

Reporting on the Rohingya: “The Tip of a Huge Iceberg of Misinformation”

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of Myanmar, is now all over the news, being taken to task for “not speaking out” against the mistreatment of the Rohingya, the Muslim minority in Myanmar, almost all of whom live in the western Rakhine State of Myanmar. 365,000 people have signed a petition demanding she be stripped of her Nobel Prize for not speaking out and denouncing the Buddhists of Myanmar; in Pakistan, a country renowned for its humane treatment of minorities, her photograph has been publicly burned; Al Jazeera has denounced her, and so has that champion of justice Tariq Ramadan.

In the last month, the world media reports, 250,000 Rohingya have now fled the latest cycle of violence, that began with

Rohingya attacks on the military in mid-August, for Bangladesh. In fact, Aung San Suu Kyi has spoken out, but not in the way that many expected. They wanted her to categorically denounce the Burmese military and to depict the Rohingya as entirely innocent victims of Buddhist attacks; this she has refused to do. She believes the story of the Rohingyas in Myanmar is more complicated than the outside world believes. She has noted that “fake news” about atrocities in Myanmar have been relied on by much of the world’s media. More than a few of the stories about the Rohingya have indeed been accompanied by photos purportedly showing the violence against them, but which, in fact, have turned out to be photos of other atrocities experienced by other peoples, having nothing to do with Myanmar. Even the BBC’s south-east Asia correspondent, Jonathan Head, concedes that “much of it [the photos, and the coverage] is wrong.” A closer look reveals that many of the pictures supposedly from Myanmar have come from other crises around the world, with one of those tweeted by Turkey’s Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Simsek even dating back to the Rwandan genocide in 1994.

Jonathan Head discusses at the BBC website four of the most widely-circulated photographs, ostensibly showing Rohingya victims of current Buddhist violence, that are examples of “fake news.” The first photograph, showing a number of bloated corpses, “does appear on several websites dated last year. This suggests the image is not from the recent violence in Rakhine state.” “Suggests” is British understatement for “clearly shows.”

The BBC has ascertained that the second photograph, of a woman mourning a dead man tied to a tree, was taken in Aceh, Indonesia, in June 2003, by a photographer working for Reuters.

The third photograph, of two infants crying over the body of their mother, is from Rwanda in July 1994. It was taken by Albert Facelly for Sipa, and was one of series of photos that

won a World Press Award.

It has also been difficult to track down the fourth image, of people immersed in a canal, but it can be found on a website appealing for funds to help victims of recent flooding in Nepal.

In other words, not one of the four photographs widely distributed as examples of Rohingya suffering has anything to do with the Rohingyas. This is what the BBC's south-east Asia correspondent has confirmed. Surely that ought to be made widely known, and just as surely, it won't.

This "fake news" is, according to Aung San Suu Kyi, "simply the tip of a huge iceberg of misinformation calculated to create a lot of problems between different communities and with the aim of promoting the interest of the terrorists."

Let's refresh our memories of what has been going on in Myanmar this last month. All the news reports coming from Myanmar (Burma) tell the same story: tens of thousands of the Rohingya, a Muslim minority, have been fleeing into Bangladesh, to avoid the sudden upsurge in violence from both Burmese military and civilians. The Rohingya are presented as the innocent and long-suffering victims of "racist" Burmese Buddhists (Islam being, for propaganda purposes, a "race"). Only a handful of the reports mention, and only briefly, as if in passing, that the current violence began when, in mid-August, Rohingya fighters attacked 30 different police stations and an army base, as part of their campaign to stake their claim to Rakhine State, in western Myanmar, and showing themselves able "to strike terror in the hearts" of the Infidels to get it. The attacks left more than 70 dead, Muslims and Buddhists.

