrative recognition of their name by the state and referred to a variety of official and public documents that date mostly from the period of the Mayu Frontier Administration period (1961-64) mentioned above. Official documents and Rakhine Buddhist texts that expressed opposition to the use of the name appeared later. While a few Rakhine writers publicly questioned the historical narrative of the Rohingyas since the 1980s, a flow of official government statements denying the recognition of the

group's ethnic claims emerged only in the 1990s when the military regime established an increasingly repressive regime in Rakhine state. For Rakhine Buddhists and the government alike, the name "Rohingya" stands for an ahistorical ethnic claim raised by people of Bengali (mainly Chittagonian) origins whose relatively recent arrival in the country was linked to the export-oriented policies of the colonial period (rice exports), to separatist leanings after World War II and to illegal immigration after independence from East Pakistan and Bangladesh. The Rohingyas themselves claim origins that reach back to the arrival of Muslims from the Middle East since the 8th century and emphasize that they are different from the Chittagonian Bengalis whose East Bengali dialect they largely share.

There is no mystery about the linguistic nature of the word "Rohingya" as it can be related to the Bengali term "Roshang" for Arakan and its local variant "Rohang" (Leider, 2012). Its existence as a spoken language is ascertained, though just by a single quotation in an article by Francis Buchanan-Hamilton in 1799. Hamilton was a Scottish physician who recorded "Rooinga" as a term denoting the language of Arakanese deportees living in Amarapura, Burma's capital, in 1795. The fact that the small Muslim community had their own tongue besides speaking Arakanese is confirmed by several early British or American observers. Modern Rohingyas, passing over the considerable social and demographic changes of the later part of the colonial period (1870-1940), consider this single mention as a proof of the existence of a single Muslim Rohingya ethnicity.

Academic research about the Rohingya population in Myanmar, Malaysia and Bangladesh undertaken between 2011 and 2018 has focused on humanitarian and legal issues confronting the topics of statelessness, refugee status, islamophobia and ethno-political marginalization (Hnin Yee Myint, 2011; Di Gaetano, 2012; Wirtz, 2013; Biver, 2014, Crossman, 2014; Marzoli, 2014; Benhsaïne, 2015 and Lamboo, 2017 – to name but a few of these studies). Investigations on Buddhist-Muslim relations in Myanmar and the failure to ensure justice and protection of minorities have led to incriminating reports hitting at the government's failures (Allard 2015; Asian Parliamentarians 2015; Human Rights Council 2018, to quote but a few). However, the life of the contested name and the history behind it have only been partly unpacked. While after 2012 the name "Rohingya" became rapidly adopted by journalists and diplomats around the world as the only politically correct term to refer to this Muslim community, no collective endeavor to study the population behind the name and to expand the understanding of the roots of the cultural and political divide between the Muslim Rohingyas and the Rakhine majority population emerged. Going beyond the assessment of the human rights violations and the legal conundrum, a study of the reasons that drove the communities apart may have made a valuable contribution towards a better understanding of the deep feelings of injustice and communal grief that had existed for decades. Yet the poor interest in the historical background was not a new phenomenon. Despite the pro-Indian and pro-Muslim leanings of British colonial authors like D.G.E. Hall and

Maurice Collis, academic research on the Muslims in Arakan (and in Burma as well) never became rooted in the wider field of Burmese cultural studies (Collis, 1925; Hall, 1936). Nor did the study of Buddhist Arakan/Rakhine State, which remained an entirely marginal field until the 1990s. In post-colonial Burma/Myanmar itself, academic research on the history of the non-Burman ethnic groups, geographically identified with the periphery of the country, was never encouraged unless it could be tied into the national discourse on Burmese leadership.

It is against this background of missing context and critical analysis that the present essay argues in favor of a heuristic approach built on the archive of naming practices as an opening to the subject of historical change and cultural complexity in the Bengal-Arakan frontier zone. As names developed lives of their own, they have been sign-posts of social, cultural and political change and continuity.[3]

The archive that I have in mind is a virtual archive that includes all the instances where terms denoting Muslims have been used in variant spellings and contexts by inside and outside actors. This archive must be attentive to names

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[3] The present essay provides summary presentations of the contested historical background based on the author's research on the region. The author is aware that they include interpretations of data that may be understood differently in various contexts. This is inevitable and the basis of collaborative research. Yet, after 2012, there has been a strong tendency to politicize statements, facts and beliefs alike producing a minefield of interpretations and acrimony that has damaged the prospect of a dialogue on Rakhine issues. The reader is therefore invited to see the present state of research and reflection as points of departure for further research.

of other groups as well to embrace the role and impact of inter-ethnic relations. It should not be an antiquarian collection of individualized items, but function as a pool for consultation, reference and reflection, embracing the naming and the self-identifying practices of Muslims in general and in close relation with the local Buddhist, Myanmar national, and transregional cultural environment in which they were rooted.

The practice of naming

Names identify and define, but they have a life of their own that evolves beyond the conventions that rule their primary functions of identifying and defining. They result from individual and collective choices that depend on motives and intentions. People belonging to one group will choose a name for themselves while outsiders may refer to them quite differently. This produces not only a difference between endonymic and exonymic ethnonyms, but it may also reflect or lead to ongoing contestation. The current government in Myanmar rejects the term "Rohingyas," and calls the majority of Muslims in Rakhine "Bengalis" because of the geographical origins of many of these people.[4]

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[4] The Western media took the habit after 2012 to state that the term "Bengalis" is pejorative and denotes not only the foreign but also an illegal status in the view of the state. The term "Bengali" has been in use since the late 1970s in Burma/Myanmar and fits into a tradition of naming people according to the name of the country at a certain time, (in the 1950s, the term "Pakistanis" was common because there were Muslims in Burma and in Arakan who were recognized by Pakistan as its own citizens). Before the 1990s, it seems that the word "Bengali" was

As names qualify or disqualify and as their usage depends on implicit or explicit criteria of appropriateness or efficiency, name usage is generally hierarchized according to social, administrative or political conventions. These conventions and rules recognize, validate, raise, emphasize, subordinate, dismiss or discriminate. "Rohingya" is a source of pride for the people who claim a Rohingya identity, but a source of contestation and a road to exclusion in Myanmar.

Another aspect is name recognition, which is the inherent social or political value that a name incorporates and the status it may provide. "Rohingya" did not attract international media attention before the late 1990s and it did not carry recognitive value, but when it became globally known after 2012, it came to represent an ethnic profile of state-inflicted injustice and generated waves of sympathy and humanitarian support. Arguments rooted in controversial history, ethno-political strife or contrary politics did not matter as much as the status of victimhood (or technically speaking, the refugee status) inherently legitimizing an international legal rather than a historical or cultural approach.

When people refer to what is 'behind a name', they wonder about meaning and power embedded in words, raising for example questions about subjective and collective intentions when choosing names, as well as the social dynamics of naming. Etymologies which appeal to sentiments, ideological assumptions, prejudice or the

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used uncontroversially in Western diplomatic accounts and newspaper reports. This essay does not review the use of "Bengali," as it would call for a more detailed examination than space allows.

supremacy of human imagination may translate such subjectivities into value-laden interpretations. Historical linguistics explains that both Rakhine (*rakhuiṅ*) and Rohingya (*ruihaṅgyā*) are derived from Rakhanga (*rakhaṅ*), a name found in Pali forms (and also Sinhalese texts). Nonetheless, flowery interpretations remain popular linking the word "Rakhine" to beings of Hindu-Buddhist mythology and the word "Rohingya" to Arabic origins.

With the multifaceted aspects of naming and its implications in mind, one may realize that there is no single textual or oral source that provides a comprehensive answer and a uniquely valid truth. The signification (the main function of a name) is always context-dependent. It also depends on power relations. Yet we can only discuss arguments based on such sources as do exist and are accessible. These sources impose limits on our research and our understanding. While there is a substantial body of English language references from the colonial period, there is a relatively poor archive of data from indigenous languages.

