

Letter of Concern to Oxford University Press  
regarding Dr Jacques Leider and OUP Asian History Series

We the undersigned are a group of scholars, academics and rights campaigners, are disturbed by the fact that the OUP's Oxford Research Encyclopedias of Asia History Series has commissioned Dr. Jacques Leider, head of the Bangkok-based Ecole Française de l' Extrême-Orient (EFO) and a well-known advisor to the Myanmar military's Armed Forces Historical Museum in Naypyidaw, to write a reference article on the subject of the Rohingya people in its forthcoming series: the ORE of Asian History (under Political) (see <http://asianhistory.oxfordre.com/page/forthcoming/>).

As you know the Myanmar military, known as the Tatmadaw, has been credibly accused of committing crimes under international law including crimes against humanity and, even the crime of all crimes, the genocide, against the Muslim Rohingya.

As you also know, the Oxford University Press has a very well-earned reputation for fairness and authority in the fields in which they publish reference material. Anything published by OUP online about the Rohingya and Myanmar will be given a great deal of credibility by both scholars and the general public and carry a great deal of weight in any ongoing disputes over the exact legal name of the crimes against this world's largest stateless population whose group identity and historical presence is being erased officially and popularly in Myanmar.

We therefore draw your attention to concerns regarding your selection of Dr. Jacques Leider to write a reference article for the Oxford Research Encyclopedias of Asian History regarding several points:

(1) We find that positions that Dr. Leider has taken publicly in interviews with the press, in talks and in published articles raise serious questions about his objectivity regarding the Rohingya and their history. His well-documented pattern of denials that the Myanmar military-directed mass violence and scorched-earth military operations against the Rohingya community – the subject of his OUP article – is challenged by the growing body of legal analyses and human rights research reports which point to the fact that Myanmar's persecution of the Rohingya as a group amounts to international crimes including crimes against humanity and even a genocide.

(2) We believe that televised appearances by Dr. Leider with military and government officials condoning state policies against the Rohingya give the appearance to the viewing public that he validates views that underlie the Burmese military's ousting of 650,000 people and the massacre of Rohingya for which the military has recently admitted responsibility. A recent English-Burmese bilingual book entitled "Talk on Rakhine Issue: Discussion on Finding Solutions" published by the Ministry of Defence's Myawaddy News Group in Myanmar highlights the fact, in photos and text, that Dr Leider was the only foreign expert to participate in the strategic discussion organized by this official propaganda organ of the Myanmar MOD in the first month of what the United Nations officially described as "ethnic cleansing" of the Rohingya. On 7 and 8 September, 2017, Dr Leider was on stage seated with two ex-Lt-Colonels named Than Aye and Ko Ko Hlaing (ex-officer in charge of the strategic affairs unit and ex-adviser to the former General and former President Thein Sein (2010-15) respectively) in the Burmese capital Naypyidaw at the said invitation-only event billed as "Talk on Rakhine Issue: Discussion on Finding Solutions".

In the introduction of the aforementioned book published by the Myanmar Military, the position of Myanmar regarding the actions taken against the Rohingya, which are widely accepted by 6 successive UN Special Rapporteurs on human rights situation in Myanmar since 1994 as well as by the world's leading human rights monitors such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch as egregious human rights violations, is presented as a legitimate courses of action (that is, by the Myanmar military to defend the country against Islam's attempt to expand its demographic power base and dominate the world, p.4, "Talk on Rakhine Issues", Ministry of Defence Myawaddy News Group).

In these strategic discussions, ex-Colonel Ko Ko Hlaing openly singled out Oxford University as a very influential institution which hosted an international conference on the Rohingya where knowledge about the Rohingya - history, identity and repression was discussed and disseminated. By this, he implied that Oxford University - and other similarly influential places - are places where Myanmar's military needs to try to make strategic inroads to promote its official denial both of Rohingya identity and history, and of the state-directed terror and expulsion.

The audience was made up of mainly of officials from the Ministry of Defence. Myanmar's official and popular Islamophobia where Muslims have been scapegoated in the same way as the Jews were in the old Europe is well-documented in scholarly and human rights literature. These discussions took place at the time Leider's host organization – the Military – was responsible for the violent deaths “at least 6,700 Rohingya, in the most conservative estimations ... including at least 730 children below the age of five years,” in the first month of military operations in Northern Rakhine state of Myanmar alone (from 25 August to 24 September 2017), according to the findings from a limited survey carried out by the MSF among the survivors of this wave of ethnic cleansing who are now in refugee camps in Chittagong, Bangladesh. (source: “Myanmar/Bangladesh: MSF surveys estimate that at least 6,700 Rohingya were killed during the attacks in Myanmar” <http://www.msf.org/en/article/myanmarbangladesh-msf-surveys-estimate-least-6700-rohingya-were-killed-during-attacks> ).

