

## A Critical Assessment of the Exhibition ‘Burma’s Path to Genocide’ at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum

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On 3 December 2018 the United States (‘US’) Holocaust Memorial Museum declared that there was “compelling evidence that the Burmese military committed ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, and genocide against the Rohingya, a Muslim minority population of Burma”. The evidence for this declaration was based on a report issued in November 2017 by the Simon-Skjoldt Center for the Prevention of Genocide at the Holocaust Museum and Fortify Rights, a human rights organisation which has been at the forefront of investigations into human rights violations.<sup>1</sup>

In December 2021, the Museum opened a special exhibition on ‘Burma’s Path to Genocide’. There is an online version of this exhibition which “explores how the Rohingya went from citizens to outsiders – and became targets of a sustained campaign of genocide”.<sup>2</sup>

On 21 March 2022, the US Secretary of State Anthony J. Blinken made a declaration at the Holocaust Museum that:

Beyond the Holocaust, the United States has concluded that genocide was committed seven times. Today marks the eighth, as I have determined that members of the Burmese military committed genocide and crimes against humanity against Rohingya.

It’s a decision that I reached based on reviewing a factual assessment and legal analysis prepared by the State Department, which included detailed documentation by a range of independent, impartial sources, including human rights organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, as well as our own rigorous fact-finding.<sup>3</sup>

Secretary Blinken’s determination, like the seven previous determinations, was a political act and has no criminal law implications, although it is quasi-legal in content. In this context, David I. Steinberg, Distinguished Professor of Asian Studies at Georgetown University, has observed:

The Holocaust was different from the horrors imposed on the Rohingya – not only in the magnitude of the disaster but also when it comes to intent, for the Holocaust expressly sought as state policy to eliminate the Jews, not only to expel them. This is not apparent in the Myanmar case. The US action may appeal to some members of Congress and place the United States in a morally defensible position. But if the desired effect was also to delegitimize the Myanmar military, it does so at the expense of the previous civilian government, for however much they may rightly complain about the military’s domination, dictatorship, and excesses, and however much they now deplore what has happened, they gave their imprimatur to the tragedy through

their leader, Aung San Suu Kyi.<sup>4</sup>

Secretary Blinken makes considerable use of narrative in the Holocaust Museum’s special exhibition on ‘Burma’s Path to Genocide’. He takes his cue from several of the exhibition’s photo-captions, which in my view reflect bias and a disregard for historical truth.

### 1. Secretary Blinken and the Holocaust Museum’s Burma Exhibition

My concerns can be illustrated by analysing a passage (which I have split into six sections) of Secretary Blinken’s brief review of Rohingya history.

1.1. *“The museum’s exhibit that I toured shows us the long path to genocide in Burma, how Rohingya, who had been an integral part of Burma’s society for generations, saw their rights, saw their citizenship methodically stripped away.”*

Arakan Muslims have certainly been an integral part of Burma’s society for generations. But they were classified in British Censuses not as ‘Rohingya’ but as other ethnicities, divided since the 1921 Census into two broad groups designated ‘Indian’ and ‘Indo-Burman’, each group subdivided into individual ethnicities.<sup>5</sup> ‘Rohingya’ as such on the basis of the evidence is a political construction dating from around 1960, coalescing all Indian and Indo-Burman designations except the Kaman.

1.2. *“In 1962, when the military staged its first coup, it canceled all Rohingya-language programming on the state-run broadcasting service.”*

This is not correct. General Ne Win established the Mayu Frontier District in 1960 encompassing Maungdaw, Buthidaung and part of Rathedaung townships, during his brief ‘caretaker’ administration prior to the March 1962 coup. He was praised by the President of the United Rohingya Organisation of the District: “This single act of service to the Rohingyas by General Ne Win is uppermost in the mind of every Rohingya and will be remembered for generations”.<sup>6</sup> A radio programme in ‘Rohinja’ started on 22 August 1961.<sup>7</sup> Four years later, programmes in Rohinja, Lahu and Pa-O all closed on the same day at the end of October 1965. This followed the winding up of the Frontier Areas Administration, of which the Mayu Frontier District was part, at the end of September 1965.