The Rohingyas unleashed still other attacks, and the Burmese army then retaliated, and the Rohingya continued to strike back during the last two weeks in August, and then there was

more retaliation from the Buddhists. Many Rohingya have fled the retaliatory violence – a violence which they began – for Bangladesh, but it is their flight, and that retaliation by the Buddhists, which is getting almost all of the attention in the Western press, complete with photographs of victims of other conflicts who are presented as Rohingya (the “fake news” of which Aung San Suu Kyi complained), rather than what prompted it.

Seldom mentioned is that the August attack by the Rohingyas was preceded by a similar attack, last October, by the Rohingyas on the Burmese (Buddhist) police, and again, it was not their initial attack, but almost exclusively the retaliation by the Buddhist army, that was the focus of reports in the foreign press last fall. Reports of Rohingya villages being burnt down are reported uncritically. The Myanmar authorities have claimed that Islamic militants, having infiltrated Rohingya communities, have themselves been setting fire to houses in Muslim villages in order to get the world even more on their side. Instead of assuming these claims must be false, why not investigate them?

According to most of the world’s media, an unfathomable tragedy has been unfolding in Myanmar. The Buddhist majority, inflamed by rabble-rousing anti-Muslim monks, has been persecuting, killing, even massacring, members of the entirely inoffensive Muslim Rohingya minority in the western state of Rakhine (formerly, and in some places still, known as “Arakan”). An example of this hysterical coverage can be found in a report from, unsurprisingly, the pro-Muslim Guardian. It describes a sinister senior monk, Shin Parathu, who is repeatedly accused by the Guardian of “stoking religious hatred across Burma. His paranoia and fear, muddled with racist stereotypes and unfounded rumors, have helped to incite violence and spread disinformation.” One might note that no examples of these “racist stereotypes” are ever given. Could it be that the “stereotype” that this monk is accused of

spreading has to do with depicting Muslims as intent on Jihad in the path of Allah, unwilling and even unable to integrate into a Buddhist society, and with a history, going back to 1942, of violence against Buddhists, that is the Rakhine people of Arakan State, and even attempting to join part of East Pakistan, and through the late 1950s, and in the 1970s, and again in the 1990s, conducting a low-level insurrection against the Burmese state – all of which is true?

And while the Guardian insists that the Rohingya are never the instigators of violence, the policemen they attacked without warning and nine of whom they murdered last October, and the people they killed in 31 coordinated attacks in mid-August, and those Buddhists they have killed since, might beg to differ. The Western press remains resolutely unsympathetic to the Buddhists of Myanmar, unwilling to find out why those Buddhists might have reason to be alarmed.

The Western media have uncritically repeated the Rohingya claim that they have inhabited Arakan for many centuries or “since time immemorial.” Others beg to differ, among them a well-known historian, and author of many works on Burma, Professor Andrew Selth of Griffith University in Australia. He has stated categorically that the name “Rohingya” was taken by “Bengali Muslims who live in Arakan State...most Rohingyas arrived with the British colonialists in the 19th and 20th centuries.” It is true that a handful of Bengali Muslims drifted down to Burma over the centuries, but Professor Selth makes the important point – unknown to Western reporters – that the vast majority of Rohingyas are recent arrivals, their great migration made possible by the fact that Burma was administratively part of British India until 1937, which meant there was no formal border to cross.

Particularly disappointing for many in the West (not to speak of the reactions of Pakistan, Al Jazeera, and Tariq Ramadan) has been what they regard as the unforgivable silence of Aung San Suu Kyi, currently the head of the Myanmar government. For

Aung San Suu Kyi was formerly the leader of the nonviolent opposition to the Burmese military, placed under house arrest by the generals, then freed, and awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. For more than two decades she was, for her continued defiance of the generals, and willingness to endure that house arrest, a darling of the international media. Since the end of military rule, which she helped to bring about, she has held a number of important government posts, and is now the State Counsellor (equivalent to Prime Minister) in Myanmar.

