

The Citizen Archive and Strategic Silencing: A Study on Rohingya Genocide

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Research Article

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the role of citizen archives in the systemic disenfranchisement and eventual genocide of the Rohingya people in Myanmar. By analyzing the historical and contemporary practices of documenting national identity, it reveals how the Myanmar government's manipulation of citizen archives rendered the Rohingya stateless and silenced, culminating in the brutal ethnic cleansing recognized by the international community. The study juxtaposes this with similar archival strategies in the USA, UK, Palestine, and India, highlighting a disturbing trend where state-controlled identity documents are weaponized to discriminate against and control marginalized groups. The findings underscore an urgent need to monitor and reform the management of citizen archives to protect minority rights and prevent such atrocities, offering a poignant reminder of the dangers of allowing governmental control over personal identities to go unchecked.

Keywords: Rohingya Genocide, Ethnic Cleansing, Citizen Archives, State-Controlled identity, Minority Rights

Vatandaş Arşivi ve Stratejik Susturma: Rohingya Soykırımını Üzerine Bir Çalışma

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ÖZ

Bu makale, Myanmar'da Rohingyaların sistematik olarak mahrum bırakılması ve sonrasında soykırımla sonuçlanan süreçte vatandaş arşivlerinin rolünü eleştirel bir şekilde incelemektedir. Ulusal kimliği belgeleme pratiklerinin tarihsel ve çağdaş uygulamalarını analiz ederek, Myanmar hükümetinin vatandaş arşivlerini manipüle etmesinin Rohingyaları devletsiz ve sessiz bıraktığını, uluslararası toplum tarafından tanınan acımasız etnik temizliğe yol açtığını ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma, benzer arşiv stratejilerini ABD, İngiltere, Filistin ve Hindistan ile karşılaştırarak, devlet kontrolündeki kimlik belgelerinin marjinal gruplara karşı ayrımcılık yapmak ve kontrol etmek için silah olarak kullanıldığı rahatsız edici bir trendi vurgulamaktadır. Bulgular, azınlık haklarını korumak ve bu tür katliamları önlemek için vatandaş arşivlerinin yönetiminin izlenmesi ve reforme edilmesi gerektiğine acil bir ihtiyaç olduğunu vurgulamakta ve hükümetlerin kişisel kimlikler üzerindeki kontrolünün denetlenmemesinin tehlikelerini hatırlatan dokunaklı bir uyarı sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rohingya Soykırımı, Etnik Temizlik, Vatandaş Arşivleri, Devlet Kontrolündeki Kimlik, Azınlık Hakları

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Introduction

The military government of Myanmar has systematically denied the Rohingya Muslims of Arakan their political, social, economic, and fundamental rights through the revocation of their national identity. In the modern nation-state mechanism, national identity has become a fundamental tool for an individual to exist in the world. The United Nations identifies the Rohingya minority group in Myanmar as one of the most persecuted minorities globally.¹ The Myanmar government has been implicated in the killing of thousands of Rohingya people; it is a pattern of violence that can be classified as genocide under Article 2 of the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention.² The Convention (1948 UN Genocide Convention) defines genocide as an intentional physical destruction of national, ethnic, racial, or religious groups in whole or in part, which the Myanmar government committed against the Rohingya population.³ Also, The Myanmar government has been accused of engaging in a series of egregious human rights violations against the Rohingya population. It includes arbitrary detention, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, forced displacement, and the abduction of individuals. Additionally, it indicated the forcible transfer of children from the Rohingya community to other groups, as well as actions aimed at inflicting both physical and psychological harm. Notably, these actions have extended to practices that impede the ability of the Rohingya people to maintain their demographic existence, including the prevention of births within their community. Almost all of the aggressive acts that Myanmar has repeatedly committed against the Rohingya represent clear violations of the 1948 Genocide Convention and constitute heinous crimes under international law.⁴