Names unite and divide. Indians (including many Muslims) and Muslims of Middle Eastern origins have played important roles in continental Southeast Asian Buddhist societies and held often defined ranks within administrative and social hierarchies. Muslim traders also played a key role in the trade of the Bay of Bengal connecting Arakan and Myanmar with India and Southeast Asia. In Burma/Myanmar and Arakan/Rakhine, exonymic appellations have underscored their foreign character. Nonetheless there is no one-size-fits-all perception of

Muslims (or prejudice against Islam), as Muslims in Rakhine and Myanmar have had different geographical, ethnic and cultural origins and been socially integrated at various degrees. In Arakan, the Muslim minority of the Kaman was recognized as an ethnic minority within the Rakhine group of ethnic communities living under the Konbaung king at the end of the 18th century; one meets a similar case with the Myedu in southern Rakhine; but other Muslim communities either in the Kyauktaw area or along the Naf were denied such a recognition for reasons that remain unknown. The genealogy of perceptions of Muslims of Indian origins as cultural strangers and essentially foreigners did not necessarily condone or imply racist attitudes or violence, nor did it prevent social integration and cohabitation. Other factors and triggers would be in play when communal violence took place. The nexus of Indian origins and foreignness in contexts of economic and political tensions has lowered the barrier for igniting violence and eased hate speech feeding on prejudice, greed and chauvinism. Socially integrated Myanmar and Rakhine Muslims have struggled for generations to gain broad acceptance within the Buddhist society.

For over thousand years, the prevailing term in the Burmese language to designate Indians (both Hindus and Muslims) and other foreigners from the West has been "kala". This term can be used and has been profusely used in social media in the 21st century as a racist slur. But it is also and remains a very common word to refer to Indians and Muslims in general without any pointedly racist connotations. The main river in Rakhine State is called

Kaladan and even Rohingyas have not rejected traditional appellations of villages in Northern Rakhine that included the word "Kala". The word can also be used jokingly for dark-skinned people among the Burmese. Nonetheless, the dissatisfaction of Muslims with exonymic terms in general has led to calls for more socially and politically acceptable words.

Take the case of Burma/Myanmar itself. In colonial times, the offspring of Indian Muslim migrants who married local Burmese women were called Zerbadis. The term was disliked by "Zerbadis" themselves as it denoted foreignness. In 1941, the British authorities allowed Muslims to refer to themselves as "Burmese Muslims". This expression was used after independence to differentiate inculturated "Burmese" Muslims from "Indian" Muslims whose recent (colonial) origins were visible in their dress, their use of Urdu as an educational language and their physical appearance. The adoption of the term "Myanmar Muslims" in the 1990s broadened the profile of Muslims throughout the country, as "Myanmar," the official name of the country since the late 1980s, was meant as a specifically national rather than ethnic designation. The choice of "Pathi," a word found in the royal chronicles to refer to Muslim traders and mercenaries in the early modern period, was put forward as the name of a Muslim political party in the 21st century. But it failed to gain either official or wide public recognition. After the islamophobic violence in 2013-14, Muslims keen to re-state their national belonging advocated for the adoption of "Union (*pyidaungsu*) Muslims," seen as a more pro-inclusive expression. This

sketch of terms in Burma/Myanmar underscores a constant and ongoing change in naming practices and semantics that is all too often forgotten. It also offers a starting point to reflect on the situation in Arakan/Rakhine State.

At its modern origins in the late 1940s and 1950s, the wish to choose a specific name, "Rohingya," sprang from the initiative of Muslim leaders in North Arakan to gain a specific recognition from the Union government in line with a widely shared understanding that political legitimacy was dependent on ethnic recognition. It is noteworthy that the early Rohingyas compared themselves with the Kaman, but they did never stress their links with the history of Islam in the rest of Burma. One may relate this to the fact that the early Rohingyas based their claims on territorial history and ethnic belonging, not on social integration in Arakan or cultural similarity with other people of Indian descent. They referred to the "Kamans" as the historical example of a Rakhine Muslim community which had gained ethnic recognition as an indigenous community since pre-colonial times, passing into oblivion that the Kaman were a socially and politically integrated group while they themselves claimed a separate territory. According to their ethnocentric logic, theirs was therefore not a novel undertaking. However, the Rohingyas also wanted to stand out from the Arakanese Buddhists with whom they were competing politically and territorially. One may recall that the Arakanese/Rakhine themselves had not yet gained recognition of their ethnic claims by the Union government during the 1950s. This fact underscores that the dissemination process of an affirmative Rohingya identity

was both a challenge and an ambition, but also functioning and going to be perceived as a political provocation. Moreover, however one wants to describe the post-colonial process of Rohingya ethnification and how it connected to previous periods, it cannot be seen as a monolithic stream-lined process of change. The appellation "Arakanese Muslims *or* Rakhine Muslims" remained very much alive until the late 20th century. Arguably, the latter appellation was preferred by those Muslims who preferred to stress social integration into the Rakhine society and were less keen on emphasizing a separate political and ethnic profile.

As Muslims have variously emphasized their feeling of belonging to counter the implicit or explicit portrayal of foreignness, an archive of names could be ordered with this structural opposition of "foreign" and "indigenous" in mind. The name Rohingya was originally meant to express Muslim territorial and historical belonging, but it became very early a constitutive aspect of a conflict that included political competition, competing sub-nationalisms, cultural difference framed as a majority-minority issue and the contest with a praetorian state which prioritized law and order.

Muslims in Arakan in pre-colonial times

Islamic rulers reigned in Bengal since the 13th century and Islam spread inland and along the coast with Sufi holy men (*pirs*) and traders. The first Muslim ruler of Chittagong was recorded at the end of the 14th century. The prestigious sultanate of Bengal and the autonomous rulers of

Chittagong, the most important port of trade in the Bay of Bengal, certainly made an impact on the fledgling monarchy of Mrauk U in the 15th century. Arakanese kings adopted so-called "Muslim" titles and several kings minted coins that followed a Bengal model (Leider and Kyaw Minn Htin, 2015). Muslims settling in Arakan since the 8th or 9th c. or the 12th c. CE, as often claimed, is a matter of speculation as there is no hard evidence. The human settlement history of Myanmar's Western regions is largely unknown due to a lack of ethnic, prehistorical and early historical research. At present legends do still often trump hard facts. Muslim traders may have played a prominent role since the early modern period. A Persian inscription of 1495 CE granting privileges to a trader is a fine example of the integration of Arakan into mercantile networks of the Bay of Bengal since the 15th century (d'Hubert, 2015).

The presence of Muslims during the 16th and 17th c. when the kingdom had become a hegemonic coastal power, was due to migrations, deportations and Arakan's oversight of trading networks. The fall of Bengal to the Mughals in the 16th century had led to the flight of Afghan and Turk soldiers eastwards and Portuguese sources suggest that they resettled in Arakan, too. During the rise and the flourishing of the Arakanese kingdom (1530-1670), kings led wars against local Hindu and Muslim chiefs in South and Southeast Bengal, against the Mughal governors of Bengal and against the Portuguese chiefdoms in Dianga and Sandwip. They depopulated systematically lands north of Arakan's territories (between Chittagong and the Feni River) to create a buffer zone and resettled the Bengali population

in Arakan's river valleys. Many educated "slaves" or "bonded labor" as they would be called by historians today, found a "golden prison" at the court of Mrauk U as they were employed in the administration and participated in court life.

From Portuguese and Dutch descriptions of the 17th c., one learns that there was a diversity of Muslims in Arakan who hailed from various parts of Asia and would have been referred to accordingly. Bengali literati like Alaol flourished at the court (d'Hubert, 2018). The urban environment was cosmopolitan and tolerant in a sense that matched the local hierarchy, but the ethno-political border that crossed the region and its politics predicated frictions and even violence in crisis situations (one famous example being the revolt of Shah Shuja's guard crushed by local soldiers in 1661). On the other hand, the Rakhine annals of the late 17th and 18th c. do not hide the involvement of Muslim officers in court politics and one is far from a one-sided picture of a monocultural Arakanese Buddhist kingship (Leider, 1999). Sources from the late 18th and 19th c. would suggest that people identified according to the regions where they lived, places of origins and social status (Kyaw Minn Htin, 2017). Religious and cultural identities were important and were actualized by social practices. An over-arching process of ethnic homogeneity did apparently never take place among the Buddhist Rakhine as a whole and more studies are needed to understand such processes in the post-colonial period. Similar hypotheses are arguable for the Muslim communities as well. No textual sources are extant to provide us information on names used by or used for

Muslims specifically in Arakan in these various pre-1785 contexts.