<sup>4</sup> David I. Steinberg, “PacNet #19 – Myanmar: Words like “genocide” have consequences”, Pacific Forum, 2021 (available on its web site).

<sup>5</sup> See my October 2017 brief to the United Kingdom (‘UK’) Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons, Derek Tonkin, “Written Evidence submitted in October 2017 to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee for their Inquiry on Violence in Rakhine State: Memorandum by Mr Derek Tonkin”, BUR0009, 16 November 2017 (<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/jhx9zy/>).

<sup>6</sup> “Letter dated 3 May 1963”, National Library of Australia, Collection Gordon Luce, MS6574.

<sup>7</sup> According to “Broadcasts in Pa-O Lahu and Rohinja”, *The Nation*, 20 August 1961, the programme would be for 10 minutes only on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

<sup>1</sup> Fortify Rights and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Simon-Skjoldt Center for the Prevention of Genocide, “‘They Tried to Kill Us All’: Atrocity Crimes against Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State, Myanmar”, Bearing Witness Report, November 2017.

<sup>2</sup> US Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Burma’s Path to Genocide” (available on its web site).

<sup>3</sup> US Department of State, Anthony J. Blinken, “Secretary Antony J. Blinken on the Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity in Burma”, 21 March 2022 (<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/s3u8yn/>).

1.3. *“In 1978, when the military used a nationwide campaign to register so-called foreigners as a pretext to terrorize Rohingya, forcing more than 200,000 to flee to Bangladesh.”*

Operation Naga Min (‘Dragon King’) in Arakan was designed to check the registration of citizens in frontier areas and to take action against illegal residents, by prosecuting them and, if necessary, deporting them. Action was completed elsewhere in Burma without trouble. In Arakan (Rakhine State) action was conducted in Sittwe town without difficulty, but an alarmingly high number of illegal residents was reported – 2.8 percent of all those checked. This caused consternation among Muslims further north where the incidence of illegal residence was thought to be much higher, so that when the inspection teams reached Buthidaung, they met physical opposition.<sup>8</sup> The Army were called in to restore order. Muslims clashed with Buddhists as communal violence escalated, the Army behaved brutally and many Muslims, gripped by mass hysteria, took fright and fled to Bangladesh. The same happened in Maungdaw.<sup>9</sup>

These events are recorded in contemporary accounts, notably in US, UK and UN archives already released. US diplomatic cables in particular stressed that there was little evidence that Arakan Muslims has been forced to flee, but that they did so out of fear, that elsewhere in Arakan Muslim villages were functioning normally, and that Bangladeshi claims of ill-treatment were much exaggerated. No reports provide evidence to support the allegation that Operation Naga Min was used “as a pretext to terrorize Rohingya”.

In his Despatch of 3 July 1979 reporting the eventual repatriation,<sup>10</sup> British Ambassador Charles Booth commented:

The most interesting question is why Ne Win, always suspicious of foreigners, decided that the refugees should be allowed to return [...]. Whatever the motive the Hinth<sup>11</sup> [Repatriation] Project shows the man as imaginative and magnanimous, adjectives seldom if ever applied to him during the decades of his rule. It also shows at a time when refugees are the major concern of South-East Asia and beyond that two neighbour states can cooperate in a manner which is an example to the rest of the region.

1.4. *“In 1991, when soldiers carried out killings, rapes, massive destruction of Rohingya communities as part of the military’s so-called ‘Clean and Beautiful Nation’, driving an additional 250,000 Rohingya to Bangladesh.”*

The exodus in 1991-92 was far more serious than the flight in 1978 and is well described in the report referenced below.<sup>12</sup> It was preceded, if not triggered by Rohingya insurgent action.<sup>13</sup> The evidence that 250,000 Rohingya were physically ‘driven’ to Bangladesh or forced out of Burma is however unconvincing. Most refugees who fled did so out of fear, as a result of maltreatment and forced labour, loss of property and livelihoods, and the brutality of the Burmese military.