In response to Myanmar's atrocities, numerous international organizations, including the United Nations, Amnesty International, various non-governmental organizations, several Western states, and almost all countries in the Muslim world, have called for an end to the genocide. However, Myanmar has so far failed to take meaningful steps to address these grave violations. After fifty years of gruesome atrocities perpetrated by the Myanmar military and Buddhist extremists, the United States officially recognized the genocide on March 21, 2022. This paper analyzes Myanmar's strategy of making Rohingya stateless by excluding them from the citizen archive. It is argued that the citizen archive of Myanmar enables the Myanmar state authority to silence and conduct genocide against the Rohingya minority group. This analysis includes the history of citizen archives (e.g., National Identity Card, Passport), the state mechanism of expelling citizenship, and the strategy of legitimizing atrocities by silencing victims by eliminating them from citizen archives. This paper examines the citizen archives of the USA, the UK, Palestine (occupied), and India before turning to the analysis of the Rohingya genocide in Myanmar. The categorization of individuals through the National

¹ Amal de Chickera, "Stateless and Persecuted: What Next for the Rohingya?," migrationpolicy.org, March 18, 2021, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/stateless-persecuted-rohingya>; Nasir Uddin, *The Rohingya: An Ethnography of "Subhuman" Life* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

² "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide" (General Assembly of the United Nations, December 9, 1948), <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%2078/volume-78-i-1021-english.pdf>.

³ "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide."

⁴ "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide."

Identification System and passport in the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as the denationalization of citizens through identity documents in Palestine and India, can be useful in understanding the genocide against the Rohingya in Myanmar.

1. The Citizen Archive

Geoffrey defines archive as “a set of all events which can be recalled across time and space.”⁵ Robertson states that archive works in the logic and practice of interpretation, classification, identity, evidence and authenticity.⁶ Robertson also emphasizes the notion of practice rather than institution while discussing the archive of the US passport. He states, “The US passport illustrates how in a period prior to establishing a National Archive, developing archival practices were articulated to a truth apparatus that sought to secure national identity and manage difference through citizenship.”⁷ In the entire paper, the definition of the citizen archive is discussed. Nevertheless, one definition of citizen archives might be a collection of information and documents pertaining to government-issued identity cards (National ID, Passport, Driving License, and other service cards).

The ‘Identity Card’ has become a tool used by modern states to identify citizens and differentiate people with certain characteristics as ‘us’ from many ‘others’. With the development of science and technology, citizen identification tools have also become more sophisticated. A citizenship card is not only for identifying an individual as a citizen but also for governing in a political system. A citizenship card allows a state to enhance its security mechanism by protecting its citizens from outsiders, i.e. illegal migrants, terrorists, and criminals. In addition to this, it allows a country to classify its citizens according to different categories, for example, important or ordinary, superior or inferior, innocent or criminal, etc. Abu-Zahra et al. discusses, that in the colonial Indonesia subversives and traitors were identified with ‘special punching’ on their identity documents.⁸ He argues that identity documents can be a contributing factor to genocide.⁹ Technological development enables states to incorporate a more sophisticated way of identifying citizens. For instance, photos, fingerprints, retinal scans, and hand-geometry.

2. Passport as Citizen Archive: Control, Govern and Categorization of People

A passport is the most significant identity card to maintain the trans-national movement of an individual. In addition, it is seen as a tool for restricting illegal immigrants or aliens. An individual must submit every bit of information regarding himself/herself to the state in order to obtain this document. The state gathers that information as an archive and can use it to control or govern the citizen. Robertson depicts the USA passport as a modern identification document that developed into an archival technology, used to explain who “we” are and where “we” come from.¹⁰ He also discusses that a passport is used to produce the ‘truth’ of

⁵ Geoffrey C. Bowker, “The Archive,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 7, no. 2 (June 1, 2010): 212–14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14791421003775733>

⁶ Craig Robertson, “Mechanisms of Exclusion: Historicizing the Archive and the Passport,” in *Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, ed. Antoinette Burton (New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2005), 68–86, <https://doi.org/doi:10.1515/9780822387046-005>

⁷ Robertson.

⁸ Abu-Zahra, Nadia, and Adah Kay, *Unfree in Palestine: Registration, Documentation and Movement Restriction* (London: Pluto Press, 2013).

⁹ Abu-Zahra, Nadia, and Adah Kay,.