In the late 18th c., as already mentioned above, Francis Buchanan-Hamilton, a Scottish physician who resided with Captain Michael Symes in Amarapura for nearly nine months (1795) mentioned in an article on languages spoken in the kingdom that Muslims deported from Arakan spoke Rooinga, referring to the East Bengali dialect used by Muslims in Arakan. This single reference, known to a modern public only since 2003, has been cited as a proof of the existence of an ethnic Muslim community of Rohingyas in Arakan in pre-British times (Buchanan-Hamilton 1799, reprint 2003). To be sure, there is no contestation of the existence of Muslim communities in Arakan before 1823 and Buchanan-Hamilton's mention is an important source. But as a single piece of evidence quoted outside of the geographical context it relates to, with no other mention thereafter in any written or oral form during 122 years of British presence neither in local nor in colonial sources, Buchanan-Hamilton's mention of the "Rooinga" language raises questions when it is essentialized as an indicator of a self-conscious ethnic community. The fact that the Muslims spoke their own language besides Arakanese is not a new fact and it is ascertained in all the contemporary sources that talk about Arakanese Muslims. But the deported Muslims in Amarapura most likely came from the Mrauk U/Kyauktaw area and not from the Maungdaw border area from where the modern Rohingyas arose with the political mobilization of the city's Jamiat ul-Ulama (Congregation of teachers).

Moreover, Buchanan-Hamilton never mentioned the Arakanese Muslims as a separate *ethnic* group in a series of other articles dealing with the border region (Hamilton, 1825abc). In his well-known *Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava in the Year 1795*, Michael Symes only mentioned the Arakanese Hindus, not the Muslims, who had been deported to Amarapura. Symes did not investigate the ethnic belonging of this Hindu minority, but typically underscored what he saw as, or what others led him to see as their perception of, their foreign, "unnaturalized" character.

> "The natives of Arracan proper, call their country Yee-Kein; the Hindoos [...] who have settled in great numbers in Arracan, are denominated, by the original inhabitants, Kulaw Yee-Kein [Kala Rakhine], or unnaturalized Arracaners..." (Symes, 1800, p. 94)

Ten years after the Burmese conquest of 1784, the forced recruitment of Arakanese men for King Badon's campaigns against Siam, over-taxation and famine pushed tens of thousands of Rakhine out of their country. They fled to Southeast Bengal. This exodus included Muslims as well. Unlike the Rakhine, the Muslims integrated themselves into the native Bengali society, as a Dutch-Indonesian missionary observed (Robinson, 1871,   pp. 79-80, passim). Letters written from East India Company officials in Chittagong to the Board of the East India Company contain first-hand information on the refugees. Their chiefs did not want the

refugees to become fixed in the country as they plotted for a reconquest of their homeland.

Muslims and socio-economic change in colonial Arakan

After the annexation of Arakan by the East India Company (Treaty of Yandabo, 1826), many Arakanese who had previously taken refuge in the Chittagong District (a British-administered territory since 1761) returned to their motherland. Early descriptions of Arakanese Muslims by administrators or missionaries agree on a few essential points. They recall that the Muslim villagers were the descendants of Bengalis deported from their homeland during the heyday of the Arakanese monarchy. They were perceived as a minority practicing their own religion, but well integrated into the Arakanese society, speaking the local language besides their own Bengali dialect and wearing the same dress as the Buddhist majority. The earliest descriptions of the border area by officers of the East India Company (covering the period from the beginning of border troubles around 1794 to the first Anglo-Burmese War, 1824-26) make implicitly clear that people from Arakan frequently migrated back and forth and that there were family connections between the people north and south of the Naf River. The Naf was the border between the territories of what are now Bangladesh and Myanmar since the Mughal period.

They described these Muslims as "Mug" or "Mugh" using a vague and pejorative term that was applied in Bengal to

all people from Arakan.[5] "Mugh Mussulmans" is an expression used by Halsted (1841), Comstock (1844), Robinson (1871, quoting the Dutch-Indonesian Reverend J. C. Fink) and Tickell (1858).

These early descriptions already made a difference between the local Muslims to whom they would simply refer as "Muslims," and the newly immigrating "Bengalis" who were decades later referred to as "Chittagonians." R.R. Langham-Carter, a British administrator who analysed the archives of an Arakan family originating from the border region, quotes a certificate given by the British to an Arakanese village head who contributed to the arrival of Chittagonian settlers during the early British presence.

> "Moreover, he called the Chittagonians and established villages in the said Naff circle[6] for the purpose of increasing the Government revenue and therefore the revenue of the said circle has become more than twenty thousand rupees" (Langham-Carter, 1938, p. 106)

The percentage of Muslims in the general population is a point calling for further discussion. Captain Francis Richardson noted in 1831 that half of the population of Mrauk U were Muslims. Charles Paton estimated the Muslim minority at one third of the total population (Paton, 1828). These evaluations are surprisingly high when compared with the precise figures that were published annually after 1862 and indicating a much lower percentage. There is no simple answer to these differences in the percentage. The population grew steadily between 1830 and 1860, a growth that was due to ongoing returns of Arakanese from the Chittagong Division, the natural growth of the resident population and immigration from Upper Burma favored by the British tax regime. A seasonal migration of Chittagonian laborers became a major feature of the rice-growing economy until the end of the colonial period. This Chittagonian migration to Arakan after 1870 by land owed much less to the action of the British than in Lower Burma and it remained poorly surveyed in census reports in comparison to the seasonal migrations from Southern India closely monitored at the port of Rangoon. The early estimations may also have been conditioned by a strong Muslim presence in the Kaladan valley and at Akyab where British officers who ruled Arakan for the East India Company were mostly active.

Arthur P. Phayre, Burma's acclaimed administrator-historian who was active in the country between 1840 and 1867, made himself into an expert of Arakan and its history. He estimated the Muslims in Arakan at 15 percent of the general population in the 1840s. Around 1870, the figures of the census reports put that percentage at below 10 percent. Only after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, a steady migration of Chittagonians saw the Muslim population grow to over 20 percent until the early 1930s.

The local Buddhist population called the Muslims "kala," a term, as has been said above, which pointed to their

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[5] Howard Malcolm writes that the Arakanese "...regard the term as a contemptuous nickname" (Malcolm, 1839, p. 145).
[6] Naff circle, an administrative unit in the late 19th century included the Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships.

foreign (Indian) origins. Francis Buchanan-Hamilton noted that the *"Mohammedans, who have been long settled in Arakan, and who call themselves Rooinga, or natives of Arakan,"* were referred to "by the real natives of *Arakan"* as *"Kulaw Yakain,* or stranger *Arakan"* (Hamilton, 1799, p. 221). In his description of Arakan forty years later, Phayre confirmed this usage.

> "The *Kolas,* or Moosulmans, are of an entirely different race to the preceding, they being of the Bengalee descent. [...] While Arakanese held these possessions in Bengal, they appear to have sent numbers of the inhabitants into Arakan as slaves, whence arose the present *Kola* (foreign) population of the country... The *Arakan* Moosulmauns preserve the language of their ancestors for colloquial purposes, but always use the Burmese in writing..." (Phayre, 1841, p. 681)

The first study of Arakan's dynastic history, compiled by Thomas Campbell Robertson and presented by Charles Paton in his *Sketch of Aracan,* contains surprisingly little on the Muslim population though Muslim translators clearly had an impact on his article as far as dynastic history was concerned. A single remark on the language, namely the proficiency of Muslims in Hindustani, appears and was probably a relevant fact for the first British administrators.

> "The Musselman Sirdars generally speak good Hindustani, but the lower orders of that class, who speak a broken sort of Hindustani are quite unintelligible to those who are not thoroughly

acquainted with the jargon of the southern parts of the Chittagong district." (Paton, 1828, p. 373)

Reverend G.S. Comstock, Reverend J.C. Fink and Reverend Howard Malcolm, three Baptist missionaries who lived for extended periods in Arakan, sketch a socially integrated community distinctive by its faith. They do also describe them as descendants of Bengali slaves.[7]

> "Many Bengalees are settled in the maritime sections of the country, who retain their own faith. They are called by the Arracanese, *Kulâ-yekein."* (Malcolm, 1839, p. 127)

> "...Mugh Musulmans... [t]hey were not Mughs converted to the Mahomedan faith, but bona fide Musulmans whose ancestors had been imported into the province from Bengal. They are supposed to have been brought away as slaves during the time when Arracan was an independent kingdom and the incursions of its monarchs into Bengal were of frequent occurrence. Many of the Mugh Mussulmans still retain the language and habits of their forefathers; many have to all intents and purposes identified themselves with the natives of the soil; but all have adopted the style of dress and some of the habits of the country." (Robinson, 1871, pp. 79-80)

> "The Mussulmans are supposed to be the descendants of Bengalee slaves, imported when

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[7] See also Foley, 1835, 200-201.

the kings of Ava held Chittagong and Tippera.[8] They have retained for the most part of their language and customs of their forefathers; but have partially adopted the dress of the country. Within a few years past, many Bengalee Mussulmans have immigrated to Arakan to get higher wages and better living, than they could procure in Chittagong: these constitute the five thousand Bengalees mentioned in enumerating the population of the province." (Comstock, 1847, p. 228).[9]

Similarly, S.R. Tickell depicted the Muslims he met near Kyauktaw in 1851, as "completely naturalized in the country, speaking indiscriminately Aracanese or Bengali to each other" (Tickell, 1854, p. 92). But these observers do not tell us if the Muslims living in enclaves on the Upper Kaladan River referred to themselves by a specific name.