1.5. *“The path is a familiar one, mirroring in so many ways the path to the Holocaust and other genocides. We see it in the segregation of Rohingya into internally displaced persons camps in Rakhine State, the requirement that all Rohingya households register with the government.”*

The British started a system of annual household registration in Arakan in 1829. The local revenue officer assessed each family’s ‘capitation tax’ and

<sup>8</sup> A Senior United Nations (‘UN’) High Commissioner for Refugees Repatriation Officer recorded not only violent demonstrations against the screening, but even “acts of terrorism and sabotage”, Peter Nicolaus, “A Brief Account on the History of the Muslim Population in Arakan”, 1994.

<sup>9</sup> Details of the course of Operation Naga Min may be found in Klaus Fleischmann, “Arakan: Konfliktregion zwischen Birma und Bangladesh”, *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Asienkunde*, Hamburg, 1981.

<sup>10</sup> British Embassy in Rangoon, Charles Booth, “Refugees, Burmese Style”, FCO15/2468, 3 July 1979 (<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/9r2fmo/>).

<sup>11</sup> The Hinta is a mythical bird in Burmese legend, famous for its beauty and faithfulness to its spouse. “The Burmese followed the legend by making sure that the refugees would be given a good reception” on their return, *ibid*.

<sup>12</sup> “Myanmar: Muslims from Rakhine State: Exit and Return”, WRITE-NET, 1 December 1993 (available on the RefWorld web site).

<sup>13</sup> Notably by the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front and the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation: D. Hastings, “Burma-Bangladesh Border Tension”, Memorandum, Commonwealth Office, 10 January 1992.

at the same time the village headman did a rough count of family numbers. The first count in 1829 assessed the total population of Arakan at only 121,288. Household registrations after independence have provided acceptable and important evidence of legal residence, especially in the context of repatriation after the exoduses of 1978 and 1991-2. Registrations include Buddhist as well as Muslim villages.<sup>14</sup>

1.6. *“We see it in Burma’s 1982 citizenship law, which effectively excluded Rohingya from citizenship and denied them full political rights, echoing the 1935 Nuremberg Laws that stripped Jews of their German citizenship.”*

These allegations are serious but the evidence does not support them. Thant Myint-U, the grandson of UN Secretary-General U Thant, and one of Burma’s leading historians, observes in his book *The Hidden History of Burma*:

In 1982, a new citizenship law was enacted. There is a common perception that the Rohingya were stripped of their citizenship by this law. That’s not true.

In the same vein, Nick Cheesman, the Australian scholar and author of many works on human rights in Burma, has noted:

The process of rendering stateless hundreds of thousands hitherto identified or self-identifying as Rohingya but now officially designated ‘Bengali’ was not *de jure* but *de facto*. It was not achieved by complying with the terms of the Citizenship Law per se, even though the law’s contents were in their general intentions inimical to the interests of this population, but through their deliberate breach and selective application.<sup>15</sup>

Acting Head of Mission Roger Leeland reported to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London on 25 November 1982 that:

It would be possible to argue that the new Law is a generous and far-sighted instrument to resolve over a period of time an awkward legacy of the colonial era.<sup>16</sup>

The 1982 Citizenship Law<sup>17</sup> and the 1983 Regulations provide that the third generation of associate and naturalized citizens would become full citizens, regardless of their ethnicity. Ne Win made this repeatedly clear in several passages of his policy address on 8 October 1982 to the Central Committee of the Burma Socialist Programme Party:

As I said earlier, his grandchildren will be given citizenship. Although there are three types of citizens at present, eh-naingngan-tha (associate), naingngan-tha-pyu-khwint-ya-thu (naturalized) and pure citizens, the grand children of eh-naingngan-tha and naing-ngan-tha-pyu-khwintya-thu will become full citizens. Then there will be only one type of citizen.<sup>18</sup>

In short, the creation of different classes of citizenship under the 1982 Citizenship Law was meant to be only a temporary measure. If the legislation had been put into effect immediately, most Rohingya would by now already have full citizenship. But this did not happen, because of the corruption, intolerance and obstructiveness of Rakhine officials, aided and abetted by central government. Yet outside Rakhine State, by and large Rohingya had few problems in exchanging their old identity documents for new ones as ‘Burmese Muslims’.