But in her continuing refusal to condemn outright the attacks on the Rohingya, and in her insistence that in Myanmar there has been “violence on both sides” – for which there is ample evidence – Aung San Suu Kyi is now seen by many outside Myanmar in quite another light. Many have criticized Aung San Suu Kyi for her silence on the 2012 Rakhine State riots, when, after the rape and killing of a Buddhist woman by three Rohingyas, Buddhists retaliated, and then the violence escalated when hundreds of Rohingyas went on a rampage following Friday prayers at a mosque, throwing rocks and setting fire to houses and buildings. Four Buddhists, among them a doctor and an elderly man, died of multiple knife wounds. Recent accounts in the foreign media ignore all that. For the Western media, the narrative remains the same; the Rohingya are always the victims, and the Buddhist violence against them is always unwarranted.

The outside world deplores Aung San Suu Kyi’s refusal to condemn the Buddhists and what they see as her general indifference to the ongoing mistreatment of the Rohingya by Burmese Buddhists. Twenty-three Nobel laureates and other “peace activists” signed a letter in November 2016 asking Aung San Suu Kyi to speak out about the Rohingya: “Despite repeated appeals to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, we are frustrated that she has not taken any initiative to ensure full and equal citizenship rights of the Rohingyas,” their Open Letter states. “Daw Suu Kyi is the leader and is the one with the

primary responsibility to lead, and lead with courage, humanity and compassion.” But perhaps she has an understanding of the situation, based on an intimate knowledge of her country’s history, that the outside world does not possess.

Aung San Suu Kyi has refused to address accusations that the Muslim Rohingya may be victims of crimes against humanity, and in an interview with the BBC’s Misha Husain in March 2016, she refused to condemn violence against the Rohingya and denied that Muslims in Myanmar have been subject to ethnic cleansing. She insisted that the tensions in her country were due to a “climate of fear” (among the Buddhists) caused by a “worldwide perception that global Muslim power is very great.” And apparently, according to some reports, she was angry that the BBC had chosen a Muslim to interview her. Given the BBC’s history of pro-Rohingya advocacy, can you blame her?

What shall we make of this attitude from someone who had previously been put on a Nobel Peace Prize pedestal? Has she metamorphosed from being a moral exemplar to becoming a moral monster who needs correction, someone who, as researchers on state crime at St. Mary’s University in London claim, is “legitimising genocide”? It is genocide if you attempt to kill all the members of another racial or religious group; it is not genocide if you seek to expel them from your country because of the threat you believe they pose. When Eduard Benes in Czechoslovakia attempted to remove several million ethnic Germans from his country after World War II, based on what they had done before and during the war, in taking Germany’s side, and what he feared they might someday do again should Germany again become a threat, it was not “genocide,” and the Benes Decree, as it was known, was accepted by the West.

It’s not surprising that for the giddy globe’s Great and Good, as the Economist put it, her “halo has even slipped among foreign human-rights lobbyists, disappointed at her failure to make a clear stand on behalf of the Rohingya minority” and to “give details on how her government intends to resolve the

violence faced by the long-persecuted Muslim minority.” Or might it just be conceivable that the well-educated Burmese liberal Aung San Suu Kyi knows more about the Rohingyas, and the past history of Muslims in her own country, Myanmar, than do her critics, and that that knowledge makes her more studied and nuanced in her judgments, less credulous about the Rohingya claims of innocent victimhood, and more sympathetic to the fears of the Buddhists of Myanmar?