Between 1872 and 1911, British administrative sources like the ten-year census reports (1872, 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911) also differentiated the older local Muslim community from the newly forming migrant community of mostly Chittagonian, but also partly Telugu, Tamil (also referred to as "Madras" or more clearly "Chulia") and Oriya origins. But with the preferred criteria of language (predominantly Bengali) and religion (Islam) applied in the

early 20th century, they were all conflated in a large single group of Muslims. In the census reports of 1921 and 1931, an effort was made to emphasize their otherness by racializing the historical differences. The newly migrant community of Chittagonians who formed 80 percent of Arakan's Muslim population in 1931 was put into the racial category of "Indians" while the older community of socially integrated Muslims was classified as part of a mixed category of "Indo-Burmans". This racial categorization of British colonial administrators has been severely criticized by post-colonial scholars; however, in the case of Arakanese Muslims, it is not just the racialization that is problematic, but also the conceptual difference between indigenous and foreign people. The case of the Kaman Muslims shows that a historically grown and socially embedded Muslim community could gain recognition as a distinctive ethnic community in pre-colonial Arakan. A comparable case exists in Burma with the Panthay (Chinese Muslims) in Mandalay. After Burma's independence in 1948, the internal differences between older and newer communities disappeared or were eroded in ways and conditions that have never been investigated.

The colonial classification was not just the result of arbitrary administrative choices. It reflected real cultural differences between communities that had formed in different contexts. When the British annexed Arakan, Muslim communities had existed in the Kaladan Valley, at Mrauk U and Kyauktaw and in the Lemro Valley, between Mrauk U, Minbya and Myebon for three-four centuries. The migration of Chittagonians (who were classified in British

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[8] This is an error, it should be the kings of Mrauk U or Arakan, not Ava.
[9] Comstock is the first author to mention the Kaman Muslims in Ramree providing the historical explanation of the arrival of their ancestors in 1661 as members of the guard of Shah Shuja, the former Mughal governor of Bengal who took refuge in Arakan. (Comstock, 1847, p. 373).

census reports as a group separate from Bengalis because they were so numerous in Burma) led to the formation of populous and fast growing Muslim communities in the border districts of Maungdaw and Buthidaung as well as in the colonial capital of Akyab. The differences existed not just in the eyes of outside observers, but they reflected social and economic competition. They created local resentment because the new migrants were outdoing the local Buddhists economically. Since the time of the First World War, British administrators thought that the Arakanese were progressively displaced by the immigrant Chittagonians (Smart, 1918, p. 14). Communal riots broke out in 1942, shortly after the Japanese invasion, probably ignited by the anti-colonial and anti-Indian propaganda of the Burma Independence Army that preceded the Japanese military administration. Buddhists chased Muslims from villages in central Arakan who fled to the north and Muslims in the north drove Buddhists down south. The census of 1931 shows that three quarters of the Chittagonian and "Madrasi" population in North Arakan had been born in Burma. But their demographic growth and their concentration in two border townships together with linguistic and cultural differences contributed to their isolation and tensions with the long-established groups.

For centuries, people in the Northeast Bay of Bengal had been migrating along the coast for economic and political reasons. They adhered to their clan structures and religious and cultural affiliations more than to overarching ethnic identities. Migration movements were a mirror of changing opportunities and oppressive living conditions. Yet details of

the social lives of the Muslim community between 1870 and 1940 remain poorly known. Inter-ethnic relations were not seen by the British administration as a matter of administrative or political interest. Therefore, we lack written documentation. The colonial state eased labor migrations and the rapid demographic increase led to the displacement of one population group by another before the First World War. This was a novel phenomenon. The creation of political borders entailed by the nation states of Pakistan and Burma in 1947 and 1948 did not stop these migrant movements, but it divided migrants into pre-1948 "legal" and post-1948 "illegal" migrants. The regional economic and territorial factors that drove these migrations in modern times (overpopulation, famine, political strife and instability, unexploited fertile lands and other causes) played out in correlation with the seasonal (agricultural, climate-related) factors, but also in dissociation with the political and social development of Burma and Pakistan and changing priorities and ideologies at the national level.

Muslim nationalism and the rise of the Rohingyas

Arakan terribly suffered under the impact of the Second World War and political disorder was notorious until the early 1950s. Arms were widely available to transform any form of discontent into an armed uprising. An Arakanese rebel movement under a former monk, U Seinda, fought for an independent Arakan state in 1946 and 1947, communist factions established themselves in the jungle fighting the government's authority, the army and para-military groups

got involved in the border region fighting the Mujahids. The Mujahid rebellion resulted from the discontent of the Muslim elite in North Arakan, trans-border smuggling interests and the political ambitions of Muslim landowners. While the Mujahid rebellion was a minor threat after 1954, it dragged on until the final surrender of the insurgents in 1961.

The situation of the Muslim communities and their political orientations in Arakan were not homogenous as their level of integration into the Rakhine society varied widely. The North Arakan Muslims themselves were divided on their political objectives, their strategies and their methods. Some were ready to submit to an electoral system and parliamentary rules and remained open to compromise with the Arakanese Buddhist majority about the creation of an Arakan state rejected by the central government. Others embraced the idea of an autonomous Muslim state and were united in their hostility to the creation of an Arakan state by the Buddhists. In 1946, a few had entertained the idea of North Arakan joining Pakistan. In 1947, another group lobbied the British expecting a show of recognition for diligently serving them during the war. After independence, they put their faith into Burma's new leaders affiliated with the anti-colonial AFPFL (Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League). It is during those early post-war years that the term "Rwangya" appeared (or was likely revived and expanded geographically) as a name used by Muslims to self-identify in contradistinction with Muslims from Bengal. As the novel use of this term in the late 1940s has even been acknowledged by Rakhine writers, there is

no doubt that Muslims with a claim on deep roots in the country would have wished to express their belonging by using it to distinguish themselves from other Muslims. But until today, occurrences of "Rwangya" have been mostly traced in Western reports and books and explanations of the term have varied, suggesting that its use and meaning were not yet fixed, or at least not always clearly understood (Leider, 2013, 2017, 2018).

To sum up, in the late 1940s and 1950s, Muslim leaders in North Arakan were in harmony on the principle of political autonomy for the Muslims, because they were wary of the Arakanese Buddhist nationalists and their calls for an ethnically denominated "Arakan State" perceived both as a state of the Buddhist majority and an immediate threat for the North Arakan Muslims. But they certainly disagreed on the politically sustainable level of Muslim self-affirmation in a national context where ethnic claims linked to claims for political autonomy were frowned upon by the leaders of the anti-colonial AFPFL-dominated Burmese government.

As a matter of fact, for the AFPFL-governments in the 1950s, political concessions to ethnic demands should not undermine the Burmese vision of a centrally organized state. It is the frictions and confrontations between centralist and ethnocentric perspectives of state leaders on the one hand and the ethnic claims for representation and self-government on the other that fueled a long history of ethnic strife and ethno-political discontent in post-colonial Burma. Therefore, the military regimes that followed the parliamentary rule after 1962 presented themselves as

guardians of national unity. The claims of the Muslims in North Arakan challenged the state's assumptions of the nation-state early on. They did so in three ways. North Arakan Muslim leaders claimed that the Muslims of the region were an ethnic group. This claim was new, it did not include all the Muslims throughout Arakan and there is no evidence that it was shared by the Muslims who were not living in the north where Muslims dominated. They also claimed an autonomous territory where Islamic law would apply. This claim was politically sensitive because the rural Muslims, unlike the mostly urban Muslims elsewhere, lived in a frontier region that was difficult to control by the security forces. Due to their demographic weight in the region and their cultural proximity with East Pakistan, they were mistrusted and perceived as a centrifugal force and open to separatism.