To compare the Myanmar 1982 Citizenship Law with the 1935 Nuremberg Race Laws is not justified. The Nuremberg Laws specifically mention people of Jewish parentage and descent by name, whereas the Myanmar Law lists only the eight main ethnic groups already given in the 1948 legislation. Under the 1948 law,<sup>19</sup> those who either under Article 4(1) could trace

<sup>14</sup> See “Regime troops check household registration documents in Ponnagyun Twsp villages”, *Development Media Group*, 4 May 2022, for a report of the Burmese military checking household registrations in Rakhine Buddhist villages in May 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Nick Cheesman, “How in Myanmar ‘National Races’ Came to Surpass Citizenship and Exclude Rohingya”, in *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 2017, vol. 47, no. 3.

<sup>16</sup> British Embassy in Rangoon, Roger Leeland, “Burmese Citizenship Law”, 25 November 1982 (<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/40czet/>).

<sup>17</sup> Myanmar, Burma Citizenship Law, Pyithu Hluttaw Law No. 4 of 1982 (<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/d3e586/>). No English translation has yet been made of the Regulations.

<sup>18</sup> “Speech by General Ne Win”, in *the Working People’s Daily*, 9 October 1982.

<sup>19</sup> Myanmar, Union Citizenship Act, 1948, Act No. 66 of 1948 (<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/f63770/>).

their ancestry back to before 1823 or who under Article 4(2) were third generation born in Burma were automatically citizens, by statutory right.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. Controversial Materials in the Burma Exhibition not Used by Secretary Blinken

Among controversial items in the online narrative not mentioned by Secretary Blinken I would draw attention to the following four, numbered 2.1. to 2.4.

### 2.1. Chapter V: Photomontage of Aung San Suu Kyi – “Burmese Leaders Deny Genocide”

The text reads:

Burmese leaders have categorically denied any persecution of the Rohingya, which continues today.

“We are concerned to hear that numbers of Muslims are fleeing across the border to Bangladesh. We want to find out why this exodus is happening [...]. I think it is very little known that the great majority of the Muslims in Rakhine State have not joined the exodus.”

Aung San Suu Kyi, State Counselor of Burma,  
in September 2017

Aung San Suu Kyi is a former political prisoner of the Burmese military and a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate. She has been the elected leader of Burma since 2015. She has denied allegations of genocide against the Rohingya and has minimized the number of people affected.

The truncated quotation, taken from Aung San Suu Kyi’s address in Nay Pyi Taw on 17 September 2017, is abrupt. What she actually said was more nuanced:

The government is working to restore the situation to normalcy. Since 5 September, there have been no armed clashes and there have been no clearance operations. Nevertheless, we are concerned to hear that numbers of Muslims are fleeing across the border to Bangladesh. We want to find out why this exodus is happening. We would like to talk to those who have fled as well as those who have stayed. I think it is very little known that the great majority<sup>21</sup> of Muslims in the Rakhine State have not joined the exodus. More than 50 per cent of the villages of Muslims are intact. They are as they were before the attacks took place. We would like to know why.

What Aung San Suu Kyi said was broadly true at the time, since a total of only 421,000 refugees had by then crossed into Bangladesh, according to the International Organisation for Migration.<sup>22</sup> Though she was heavily criticised for her lack of compassion, almost a year later, on 21 August 2018, she personally endorsed at a speech in Singapore<sup>23</sup> the agreement reached with Bangladesh “to effect the voluntary, safe and dignified return of displaced persons from northern Rakhine.” In her speech to the International Court of Justice on 11 December 2019, Aung San Suu Kyi finally recognised the gravity of the situation and admitted that: “Tragically, this armed conflict led to the exodus of several hundred thousand Muslims from the three northernmost townships of Rakhine into Bangladesh.”<sup>24</sup>

### 2.2. Chapter I: Who Are the Rohingya?

The text reads:

The Rohingya are a religious and ethnic minority in Burma.