If we examine the last 150 years of Burmese history, we may find that Madame Suu Kyi has more of a point than her foreign critics think. It is that history that is in the minds of, and explains the behavior today of, the Buddhists of Myanmar. In 1826, after the Anglo-Burmese War, the British annexed Arakan (Rakhine State), where almost all of the 1.1 million Rohingyas now in Myanmar still live, to British India. And they began to encourage Indians, mainly Muslims, to move into Arakan from Bengal as cheap farm labor. They continued to encourage this migration throughout the nineteenth-century. The numbers of Bengali Muslim migrants is impressive. In Akyab District, the capital of Arakan, according to the British censuses of 1872 and 1911, there was an increase in the Muslim population from 58,255 to 178,647, a tripling within forty years. At the beginning of the 20th century, migrants from Bengal were still arriving in Burma at the rate of a quarter million per year. In the peak year of 1927, 480,000 people arrived in Burma, with Rangoon in that year surpassing New York City as the greatest migration port in the world. And many of these migrants were Bengali Muslims who joined the Muslims already in Rakhine State, renaming themselves the Rohingyas. The Buddhists continued to call them, as they still do today, “Bengalis.” And the immigration of Bengali Muslims continued for decades. In a 1955 study published by Stanford University, the authors Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff concluded that “the post-war (World War II) illegal immigration of Chittagonians [i.e., Bengali Muslims from Chittagong in East Pakistan] into that area [Arakan state] was on a vast scale,

and in the Maungdaw and Buthidaung areas they replaced the [Buddhist] Arakanese.”

The Buddhist Burmese looked on helplessly at the arrival of these hundreds of thousands of Muslims, but there was nothing they could do against the policy of their British colonial masters. During World War II, the British retreat in the face of the Japanese led to a power vacuum, and simmering inter-communal tensions erupted, with the Arakanese Massacres of 1942, when 50,000 Buddhist Rakhines were killed by the Rohingyas in Rakhine (Arakan) state. In retaliation, the Buddhists then killed as many as 40,000 Rohingyas. (In another account, with much lower figures, the Rohingyas killed 20,000 of the Buddhists, who then killed 5,000 of the Rohingyas.) The origins of the mass killing instigated by the Rohingya Muslims in 1942 have a simple explanation: they had been left weapons by the retreating British, who had been assured that the Rohingyas would use the weapons against the Japanese. Instead, as soon as they acquired these arms, the Rohingyas attacked the Buddhists, mainly Arakanese, in Rakhine State, And after World War II, illegal immigration by Bengali Muslims “was on a vast scale.” For the Western media, none of this matters. History doesn't count. For the Buddhists of Burma, this history matters a great deal.

And what the Rohingya did next also matters. In May, 1946 Rohingya leaders met with Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the Muslim leader who founded modern Pakistan, and asked that the northern part of Rakhine state be annexed by East Pakistan. Then, when Jinnah refused to interfere in Burmese affairs, they founded the Mujahid Party in northern Arakan in 1947. The aim of the Mujahid Party was initially to create an autonomous Muslim state in Arakan. The local mujahideen – that's what the Rohingya warriors proudly called themselves – fought government forces in an attempt to have the mostly Rohingya-populated Mayu peninsula in northern Rakhine State secede from Myanmar (then Burma), and after that secession, the Rohingyas

hoped that territory would be annexed by East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh). Fighting between the Rohingya and the Burmese state, then, is not a new thing; it has been going on intermittently since 1947, and it was started by the Rohingya. The Rohingya revolt eventually lost momentum in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and many of the Rohingyas surrendered to government forces.

The Muslim insurrection by the Rohingya did not end, but was revived in the 1970s, which in turn led to the Burmese government mounting, in 1978, a huge military operation (Operation King Dragon) that inflicted great damage on the mujahideen, and bought a decade of relative calm. But again the Rohingya rose up against the Burmese state, and in the 1990s the "Rohingya Solidarity Organisation" attacked Burmese authorities near the border with Bangladesh. In other words, this war on the Buddhist Burmese conducted by the Muslim Rohingya has been going on – waxing and waning – ever since that massacre of Buddhist Rakhins in 1942. It is by keeping in mind that history,, and the memory, too, of how the Rohingya tried on several occasions to secede from Burma and become part of East Pakistan, that Buddhist fears of a Muslim takeover of northern Myanmar should be taken seriously, and viewed sympathetically. The Burmese monks who have recently been whipping up anti-Rohingya sentiment are not behaving out of motiveless malignity; they are keenly aware of all this history. The current reports by journalists are singularly one-sided, and lacking in any historical context. Not a single Western reporter has mentioned that 1942 massacre of the Buddhists by the Rohingya; not a single Western reporter has mentioned the attempts by the Rohingya to join Arakan state to East Pakistan. Not a single Western reporter has noted the Rohingya insurrections of the 1970s and 1990s. Not a single Western reporter has provided the data that shows just how many Bengali Muslims poured into Burma in the late 19th and early 20th century, that certainly calls into question their claim that "Rohingya have been living in Arakan from time