¹⁰ Robertson, “Mechanisms of Exclusion: Historicizing the Archive and the Passport.”

national identity for the individual and the state and it is also a mechanism of exclusion.¹¹ Passport categorizes Aeroplan passengers, who are law-abiding, low risk, trusted travelers and who is not.¹²

Baiburin explains Soviet Russia's passport and discusses the importance of the identity document, saying, 'You never knew: and without documents, you did not exist'.¹³ In Soviet Russia state used to decide where one individual would live and where one could not, and who is allowed to go abroad who is not.¹⁴ "Soviet Russian passport was an instrument of control, intended to 'register, cleanse, and purge', to define every aspect of life so that the state could tax you, recruit you, decide where you could live and work, distinguish between those it trusted and those it did not and track you down when it needed to punish you." Moreover, in Soviet Russia, people had been given a temporary passport titled 'Propiska,' which was used by the state to move people from one place to around. To identify skilled or unskilled workers in big cities, another identity card 'Limitchiki' was issued in Soviet Russia. Soviet Russia forcefully used the citizen archive to identify, control, govern, and punish people. When people would get their passport in that period, they would celebrate it as a festival.¹⁵ In the late 1920s fascist Italy denied passport to the individuals who is identified as anti-fascists, and also restricted emigration for much of the population.¹⁶ Nazi issued identity cards for Jews were used to restrict movement, such as denying travelling without permit, denying entry into the non-Jews residential areas, and restricting moving during curfew. These cards were also used for dispossession of land, assets and deportation.¹⁷

2.1. The US Archive of Passport and Real ID

The US archive of passport is one of the rigorous information archives of individuals that enable government control, govern, and categorize people. Robertson argues that the large-scale state archive of identity offers indirect form of state control through which an individual was made permanently visible to the government through presence in a file.¹⁸ The US is making its citizen archive digital and sophisticated to ensure maximum utilization. The term 'smart' is also used to make people give access their personal information to state in a satisfactory mindset though it makes the archive and the body into a card. Robertson depicts the US smart card as a combination of driver licenses and ID cards that transform the body into a card.

By looking at the historical records of US passports, one can observe a series of categorizations and exclusions. The first photo inclusion in the US passport was to identify and categorize Chinese immigrants. In the middle of the twentieth century, the formal and informal changes to the Chinese names for assimilating to the Anglo-American norm were a frequent occurrence in the Passport archive of the USA.¹⁹ The US passport archive also depicts the gender stereotypes and discrimination against women in 1920s America. Women were not

¹¹ Robertson.

¹² Craig Robertson, *The Passport in America: The History of a Document* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=322534>.

¹³ Albert Baiburin, *The Soviet Passport: The History, Nature and Uses of the Internal Passport in the USSR* (John Wiley & Sons, 2021).

¹⁴ Baiburin.

¹⁵ Baiburin.

¹⁶ Abu-Zahra, Nadia, and Adah Kay, *Unfree in Palestine: Registration, Documentation and Movement Restriction*.

¹⁷ Abu-Zahra, Nadia, and Adah Kay,.

¹⁸ Robertson, *The Passport in America*.

¹⁹ Robertson.

issued any passport and married women would identify on their husband's passport as "accompanied by his wife" or "and wife."²⁰ Moreover, a passport can make one respectable, honest and trustworthy or the opposite, depending on their access to private and personal information.

In 2005 former US president George Bush signed a law under the 'Real ID Act of 2005' that focused on security enhancement as a counter approach of 9/11 terrorist attack. The act was recommended by the 9/11 commission to improve security for driver licenses and personal identification cards. The Real ID is a must from 2023 for every US citizen to fly domestically and to enjoy some federal facilities.²¹ The Real ID is going to be the most sophisticated method to control, govern, and categorize citizens in the US since it incorporates biometric information and will be used as a chip-card.

2.2. The Citizen Archive of the UK

The United Kingdom has no typical form of national identity card similar to the national identity card of Myanmar or the real id of the USA. However, we find evidence of using citizen archives to categorize people in the UK during and after World War II. Sir Syllanus Vivian stated in 1951 that the National Registration Program led them to distinguish the sheep from the goats.²² The UK government rigorously collected data from all individuals living within the UK to accomplish a massive recording of the personal information. Then the authority titled the registration cards Second World War National Registration Identity Cards. Based on the risk associated with various populations these cards incorporate color-coded identifying techniques. The color-coded system helped the police to identify who were above suspicion and who were not. Though in 1939 all the NR cards issued were in brownish colored 'buff' ID card, these were later replaced by color-coded cards.