In the 1950s, Abdu Ghaffar, a politician North Arakan and his prolific relative, Mohammad Taher Ba Tha, in conjunction with a new generation of Muslim students at Rangoon University, took a further step and militated for the expression of a more strongly affirmative identity of North Arakan Muslims. They did not only claim that Muslims in North Arakan were sons of the soil who wanted official recognition of their historical roots, recognition of an acclaimed frontier status and acceptance as an ethnic group. They believed that if Muslims in North Arakan formed a distinct ethnic group, they should also adopt a proper name to clearly express this claim. The question if this name should be simply the place-name of where they came from in Arakan, or one of a set of variant spellings of

"Rohingya" led to internal discussions. Only around 1963 the spelling "Rohingya" became the standard form in print. The name was not the only distinctive feature of the Rohingya movement. The followers of the Rohingya movement saw themselves as part of an emerging Muslim society that identified itself around an imagined regional past and shared social and political interests of their community.[10] They made clear that Rohingyas had existed throughout the centuries and minimized the demographic developments and the migrations during the colonial period. The story of the emerging Rohingya movement was never been written and there are no written testimonials of its main actors to understand the history of their ideas. As they tied their ethnic claims to a distant and poorly known past, Rohingyas took little interest in historicizing their political rise during the U Nu era when the issue of citizenship was not yet the contested issue it became in the 1970s. The only reference that has remained continuously present in the later discourses is the reiteration that the name "Rohingya" had been publicly accepted.

In the 1950s, the government of Prime Minister U Nu confronted, on the one hand, the Arakanese nationalists (led by the *Arakan National Unity Organization* under U

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[10] I have used the term "movement" in an earlier article (Leider, 2013) which presents the political rise of the Rohingyas. The choice of this term considers that there was no coordinated leadership and individual leaders that can be found in the available sources. The terms "party" and "movement" were also used for the Mujahids. Interestingly, at the time of the MFA there were calls from within the Kaman community to create a similar "movement" of Muslim self-awareness to the Rohingyas.

Kyaw Min, see Saito, 2000) who called for a state of their own (like the Kachin or Shan who had been granted an ethnically denominated state) and, on the other, the Muslims of North Arakan who wanted their autonomous state, but were opposed to a state for the Buddhists. As a show of gratitude to the Muslim parliamentarians who supported U Nu's government when it lacked a majority, in 1960, the Prime Minister, in agreement with the army under General Ne Win, created the Mayu Frontier Administration (MFA) as a special territory including Buthidaung, Maungdaw and a part of Rathedaung. The creation of the MFA in 1960 boosted the Rohingya movement whose leaders in Maungdaw then hoped for a brilliant future for their cause. The frequency at which the name Rohingya and its variants appeared in publications during the years between approximately 1958 and 1965 is a clear indicator of this political ebullience. But the political hopes of the Rohingyas were dashed when after 1964 the regime of General Ne Win enforced centralist policies that denied ethnic calls, be they Muslim or Buddhist, for autonomy. The mistrust towards people of Indian descent who had entered the country during the colonial period was part and parcel of the mindset that impacted Ne Win's nationalist policies.

The most important textual sources where the name "Rohingya" or its early variants appeared includes magazine and newspaper articles as well as booklets written and published by Rohingyas and their organizations in English or Burmese between 1958 and 1965. As stated above, this period includes the years 1960 to 1964 when the Mayu

Frontier Administration (MFA) existed in North Arakan. The texts are uncontroversial because they use the name "Rohingya" univocally and intentionally to present, explain and promote a separate Muslim ethnic identity in association with a specific historical contextualization of Muslim pasts in Arakan, drawing on Rakhine chronicles, colonial historiography and pre-colonial Indian and Western sources. Important publications (in Burmese language) were *A Short History of "Rohingyas" An Indigenous Race of the Union of Burma* published by the United Rohingyas Organization in 1960 and the Rohangya Muslim United Front of Burma's 1961 *Report and Historical References regarding the ethnic Rohingyas, sons of the Union* as well as Mohammed A. Tahir Ba Tha's *Ethnic Rohingyas and Kaman* published by the United Rohingya League of Myitkyina in 1963.

Mohammad A. Tahir Ba Tha was the most important Rohingya author during the MFA years. He published a series of historical articles (in English) in *The Guardian* monthly, renewing earlier attempts to put Arakan on the map of Islamic history, notably via the assumption of first millennium Arabo-Persian origins and a compilation of both historically certified and mythical elements (United Rohingya Organization, 1960; Rohangya Muslim United Front of Burma, 1961; Ba Tha, 1963). Muhammad Khalilur Rahman's *Tarikh-i-Islam: Arakan aur Burma* (1944) and Azad G. Hasan's *Qaum-i-Halat-i-Musulmane Burma wa Arakan* (approx. 1946), written in Urdu, had tried to connect the Muslims in Arakan to the long presence of

Muslims in central and southern Myanmar.[11] Ba Tha's writing marked a break with this tradition as the Rohingyas wanted to be recognized as an ethnic group like the Kamans. As there was also a strong presence of Chittagonians in the colonial shipping business in Central Myanmar, the association with Burmese Muslims may have been seen as politically counterproductive. As we have mentioned earlier, various spellings of the name were in competition during those years. In 1960, Ba Tha had suggested "Roewenhnyas," but up to 1963, he generally preferred to use "Roewhengya." Only in 1963, the current spelling became firmly established. The simultaneous appearance of the variants [Roewengyas (Ba Tha, 1960, 1961), Rowannyas (Maung Than Lwin, 1962), Rohinjas (Luce, 1985, p. 71), Rohinga (Yegar, 1972), Ruhangya (*The Guardian*, 21 July 1960), Rawengya (Tha Htu, 1962), or Royangya (Tha Htu, 1963)] demonstrates both an earlier oral presence of the term and the absence of a standardized spelling.

In the vast amount of publications and comments that was produced by Rohingya activists since 2012, they have rarely referred to the foundational texts that were produced by Rohingyas themselves during the "golden years" of the Mayu Frontier Administration. They have rather cited those instances where the name was used by *others* as proofs of their ethnic recognition, for example the registration of Rohingya student organisations in the early 1960s, a radio emission of the 1950s, a map indicating the

name in 1978, identity papers including "Rohingya" and the Burmese encyclopedia of 1964 which do mostly fit into the context of the U Nu period. The relatively few instances where the name was used in official speeches by national leaders raise questions of interpretation depending, at hindsight, on the reader's ideological viewpoint. (National Democratic Party for Development, 2012; U Kyaw Min, 2012, pp. 11-12)[12].

In a radio talk on 25 September 1954, Prime Minister U Nu made clear that the country needed a stable center while the majority group should not behave arrogantly towards minorities. After briefly referring to the Shan and the Kachin along the border, he spoke more specifically about Arakan and distinguished the "ethnic majority Ruhangya" from the "group of rebels called Mujahids". The first were described as "sons of the Union" while the Mujahids were portrayed as a gang whose intention it was to detach Buthidaung and Maungdaw from the Union and "create a Muslim state". Needless to repeat that in the late 1940s and early 1950s the threat of ethnic separatism was a core issue for the state. After Arakanese armed separatists had dominated the news in 1946-47, Muslim separatism raised its head with the rebellion of the Mujahids in 1948. In 1954, a serious blow put an end to the Mujahids as a military threat, but the rebels remained active. It is clear

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[11] Both texts exist only in manuscript form and have never been edited or published.