immemorial." Not a single Western reporter has noted, either, that the Hui Panthays – a Muslim Chinese people – live in perfect security, free to practice Islam, in Myanmar, perhaps because that doesn't fit the narrative of anti-Muslim mad monks that has been so successfully peddled in the West. Unlike the Rohingya, the Hui Panthay have not attacked and displaced Buddhists, as the Rohingya, Bengali Muslims, attacked and displaced the Buddhist Rakhine people in parts of Rakhine state.

Do the Buddhists in Myanmar have any legitimate reason to fear the Rohingyas? We've already noted the 1942 massacre of 50,000 Buddhists, and the large-scale Rohingya uprising in the early 1950s, and again in the 1970s, and then again in the 1990s, all of it underreported, or not reported at all, in the outside world. If you are a Buddhist in Myanmar today, you look around the globe and it appears that Muslims are everywhere on the march. In Europe there are now 44 million Muslims (including those in European Russia), with thousands more arriving every day, and the Muslims already in Europe have become a source of both steadily increasing terrorism and of ever-rising anxiety. Western leaders, from Pope Francis to Angela Merkel to Theresa May, appear to be falling all over themselves to make excuses for Muslim behavior and for Islam. The Buddhists of Myanmar feel they are alone, with the Rohingya supported not only by the worldwide umma, or Community of Muslim Believers, but also by Westerners who have completely accepted the Rohingya version of Myanmar's history.

Ever since the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, Buddhists have been systematically mistreated in Bangladesh (East Pakistan), and have been pushed out, with a few still remaining in the Chittagong Hills Tract in Bangladesh. Some have fled to Myanmar, which has resettled them. And unsurprisingly, just as Muslims moved into the houses that the fleeing Buddhists left behind in Bangladesh, the Buddhists in Myanmar have given to some of those Buddhists who arrived from

Bangladesh land taken from the Rohingyas, as a tit-for-tat exchange. The Buddhists of Myanmar assume that if the Rohingyas leave for Bangladesh, from whence they originally came, they can be given in recompense the villages that the Buddhists left behind in Bangladesh when they fled to Myanmar or to India proper.

For the Burmese – and not just a handful of monks – the Rohingyas are not a true indigenous people of Myanmar, but the descendants of the Muslims who began arriving from East Bengal in the 19th century. Today's Rohingyas, for the Buddhists in present-day Myanmar who are leading the anti-Rohingya campaign, are the same people who attacked Buddhists in Rakhine State in 1942, who tried to secede and join Pakistan in 1946, who, as self-described Jihadist warriors (“mujahideen”) conducted a violent insurrection against Burmese authorities that began in 1948 and lasted to the 1950s, in order to make Rakhine an autonomous state under Muslim control, and then, in a second attempt, to possibly have it annexed by Pakistan. These are the same Jihad warriors who conducted an insurrection against the Buddhist government in the 1970s and again in the 1990s. For the Buddhist monks of Myanmar, the Rohingyas are Bengali Muslims– the Buddhists have never called them “Rohingyas” but, rather, “Bengalis” – who migrated south to Burma, and are the local branch of the world-wide Muslim *umma* that has been in continuous warfare against Buddhists and Buddhism for centuries, and is again becoming more aggressive and violent all over the world.