<sup>20</sup> Article 4(2): the ‘third generation’ principle is an important bastion of Myanmar citizenship policy. It is to be found in both the 1948 Act and the 1982 Law and was expounded by former President Thein Sein to António Guterres, then UN High Commissioner for Refugees, when they met on 11 July 2012, to clarify the entitlement of Bengali migrants during British rule to full citizenship. See Derek Tonkin, “Migration from Bengal to Arakan during British Rule 1826-1948”, Occasional Paper Series No. 10 (2019), Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher, Brussels, 2019, p. 26 (<https://www.toaep.org/ops-pdf/10-tonkin>) for details.

<sup>21</sup> The term “great majority” is an exaggeration. ‘Majority’ would have been better, reflecting her belief that more than 50 percent of Muslim villages were intact.

<sup>22</sup> Poppy McPherson, “Aung San Suu Kyi says Myanmar does not fear scrutiny over Rohingya crisis”, *The Guardian*, 19 September 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Aung San Suu Kyi, “Democratic Transition in Myanmar: Challenges and the Way Forward”, Speech at the 43<sup>rd</sup> Singapore Lecture of the Institute of South East Asian Studies, 21 August 2018.

<sup>24</sup> “Transcript: Aung San Suu Kyi’s speech at the ICJ in full”, *Al Jazeera*, 12 December 2019.

They are Muslim. Most Rohingya live in Rakhine State on Burma’s western coast. For centuries they lived side by side there with the Rakhine Buddhist community. But in the last 200 years Rakhine State was invaded – first by the British, later by the Japanese. These outside influences created divisions between the local communities that would later intensify.

The Rohingya trace their history back to a kingdom known as Arakan in present-day Burma. It is illustrated here.

It is true that for centuries Arakan Muslims have lived side by side with Buddhists and other minorities. However, most of today’s Rohingya are descendants of migrants from Bengal during British rule 1826-1948, mainly in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century. The 1931 decennial Census for British Burma, then still a province of India, recorded a total of 201,912 Chittagonians and Bengalis (British-era migrants and their descendants) against only 56,983 ‘Arakan Muslims’ (quasi-indigenous settlers including Kaman).<sup>25</sup>

If you go back not 200 years but 250 years, you would need to record the conquest of Arakan in 1784 by the Burmese Empire under King Bodawpaya. This resulted in the flight of many thousands of both Muslims and Buddhists to the safety of British Bengal and the forced transfer of many thousands more to servitude in Ava. If you go back further still you would need to record Mughal depredations in the seventeenth century which led to the loss of Chittagong by the Kingdom of Arakan.

There is no historical logic for juxtaposing over 120 years of British colonial rule with some three years of Japanese military occupation.

### 2.3. Chapter I: Leading a New Nation

The text reads:

Burma gained independence from Great Britain<sup>26</sup> in 1948. In the years leading up to independence, Rohingya played important roles in establishing Burma’s new government.

Two Rohingya served on the country’s governing body, the Constituent Assembly, in 1947. One was a member of the committee that laid out the fundamental rights and citizenship of the nation.

Photo: Rohingya and leaders from other communities meet in 1946. Burma’s founding father, Aung San, is standing fourth from the left. U Nu, fourth from right, would become Burma’s first prime minister. Rohingya leader M.A. Gaffar stands second on the right.

The two Muslim politicians concerned are not identified. One of them, Mohammed Abdul Gaffar, is actually pictured in the photo. The other was Sultan Ahmed. Both these politicians took junior ministerial posts<sup>27</sup> in the government established on 4 January 1948 when Burma gained independence from Britain. The Constituent Assembly was not the country’s governing body, but was elected to draw up an independence constitution while the administration of the country was left to the Governor’s Executive and Legislative Councils as provided for in the London Agreement of 27 January 1947 between Clement Attlee and Aung San. Effectively, the Executive Council became the interim government and the Governor played no role.