[12] Lists with such references can be found in publications distributed by Rohingyas based in Myanmar, for example in National Democratic Party for Development (NDPD). 2012. *Submission of monograph in respect of the fact that local Islam, Inhabitants within Rakhine State, are native race and citizen.* Yangon: NDPD.

that the Prime Minister, speaking in 1954, wanted to express his appreciation to that part of the Muslim population which did not cooperate with the rebels. Using the term "Ruhangya" in a political speech given by a Burmese leader was apparently not seen as a contested matter at that time. It is not clear on the other hand if in the mid of the 1950s the name Ruhangya was widely known in the region and if it was resented by the Arakanese/Rakhine Buddhists. U Nu's political speech can therefore be interpreted in different ways depending on one's own standpoint. It can be understood as a formal recognition of the Rohingyas as an ethnic group (as Rohingya leaders have argued); it can also be interpreted as a piece of rhetoric as U Nu diplomatically tried to please the local Muslim leaders by using a term that had been revived as an ethno-religious identifier. As neither the history of the Mujahids nor of the Rohingyas in the 1950s has been studied in-depth, interpretations that do either wrap up Mujahids and Rohingyas as the same political stock or deny any links between the two can keep hold. It is also not clear who among the Muslim leaders at that time wanted to call himself a Rohingya and who didn't. It was probably a matter of opportunism as much as of ideological choice. The example of the North Arakan politician Sultan Ahmed illustrates the complexity of this matter. Sultan Ahmed was an Arakanese Muslim member of the constitutional Assembly in 1947 and an elected member of the Burmese parliament in 1951 and 1956. He was also secretly known as a leader of the Mujahid rebels. Twenty years later, in 1976, he appeared in Chittagong as the spokesperson of the

Rohingya Patriotic Front, an armed rebel group fighting the military regime in Burma.

Therefore, the contradiction between unity-threatening Mujahids and law-abiding Rohingyas was real in the sense that not all the Muslims in Arakan agreed with the violent struggle. But it was also a myth because the sense of identifying as a distinctive ethnic group which called for a special territorial status certainly united the leaders across political borders.

Another instance of controversial interpretations concerns the often-quoted mention of the name "Rohingya" by a top Burmese military leader. In July 1961, a group of Mujahids surrendered their arms and Brigadier General Aung Gyi gave a conciliatory speech. He talked about the Rohingyas as a *lu-myo* (ethnic group) that should stay loyal to Burma as ethnic groups in the country should be united. However, he also perceived the Muslims living within the border region as a similar, not to say identical, population that thrived on both sides of the border, with those residing on the side of Burma calling themselves Rohingyas. This is a characterization that Rohingyas have often denied when emphasizing their claim of being an indigenous people, insisting on the fact that they had little in common with Chittagonians. Once again, one may interpret Aung Gyi's speech as a principled statement on the ethnic character of the Rohingyas or one may interpret it as a political gesture towards the local Muslim population that had been granted a special administrative status a year before (1960) and reflecting the government's effort to pacify the border region.

From the late 1950s when the name of the modern Rohingyas emerged (or re-emerged) until Myanmar's political opening in 2011, the alternate designation "Arakan Muslims," well established since the colonial period, remained a common appellation, too. It did not disappear because it continued to be used by Muslims from Arakan/Rakhine state, by Muslims in Myanmar and by foreigners.[13] It would therefore warrant a distinct treatment as its use was only discontinued by the hegemonic rise of Rohingya after 2012. In a memorandum sent to the government on 18 June 1948 to defend the right of North Arakan Muslims to citizenship, Sultan Ahmed protested the use of the term "Chittagonians" stating that only the expression "Arakan Muslims" should be used, in line with the use of "Burmese Muslims" for Muslims in Burma proper (Ahmed 1948). But the reference to "Chittagong" remained in official texts at least until the census of 1973 which recognized 143 ethnic groups including "Rakhine-Chittagong" which included all Muslims in Arakan with the exception of the Kaman and the Myedu of Thandwe (Sandoway) (Myint Thein, 2012, p. 397).[14] In 1948, a "Central Arakanese Muslim Refugee Organisation" existed

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[13] The expression was contested by the Arakanese Buddhists, because in their view the Arakanese identity was coterminous with the practice of Buddhism and Muslims *qua* their religion were people of foreign origins. This is not unlike the Malay understanding of Malay identity as a Muslim identity and Burman identity as a quintessential Buddhist identity.

[14] Myint Thein quotes the *Botahtaung Daily* of 23 February 1973 that included these categories, but the instruction manual for the census published in 1972 (Myint Thein, 2012, pp. 395-96) used the more common expression "Myanmar Muslims" instead of "Myanmar Chittagong".

in Cox' Bazaar to take care of those who fled the political disorders. In 1951, it was also used in the "Charter of the Constitutional Demands of the Arakani Muslims" concluded at Alethangyaw (in Maungdaw township) calling for the creation of an autonomous territory and the introduction of Urdu as an educational language as well as the sharia law. The binary use of "Arakanese Muslims" (as a term for Muslims who rejected the Rohingya claims and/or were associated with the pre-colonial Muslim community) vs "Rohingyas" (being mainly the descendants of the Chittagonian settlers who lived in Maungdaw and Buthidaung) appeared only in later years. An example dated from 2002 is quoted at the end of the next paragraph.

The name "Rohingya" after the suppression of the Mayu Frontier Administration

In 1964, the Mayu Frontier administration was abolished by the military government and its two townships were once again included in the Akyab district. This put an end to the short-lived hope of North Arakan Muslims for an autonomous territory. Like other ethnic groups, one part of the political class opted for armed resistance to the military government. The armed struggle did not lead to any political gains, but the name "Rohingya" lived on in the appellations of Rohingya exile groups. The armed militants were active along the border with East Pakistan and Bangladesh.[15] A few years after Bangladesh's independence

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[15] A historical and comparative analysis of these groups is a desideratum.

war (1971), the Burmese security forces and the immigration authorities launched investigations to catch illegal migrants in Arakan. People started to cross the border into Bangladesh when acts of brutality perpetrated by the army triggered a mass panic (1978). In fact, activities of the security forces were already interpreted by the Rohingya Patriotic Front as a genocidal campaign against the Rohingyas two years earlier in pamphlets published in Chittagong. Incidents and flows of migrants reported from 1974 to 1976 were in fact the forerunners of the huge exodus of 1978. Despite the international attention raised by the arrival of two hundred thousand people in Bangladesh and their subsequent repatriation (1979), the name "Rohingya," while appearing in the international press, was soon again forgotten. When it was used in the media, it was explained with the help of the term "Bengali," a stark contrast with the discredit thrown on the term "Bengali" after 2012. In its edition of 19 June 1978, *The Economist,* for example, referred to the "Rohingyeas" as "the Moslem Bengali people from the Arakan region of Burma". In those days the Muslim population of this isolated region in a self-isolating country was portrayed as Muslims of colonial origins, but also related to earlier migrations and later illegal trans-border crossings. The Rohingya Patriotic Front played no role in the mass flight or the repatriation it opposed. The 1982 citizenship law that created a three-tiered citizenship in Myanmar put severe restrictions on the access of North Rakhine Muslims to citizenship and was a further step in their marginalization and disenfranchisement. It is seen by many observers

writing in the 21st century as a watershed that signaled the intentional disenfranchisement of the North Arakan Muslims as it drew a line between pre-1824 ethnic groups who could claim first-class citizenship and later colonial arrivals. Analysts like Nick Cheesman have pointed out that the 1982 law was only applied years later and that it was used in arbitrary ways that hit unfairly an underdeveloped and poorly educated Muslim minority (Cheesman, 2017). It led to the foundation of the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO), an important pool of another generation of Rohingya activists, but considered as a terrorist organization by international agencies during its active period in the 1980s and 1990s.

There are no easily accessible sources to indicate how much the name "Rohingya" was used in Arakan/Rakhine State itself among the Muslim population from the mid-1960s down to the turn of the century. Its public use was excluded. Nonetheless, was it a tool of political rhetoric and the preserve of a rural political elite or was it gradually appropriated by the masses? What was the relationship between the use of the term "Rohingya" and the increasing cultural homogeneity of North Rakhine Muslims who were marginalized by the state? So far, such questions have not been investigated. The term "Rohingya" re-appeared in printed form in a Burmese-language booklet published in 1990 in the context of national elections for a new parliament (NHRDP, 1990). Information gleaned among foreigners who worked in North Rakhine and Sittwe between 1994 and 2012 do not confirm a wide-spread quotidian use of the name "Rohingya" in Maungdaw. In

Burma (apart from North Arakan), the name "Rohingya" virtually disappeared. It had not been rooted in public minds within the country in the early 1960s as it stood for a novel change at the country's periphery during a time when public attention was caught by other dramatic developments. From the late 1970s onwards, the Burmese administration and press media called the North Rakhine Muslims "Bengalis". Until 2012 the term "Bengali" was not criticised internationally and frequently used in foreign reports and articles when talking about trans-border migration, as seen above.[16] It was apparently not a focal point of criticism by the Rohingyas themselves until the Rohingya issues became a global human rights concern in the 21st century.