When those Burmese monks look next door to India, they remember that in the 12th century, Muslim invaders pillaged Buddhist monuments and monasteries, leading to Buddhism's final decline in that country. The monks know too that the last large group of Buddhists still remaining in the subcontinent, those in the Chittagong Hills tract in Bangladesh, are in danger of being completely driven out, or even disappearing, because of repeated attacks by Muslims.

The monks remember the recent destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan by the Taliban, and that gigantic act of cultural vandalism reminds them of the thousands of Buddhist temples and statues and stupas and monasteries that were destroyed over the centuries by the Muslim invaders of India and its neighbors.

And then they think, too, of what Muslims have done to Hindus, in Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and especially in Kashmir, where 50,000 families of Kashmiri pandits, Hindus indigenous to Kashmir, have been forced out – to escape death – by Muslims. The mass killings of the Pandits, which almost no one in the West seemed to notice or care about, were taken to heart by the Buddhists in Myanmar. It made them realize what could happen to them and how, like the Kashmiri Pandits, they were on their own in facing Muslim aggression. They read about such things as this (which I have previously posted, but it deserves re-posting):

“The days that followed the night of January 19, 1990 saw Kashmiri Pandits being killed in scores every day. Atrocities against KPs had become the order of the day. From Budgam to Brijbehara, from Kupwara to Kanikadal there was hardly a day when Kashmiri Pandits haven’t been killed. Most brutal forms of torture from gouging out of eyes, to cutting genitals, to burning bodies with cigarette butts and even chopping off body parts were used to kill Pandits. Sarwanand Kaul Premi, a noted scholar had nails hammered in place of his tilak. BK Ganjoo was killed in his home and his wife was asked to eat the rice soaked in his blood. Sarla Bhat a nurse was gang-raped before being killed and her naked body was thrown on the street. The killers of Ravinder Pandita of Mattan danced over his body. The bodies of Brijlal and Choti were tied to a jeep in Shopian and dragged for 10 km.”

“Girja Tikoo, a school teacher in Bandipora, was gang-raped before being killed. There are hundreds of such stories. One can almost write a book on the people who suffered at the

hands of the terrorists while the meek and feeble Indian state looked the other way. A notorious terrorist named Bitta Karate alone killed more than 20 Pandits and had no shame accepting the same. ...More than a thousand Pandits were killed, tortured and raped."

The exodus, meanwhile, carried on.

The Buddhists of Myanmar have also noticed the long-running terrorism of two Muslim groups, Abu Sayyaf and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, in their attempt to gain independence for Muslim-majority islands in the Philippines; the two groups have been responsible for more than 100,000 dead. And they know about the more than 30,000 attacks by Muslim terrorists since 9/11/2001, against many different indigenous non-Muslims – Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, atheists – in such non-Muslim lands China, India, Australia, the Philippines, Russia, Israel, Great Britain, France, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, the United States, as well as the persecution and killings of Christians by Muslims in Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Pakistan, Nigeria, Algeria, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Tunisia, Somalia, Yemen, and Indonesia.

And every day brings fresh news, from somewhere in the world, of atrocities committed by Muslims, whether members of the Islamic State, or of Al-Qaeda, or of other groups under other names, or by lone-wolf mujahideen determined to fulfill their duty to engage in violent Jihad, to sow terror, and to kill Infidels. And the Buddhists in Myanmar begin to think, given that so many powerful countries in the West seem unable to handle their domestic Muslim problems, and given, too, the unwillingness of the non-Muslim peoples to band together in a counter-Jihad, that they can rely only on themselves, and that history teaches them that they must retaliate with ferocity. They believe that the Rohingya, or almost all of them, arrived in Myanmar from the late 19th century on, and were not, as the

Rohingyas claim, in Myanmar “from time immemorial.” Of course, they wish to encourage the Rohingyas, whom they regard as a distinctly foreign group (“Bengalis”), with a history of violence and insurrection, to leave Myanmar for the Bengal region from which, the Burmese know, the Rohingyas originally came.