Blue card holders were identified as 'small people' who were restricted in their movements within particular zone. Green card holders were granted access to prohibited or protected areas, which were restricted to the general public, and had to provide as much private information as possible to the NR authorities. The Pink card was issued to the senior government officials, civil servants and service officers. This card was an extension of the Green card, including government department information. The Alien card was issued for the citizen of enemy nations living within the UK. They were seen as suspect and alien prisoners of war and were in the process of being deported.²³ Another card was issued by NR during that time to alienate the Irish laborers to ensure greater security. That card was called the Yellow Card. The Yellow card holders were identified as highly risky individuals though they had no criminal records. The NR authority exercised full authority to change a person's identity from Yellow to Blue, Blue to Pink, or Alien to Blue throughout the entire process. By 1952, shortly after the Second World War, all the color-coded cards and procedures used to identify and categorize people had been withdrawn.

UK passed the Identity Cards Act 2006 on 30 March 2006 to issue National Identity cards for all UK citizens. The discussion and urgency of this act were inaugurated and promoted by

²⁰ Scott Thompson, "9 Separating the Sheep from the Goats: The United Kingdom's National Registration Programme and Social Sorting in the Pre-Electronic Era," in *Playing the Identity Card* (Routledge, 2008), 145.

²¹ Thompson.

²² Thompson.

²³ Thompson.

the crisis felt after the 9/11 terrorist attack. Moreover, there were other international and domestic motivations that worked behind this act. The international motivations were the International Civil Aviation Authority passport standards, the USA visa waiver program, and the European Union Schengen agreement. The domestic motivations are immigration and illegal working, personalized and joined up 'e-government', national security, terrorism and crime, and finally securing identity.²⁴ As like the US Real ID Act the Identity Cards Act also highly focused on the security of the state and individual. This technique is strategically significant and effective for a state to categorize and control citizens.

2.3. Exploitation and Denationalization through Citizen Archive: Perspective Palestine

Israeli forces continuously and rigorously control Palestinian citizens in the West Bank and Gaza Strip through identity documents. Many people are restricted in their movements and sometimes denied travel merely because they have or do not have a certain identity card. Color-coded license plates, permit, and identity documents define who can go where, when, and for how long.²⁵ Moreover, throughout the bureaucratic process of registration Israeli authority denationalized around one and half million Palestinians who now live as refugee or migrants in other countries. Denationalization through registration of identity documents is a Nazi practice used against Jews during World War II as a means of ethnic cleansing.

Israel uses other methods of exploiting Palestinian citizens, such as eliminating them from censuses, which it did initially in 1948 and then later in 1967. Through census data Israeli authorities try to make a new reality that indicates Palestinians are returnees not indigenous. In 1986 Israel introduced a magnetic ID card as a prerequisite for Gaza and West Bank residents if they wanted to leave their place for livelihood across the Armistice lines.²⁶ With the passage of time Israeli authority enhanced its technique to denationalize, categorize, control, and occupy the Palestinians through identity documents.

2.4. Denationalization of Muslims in India through Exclusion from Citizen Archive

Colonialism, famine, natural disasters and war have characterized the history of the Indian subcontinent for centuries. The most prominent colonial history is that of the British colonies from 1757 to 1947.²⁷ People collectively or individually moved from one place to another for better living alternatives during that period. Following the annexation of Assam by the British in 1826, there was a dramatic increase in the outflow and inflow of migrants. Between 1947 and 1948, when India and Pakistan gained independence from British colonization, there were incidents of religion-based migration between the two countries.²⁸ India has a majority Hindu population, whereas Pakistan has a majority Muslim population. In 1971, the liberation war between Bangladesh and Pakistan resulted in a refugee influx in India, where 10 million refugees sought shelter in India, and 0.3 million of them in Assam.²⁹ Bangladeshi immigrants

²⁴ Abu-Zahra, Nadia, and Adah Kay, *Unfree in Palestine: Registration, Documentation and Movement Restriction*.

²⁵ Abu-Zahra, Nadia, and Adah Kay,.

²⁶ Abu Sufian, "Geopolitics of the NRC-CAA in Assam: Impact on Bangladesh-India Relations," *Asian Ethnicity* 23, no. 3 (July 3, 2022): 556–86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2020.1820854>.

²⁷ Abdulla Al Mahmud, "The Inception of the Kashmir Crisis: Inquiries from a Historical Perspective (1931–1947)," *International Journal of Social, Political and Economic Research* 7, no. 2 (June 2, 2020): 196–213, <https://doi.org/10.46291/IJOSPERvol7iss2pp196-213>.