At the time, neither Abdul Gaffar nor Sultan Ahmed<sup>28</sup> called them-

<sup>25</sup> See Chapter VII of Financial Secretary James Baxter, “Report on Indian Immigration”, Government Printing and Stationery, Burma, 1941 (<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/cc5cu2/>), for an analysis of permanent migration from British India into Arakan during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Rohingya activists have claimed that these migrants were only returning to ‘ancestral lands’ abandoned generations before, or were seasonal workers caught up in the census, or were deliberately transferred by the British to stir up local conflict as part of their ‘divide and rule’ strategy of colonial control. Anything reminiscent of Heinrich Himmler’s ‘Ahnenerbe’ (‘ancestral heritage’) policies has no place in the Holocaust Museum.

<sup>26</sup> The term ‘Great Britain’ is incorrect; it excludes Northern Ireland.

<sup>27</sup> On independence Abdul Gaffar became Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Sultan Ahmed Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Minorities. Abdul Gaffar held strong ideological convictions about the origins of Arakan’s Muslims, see “Mr MA Gaffar (1910-1966) MP and His Memorandum”, *Rohingya Vision*, 11 October 2018 (available on the Network Myanmar’s web site).

<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Sultan Ahmed petitioned U Nu’s Government, on behalf of the North Arakan Jamiat ul Ulema (Council of Scholars) on 18 June 1948, for



selves 'Rohingya'. Both were described as 'Rwangya' by Professor Bertie Pearn in a study prepared for the British Foreign Office in 1952.<sup>29</sup> This designation was used until the mid-1950s to describe quasi-indigenous 'Arakan Muslims' as distinct from migrant 'Chittagonians'. Pearn held that most members of the Jamiat ul Ulema, the Council of Scholars of North Arakan, were 'Rwangya', reflecting their long-established status in Muslim society descended from families who had lived in Arakan since well before the British arrived.<sup>30</sup>

#### 2.4. Chapter I: Prime Minister U Nu

The text reads:

Burma's first prime minister, U Nu, recognised the Rohingya as nationals of Burma in 1954.

"Located to the southwest of the Union [Burma] is 'Rakhine' [...]. There are two townships [there] called Maungdaw and Buthidaung. The majority of the nationals residing in these townships are Rohingya who are Muslims."

Prime Minister U Nu

The text comes from a radio broadcast of Saturday 25 September 1954. In the printed Burmese text, the term used by U Nu is transcribed 'Ruhinja'.<sup>31</sup> U Nu was appealing for political support to the established Arakan Muslim community, both Rwangyas and long settled Chittagonians. Furthermore, in referring to them as 'nationals' he was not confirming their citizenship, but noting their 'national race'. Ruhinja is cognate with historical, narrowly defined Rooinga and Rwangya, not with the as yet unknown 'Rohingya' which the ideologue U Ba Tha and his associates were to elaborate and establish between 1957 and 1963.<sup>32</sup>

Thaung Myine, a leading political journalist in U Nu's party, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, wrote an informative quartet of articles on Arakan<sup>33</sup> in the monthly 'Guardian' magazine in 1954. In striking contrast to what his party leader U Nu had said only a few days earlier, Thaung Myine wrote in the October 1954 issue:

The Muslim leaders claim that the Muslim population are indigenous "Rowangyas"<sup>34</sup> descended from Arab settlers who took service under the Arakanese kings but there is little ethnological or historical evidence to support it. The apparent fact is that a greater number of Muslims than the Muslim leaders would concede belong to the annual influx of cheap Chittago-

nian labour brought in by the Arakanese landowners to help till the soil, harvest the paddy crop, transport and convey in the paddy trade, and permitted by the British administration to settle down in Arakan.