When Myanmar opened itself to the world in 2011, Burmese people stated that they had never heard the term. Outside Burma/Myanmar, the word "Rohingya" had survived, as we have said, mainly thanks to politically active groups. Neither Bangladesh, nor Saudi-Arabia or Pakistan, where hundreds of thousands of people lived who openly claimed a Rohingya identity or hid it for political reasons, officially used the word "Rohingyas". The name "Rohingya" spread much more in Malaysia where the refugees started to settle during the latest phase of maritime migrations.

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[16] "One is very conscious that the border area is flooded with Bengalis. They consist of 90 percent of the 400,000 population of the two main townships involved against 35 percent ten years ago with the Arakanese forced to move to the South." British Embassy, Rangoon (Rex Farrar) to SEA Department (Brian Smith), FCO, London, Confidential report of 23 February 1979.

In the 1990s, Rohingya writers gave up on comparing their ethnic status with the indigenous Kamans and rather emphasized connections with Arakan. At the same time, the human rights discourse displaced the pro-eminent role of history as the main strategy to legitimize Rohingya claims. New publications on the history of the region were eagerly read by U Kyaw Min, a high profile Rohingya leader in Myanmar who thereby bolstered and updated the Rohingya struggle for state recognition (Kyaw Min 2012). The profile of the Buddhist Rakhine as a fundamentally hostile community also receded as the political leaders in the Rohingya diaspora (such as the *Arakan Rohingya National Organisation*) wanted to rejoin the democratic opposition to the military junta. A hostile stance towards a fellow ethnic group risked backfiring. However, in the 1990s, it was the turn of Rakhine nationalists to become more outspoken than ever before about their hostility towards the Rohingya ethno-historical claims.[17] Burmese censorship under the authoritarian regimes did not allow the open expression of such inter-ethnic strife. The military rulers between 1962 and 2011 kept Rakhine and Rohingya nationalisms in check by alternately favoring the leaders of one or the other

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[17] The names of Dr Aye Chan, Shwe Zan, Saya Khine Myo Saung, Khin Maung Saw, Dr Aye Kyaw and Maung Tha Hla come to mind in this context. They were Rakhine nationalists who contested the Rohingya ethnic identity claims. Some were political prisoners or refugees. Rakhine nationalism was not tolerated any more than Rohingya nationalism under the military juntas. Rakhine and Rohingya publications of the 1990s include valuable historical points contributing to an understanding of the late colonial and post-war context in Arakan (Khin Maung Saw, 1994; Aye Chan, 2005; Maung Tha Hla, 2009; Yunus 1994; Zaw Min Htut, 2001).

group in political transactions. Before the 1990s, they kept both sides satisfied either with expressions of cultural gratification (maintaining sites of memory in the case of the Rakhine) or ongoing political representation (participation in regional and/or national elections).

While ethno-centric state policies hurt all the communities, the systemic repression which hit the North Rakhine Muslims during the 1990s, including forced labor, harassment and denial of freedom of movement, did not only condition a second mass flight in 1991-92, it also made the discourse of the Rohingyas in exile about themselves more rigid and uncompromising.

To be true, the youthful Rohingya discourse of the 1950s had always been based more on popular history than on academic historical research. One may surmise that an increasingly dogmatic stance on the self-identity of the Rohingyas became deeply engrained among Rohingya political leaders in their Pakistani and Bangladeshi exiles discouraging open-faced discussions of the identity formations among North Arakan Muslim since 1937.[18]

In conclusion, the obscure life of the name before 2012 confirms the marginal character of Rakhine State's situation itself, the lack of news circulating about this region and its peoples inside and outside the country, and the lack of descriptions and analytical depth of international political reports when dealing with the issue of Muslims in

Burma/Myanmar. The Karen, Shan and Kachin ethnic conflicts dominated the news about Myanmar until 2012.

To study the history of the name during the period from 1992 to 2012, a detailed analysis of diplomatic records, media sources and NGO reports dealing with the refugees' issues is necessary. For a long time, Western authors and writers from within the region were unsure if and how they should use the term "Rohingya". Besides Myanmar, Bangladesh and Saudi-Arabia where many Rohingyas lived, had never recognized their separate ethnic status. At hindsight, there is a stark contrast between the discerning approaches before 2012 and thereafter when political correctness dictated the use of "Rohingya" for all the Muslims in Rakhine State independently of any fact-check and even led to renaming Burmese/Myanmar Muslims as Rohingyas in contexts that had nothing to do with Rakhine state (see Leider, 2018). The Karen Human Rights Group's 2002 report on the persecution of Muslims in Burma neatly distinguished Rohingyas and Arakanese Muslims.

> "The use of the terms 'Rakhine', 'Arakan' and 'Rohingya' is complex due to the political and racial significance of the terms. In this report the term 'Rohingya' is used to refer to Muslims in Rakhine State and 'Rakhine' is used to refer to the Buddhist inhabitants of Rakhine State. 'Arakanese Muslim' will be used in this report to differentiate between Muslims whose ancestors are indigenous to Rakhine State and Muslims whose ancestors arrived in Rakhine State during the British colonial period." (KHRG, 2002)

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[18] One example is the Rohingya history of Dr Mohammed Yunus, the founder of the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (Yunus, 1994).

When after 2012, the term "Rohingya" became the only politically acceptable term for Muslims of Rakhine State (apart from the Kamans), this re-alignment of naming practice was the immediate outcome of a wave of international sympathy for the numerous internally displaced people and the numerous reports on their statelessness. Historical background presentations that tried to historicize the name were frowned upon by Rohingya activists and their defenders alike, because they were interpreted by them as attempts to question Rohingya rights for self-identification.

However, as the need for accurate information subsists, many questions remain and some have been alluded to in the paragraphs above. We lack a clear understanding of how Muslim communities in different locations in Rakhine State addressed issues of self-identification and political goals since independence and what a role the term "Rohingya" played as an identifier outside the purely political field. What role did the name "Rohingya" further play among the diaspora in Saudi-Arabia and Pakistan where the migrants often lived as illegals and were referred to as Burmese Muslims or Bangladeshis because of their passports made in Bangladesh? New questions have emerged with the Rakhine State crisis unfolded. Rohingyas in the 21st century essentialize Rohingya ethnicity as a thing of the pre-colonial past, while the evidence of the 20th century suggests a growing process of ethnification under the impact of external political and internal social factors. In the acrimonious debates that followed the violence of 2012, Rohingya activists strongly rejected the view that

"Rohingya" was a political identifier, even though generations of Rohingya leaders had stressed the momentous political aspect of their struggle.

Due to the extreme turn that events took after the attacks of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army in October 2016, the public perception of the name "Rohingya" further evolved. While in the early 1960s, the name reflected an emphasis on a local Muslim self-identity linked to territorial claims, in the 1980s, it became a synonym for armed Muslim militants. Since the 1990s, Rohingya organisations largely dropped the call for an autonomous territory because they wanted to join the democratic movement that fought the military junta. "Rohingya" then came to denote mainly Muslim victims of Myanmar state repression. When the army's cleansing operations pushed more than 600,000 people over the border into Bangladesh at the end of August 2017, the perception of victimhood became even more fixated with the dominant discourse on ethnic cleansing and allegedly genocidal intents against the Rohingyas.

Yet the close association of Rohingya identity and victimization will likely not be the final stage in the history of the name and its connotations. A recent development is the attempt to project the name back into the past, by expanding the name and rohingya-ize Muslims in colonial sources. On 24 February 2018, a Rohingya activist, "Ro" Nay San Lwin (@nslwin) tweeted that "a *Rohingya*, Mr Maracan, contributed for building Sittwe hospital in 1914". But the Maracans were not Arakanese Muslims, but Chulias of

Madrassi origins.[19] In the same tweet, Nay San Lwin also described "Ali Hussein, headman of Ngakura and Kazi Abdul Ali" who were benefactors of the Maungdaw hospital at the time of the First World War, as *Rohingyas*.[20] "Note that Ro" has become an internationally used short cut for the Rohingya activists to identify themselves, a phenomenon responding to the Rakhine practice of using "Khine" as an associated part of their names to convey a hint at their ethnic identity.