²⁸ M H Mahmud and Abdulla Al Mahmud, "Good Governance and Student Politics in Public University Campuses: Bangladesh Perspective," *Yönetim Bilimleri Dergisi* 22, no. 52 (March 20, 2024): 308–23, <https://doi.org/10.35408/comuybd.1352473>.

²⁹ Sufian, "Geopolitics of the NRC-CAA in Assam."

(often referred to as illegal Bangladeshis) became an issue on the political agenda even though most refugees returned to independent Bangladesh.

BJP, the current ruling party in India, has consistently promoted the idea that illegal migrants are a threat to Hindu India due to the fact that most of them are Muslim. A leading criticism of the BJP is its promotion of majoritarian politics based on religion and focus on the extremist political concept of 'Hindutva' instead of secularism. In India, Hindutva is constructing a de facto technocracy that aims to build a 'Hindu Nation' for majority Hindu population.³⁰ Though the religious identities of the refugees in Assam are Hindu and Muslim, BJP systematically excluded only Muslims and Jews immigrant through Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in 2019. With the supervision of the Indian Supreme Court, the National Register of Citizen (NRC) excluded 1.9 million people on the basis of religion from the citizenship archive and made them stateless.³¹ Furthermore, the religious minority Muslims in India are in fear of genocide and persecution as the CAA-2019 fails to include this minoritized group under the class of religious majorities eligible for expedited citizenship.³² Current BJP government is excluding Muslim from citizenship rights and documentations and making them illegal and perceiving as threat for India. Tiwari and Sings analyze how state institutions like Indian Supreme Court, with legal procedures, unleash violence against the excluded Muslim minority in Assam.³³ This mirrors the attitudes towards the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar prior to the genocide.

3. Citizen Archive and Rohingya Genocide

Rohingya is the Muslim minority group living in the Buddhist majority Rakhine (previously known as Arakan) state of Myanmar since the ninth century. Peace and harmony had been prevalent in Rakhine among Buddhists and minorities of Muslims before the invasion of the Japanese and the British. The invasion of the Japanese and the British empire brought many political and social changes to Myanmar and created division based on religion and other identities. Burma has undergone many political transitions and bloody transitions of power from a military dictatorship to a civil government since it gained independence from the last colonial power, Britain.³⁴ Rohingya people have always been a bone of contention for the political parties. However, every political party tries to subjugate the Rohingya people as a process of gaining their political agenda. The Rohingya genocide is the final outcome of the Myanmar's brutal and inhuman treatment of Rohingya.

From the very beginning of the inhuman treatment to genocide against Rohingya, citizen archive played a pivotal role. Myanmar's first independent government treated Rohingya like

³⁰ Shahnawaz Ahmed Malik, "Future of Citizenship Laws in India With Special Reference to Implementation of NRC in Assam," SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY, July 31, 2020), <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3665733>.

³¹ Amrita Hari and Sugandha Nagpal, "The National Register of Citizens (NRC) in India and the Potential for Statelessness in Situ: A Cautionary Tale from Assam," *Contemporary South Asia* 30, no. 2 (April 3, 2022): 194–201, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2022.2057439>.

³² Anubhav Dutt Tiwari and Prashant Singh, "Experiencing the Violence of Law: Contextualising the NRC Process in Assam," *Jindal Global Law Review* 12, no. 1 (June 1, 2021): 29–54, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41020-021-00148-3>.

³³ Ahmad Sabbir, Abdulla Al Mahmud, and Arif Bilgin, "Myanmar: Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya. From Ethnic Nationalism to Ethno-Religious Nationalism," 2022, <https://doi.org/10.24193/cs.39.6>.

³⁴ R. Lee, "Myanmar's Rohingya Genocide: Rohingya Perspectives of History and Identity" (thesis, Deakin University, 2019), https://dro.deakin.edu.au/articles/thesis/Myanmar_s_Rohingya_genocide_Rohingya_perspectives_of_history_and_identity/21114874/1.

all other ethnic groups and citizens. For instance, the Constitution of the Union of Burma and the Union Citizenship Act of 1948 includes Rohingya as the same par in status of nationality with Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan.³⁵ As Burmese citizens, Rohingyas enjoyed all kinds of citizenship rights. After the bloody coup of 1962, a xenophobic Buddhist nationalist military dictator took the power and detached the Rohingya Muslim minority group from other ethnic groups. Since then, Rohingya has been a subject to harassment, exploitation, torture, killing, forceful displacement, and finally genocide in 2017. In the midst of these violent and inhumane strategies, citizen archives play a significant role and contribute to the genocide.

