

Never Again: Analysis of the Rohingya Crisis and the Role of Religion in Conflict

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## **Abstract**

After the Holocaust, the world promised “never again.” However, in the last century, the frequency of genocide has only increased. With the global trend of nationalism, a scapegoat is needed to define identity. In Myanmar, the rise of Buddhist nationalism along with the power of the military resulted in the scapegoating of the Rohingya (a Muslim minority) with a genocide in 2017. The conflicting historical narratives between Buddhists and Muslims created tensions over time that have bubbled into political, legal, and social conflicts. The alignment of religion and violence is nothing new, but there is a lack of religious understanding when analyzing the factors resulting in the crisis. In this thesis, I examine the history of Muslims in Myanmar, the role of religion in the Rohingya crisis as well as its relationship with the country’s political landscape and offer reconciliation-oriented solutions to the crisis.

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## Section One

*Introduction/Background:* “Never again”—a phrase used after the Holocaust. The world promised to prevent another genocide from happening. We, as human beings, aspire to be morally right and must fight for justice. But, “never again” was also used after the Cambodian genocide, the Anfal genocide, the Bosnian genocide, the Rwandan genocide, the Yazidi genocide, and other genocides/ethnic cleansings post-WWII (Power 2002). As history repeats itself, minority groups continue to suffer the most horrid of war crimes and atrocities. While many factors contribute to this form of violence, the failures of leadership in these countries and the lack of international involvement play a decisive role in allowing genocides to occur.

A present-day example of genocide is evident in the country of Myanmar. After achieving its independence from Britain, Myanmar (also known as Burma) experienced decades of political instability, primarily with internal conflicts between military regimes. Myanmar’s political system began to shift towards democracy due to Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of a famous Burmese politician. Suu Kyi was hailed for her nonviolent approach to oppressive military regimes and bringing democracy to the country. In 1991, Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her outstanding efforts in transitioning Myanmar to a democracy (Goldberg 2019). In 2015, the world was hopeful that Myanmar would begin to flourish when Suu Kyi became the State Counselor of Myanmar. However, that hope was crushed when the Rohingya crisis became public knowledge.

In August of 2017, thousands of Rohingya people started to flee the country because of violent attacks from Myanmar’s military. The testimonies that came from the Rohingya describe textbook examples of genocide. Myanmar’s military raped and

tortured Rohingya women and girls (Majumder 2017). In the Rakhine State, villages were burned to the ground. In the first month after violence broke out, at least “6,700 Rohingya, including 730 children under the age of five, were killed” (“Myanmar Rohingya...” 2020). The majority of the Rohingya fled to Bangladesh, where they are currently living. The Rohingya were fearful not only of the military, but also of “Buddhist militias, meaning Rakhine Buddhists, and the ‘Buddhist army’” (Holt 2019, 13).

When criticized for her lack of action, Aung San Suu Kyi stated: “show me a country without human rights issues” (Broomfield 2016). In 2018, the UN issued a report that declared the situation in Myanmar to be classified as a genocide and urged the international community to use their resources to “assist Myanmar in meeting its responsibility to protect its people from, genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes” (“Report of the...” 2018). With the outright violence and outcry for change, what is similar with the Rohingya crisis that relates to genocides before it? In all of these tragedies, common thread is intentional persecution based on religion as well as lack of action from the state.

With the situation present in Myanmar, it is easy to dismiss the Buddhist majority’s religious extremism as nationalism, which is partly true. However, what is often overlooked are the fervent Buddhists who genuinely believe that their religion supports their violent actions, like the burning of villages and attacking the Rohingya. They are fervent in their hatred towards the Rohingya people. The complex relationship of religion and nationalism makes it difficult to identify the origins of violence within a state. In order to fully grasp the situation in Myanmar, a basis for peace studies and

religious studies terminology and theories must be established. When looking at the relationship between religion and conflict, several scholars have set the theoretical foundation. Specifically, R. Scott Appleby and Mark Juergensmeyer have analyzed and researched this dynamic and contributed significantly to political and religious discourse.

*Theoretical Foundations:* R. Scott Appleby is a professor of history and prominent scholar of global religion. His work has identified Peace Studies frameworks for the analysis of global politics and religion and thus provides a strong theoretical framework for this project. He specifically works with Peace Studies frameworks in his analysis of religion. His most popular works include *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and Reconciliation* and *The Oxford Handbook on Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding* (co-edited with Atalia Omer and David Little). Appleby uses three terms to describe the relationship between religion and politics: Strong Religion, Weak Religion, and Pathological Religion. This thesis will look at the first two due to their relevance to my topic. Strong Religion refers to “religion itself as the source of, or justification for, deadly violence, or that emphasize distinctive religious practices, beliefs and ideologies as the decisive ingredients in violent movements that may also draw on nationalist, ethnic, or other motives” (2). When writing about “strong religion,” Appleby notes how authors often “focus on the phenomenology and history of religion itself as sufficient to inspire and authorize deadly violence” (3). Weak Religion refers to “religion as a dependent variable in deadly violence, the primary source of which is secular in origin (e.g., enacted by the state or by nationalist or ethnic extremists)” (2). The distinction between the two religious presences is based on a specific question: “under what conditions are religious actors (leaders, individuals, movements, institutions) more

and less vulnerable to non-religious forces?” (11). Appleby details the influence these two ideas have on religious nationalism and ethnoreligious violence.

Specifically, with ethnoreligious violence, Appleby emphasizes how “the relationship between ethnicity and religion can become a vicious circle” (13). Ethnicity can carry a religious meaning when tied to the idea of “a chosen people.” This then constitutes the claims to ownership/rights (and ultimately supremacy) within a state in hopes of creating a unified ethnostate. Appleby notes how “ethnonationalist leaders can and do exploit a religion's identification with ‘the people,’ especially at times when heightened perception of threat destabilizes society” (14). The two terms relate to how strong religion's presence is within religious violence. Appleby concludes that “religion is indeed ‘something apart’ from other modes of belief, behavior, practice, and social organization, and that it can generate through (always internally contested) self-understandings excavated from the depths of an identifiably religious logic and religious dynamics” (17).