(3) Dr. Leider's insistence (see “History Behind Rakhine State Conflict” <https://www.irrawaddy.com/from-the-archive/history-behind-rakhine-state-conflict.html>, “The Frictions in the Rakhine State Are Less About Islamophobia Than Rohingya-Phobia” <https://thewire.in/182611/frictions-rakhine-state-less-islamophobia-rohingya-phobia/> , and “The Truth About Myanmar's Rohingya Issue” <https://thediplomat.com/2016/03/the-truth-about-myanmars-rohingya-issue/> ) that Rohingya identity – not Rakhine or the majority Burmese – be critically scrutinized as a political identity born out of political and communal conflict indicates a bias against Rohingya claims of their long documented history of settled existence in Rakhine state that should have raised doubts about his appropriateness to write a reference article about the Rohingya. We perceive in Dr. Leider's scholarship an unconcealed bias against Muslim Rohingyas, which results in his dismissal or wilful ignorance of irrefutable – and easily accessible – evidence that effectively undermines his thesis which is that the Rohingya, unlike other “genuinely ethnic identities”, were manufactured by Muslim fighters or Mujahideens in the post-independence period of 1950's. For instance, Dr. Leider calls the Rohingya's belief a “delusion” that the Government of the Union of Burma had recognized them as a constitutive ethnic group of the Union, following the surrender of the separatist Mujahideen in July 1961. The irrefutable fact is this: as late as 1964, the Government of Burma had officially included the Rohingya as an ethnic group of Burma in its official Burmese language “Encyclopaedia Myanmar” (V. 9). In addition, the Rohingya were granted a slot on the country's sole broadcasting station known as the Burma Broadcasting Service

(BBS) as an indigenous language programme, broadcast 3 times per week alongside other indigenous languages such as Shan, Lahu, etc., until the 3<sup>rd</sup> year (1964) of the military rule of General Ne Win.

The readily accessible official documentation supports the Rohingya's collective claim that they were officially recognized as an ethnic group of the Union of Burma from which follows the conclusion that it is the State of Myanmar that has embarked on the project of erasing Rohingya ethnic identity, their history and presence predating the formation of the post-colonial state of the Union of Burma in 1948. Dr. Leider's choice to ignore these primary and official sources regarding Rohingya ethnic identity and nationality further reinforces Myanmar's institutionalized propaganda and Fake News that the Rohingya do not exist as an ethnic nationality, while lending a veneer of objective scholarly authority. There is an alarming parallel between Myanmar's de-nationalization and identity destruction and the German de-nationalization of the Jewish population under Nazi rule.

(4) Genocide denial is a crime in countries such as Germany. Although there is no UK or international law against which the denial of state-directed crimes against humanity, including the genocide, of the Rohingya can be judged, the consensus is emerging among the world's leading institutions and scholars in the field of genocide studies – from the US Holocaust Memorial Museum and Yale University Human Rights Law Clinic, the University of Washington Law School, the Queen Mary University of London International State Crimes Initiative to the Russell-Sartre tribunal, the Permanent People's Tribunal on Myanmar – that Myanmar is guilty of a genocide. Even the head of the UN Human Rights Council has officially stated that the Council is “not ruling out” that a genocide is being committed against the Rohingya. Despite the well-publicized findings by world-renowned research institutes and scholars of genocide, Dr. Leider dismisses them. He also fails to acknowledge that Myanmar's majoritarian racism against the country's Buddhists is violent. He characterises Buddhist racism towards the Rohingya as merely “strong sentiment”.

We do not deny that Dr. Leider, like anyone else, has a right to comment on the Rohingya or any other topic, but when someone takes such a strong position against the historicity of one group's claims regarding ethnicity (and only one group's in a context of conflict between two or more groups), it seems unfair that they should be commissioned for a project to write an article

on the ethnic group in question that seeks to present itself as a fair and unbiased reference source.

We note also that OUP appears only to have commissioned an article on the Rohingya and not on the Rakhine Buddhist community whose ethnic claims, we understand, are no stronger than those of the Rohingya. It is hard to interpret this as other than OUP's taking a stand in favour of the Myanmar military against the Rohingya for reasons unclear and that OUP supports, at least indirectly, the current ethnic cleansing which Dr. Leider's writings and media appearances are used to deny.

Finally, it needs to be stressed that there is something more consequential than our objection *per se* to OUP's commissioning a reference article on the target of the Myanmar military's repression from Dr. Leider. That is the question whether Western educational institutions of worldwide influence should allow themselves, wittingly or not, to be used as a platform by illiberal regimes through academics and scholars whom the regimes view as supporters of their views (and hence as, in effect, their proxies for propaganda)? The well-reported cases of Cambridge University Press and China, the LSE and the Ghaddafi regime spring to mind.

It is worth quoting the recent words of Ruth Barnett, a Jewish Kindertransport survivor in Britain:

“ ‘Never Again’ is unlikely to be achieved in our lifetime but it is we who need to make an effective input towards making it happen. Each and every one of us can do something. It is essential to learn to contain our own violent impulses so that we can talk and negotiate instead of exacerbating and increasing the violence of others.

Perhaps the most poisonous factor is the toleration and cover-up of denial. Denial opens the door for others to commit crimes against humanity, as we clearly see others getting away with it. We need to enthuse and stimulate curiosity and an insistence to expose the truth.

