

Mapping the Identity Politics of the Rohingya People

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Abstract

This paper examines the evolving identity politics (IP) of the Rohingya people (RP), who inhabit Arakan (now Rakhine State) in Myanmar. Theoretically, it draws on Brubaker's (2004) "identity politics as practice" framework and postcolonial state critique (Chatterjee, 1993) to analyze how marginalized groups reformulate collective identity in response to systematic exclusion. Methodologically, the study employs qualitative historical documentary analysis, tracing political claims, legal documents, and activist narratives from colonial records to contemporary social media.

The analysis contextualizes the Rohingya's political and social struggles as a response to systemic persecution imposed by the military junta, supported by the Bamar polity. Since independence in 1948, the Rohingya have confronted significant challenges during successive waves of persecution (1942, 1962, 1978, 1991–1992, 2012, 2015, and 2017–2018). This history has shaped their political identity through processes of Islamization, Creolization, and Arakanization.

The paper traces the origins of Rohingya political mobilization to the reign of King Naramaikhla and notes a resurgence of IP after British colonial withdrawal (1947 Panglong Agreement). Post-independence military rule, however, led to the annulment of their citizenship and escalating ethnic cleansing. Drawing from these experiences, the Rohingya are now reframing their political identity around Rohingya Nationalism, using social media and international networks to advance claims for recognition and rights. This study contributes to understanding identity politics as a fluid, dynamic process shaped by persecution, cultural hybridity, and transnational activism.