As the global use of the name expanded, its unexpected absence was suddenly seen as a deviation from an anticipated norm. Adil Sakhawat, in a special issue of the *Dhaka Tribune*, wondered why a group of 47 *Rohingya* muftis who had fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh, did *not* use the word "Rohingya" in what he termed a "fatwa" from October 2017.[21]

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[19] Chulias are *Tamil Muslims*, a term that covers a complex ethno-religious group from South India. Peter Murray, an officer of the British Military Administration during World War II, identified the Maracan family as "Burma Indian[s] of *Chulia* (Madras) origins whose family had been settled in Burma for several generations," owners of "a great deal of land south of Maungdaw". (Murray, 1980).

[20] Nay San Lwin identifies them as founders of the Maungdaw hospital in 1885 which misinterprets the text. The photographic reproduction of page 213 of an unidentified book on Akyab District states that the two gentlemen had financed a "new ward" at that hospital and the context makes it clear that this new construction took place at the time of the First World War. This point is, however, irrelevant for the purpose of this essay.

[21] *"The fatwa strangely does not use the word Rohingya."* – In Who's calling the shots for the Rohingya people? *Dhaka Tribune*, (2018, March 12th). Available online https://www.dhakatribune.com/world/south-asia/2018/03/12/who-calling-shots-rohingya-people/ – The text of the

The retrospective interpretive insertion of the term "Rohingya" in a colonial source, on the one hand, and its *absence* in an early 21st century political context where it would be expected by observers, on the other hand, show that naming practices are fluctuating and do not easily fit into a normative context. By extension, they do also illustrate that the construction of an imagined Rohingya community is far from finished.

Conclusion

The shift from "Arakanese Muslims" (and its variants) to "Rohingya" (and its shifting semantics) resonates against the background of the recent ethnonymic standardization of "Rohingya". The present essay has shown that names and expressions used to identify Muslims in Arakan and specifically North Arakan have a history and that name changes of the last six decades feed into a living archive that reaches back into the distant past. Terms like "Kala", "Rohingya," "Arakanese Muslims," "Chittagonians" or "Bengalis" are politically and culturally charged and any effort to disentangle meanings and connotations should start by contextualizing their origins, their becoming and their practice. The present overview did not include a historical account of the ethnonyms of other groups of population in the Northeast Bay of Bengal, notably the Buddhist people who identify as Rakhine (Arakanese), Mog, Marma or other regional terms. Their identities are based

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fatwa contained a condemnation of the jihad launched by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army.

on connected histories that are intertwined with the people of Burma/Myanmar, more ethno-linguistic groups of Arakan/Rakhine State, of Southeast Bengal, and partly at least, people of Northeast India. A more comprehensive approach would call for a book-length treatment of the subject. The present essay is at best a point of departure arguing for more systematic research.

One spontaneous outcome of the name controversy in 2012 and thereafter was the creation of *ad hoc* compilations of source texts and references that fed into social media discussions on the history of the modern Rohingyas. Academics and independent researchers cooperated to form digitally accessible archives containing official and non-official documents that allowed a close examination of the chronological record.[22] Rohingyas and pro-Rohingya activists were keen to prove that the Union of Burma had already recognized the Rohingyas as an ethnic group in the 1950s and 1960s so that their citizenship rights

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[22] The most complete collection of English and Burmese language documents relating to the Rohingya issue is found on the website www.networkmyanmar.com curated by Derek Tonkin, a former British diplomat. Maung Zarni, a pro-Rohingya activist also going under the name of Dr Zarni, compiled various sets of documents accessible on his website www.maungzarni.net. Abu Taher, a Rohingya politician, published a volume with historical documents which he circulated among embassies in 2012 (National Democratic Party for Development, 2012). . Abu Anin (aka U Kyaw Min), another Rohingya politician, has reproduced and quoted historical documents in his publications in Burmese and English, some of which are available on Rohingya websites. Rohingya websites, like www.rohingyablogger.com have occasionally reproduced documents as well. Others have been posted on Scribd.

in the emerging post-2011 democratic regime could not be denied. Nonetheless, the content of these collections informed the virtual media conversations only to a limited amount. Observers who became familiar with the Rohingya issue only after 2012 found the wider historical context opaque and many saw histories as a moot point in comparison with the clear-cut documentation on human rights violations. Legal and humanitarian assessments based on tested methodologies offered them a morally sustained view of the situation that did not request research in obscure archives and rare document collections. The sheer lack of sociological and anthropological research on the conflicting societies in Rakhine was also passed over in silence. Even in many academic papers on the legal and humanitarian aspects of the crisis, the so-called historical background has not been based on peer-reviewed research work, but on very limited and often eclectic bodies of reports and newspaper articles. The present essay has shown that an archive of naming practices demonstrates change and adaptation at various levels of social and political interaction and conflict while still including the role of both Muslims and Buddhists as actors in political and administrative relations until the elections of 2015. It may thereby function as an opening for further discussions and as an antidote to ahistorical and purely ideological approaches.

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อดีต ตัวตน กับความจริงแท้
ของชาติพันธุ์ ศิลปะ และโบราณคดี

Past Identity and Authenticity
Of Ethnology Art and Archaeology

สุรกานต์ โตสมบุญ และ อรพินท์ คำสอน

บรรณาธิการ

บทบรรณาธิการ

ศูนย์มานุษยวิทยาสิรินธร (องค์การมหาชน) ร่วมกับสำนักฝรั่งเศสแห่งปลายบุรพทิศ ศูนย์กรุงเทพฯ (École française d'Extrême-Orient, centre de Bangkok) จัดทำโครงการเสวนาวิชาการสาธารณะและนิทรรศการภาพถ่ายชุด "คนกับโบราณสถาน" มาแล้วในระหว่างวันที่ 3 ถึง 23 พฤศจิกายน พ.ศ. 2559 เพื่อแลกเปลี่ยนและเสริมสร้างเครือข่ายทางวิชาการความรู้ทางมานุษยวิทยาและสาขาที่เกี่ยวข้องแก่นักวิชาการ ผู้ปฏิบัติการทางวัฒนธรรม และสาธารณะ โดยเน้นการเผยแพร่ผลงานวิชาการใน 3 ประเด็นหลักคือ ประเด็นทางชาติพันธุ์วิทยา การจัดการมรดกทางวัฒนธรรม และทบทวนมุมมองว่าด้วยการประกอบสร้างตัวตนทางประวัติศาสตร์-โบราณคดีไทย เพื่อตอบสนองนโยบายของศูนย์มานุษยวิทยา-สิรินธร (องค์การมหาชน) ตามแผนยุทธศาสตร์ปี 2557 – 2560

อย่างไรก็ดี ทีมงานพร้อมด้วยนักวิชาการผู้ร่วมโครงการเล็งเห็นว่ากิจกรรมดังกล่าวสามารถที่จะพัฒนาต่อยอดเพื่อเป็นประโยชน์ต่อวงวิชาการทางมนุษยศาสตร์-สังคมศาสตร์ และสาธารณชนผู้สนใจในวงกว้างได้ด้วยการตีพิมพ์เผยแพร่เป็นหนังสือรวมเล่มบทความ โดยมีหัวข้อหลักเพื่อทบทวนมโนทัศน์ว่าด้วย "อดีต" "ตัวตน" และ "ความจริงแท้" ขององค์ความรู้ในสาขาวิชาชาติพันธุ์วิทยา มนุษยศาสตร์ และโบราณคดี ผ่านประเด็นเฉพาะ อาทิ มิติชุมชนกับการบูรณะแหล่งโบราณสถาน, ประวัติศาสตร์นิพนธ์, วาทกรรมว่าด้วยพุทธศิลป์ไทย, เอกลักษณ์และตัวตนของกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์ชนกลุ่มน้อยในรัฐชาติสมัยใหม่, การส่องทางให้แก่กันระหว่างศิลปศาสตร์ ศิลปกรรมศาสตร์ และโบราณคดี รวมทั้งประเด็นถกเถียงว่าด้วยอดีตกับการประกอบสร้างความจริงแท้ของผู้คนและวัตถุทางวัฒนธรรม จึงได้จัดทำโครงการจัดพิมพ์หนังสือ "อดีต ตัวตน กับความจริงแท้ของชาติพันธุ์ ศิลปะ และโบราณคดี" ขึ้น

โครงการจัดพิมพ์หนังสือ **อดีต ตัวตน กับความจริงแท้ ของชาติพันธุ์ ศิลปะ และโบราณคดี** ได้รับทุนงานสนับสนุนและพัฒนาศักยภาพภาคีเครือข่าย

อดีต ตัวตน กับความจริงแท้ ของชาติพันธุ์ ศิลปะ และโบราณคดี

Past Identity and Authenticity
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