Specifically, analyzing the landscape of this conflict, gaging the religious influence within Myanmar's government is best understood through Appleby's idea of “weak” and “strong” religion. Appleby details religion's role in government. Strong religion is an idea that sees religion as “the source of, or justification for, deadly violence, or which emphasize distinctive religious practices, beliefs, and ideologies as...ingredients in violent movements that may also draw on nationalist, ethnic, other motivations” (Appleby 2015, 34). This idea emphasizes the role religion plays as a direct cause of violence, influencing every part of a government/political system. Weak religion is the idea that sees religion as “a dependent variable in deadly violence, the primary source of

which is secular in origin (e.g., enacted by the state, or by nationalist or ethnic extremists)” (Appleby 2015, 34). While most conflicts do not fully fall into one idea, the conflict in Myanmar seems to fall into both categories.

Mark Juergensmeyer is a prominent sociologist of religion. His research focuses on religion's relationship with violence and terrorism. He is seen as a founding scholar in the discourse of global religion and politics, often cited by other scholars as the first to combine these two fields on a significant scale. He writes about the religious terrorism relating to 9/11 and Islamic extremism's effects on the relationship between religion and politics. While the focus of this thesis is not Islamic terrorism, the existence of Islamic extremism is frequently used as a justification for the violence against the Rohingya. Appleby cites Juergensmeyer's influence when detailing the spectrum of strong and weak religion (Appleby 2015). When detailing the meaning of religious terrorism, Juergensmeyer is looking “for explanations in the current forces of geopolitics enhanced by a strain of violence that may be found at the deepest level of religious imagination” (5). He sets up the premise of the book to answer a critical question: Why are religion and violence seemingly connected?

According to Juergensmeyer, religious terrorism refers to is “public acts of violence at the end of the twentieth century and first decades of the twenty-first, for which religion has provided the justification, the organization, and the worldview” (6). He also examines why these acts are frequently occurring in the contemporary era (6). Juergensmeyer rejects using the term *terrorist* since it “makes no clear distinction between the organizers of an attack, those who carry it out, and the many who support it both directly and indirectly” (6).

This distinction is paramount to the Rohingya crisis. Each group that has played a significant role in the Rohingya crisis interacts with and influences one another. We must acknowledge the “vertical” and “horizontal” story of this discourse. Juergensmeyer argues that religion does influence violent acts, specifically in relation to religious nationalism. When religious and political ideologies intertwine, this is due to “the coalescence of a peculiar set of circumstances—political, social, and ideological—when religion becomes fused with violent expressions of social aspirations, personal pride, and movements for political change” (9). A frequent feature to these ideologies is often times a majority feeling as though they are under threat, like Myanmar’s 969 Movement,<sup>1</sup> which will be discussed in more detail below. Juergensmeyer also offers a distinction to the terms *communities* or *ideologies* in relation to terrorism and violence. He uses the terms “to describe the character of these groups rather than ‘cultures’ of violence” and uses the term *culture* when “it entails both things—ideas and social groupings—that are related to terrorist acts” (12). Juergensmeyer identifies the “patterns—an overarching logic—found within the cultures of violence described in the first half [of the book]” (14).

With the combination of peace studies and religious studies, I will draw from *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding* as well as other prominent scholars in the field for my theoretical framework. Specifically, I apply the frameworks set forth by R. Scott Appleby and David Little who analyze the relationship between religion and peacebuilding (such as religious nationalism, ethno-religious violence, and “strong/weak” religion). For example, with nationalism, religion “plays a role by helping to define national identity or ‘peoplehood,’ therefore influencing the ideals and values

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<sup>1</sup> The 969 Movement refers to a Buddhist nationalist movement in Myanmar.

according to which the state is organized and legitimated” (Little 2015, 61). The defining of identity through religion is present in Myanmar, with ethno-religious conflict (as stated in the introduction). This thesis is sectioned into three parts: before, during, and the future of the Rohingya Crisis.

The first section provides the historical background of Myanmar. Specifically, I will detail the history of the Rohingya people and the relations the Rohingya had with other ethnic groups over the years. Colonialism and its effects on Myanmar politically, socially, economically will be included in this thesis. Especially when discussing the origins of the conflict, colonialism from Britain and Japan are seen as catalysts for ethnic tensions in Myanmar. Following this early history, I will discuss post-WWII, the political instability that followed the war and how Myanmar shifted into a democratic government. As the history comes closer to the present, the focus will be primarily on Aung San Suu Kyi and her leadership as State Counsellor. The historical background will not only address the history of the Rohingya in Myanmar but will also consider how certain historical events contribute to the current crisis.

The second section of this thesis focuses on the recent events concerning the Rohingya crisis and the current situation. Specific testimonies of the Rohingya who experienced and witnessed human rights violations will be detailed. I identify and analyze what the catalyst was for the extreme violence that spiraled into the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya. A point of interest will be the Ma Ba Tha’s<sup>2</sup> influence and Buddhist supremacy present within Myanmar. This section employs peace studies tools and vocabulary to identify behavior, ideologies, and various institutions of the

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<sup>2</sup> The Ma Ba Tha refers to a nationalist Buddhist organization based in Myanmar.

government. I use religious studies tools to examine the religious landscape of Myanmar and religion's influence on politics. Interviews with political scientists and religious scholars, who specialize in Southeast Asia, provide additional information and insight.

The third section will consider the future of Myanmar and possible solutions to the current crisis. This section touches on how peace studies often lacks or dilutes the seriousness of religion in conflict, often dismissing religion as a tool rather than an entity that carries its own weight. Reconciliation must acknowledge the importance of religion in society. I examine other genocides and their "solutions" to extremely sensitive conflicts through Martha Minow's framework from her book *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History After Genocide and Mass Violence*. Tools from peace studies (including reparations, truth commissions, politics of forgiveness, etc.) must not forget that religion reflects society and can point to the places in which society has failed or neglected the needs of the people. Minow's book provides informed input on potential solutions for Myanmar's future with the Rohingya Crisis. I do not plan to resolve the issue with a master plan but rather point out what could be done and bring awareness to the situation.

## Section Two

*History:* When examining the Rohingya crisis, it is important to know the series of events that lead to the identification, discrimination, and (eventually) ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya in Myanmar. Who are the Rohingya? Where did they come from? What specific events contributed to the animosity and tension of the differing religious groups? What does the history of the Rohingya people show us about the current crisis? This section seeks to answer these questions, set the stage for the crisis, and discern the theorized origins of the Rohingya.