We live with so much denial that many people can no longer distinguish between misinformation, disinformation and truth."

(Ruth Barnett, 27 Jan 2018, "I Survived The Holocaust. Merely Remembering It Is No Longer Good Enough", RightsInfo.org,

<https://rightsinfo.org/why-remembering-the-holocaust-isnt-enough/> )

We sincerely urge OUP to reconsider your editorial decision to commission Dr. Leider to write a reference article on the subject of the Rohingya. We ask that if this article goes ahead, it includes a clear disclaimer that Dr. Leider is not a distant observer and that the article should be considered as an opinion piece, not as an unbiased reference source, regarding a controversial subject which has already been documented by MSF to have caused the deaths of over 6,700 the Rohingya in the first month of Myanmar's military attack and the flight of 650,000 refugees over several months.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, University Professor and a founding member of the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society, Columbia University

Barbara Harriss-White  
Emeritus Professor of Development Studies, Oxford University  
Emeritus Fellow of Wolfson College, Oxford

Barbara Harrell-Bond, OBE  
Emerita Professor and Founding Director of The Refugee Studies Centre,  
University of Oxford 1982–1996

Prof. Gregory Stanton Founding Chairman, Genocide Watch & George Mason University. Arlington, Virginia, USA

Johan Galtung, Founder, Peace Studies

Richard Falk, Professor of International Law, Emeritus, Princeton University

Youk Chhang, Chairman, Genocide Documentation Center of Cambodia/The Sleuk Rith Institute, Cambodia

C Abrar, Professor of International Relations, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

John H. Weiss, Associate Professor of History, Cornell University, USA

Tapan Bose, Filmmaker, human rights defender, India

Prof. Ranabir Samaddar, Academic, India

Rita Manchanda, Feminist writer, India

Samsul Islam, Author, India

Neelima Sharma, Theatre activist, India

Jawed Naqvi, Journalist, India

Seema Mustafa, Journalist, India

Ashok Agrawal, Lawyer, India

Nursyahbani Katjasungkana

National Coordinator of Indonesia Legal Aid Association for Women

Dr. Walid Salem, Al Quds University & the Director of The Centre for Democracy and Community Development, East Jerusalem, Palestine

Jun Nishikawa, PhD, professor emerite, Waseda University, Japan

Dr Ravi P Bhatia, an educationist and peace researcher & Retired professor, Delhi University, India, a member of the TRANSCEND Network for Peace, Development and Environment

Prof. Donesh Mohan, Academic, India

Niranjan Sahoo, PhD, Senior Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, India

Dr. Peggy Mohan, Author, India

Khin Mai Aung, Burmese American civil rights lawyer and writer, New York

Maung Zarni, Fellow, Genocide Documentation Center of Cambodia/The Sleuk Rith Institute, Cambodia

Swagato Sarkar, DPhil (Oxford), Associate Professor, O.P. Jindal Global University, India

Dr. Sumeet Mhaskar, DPhil (Oxford), O.P. Jindal Global University, India

Gill H. boehringer, Honorary Senior Research Fellow  
Macquarie University School of Law, Sydney , Australia

Paul Copeland, C M, (Recipient, Order of Canada), Lawyer, Toronto, Canada

Abdul Malik Mujahid, Chair Emeritus Parliament of the World's Religions

U Kyaw Win, Professor Emeritus, Orange Coast College, California, USA

Bilal M. Raschid  
Past President, Burmese Muslim Association

Dr Amit Upadhyay, Assistant professor, TISS Hyderabad, India

Nicola Suyin Pocock, United Nations University International  
Institute of Global Health

Rezaur Rahman Lenin, Academic Activist, Adjunct Faculty, Eastern  
University Bangladesh & Executive Director, Law Life Culture,  
Bangladesh

Natalie Brinham, ESRC PhD scholar, Queen Mary University of  
London School of Law

Niranjan Sahoo, PhD, Senior Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, India

Prof. Dr. Célestin Tagou  
prof.of PS, IR P&D Studies  
Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and International Relations  
Protestant University of Central Africa  
Executive Secretariat of the Network of Protestant Universities of Africa

Dr. Tilman Evers, Germany

Jørgen Johansen, Deputy Editor of Journal of Resistance Studies, Sweden

Sarah Tobiah, Philanthropist and Human Rights Activist



Miki Lanza, Movimento Nonviolento c/o Centro Studi Sereno Regis ,  
Torino, Italy

Oskar Butcher, Human Rights Activist and Scholar, Germany

Professor Emeritus George Kent, University of Hawai'i and Deputy Editor,  
World Nutrition

Sebastian Eck, Galtung-Institut

Robert J. Burrowes Ph.D., co-founder 'The People's Charter to Create a  
Nonviolent World', Australia

Shadi Sadr, Executive Director of Justice for Iran

Tasnim Nazeer, Award-winning journalist and Universal Peace Federation  
Ambassador for Peace

Emir Ramic, Academic, Ph.D., Chairman of the Institute for Research of  
Genocide, Canada