Is it so difficult to imagine that those Buddhist monks feel that it is they, their religion, their Buddhist culture, that are now imperiled, by Muslims following the same texts as those who put a virtual end to Buddhism in India, and who have carried out attacks on the last remnant of Buddhists in present-day Bangladesh, and have destroyed so much of the art and artifacts of Buddhist culture in India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Xinjiang in western China, Indonesia? For these monks, who are aware of how destructive a triumphant and triumphalist Islam has been for Buddhism, it is they, the Buddhists in Myanmar, who are on the permanent defensive. From the outside, looking in, with the Buddhists constituting 95% of Myanmar’s population, their worries seem unwarranted. But they see what happened in India, to both Buddhists and Hindus, when ruled by a very small group of Muslims, and history teaches them to worry. They see themselves not as the assured masters of their own country, but as needing to protect themselves, and some of them believe they should preemptively strike against, and attempt to drive out, the local representatives of Islam, an aggressive and fanatical faith, as Myanmar Buddhists see it, that has driven Buddhism out of so much of Asia.

This recapitulated history is not meant as approval of any unprovoked attacks on the Rohingya civilians. There is no doubt that tens of thousands of Rohingya have fled into Bangladesh in recent weeks, harried by both the Myanmar military and by Burmese civilians. It is meant, however, to remind people that before condemning the Buddhists of Myanmar with such ferocious one-sidedness, and denouncing Aung San Suu

Kyi for daring to have a more nuanced view of the situation (and after all, it would have been easy for her to satisfy her foreign critics, and retain her status as a human-rights paladin, by denouncing the Buddhists and declaring the Rohingyas completely innocent, but she refused, and refuses still), one ought to consider the history of the Muslims in that country, when and from where they arrived, and how they have behaved toward the indigenous Buddhists over the past century.

History tells a tale far more complicated than is acknowledged by those issuing these blanket denunciations of the Burmese Buddhists. If those who keep demanding of Aung San Suu Kyi, with such self-righteous indignation, that she “must” speak out about the Rohingya, were to learn a bit more about the history of Myanmar, they might not be quite so ready to denounce her. They have been ferocious in their responses because they are fearful; history has taught them to be so. Because of Islam, Buddhism has disappeared from so many places, including its birthplace, India. The local Buddhists think of Myanmar, despite how it may look to the outside world, as being one of the last redoubts of Buddhism, and under Muslim attack, both diplomatic and military; they want to end the Rohingya (“Bengali Muslim”) problem once and for all.

Should the history of Muslim-Buddhist relations in Myanmar be better known, with journalists taking it upon themselves to learn about, and then to transmit, this history, it is possible that the “international community” would address the current violence differently. Imagine the effect on Myanmar’s anxious Buddhists if those now lecturing them so unsympathetically instead demonstrated by their statements that they were well aware of the flood into Myanmar of Muslim migrants over a half-century, recognized that the inter-communal violence in 1942 had started with massacres by the Muslim side against unsuspecting Buddhists, conceded that the

Rohingyas had tried for many years, as self-described mujahideen, to seize part of Myanmar, and to make it an autonomous Muslim state, and that it is this past, as well as the actions over many centuries of Muslims against Buddhists (and Hindus) in south Asia, that has deeply affected how the Burmese Buddhists view their own situation.

That might help calm the Burmese Buddhists, make them feel less anxious, now that their fears were not being cavalierly dismissed, but given a sympathetic hearing. And they, in turn, might ratchet down their own violence if they no longer feel quite so alone. It should be possible for the West to come to its senses about the Rohingyas and the Buddhists of Myanmar. What is needed is for the Western media to study the history of the Rohingyas in Myanmar, when they arrived, and from where, and what has been the nature of their interactions with the Buddhists. And the Western journalists on whom we rely will learn that beginning in the 1940s it was the Rohingyas who struck first against the Buddhists, militarily with the massacre of 50,000 in 1942, and diplomatically with the appeal to Pakistan's president in 1947 to make