To understand more fully Myanmar's history, we must broaden our scope geographically. Before Myanmar was an established country, there was the region of Arakan. According to historian Muhammad Abdul Bari, Arakan was "a coastal region of the South Asian subcontinent, with the Bay of Bengal to its west, Bangladesh and India to its north and Burma proper...to its east" (Bari 2018, 2). The region was a hotspot for trade and brought many different cultures and religions into one place. Bangladeshi historian Dr. Abdul Karim outlines four phases of Muslim presence in early Arakan.

*First Phase:* It is believed that the first Muslims settled in Arakan around the ninth century (Karim 2000, 24-25). In 1917, the British Burma Gazetteer detailed how Muslim ships crashed by Arakan and went to the region. The Muslim crew went into villages and found that "they differ but little from the Arakanese except in their religion and in the social customs which their religion directs, in the writing they use Burmese, but amongst themselves employ colloquially the language of their ancestors" (Karim 2000, 25). This is the first detailed account of Muslim settlement in the region. It is important to note because these Muslims would become a central part to Arakan's future Muslim

population (Karim 2000, 25). An interesting point from this account is that, while they did assimilate into Arakanese culture, the Arab Muslims kept their religious practices and customs consistently (Minar and Halim 2020, 122). This consistency established a Muslim community in this region as more trade and interaction between different communities continued.

*Second Phase:* In the fifteenth century, a political disruption occurred when King Min Saw-Mun of Arakan was defeated by the Burmese King (Minar and Halim 2020, 124). Expelled from his kingdom, Min Saw-Mun fled to Bengal, where he gained “a great deal of knowledge about Bengali, Arabic and Persian languages and literature” (Bari 2018, 2). Min Saw-Mun regained control of Arakan with his alliance with Bengal. Upon his return to Arakan, a large number of Bengali Muslims came with Saw-Mun. The majority of the Bengali Muslims “were mainly soldiers and administrators who were needed to help the reinstated king regain his throne, but many of them stayed behind after their mission was complete” (Bari 2018, 2). Arakan and Bengal’s relationship went well in this period, with more and more Muslims coming to the region. By the seventeenth century, accounts detail that the region’s capital was “throned with Muslims in the courts as well as in religious, social, and cultural assemblies” (Bari 2018, 2).

*Third Phase:* This phase started with the arrival of the West. The third group Muslims in the Arakan region comprised of “the people of the coastal areas of Bengal but kidnapped and sold to slavery by the pirates” (Karim 2000, 43). The import of slaves was the first “exodus of Rohingya Muslims into Bengal” in 1785 (Minar and Halim 2020, 127). The people were both from Hindu and Muslim communities. They were enslaved by pirates from Portugal and Arakan (Karim 2000, 43). The Portuguese would go on to

sell the enslaved Muslims for money or trade with other western countries. While in Arakan specifically, Muslim captives were not sold and instead were forced to work in agriculture, settling in the region (Karim 2000, 46-47).

*Fourth Phase:* In the middle of the seventeenth century, political disruption causes an Indian socialite to flee to Arakan (Bari 2018, 2). It is believed that about 1,000 Muslims were in his entourage (Bari 2018, 2). While the socialite was killed due to political disagreements with the Arakanese king, his entourage stayed in Arakan, adding more to the existing religious diversity of the region. British colonialism also brought “a good number of economic migrants to Arakan from the Indian subcontinent” (Bari 2018, 3). While colonization brought more Muslims to the region, Britain’s rule over this region

*Colonization:* Following this period came British colonization of South Asia. Arakan was ruled by the British from 1826 to 1948 (Bari 2018, 3). The British were “known for extracting maximum profit from the colonies and...known to have gained mastery by using a “divide and rule” policy to keep colonial people under control” (Bari 2018, 3). To achieve their policy, Britain pitted the majority and minority groups against one another. Tensions came at an all-time high during World War II. Arakan was under “Crown Colony” by the British. Britain “stimulated labor flow, hundreds and thousands of people from India went to Arakan for agricultural needs” (Minar and Halim 2020, 128). Colonialism caused Burmese nationalism to arise, often time lumping Muslims into the “other.” In 1942, Japan attacked Burma, causing the British forces to go to India. The sudden departure from Arakan left a power vacuum to the ethnic groups. Britain’s

departure resulted in Arakan breaking into different countries, one of them being Burma (current day-Myanmar).

*Independence:* In response to the ethno-nationalism presented by Burmese people, Muslims supported the British while the Burmese aligned themselves with Japan in the World War II (Minar and Halim 2020, 128). With Britain's retreat, The Japanese "undertook multiple assaults massacring the Rohingyas for their pro-British stance and destroyed 307 villages. 100,000 Rohingyas died and about 80,000 fled from the area" (Minar and Halim 2020, 128). Japan controlled Rakhine State until the end of the war. At this time, Burmese nationalists were against the Rohingya due to their support of Japan and demanded that the ethnic group be gone. However, General Aung San argued that they "should retain [Burma's] secular nature and accommodate all who lived within Burmese border as equal citizens. But he was assassinated in 1947, six months before independence." (Bari 2018, 3). Following independence, animosities worsened with a military coup in 1962.

*Military Rule:* Since the 1960s, the Rohingya "have faced a new phase of violence, arbitrary arrest and detention, extortions, restriction of movement, discrimination in education and employment, confiscation of property, forced labour and other abuses" (Bari 2018, 3). In 1974, the reformation of the Constitution "dropped the status of the Rohingyas" (Minar and Halim 2020, 131). The reformation resulted in a military operation to "evict" the Rohingya. Operation Nagamin was a military campaign "so vicious that within a span of three months over 250,000 Rohingya refugees crossed the river Naf and arrived at Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district" (Bari 2018, 3).

The disregard for the Rohingya's humanity was expressed clearly in the 1982 Burma Citizenship Law. The law consisted of four types of citizenship: citizenship by birth, associated citizenship, naturalized citizenship, and birthright citizenship (Ansar 2020, 448). The law does not acknowledge the Rohingya as any type of citizen in Burma, making them a stateless people. After international backlash, the government granted "another documentation project by providing temporary identity cards, known as White Cards, to the Rohingya from 1995 onwards" (Ansar 2020, 448). The Citizenship Law left the Rohingya in limbo. Buddhist nationalism "came to the frontline in the process of [the Rohingya's] subjugation. A massive public outcry and organized campaigns led by Buddhist monks and nationalist groups resulted in the withdrawal of the temporary White Card" (Ansar 2020, 449). This legal form of discrimination officially made the Rohingya people "foreigners" even though their presence had been in the country for centuries. While Myanmar would endure many years under military juntas, a movement was underway, with one particular person behind it.