4. A Brief History of Rohingya in Myanmar

Rakhine is the most south-western state of Myanmar that has adjacent border with the south-eastern part of Bangladesh. Rohingya people of Rakhine and people of Bangladesh's south-eastern district of Cox's Bazar share similar languages, religions, cultures, and races. In 1459, even Chittagong, the largest district of this part of Bangladesh, was part of Myanmar's Arakan region under the Mrauk-U dynasty.³⁶ Bangladesh got independence from Pakistan in 1971 after a nine month long bloody war. Before that, this region was part of Pakistan (called East-Pakistan), which was created after the religion-based division of India and Pakistan in 1947. India and Pakistan were divided by British authority, with Pakistan having a majority Muslim population and India having a majority Hindu population.³⁷ There is a similarity in religion and language between the people of Bangladesh's south-eastern region and Rohingya, but Rohingya have very strong roots in Myanmar.

Ronan finds through archeological record and accounts from Chinese, Greek, Roman, Indian, Sri Lankan sources, and from the Arab World that from ancient times until the arrival of the antecedents of the contemporary Rakhine, sometime in the ninth century, Arakan was part of a vibrant and well-integrated regional and world trade system and was closely linked with Bengal. He reasonably assumed that current Rakhine state, which was previously known as Arakan, was a province of Eastern India. Ronan also discovers the arrival of Islam in that region. He finds that Islam at first introduced to Arakan by shipwrecked Arab Sailors. After the rise of Islam in Indian Subcontinent, it spread in other region through conquest, proselytization and trade. The Mrauk-U dynasty is the historically known first Muslim dynasty in Arakan, where the rulers were originally Buddhist and later converted into Islam after being assisted in winning a battle against the army of the Burmese Ava Kingdom.³⁸ Though Bengalis speaking, and Muslim, Rohingya ethnic group have strong root in Rakhine.

5. Inclusion and Exclusion of Rohingya from Citizen Archive and Making Stateless

To justify their atrocities against the victims, perpetrators create plots and reasons and seek to maximize their support from the people before carrying out their atrocities. The most effective technique is presenting the victim as a threat or potential problem for the greater interest or survival. Khmer Rouge, a radical Maoist regime, tried to justify their inhuman barbarity and genocide against Cambodian by portraying the illegal military crackdown of the

³⁵ Lee.

³⁶ Sabbir, A., Al Mahmud, A., & Bilgin, A., "(2023). India: Conflict with Minorities in the Conventional Political System. The Status of Muslims," *Conflict Studies Quarterly*, no. 43 (n.d.), <https://doi.org/10.24193/cs43.3>.

³⁷ Lee, "Myanmar's Rohingya Genocide."

³⁸ Michelle Caswell, *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2014).

USA. They even succeeded to gain significant support from many terrified Cambodian, who later joined the radical Maoist force to conduct genocide.³⁹ Before the holocaust Nazi Germany falsely portrayed Jews as subversives, spies, and blamed them for Germany's financial and political plight.

Before conducting the genocide against Rohingya in 2017, Myanmar made Rohingya minority group as a potential threat for the greater interest of Myanmar as well as for majority Buddhist people. The incidents of inclusion and exclusion of Rohingya from citizen archive fueled this process of securitization. Myanmar obtained its independence in 1948 from the British Kingdom. During the colonial rule of British Kingdom Rohingya were integrated into Burmese society and enjoyed equal rights as Burmese people.⁴⁰ After the independence the civil and democratic government of U Nu lasted twelve years and this regime also treated Rohingya equally and gave all civil and political rights. The definition of 'National Races' or 'Taingyintha' in 1948 included Rohingya along with other ethnic races. The Prime Minister of the independent Burma, U Nu, declared, "The people living in Maungdaw and Buthidaung regions are our nationals, our brethren. They are called Rohingyas. They are one of the same par in status of nationality with Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Mon, Rakhine and Shan. They are one of the ethnic races of Burma."⁴¹ The Union Citizenship Act (1948) and the Constitution of the Union of the Burma paved all ethnic races, including Rohingya, to obtain citizenship through some legal procedures.