U Nu, as a politician, told Arakan's Muslims what they wanted to hear; that they were all Rwangyas, although he knew perfectly well that some were, but most were not. Neither Rwangyas nor Rohingyas are listed in the Population Censuses of 1953-54, 1973, 1983 or 2014. From 1826 to 2022, no ethnicity derived from the term 'Rohang'<sup>35</sup> is to be found in either the British or Burmese civil or penal codes, that is, in primary legislation, such as laws and acts of parliament, or in secondary legislation such as rules, regulations and orders. There has at no time been any formal, legal recognition of the Rohingya.

### 3. Valedictum

The organisers of the Burma exhibition created a template of a 'path to genocide' which started only with Ne Win's coup of 2 March 1962 and his perceived nationalistic regime. Yet more than a century ago the prospect of communal violence in Arakan resulting from demographic, social and economic pressures was only too apparent:

That the Arakanese are gradually being pushed out of Arakan by the steady wave of Chittagonian immigration from the west is only too well known. The reason why they cannot withstand this pressure is that they are extravagant [...] it has to be brought home to him that if he will not do more for himself he must give way to the thrifty and hard-working Chittagonian and his only reply is to move on; he has lived better and worked less than the despicable *kula* [...] between the Chittagonian and the Yanbye [Ramree Burmese settlers] the Arakanese proper are not likely to survive long.<sup>36</sup>

But survive the Arakanese did. Then came the communal violence of March-June 1942<sup>37</sup> which was 'ethnic cleansing' on a grand scale, initially of Muslims by Buddhists and then of Buddhists by Muslims. Many thousands of both Muslims and Buddhists perished. The greater loss of life in 1942 was suffered by the Muslim community, but research suggests that more Buddhists were forced to flee from their homes than were Muslims. The first years of independence 1948-1962 were also marked by military sweeps in Arakan as savage as any that were to happen under military rule.

The Holocaust Museum might well wish to review the narrative of their Burma exhibition in order to eliminate historical revisionism, distortions and anachronisms. The need for a common narrative of Rohingya history is vital if there is to be reconciliation between the Muslim and Buddhist communities in Rakhine State. A true narrative will enhance, not hinder, the safe return home of Rohingya refugees abroad and the prosecution of those responsible for their victimisation and persecution in recent years.

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Muslims in Northern Arakan to be addressed not as 'Chittagonians', but as 'Burmese Muslims' or 'Arakanese Muslims'.

<sup>29</sup> Bertie Pearn "The Mujahid Revolt in Arakan", UK Foreign Office, Research Department, FB 1015/63, 31 December 1952 (<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/851b1e/>). Professor Pearn also noted that the political counterpart of the militant mujahids was an organisation calling itself the Arakanese Muslim Conference, which in 1951 published an appeal to the Burmese Government under the title: "Stop Genocide of the Muslims who alone stand between Communism and Democracy in Arakan".

<sup>30</sup> The word 'Rwangya' is cognate with the only known antecedent 'Rooinga' recorded in 1799 by Francis Buchanan of the East India Company. 'Rwangya' were described as "Arakanese as opposed to Chittagonian Muslims" by British Ambassador James Bowker, Despatch No. 425, 22 December 1949.

<sup>31</sup> We cannot be sure what term U Nu used. 'Rwangya' was more popular at the time.

<sup>32</sup> Derek Tonkin, "Notes on a series of cultural and historical articles about Arakan written between 1959 and 1966 by Mohammed A Tahir Ba Tha of Buthidaung", 7 March 2017 (available on the Network Myanmar's web site).

<sup>33</sup> See U Thaung Myine, "The State of Arakan", *The Guardian*, August, September, October and November 1954.

<sup>34</sup> 'Rowangya' is clearly a variant of the more frequent 'Rwangya'.

<sup>35</sup> See Network Myanmar, "Table of 'Rohang' Designations" (available on its web site).

<sup>36</sup> R.B Smart, "Akyab District: Volume A", Burma Gazetteer, Government Printing and Stationery, Rangoon, 1917, pp. 88-89.

<sup>37</sup> See Jacques P. Leider, "Territorial Dispossession and Persecution in North Arakan 1942-43", Policy Brief Series No. 101 (2020), Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher, Brussels, 2020 (<https://www.toaep.org/pbs-pdf/101-leider/>).