*Democratization and the role of Aung San Suu Kyi:* A key player that contributed greatly to Myanmar's current political landscape is Aung San Suu Kyi. The daughter of General Aung San, she was exposed to politics at a very young age. Suu Kyi was only two years old when her father was assassinated. Her mother, Khin Kyi, assumed General Aung San's parliament seat and gained prominence as a political figure in Burma (Bengtsson 2012, 98-99). Suu Kyi's mother would go on to be an ambassador to India in 1960, taking her daughter with (Bengtsson 2012, 107). There, Suu Kyi studied in India, receiving a degree in politics from the University of Delhi. She would continue her studies at St. Hugh's College, Oxford, achieving a B.A. in Philosophy, Politics, and

Economics in 1967 as well as an M.A. in politics in 1968 (Bengtsson 2012, 122). Shortly after her time at Oxford, Suu Kyi married Dr. Michael Aris, a scholar of Tibetan culture/literature, having two children together and living in London (Bengtsson 2012, 123) (Bengtsson 2012, 135-137). After about a decade of traditional family life, Aung San Suu Kyi's life direction changed drastically after receiving word that her mother's health was in critical condition.

Suu Kyi's start in Burmese politics was unintentional. In 1988, Aung San Suu Kyi went back to Burma, initially to help her mother, who suffered a severe stroke (Bengtsson 2012, 21). In the same year, long-time military leader of Burma General Ne Win stepped down, resulting in significant demonstrations and protests for democracy (Chakraborty 2013, 122). Uprisings against the military government displayed a desire for change, inspiring Suu Kyi to get involved. Aung San Suu Kyi decided to step into the public sphere and promote democracy within Burma, addressing half a million people in the capital. (Chakraborty 2013, 122) While a new military regime took power, the movement for democracy was in full force. Suu Kyi integrated nonviolence and Buddhist concepts into her political philosophy. In 1988, she helped found the Myanmar democratic party, National League for Democracy (NLD) (Chakraborty 2013, 122). In 1990, a general election was conducted by a junta in which the NLD received 59% of the votes, resulting in the NLD having 80% of the parliament seats ("Daw Aung San Suu..." 2006). Her advocacy resulted in her being put on house arrest by the military regime, which would be common for Aung San Suu Kyi in later years. Eventually, Suu Kyi's nonviolent approach and democratic advocacy resulted in her being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990. Aung San Suu Kyi endured many house arrest sentences enacted by the military

juntas, on-and-off, for the next two decades. International outcry for her release became prominent in the early 2000s, with other Nobel Peace Prize winners (like the Dalai Lama Archbishop Desmond Tutu) speaking out publicly. Aung San Suu Kyi was officially released from house arrest on November 13, 2010. In 2016, she would go on to be elected as State Counsellor of Myanmar, a position similar to Prime Minister. The international human rights community had high hopes for Myanmar, envisioning the possibility of a new democratic state. However, these hopes were crushed in 2017 when the world witnessed the mass exodus of Rohingya Muslims into Bangladesh.

*Post 9/11 Politics:* In a new world order, Muslims are “perceived not just as a foreign but as a security threat” (Kyaw 2017, 57). Worldwide, Muslims started to be seen as a legitimate threat to states, especially to countries with existing tensions with Muslim minorities. After 9/11, Buddhist monks “organised protests all over Myanmar and sparked a national debate by indignantly destructions of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan by the Taliban and the Al-Qaeda attacks in the US” (Ansar 2020, 450). Conservative Buddhist monks “found a new source to justify their resentment not only against the Rohingyas but also against Burmese Muslims in general” (Ansar 2020, 450). 9/11 is important to note due to its global impact on the overall perceptions of Muslims, which contributes to the Rohingya crisis.

### Section Three

The extensive history of the Rohingya in Myanmar exhibits how the presence of Muslims in the region is not uncommon and that the Rohingya's claim to citizenship is not unfounded. Post-colonial Myanmar has faced decades of uncertainty and political instability. However, in recent times, leaders like Aung San Suu Kyi have given the world hope for Myanmar's future. However, with the Rohingya crisis, we must analyze the immediate causes and specific accounts of what occurred in 2017. Synthesizing from the previous section, this section details the more recent events that resulted in the Rohingya genocide. I examine political and religious factors that negatively impacted the Rohingya as well as look into key players that had a prominent part in the genocide. I also attempt to determine if the Rohingya crisis falls under strong or weak religion through a deep analysis of Myanmar's political and religious landscapes, both regionally and internationally. Essential aspects of Myanmar's ethnoreligious violence include the rise of Buddhist nationalism and political instability within the government.

*Tensions in 2010s:* 2012 served as an eventful year for Myanmar's political landscape. After almost twenty years of house arrests, Aung San Suu Kyi brought her party to victory in a landslide election (Zin 2015, 375). Democracy in Myanmar was becoming a reality, and hopes were high after the win. With the country in a state of change, conflict began to arise between Buddhists and Muslims. Burmese leaders "claimed that the increase in the Muslim population would soon make [Muslims] the majority, and riots ensued, with killings on both sides" (Juergensmeyer 2017, 131). Anti-Muslim activists were credited for inciting these riots. The Myanmar government responded to Islamophobic sentiments with "a series of enactments that greatly restricted

the rights of Rohingya within Myanmar, essentially making them citizens without a country” (Juergensmeyer 2017, 132). A common belief among Anti-Muslim activists is that the Rohingya are Bengalis and need to leave Myanmar. In July 2012, Myanmar President Thein Sein even proposed the UN to “resettle the Rohingya community in other countries” (Abdul Bari 2018). Anti-Muslim sentiments started to become more vocal, and a dangerous outlet became a tool for propaganda and misinformation.

With the political transition underway, Myanmar’s Rakhine State was at the center of ethnic communal violence. The violence was triggered by the rape and murder of a Buddhist woman committed (allegedly) by Rohingya men. Muslims were beaten to death in the street by Buddhist mobs, who also destroyed Muslim establishments. The one-sided violence resulted in a state of emergency being called, and Myanmar’s military (Tatmadaw) moved into the Rakhine State. The 2012 riots were left mostly unresolved due to little legal and government action taken against aggressors. The government created no initiatives to address the violence that took place.