Moreover, the Union Citizenship Act (1948) provided citizenship by birth and eased the ways for all the people living withing Myanmar to obtain citizenship. This act permitted citizenship for the people who have settled in any of the Myanmar territories from a period anterior to 1185 BE, 1823 AD.⁴² According to this law Rohingya people obtained full Burmese citizenship. They had identity cards and passports like all other Burmese citizen. After the 1962 coup by a xenophobic Buddhist military dictator, General Ne Win, the scenario had gotten worst for Rohingya people. The military dictator used religion, ethnic identity, and modified history to control divided and disparate nation. This regime suspended the constitution of 1948 and rejected all the citizenship documents and rights Rohingya were using since 1948 and redefined the idea of 'national races' or 'taingyintha' and excluded Rohingya from the list. After stripping away the citizenship rights of Rohingya and excluded them from the citizen archive, the Myanmar authority started exclusion through nationalization of the private asset and deportation of alleged aliens.⁴³ In 1978 the Myanmar government started Nagamin operation to idenrify, prosecute, and expel illegal migrants and non-citizens. It created the first Rohingya refugee influx in Bangladesh.

6. Color-coded Citizenship Card and Exclusion of Rohingya

In 1982 Myanmar government passed another citizenship law titled 'Burma Citizenship Law (1982).' This law continued the denial of Rohingya citizenship that started in 1962 and moreover, rejected the Rohingya's right to nationality in Burma. It categorizes people into pure

³⁹ Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (Simon and Schuster, 2012).

⁴⁰ Md. Mahbulul Haque, "Rohingya Ethnic Muslim Minority and the 1982 Citizenship Law in Burma," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 37, no. 4 (October 2, 2017): 454–69, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2017.1399600>.

⁴¹ Haque.

⁴² Nick Cheesman, "How in Myanmar 'National Races' Came to Surpass Citizenship and Exclude Rohingya," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47, no. 3 (May 27, 2017): 461–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2017.1297476>.

⁴³ Haque, "Rohingya Ethnic Muslim Minority and the 1982 Citizenship Law in Burma."

blood Burmese and others. In a speech the military dictator Ne Win claimed, "racially, only pure-blooded nationals will be called citizens."⁴⁴ The law mainly intended to exclude Rohingya from all the citizen archives. The color-coded citizenship card will clarify this point more.

6.1. Pink Card

Among three categories of citizenship card pink card was more powerful. The pink card holders are recognized and identified as full citizen. To obtain this card one has to be from one of the national races. Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Chin, Burman, Mon, Rakhine or Shan, and ethnic group as have settled in any of the territories included within the State as their permanent home from a period anterior to 1185 BE, 1823 AD were eligible for the pink card. Rohingya ethnic group was excluded from the national race list, law, and the constitution.

6.2. Blue Card

Blue card holders are identified as Associate citizen. One who applied for citizenship under the 1948 Citizenship Election Act were eligible for the associate citizenship. However, Rohingya people had previously indigenous status according to the Union Citizenship Act 1948. Therefore, the Blue card did not mean for Rohingya minority. One Rohingya leader in Yangon states that they did not meet or fit the criteria for this category.⁴⁵ Only a few exceptions whose origin is Chittagong and settled in Arakan more than three generation ago applied for Blue card. Therefore, the Blue card also excluded Rohingya minority from their citizenship rights.

6.3. Green Card

Green card holders are naturalized citizen. The naturalized citizenship is intended for non-nationals and only this section of the newly defined citizenship categories includes Rohingya. Before 1982 Citizenship Law, Rohingya was identified as full citizen of Myanmar. Throughout this color-coded identity card their existence from the citizenship documents were erased and weakened. Only foreign nationals apply for the green card and President Office (known as Central Body) has full authority to revoke this card anytime from any suspicious individual. Rohingya was systematically driven to fall under this category.

6.4. White and Verification Card: The last Identity before Genocide

In 1988 new military junta took the power of Myanmar government and imposed new restrictions on Rohingya minority group. The new military ruler forced all green card holder and pink card holder Rohingya to re-apply for pink card. After submitting the green card Rohingya people were denied both the pink card and their submitted green card. Instead of giving pink card to Rohingya, the junta ruler declared that being Taingyintha is the condition to obtain pink card. With this deception of the Myanmar authority Rohingya lost their only one green identity card. Whoever applied for the pink card or submitted their green card and pink card were never returned their card back. Instead, they were given white card as a proxy permanent identity document.