The riots directly impacted the mass exodus for several reasons. The riots mandated a heavy military response as a solution to ethnic conflict, which would give the Tatmadaw full clearance to do as they please with little push back from the government. The riots also pushed the Rohingya to create a group called the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) to defend against police brutality and acts of violence against the Muslim minority. This group later became the catalyst for the 2017 genocide.

*Key Contributors to Buddhist Nationalism:* A religious movement in Myanmar called the 969 Movement is credited with fueling Anti-Muslim sentiments by spreading propaganda through their teachings and online presence. The assumed leader of the

movement, Ashin Wirathu, has specifically been cited as the one who made Facebook posts about the rape and murder of the Buddhist woman, alleging Rohingya men committed the crime. This movement and the Ma Ba Tha (another Buddhist organization) are key contributors to the Rohingya genocide through their teachings and propaganda.

The 969 Movement started as a backlash against 8-8-88 Uprisings<sup>3</sup> and the pro-democracy movement in the late 80s and early 90s. The military junta at the time “began promoting what was touted as a Buddhist renewal movement” (Coclanis 2013, 27). They “combined Buddhist religious fanaticism with intense Burmese nationalism and more than a tinge of ethnic chauvinism” (Coclanis 2013, 27). The numbers 969 carry a special significance within Buddhism. The movement was “named after the nine special attributes of the Buddha, the six distinctive features of his teachings, and the nine characteristics of monks” (Juergensmeyer 2017, 129). Kyaw Lwin, a Burmese monk, created the ideological foundation of the 969 Movement. An ethnic group that fervently follows this ideology is known as the Bamar, who make up about two-thirds of Myanmar’s population. The majority of Bamar are Theravada Buddhists (Coclanis 2013, 27). Based on their ethnic and religious superiority, the central message of the 969 Movement is “Burma for Buddhists” (Coclanis 2013, 28). However, the movement did not gain momentum until after Kyaw Lwin’s death in 2001. Another Burmese monk would assume Kyaw Lwin’s role and make the movement what it is today.

Ashin Wirathu is a central figure in the 969 Movement. He succeeded Kyaw Lwin in 2001 and “began elaborating upon the dead monk’s thoughts, albeit with a more explicitly and aggressively anti-Muslim message” (Coclanis 2013, 8). In an interview

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<sup>3</sup> The 8-8-88 Uprisings refers to the series of protests that occurred in Myanmar. The name of the protests derives from the day of their peak, which was August 8, 1988.

with Juergensmeyer, Wirathu stated that Muslims are “trying to transform Myanmar into a Muslim state,” citing them as “Islamic extremists” (2017, 130). While he seeks to maintain a seemingly peaceful persona, his actions could not be farther from it. The UN Commission on Human Rights has “identified Wirathu as one of the main figures in Myanmar’s pattern of human rights abuse against Muslims, particularly the Rohingya who live in the northern portion of Rakhine province adjacent to Bangladesh” (Juergensmeyer 2017, 131). However, Wirathu himself does not acknowledge the UN, even going as far as to say that “rich Muslim countries...bought off the UN, and its human rights accusations were part of a Muslim plot” (Juergensmeyer 2017, 132). Wirathu has been described as “the Buddhist bin Laden,” a title with which he disagrees. He claims that the media is “also under control of Islamic extremists” which is why they label Wirathu and other anti-Muslim activists “terrorists” (Juergensmeyer 2017, 132). To Wirathu, Middle Eastern countries are influencing the UN, which is where he claims his sentiments come from. With the violent views that Wirathu promotes, the Western stereotype of Buddhism as a “peaceful” religion comes into question.

Another contribution to the ethnoreligious violence is the use of the internet, specifically social media, by Anti-Muslim figures/Buddhist Nationalists. With the highly globalized state of the world, social media has become a platform where everyone can participate. In Myanmar, Facebook has become synonymous with the internet. Specifically, anti-Muslim activists like Wirathu use the platform as a way of spreading their movement’s propaganda. In an investigation by the *New York Times*, Myanmar military officials were revealed to be “prime operatives behind a systematic campaign on Facebook that stretched back half a decade and that targeted the country’s...Rohingya

minority group” (Mozur 2018). They exploited Facebook’s vast presence in Myanmar to push their agenda, going to the extent of creating fake accounts to spread misinformation. *New York Times* found that “seemingly independent entertainment, beauty, and informational pages were linked to the Myanmar military” (Mozur 2018). These actions went unreported by Facebook for a long time, allowing relations to worsen between Buddhists and Muslims. Researchers defined the purpose of the campaign as a means “to generate widespread feelings of vulnerability and fear that could be saved by the military’s protection” (Mozur 2018). The campaign's purpose was ultimately effective, with an added military presence in prominently Muslim regions and the rise of hate speech against the Rohingya.

*Genocide/Mass Exodus:* On August 25, 2017, violence broke out in Northern Rakhine when the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army launched coordinated attacks on a military base and security posts due to increased discrimination in Rohingya communities. Twelve security personnel were killed, and the Burmese military responded with brute force but disproportionately discriminated against the Rohingya people (“Report...” 2018). Starting as communal violence, the conflict escalated to the military moving into Rohingya areas. A UN report expressed that “what happened on 25 August 2017 and the following days and weeks was the realization of a disaster long in the making” (“Report...” 2018). The military was “cracking down” on Muslim terrorists and insurgents in Rakhine State, calling it “clearance operations” (“Report...” 2018). In actuality, they were committing genocide. The Tatmadaw committed systematic mass rapes. Médecins Sans Frontières reported, “about 50% [of rape victims] are aged 18 or under, including one girl who was nine years old and several others under the age of 10”

(MacGregor 2017). The military executed mass killings and systematic torture. The government stated a conservative death toll, estimating about twenty people were killed during the crackdown; however, independent organizations have estimated that thousands of Rohingya were killed (“Report...” 2018). Houses were locked and set on fire, often with people inside. Bodies were burned and disposed of in mass graves. The UN details that “people were killed or injured by gunshot, targeted or indiscriminate, often while fleeing” (“Report...” 2018). People were rounded up in forests and killed in a line. To put it simply, the military aimed to exterminate them by any means necessary.

The genocide triggered one of the most severe refugee crises globally, with approximately 700,000 Rohingya Muslims fleeing to Bangladesh in only a few months (War and Laoutides 2019, 60). The mass exodus in 2017 consisted “mostly of pregnant women, the elderly and children” (Abdul Bari 2018). Several people were reported to have drowned when on a boat or when crossing the rivers. The UN reported that “the Tatmadaw also killed Rohingya during the journey and at border crossings” as well as planting landmines in border areas to “prevent or dissuade Rohingya from returning” (“Report...” 2018). By recent estimates, about 860,000 Rohingya live in a refugee camp in Southern Bangladesh, making it the world’s largest refugee camp (Reid 2020). Out of that total estimate, about half of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are children (“The Rohingya Crisis...” 2021). Not long after the mass exodus, Commander-in-Chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing of the Tatmadaw stated in a Facebook post that “the Bengali problem was a long-standing one which has become an unfinished job despite the efforts of the previous governments to solve it. The government in office is taking great care in

solving the problem” (“Report...” 2018). His post proves that the genocide was a planned and coordinated operation.

The genocide grabbed international attention, with the UN enacted fact-finding missions and top human rights leaders started to speak out against the atrocities committed. Aung San Suu Kyi was criticized heavily for her lack of action and care for the Rohingya crisis. A democratic symbol had plummeted from grace, leaving a sense of hopelessness about Myanmar’s future. The genocide reveals a darker side of the political and religious forces within Myanmar, mainly where power and intentions lie.

*Strong vs. Weak Religion Analysis:* Using Juergensmeyer’s framework, it is difficult to discern if the Rohingya are experiencing strong or weak religion. Several political factors would explain why the government specifically targeted the Rohingya and carried out a genocide. Rakhine State has “a poverty rate nearly twice the national average” with “poor social services and a scarcity of livelihood opportunities” (“Report...” 2018). On a regional level, it would be easy to assume why the government would want to get rid of a minority group that makes up part of this state; once the Rohingya “leave,” the government can take the land and resources left behind. The government’s intentions are already evident in the aftermath of the military’s actions in 2017. After burning Rohingya villages to the ground, the government would then erase their existence from official maps and create government facilities in their place (Head 2019). The ultimate message from the military is that the Rohingya cannot and will not return to Myanmar.

On a national level, Myanmar has suffered through decades of political instability and political theorists have speculated that the government has taken a nationalistic form

of country building. With the narrative of Rohingya being Bengali, the government makes them an “other,” which unites the people against this threat. This tactic is effective because of colonization’s complicated history in the country, with the “taking of sides” between Japan and Britain. On an international level, there is an incentive for Myanmar to getting rid of the Rohingya. Allies with China, Myanmar’s government does not seem worried about international pressure. The relationship between the two countries has been one of common interest and investment. On the Bay of Bengal, Myanmar is China’s way to the Indian Ocean, specifically Rakhine State, which borders the body of water. In May of 2017, Myanmar became part of China’s “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR) initiative, which is “to improve connectivity and cooperation on a transcontinental scale” (“Belt...” 2018). The initiative would bring economic success and efficiency to both countries and improve Myanmar's agriculture and tourism.

*Religious legitimacy in conflict:* First, in order to comprehend the religious dynamics in Myanmar, one must first establish an understanding of Buddhism, specifically with Theravada Buddhism. Theravada, a sect of Buddhism, uses the Tipitaka texts as canon. The texts “contain the oldest surviving records of the teaching of Gautama Buddha, the enlightened sage who work formed the foundations of Buddhist philosophy” (Greene 2020). Theravada Buddhists follow the core beliefs of Buddhist philosophy, specifically *sila*, *samadhi*, and *prajna*. Sila is “the concept of virtuous moral conduct and includes the principles that all living things are equal and that a person ought to treat others as he or she would like to be treated” (Greene 2020). Samadhi focuses on “the importance of mental development through concentration and meditation” (Greene 2020). Prajna emphasizes that “wisdom and enlightenment will come to those with purity and

calmness of mind” (Greene 2020). Unlike most major religions, the Buddhist faith is not centered around an omnipotent creator. Monks are a central body within Buddhism, seen as a form of clergypersons. They serve as an essential part of the community, especially in Buddhist-majority countries.

Seeing between the lines, the religious legitimacy of violence, in this case, is harder to discern. From a Western perspective, a common perception of Buddhist monks is their nonviolence. A prominent figure that comes to mind is the Dalai Lama, a symbol of peace. Western stereotypes of laypeople and monks make it challenging to understand the darker, more violent acts associated with Buddhist figures. However, it should not come as a surprise to see Buddhism and violence arising in this context since it is not the first time. Religion and nationalism have been intertwined within the fabric of Myanmar’s ethno-political history. Buddhist nationalist movements in Burma “embrace a comprehensive program for the protection of Buddhism, and social and moral reform of society, involving, religious, economic and educational affairs” (Foxeus 2019, 668). Only recently, nationalist groups (like the 969 Movement and the Ma Ba Tha) gained prominence due to the added political stressors during the 2010s, such as the change in parties and reforms brought in by the new government. Specifically, the 969 movement aims “to stir up a nationalist spirit and loyalty to Buddhism and the country, to implement a ‘buy Buddhist campaign’ and boycotting Muslim-owned businesses, to encourage Buddhist women to marry only Buddhist men, and to establish Dhamma Sunday Schools for children” (Foxeus 2019, 668).

The alignment of ethnic belonging with religious belonging within Buddhist nationalism is a critical factor in the Rohingya crisis. To these nationalistic movements,

this means that “only the Buddhists among the 135 national races are perceived to belong to their nation” (Foxeus 2019, 669). This narrative is derived from the legend of the Sakiya Clan, the clan belonging to the Buddha. Descendants of this specific clan are connected to a nationalistic myth that they belong to a superior ‘race,’ which Buddhist monks and laypeople will often refer to in their sermons. The fusion of religion and nationalism is inseparable at this point. In Myanmar, Islam is seen as a threat because of nationalistic Buddhist monks through their campaigns involving “politics of monastic hierarchies, revivalist education campaigns, the advancement of law for the ‘protection of race and religion’ and attempts to influence the 2015 elections” (Arnold and Turner 2018). These campaigns are supported by Buddhist leaders, who then pass on these ideologies to their followers. Sermons by monks carry deep-seated nationalistic rhetoric to their thousands of fellow Buddhists.