The atrocities and forceful expulsion of Rohingya from Myanmar started in 1978. After pushing Rohingya to Bangladesh each time Myanmar authority simultaneously erased Rohingya identity from the citizen archive. Myanmar had to repatriate Rohingya several times from Bangladesh following pressure from international organizations and community.

⁴⁴ Haque.

⁴⁵ Lee, "Myanmar's Rohingya Genocide."

Burmese authority later provided a verification card as the only identity documents for the repatriated Rohingya minority. Even Myanmar government cancelled all white card in 2015.⁴⁶ Therefore, the only identity document for the Rohingya minority remained the verification card.

7. Dehumanization and Genocide

After erasing from the citizen archive Myanmar authority perpetrated dehumanization, the Rohingya people, followed by, torture, and finally genocide. Farzana finds that after the denial of the lawful citizenship rights and they are called by extremist Buddhist people as 'Vasha-Manush' (floating people) and 'people from the West,' which means that Rohingya does not belong to Myanmar.⁴⁷ This alienation causes inhuman sufferings for the Rohingya and finally turned into genocide. After talking to the survivor of the genocide Farzana finds that after the denial Rohingya people's movement was restricted, they had to do forced labor, and their job rights were violated and denied. If any Rohingya wanted to marry someone, they had to pay heavy tax. Rohingya's land and property was confiscated, they were evicted from the land and villages. False accusation, physical torture, and threat were the daily experience.⁴⁸

Above mentioned abuses were intensified by majority Buddhist local people, Myanmar military and law enforcement agencies. Apart from these abuses, Farzana finds many more inhuman treatments against Rohingya minority. Such as denial of education, food shortage, insufficient and expensive medical treatment, settlement of Buddhist settlers, destruction of religious settlements, forced relocation to certain specific areas, military interferences in everyday life, military operation and fear. Rohingya people were experiencing military crackdown and communal attack frequently after the first incident of 1978. In 2017 the most gruesome genocide was conducted against Rohingya unarmed civilian by Myanmar military and Buddhist extremists. Tens of thousands of Rohingya were murdered brutally in this year only and forced around one million Rohingya to leave Myanmar. When Rohingya were leaving the Burmese atrocities and moving toward Bangladesh borders they had to experience land mines. Many undocumented Rohingya are missing and there is no substantive way to find them, alive or dead.

8. Conclusion

While there are several types of identity cards for various ethnic minority groups in Myanmar, the Rohingya Muslims were an exception. Myanmar's democratic government issued yellow cards to the Rohingya to carry their identity, but the military junta canceled all types of cards. From the very beginning of the inhuman treatment to genocide against Rohingya, citizen archives played a pivotal role. After erasing the identity of the Rohingya from the citizen archives, the military junta legitimized the persecution by labeling them as "floating people" and "people from the West." So, the role of citizen archives has been particularly pronounced in the systemic disenfranchisement and eventual genocide of the Rohingya people in Myanmar. The military dictator used the national identity cards of the Rohingya Muslims of Arakan as a weapon of ethnic cleansing. This tragic event is widely recognized as one of the most horrific cases of ethnic cleansing in the 21st century, which is a

⁴⁶ Kazi Fahmida Farzana, *Memories of Burmese Rohingya Refugees: Contested Identity and Belonging* (Springer, 2017).

⁴⁷ Farzana.

⁴⁸ Farzana.

process of genocide and an international crime under the provisions of the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention.

The genocide of the Rohingya people mirrors historical atrocities, such as the Rwandan Genocide and the Holocaust, where shifts in civilian archives played a central role in facilitating state-sponsored violence. Myanmar was a step ahead of Soviet Russia, Nazi Germany and fascist Italian governments in this politics of ethnic identity cards. Of course, India is treating the Muslims of its Assam province in the same way. Therefore, these parallels highlight the critical importance of closely monitoring and regulating citizen archives. The findings of this analysis underscore the urgency of reforming the management of such records to ensure the protection of minority rights and to prevent the recurrence of atrocities. Safeguarding citizen archives is essential for guaranteeing freedom and liberty for all individuals, irrespective of their ethnicity or minority-majority status.

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