*Thoughts on legitimacies:* Looking through Juergensmeyer’s framework, I believe that Myanmar is dealing with “strong” religion due to the active role nationalist Buddhist monks and laypeople have on the political, social, and economic landscapes of the country. The intersection of political, social, economic, and religious change in the past 50 years has resulted in this crisis happening. Prime perpetrators of the nationalistic identity in Myanmar are the Buddhist nationalists, who spread propaganda in sermons and gathered in mobs to attack the Rohingya. While the military carries a majority of the political power in Myanmar, Buddhists leaders have an equal amount of power in decision-making. When looking at the relationship between the government and Buddhist groups, there seems to be some tension, but not in regard to the crisis. Wirathu spoke against Aung San Suu Kyi, “accusing [Suu Kyi’s] government of foiling the military’s

efforts to defend the Buddhist-majority nation against what he calls a Muslim onslaught” (Beech 2019). He even claimed that the government was funded by “foreigners.” For the nationalist Buddhists, the government does not have Myanmar’s best interest at heart. In the past, Wirathu in the past has praised the military for their efforts against the Rohingya; he mainly disagrees with the civilian government. Recently, Wirathu handed himself into police custody after being charged with “exciting disaffection toward the government, [which] carries a prison sentence of up to three years” (“Myanmar Fugitive...” 2020). For years, political commentators and the international community were unsure of who held power in Myanmar. However, on January 28, 2021, this became apparent when the military performed a coup against the Myanmar government, forcing Aung San Suu Kyi into house arrest once again.

Just as some religious figures are pushing for nationalism, other religious figures advocate for peace and interreligious dialogue within Myanmar. Many monks were arrested for protesting and convicted to lengthy prison sentences during the military dictatorship, leaving a space empty in their communities. I believe that this played a role in the Ma Ba Tha and the 969 Movement emerging into prominence. Nationalist Buddhists easily aligned with the Tatmadaw; So, monks posed a minor threat to the military’s control, especially with monk activists in prison. However, many are now being released from their sentences early and hit the ground running on their activism. A prominent monk activist that is aiding in this effort would be U Kawira, also known as Galoneni Sayadaw. During the riots in 2012, Sayadaw was on the streets for two days, working to calm angry Buddhist mobs down from attacking Muslim establishments (AJ+ Docs 2014). When two Muslim interfaith activists were charged with violating the law,

Sayadaw came forward to testify on their behalf in 2015 (“The Rohingya...” 2021). He is one of many that are pushing against the wave of ethnoreligious nationalism in Myanmar. While much of this section has been predominantly negative events occurring, hope is not yet lost in Myanmar. Looking towards the future, Myanmar still has a chance to build towards peace but only if they do it carefully and extensively.

## Section Four

*Conclusion:* This thesis has surveyed the history of Muslims in Myanmar and the clash of historical narratives regarding the Rohingya's origins. Then, more recent events that contributed to the genocide were examined as well as the central figures involved in promoting Buddhist nationalism and Anti-Muslim sentiments in Myanmar. The power shift in Myanmar has shown how much power the military and Buddhist leader's influence carries compared to the civic government. The many factors that impacted thousands of Rohingya have left them in limbo, with no citizenship or home to which they might return. Looking through Juergensmeyer's framework, Myanmar is experiencing strong religion with the prominent presence of Buddhist leadership along with the military. The future of Myanmar is not lost yet, with prominent figures aiding in combating nationalism and promoting ethnic and interreligious peace.

In this final section, I will detail the actions that have been taken against Myanmar from the international community. Recent events have affected my original thoughts on potential solutions for the crisis, including the 2021 coup. I will explore what the coup has revealed about Myanmar's current power structures and how that impacts reconciliation. Looking through Minow's framework, I provide several potential solutions to the Rohingya crisis with past examples supporting my claims. Different forms of reconciliation tools (truth commissions, trials, amnesty, education) can at least be a start for Myanmar's rebuilding. I plan to weigh the importance of retributive and restorative justice within the context of Myanmar. In the end, I will offer my personal takeaways from the crisis and deliver a final message on our duty as international citizens.

International courts have taken the initiative in condemning the genocide and pursued legal actions against prominent leaders in Myanmar. One prime example of this would be when Aung San Suu Kyi was put on genocide trial by the International Court of Justice (Scheffer 2020) in Hague, Netherlands. The case was brought on by The Gambia, who submitted an application with the International Court of Justice against Myanmar. As the primary judicial system of the United Nations, the International Court of Justice “ordered Myanmar to cease and desist all forms of alleged genocide against the Rohingya and to preserve evidence about alleged genocidal acts” in 2019 (Scheffer 2020). With seventeen judges on the panel, they voted unanimously to order Myanmar to take all the measures needed “to prevent the genocide of Rohingya Muslims” (“Myanmar Rohingya: World...” 2020). While this decision’s long-lasting impact is unclear, it is a big step in the right direction. The trial included the testimony of Rohingya witnesses, to which Aung San Suu Kyi was required to hear. Confronting leaders with the truth through hearing is one of the first steps in which Myanmar can change for the better and the Rohingya can receive justice. The one fault in this judicial process is that enforcement of the decision can only happen through the UN Security Council. The possibility of enforcement happening is low due to possible vetoes from China and Russia. However, hope for change in Myanmar is growing with the recent political and social catalyst: the 2021 military coup.

On February 1, 2021, the Tatmadaw performed a coup on the civic government, detaining Aung San Suu Kyi and other members of the National League for Democracy (NLD). The military seized control of Myanmar and declared a year-long state of emergency. It is believed that the military seized control “following a general election

which Suu Kyi's NLD party won by a landslide" (Cuddy 2021). The coup happened a day before the Parliament of Myanmar was supposed to swear in those elected from the general election. Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and the military cited "unproven allegations of voter fraud at last November's election" (Strangio 2021). Thousands of people took to the streets of Myanmar in major demonstrations against the coup, protesting the military and promoting democracy in the country. It is evident that the people of Myanmar are not aligning with the military's motives, with Generation Z in particular at the center of these protests.

Creative forms of political protests are taking place in Myanmar. One group in particular caught international attention for its unique form of protesting. The "pajama protestors" are lying in the street in sleepwear as a form of protest in order to signify "the war that the military is waging against them after dark" (Hölzl 2021). With the coup, many people have worried day and night about what will happen to the country. One protestor talked of how since the coup, "Every night we can't sleep, and we wake up with anxiety in the morning" (Hölzl 2021). The military is not taking these protests lightly, with severe measures enacted to stop protestors. On March 3 of 2021, security forces opened fire with rubber and live bullets at a crowd of protestors, leaving at least thirty-eight people dead ("Myanmar Sees..." 2021). The violence is shocking and horrifying, with people being beaten by police and had no warning of force. One particularly jarring image is of a Myanmar nun pleading with police to spare protestors. Sister Ann Rose Nu Tawng fell to her knees in front of police, begging for them not to harm protestors (Hölzl 2021). The image of a religious outsider coming forward and begging for protestors' lives pulled at heart strings. Nu Tawng represents in many ways the people of Myanmar, who

simply just want democracy and for the violence to stop. These political protests are a powerful sign that Myanmar is going through democratization and that the military coup does not reflect the values of the people. Looking towards the future, what are possible solutions that can help Myanmar unite and build peace with despite its tumultuous history of ethnoreligious violence?

In her book *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History After Genocide and Mass Violence*, Martha Minow explores the various ways in which a country faces its past with consciousness of the future through many forms of reconciliation, which spans across political, legal, and social landscapes. Out of the many solutions that Minow offers, I have chosen two that I think are relevant to the Rohingya Crisis as effective tools to rebuild the country: truth commissions and facing the past. I excluded reparations from the solution due to Myanmar's economic insecurity and because reparations would not need to be prioritized at the beginning of the reconciliation process. I also excluded trials from solutions due to Myanmar's current political state. Starting with punishments would begin the reconciliation process on the wrong foot. I believe that restorative justice should be prioritized instead of retributive justice. According to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, restorative justice aims to "redefine justice as accountability. Seek repair, not revenge; reconciliation, not recrimination. Honor and attend in public to the process of remembering" (Minow 1998, 82). Integrating restorative justice into the reconciliation process allows for healing to be found in truth-telling and focusing on the victims.

One of the best ways to integrate restorative justice is through truth commissions. Truth commissions were an essential part of South Africa's reconciliation process. It was effective for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, the truth commission believed in South

Africa that “it is necessary that the truth about gross violations of human rights must be: established by an official investigation unit using fair procedures; fully and unreservedly acknowledged by the perpetrators; made known to the public, together with the identity of the planners, perpetrators, and victims” (Minow 1998, 55). The transparency of the process was a crucial element in the success of the truth commission. Hundreds of victims were able to testify and detail the similarities as well as differences in their recollections. It helped to set the record straight and gain a better understanding of what occurred. Minow reiterates this by saying, “the most distinctive element of a truth commission...is the focus on victims” (1998, 60). However, another element within truth commissions that has been a point of conflict is amnesty to perpetrators in exchange for their testimonies.

During the South African Truth Commission, perpetrators were offered amnesty in exchange for admitting their crimes and recounting their actions during the conflict. Referring to its definition, the focus on healing and reformation is central to restorative justice as opposed to the punishment focus on retributive justice. Restorative justice has been critiqued by the West, due to how common retributive justice is in the West. However, to truly know what occurred, amnesty must be granted to understand the full scope of the crisis and to make sure that it does not happen again. The South African Truth Commission is also a great example to follow for the Rohingya Crisis due to the religious elements present in conflicts and religious themes in the reconciliation process. Including religion in the reconciliation is important for true healing. To include religion, Myanmar must establish a narrative that is historically accurate and accepted by all peoples.

Another way to integrate restorative justice is through facing the past and establishing a factual narrative. A key issue with the Rohingya crisis is that the tensions between religious groups are rooted in differing historical narratives of Myanmar as a country. As addressed in Section Two, the Rohingya have been a part of Myanmar's history for centuries. The narrative of Rohingya being Bengali is rooted in nationalism and has discredited the Rohingya's contributions to their country, especially by separating them from citizenship. The division that has derived from conflicting narratives must be bridged with honesty and re-education concerning Myanmar's history. It is of utmost importance that, if a truth commission were to occur in Myanmar, the past is not forgotten or brushed off after the commission. Establishing a historical understanding integrated into Myanmar's institutions will allow for a balance of remembering the past to having healing. Minow believes that for healing to occur there must be "the production of new historical narratives and accounts that build bridges between past and present" (1998, 143).

In South Africa, the history of the country was traced into how the apartheid and other atrocities occurred. Testimonies, as well as the input of historians and journalists, allowed for a fuller picture of and healing from the violence to take place. This tool could be applied to Myanmar in many ways. The truth in Buddhist nationalism has been rooted in a "psychological truth" rather than a historical one (Minow 1998, 129). Within truth commissions, establishing a common narrative that is agreed upon is central to starting the reconciliation process. Acknowledgment must also be granted to each group involved: victims, perpetrators, and bystanders.

Looking at Myanmar's current state, I see hope for reconciliation in the people's cry for change and the disconnect between civic government and the military. However, I think that a significant influence that could help the Rohingya sooner could be international involvement. The West has a complicated history with foreign involvement. But, with a reconciliation mindset and utilizing the existing peace intuitions, we can usher in the needed funding and support to aid the Rohingya and hold the perpetrators accountable.

History is repeating itself and, ultimately, we must stop the cycle of violence against minorities, specifically religious minorities. Whether we think so or not, religion impacts us all. The lack or the abundance of religion in our lives, the faith of others, and everything in between impacts us. As global citizens, we have failed the Rohingya in many ways. The rise of nationalism abroad and its direct link to the rise of Islamophobia should have been taken seriously sooner. The fact that it took the placement of Muslims in China into concentration camps, Muslims in Kashmir having a blackout, and the Rohingya Muslims fleeing by the thousands for us to realize there was an issue. We should have paid attention sooner. So much happened before that led to the crisis occurring and if we just looked a little closer, we could have helped the Rohingya. I wrote this thesis in hopes of educating others on what is happening in other parts of the world. The Rohingya are not the first religious minority to be persecuted and they will not be the last. Awareness is the first step towards making the world a better place. The more we know, the more we can come together and work as an international community to listen, to use and create reconciliation-oriented structures, and to ultimately break the cycle of genocide so we can truly say "never again."

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