

COUNTRY IN TRANSITION?

Analyzing the role of religion in
the conflict involving the
Rohingya in Rakhine State,
Myanmar

MASTER THESIS

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Religion, Conflict and Globalization

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"Like all people everywhere, they need and deserve a future, hope and dignity. This is not just a question of the Rohingya community's right to self-identity; the broader issue is that all of Myanmar's people of every ethnicity and background should be able to live in equality and harmony, side-by-side with their neighbors."

- Ban Ki-moon, 2016.¹

1.1. Introduction to topic

Burma - formerly Myanmar - became independent from the British in 1948. The country is one of the most ethnically diverse in Asia and has been largely dominated by the Bamar people, the largest ethnic group in Myanmar. After gaining independence, this dominance led to conflicts about self-determination claims by other ethnic groups. Since the military seized power in 1962, ethnic minorities have been increasingly excluded from positions of authority and faced different restrictions. In 1982, the Citizenship Law recognized eight major national ethnic groups in the country, which can be broken down further into 135 recognized national ethnic groups.² However, this law does not include all ethnic groups in Myanmar. Myanmar is a predominantly Buddhist country, in which other ethnic groups are discriminated against. The Rohingya Muslims represent the largest percentage of Muslims in Myanmar and claim a long-standing connection to Rakhine State, the state in Myanmar where they live. They also self-identify as a distinct ethnic group with its own language and culture.³ However, many Myanmar governments have rejected these claims and the Rohingyas were thus not included in the Citizenship Law of 1982, making them stateless.⁴

Since 2011, the country has undergone a large transformation following wide-ranging reforms launched by the government to open up the democratic space. Changes have been made regarding the freedom of assembly and oppression.⁵ At the beginning of his presidency in 2011,

¹ Lun Min Mang, "UN chief Ban Ki-moon calls for 'strengthened' peace process," *The Myanmar Times*, August 31, 2016, accessed June 2, 2017, <https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/22236-un-chief-ban-ki-moon-calls-for-strengthened-peace-process.html>.

² United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, A/HRC/32/18 (June 28, 2016), pars. 2, 5, available from <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/32/18>.

³ UNHRC, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," pars. 2-3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, par. 3.

⁵ UNHRC, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," par. 6.

United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee*, A/HRC/28/72 (March 23, 2015), available from <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/28/72>.

President Thein Sein made a series of commitments towards democracy and reform.⁶ In 2015, fair and free elections took place.⁷ However, the military still retains twenty-five percent of the seats in parliament and some minorities, among which the Rohingya, were disqualified from standing for election.⁸ Moreover, in several areas the restrictions on democratic space remain severe and there continue to be increasing concerns about discrimination and ethnic conflicts.⁹

One of these ethnic conflicts is the one involving the Rohingya Muslims. The Rakhine, the Buddhist population in the Rakhine State, reject the links that the Rohingya claim to have to the State and consider them ‘Bengali’, thus viewing them as illegal immigrants.¹⁰ The Rohingya – and other – Muslims are often portrayed by them as ‘a threat to race and religion’.¹¹ Rakhine State is already one of the poorest states of Myanmar, with limited access to basic services and few livelihood opportunities for the entire population. The Rohingya face additional barriers in the State.¹²

Since 2012, incidents of religious intolerance and incitement to hatred by extremist and ultra-nationalist Buddhist groups have increased enormously in Myanmar.¹³ The violence has been targeted at Rohingya Muslims, an ethnic group that, as previously mentioned, had already suffered long-standing discrimination in the Rakhine State.¹⁴ In June and October 2012, violence broke out, which led to hundreds of cases of injury and death, the destruction of property and the displacement of 140.000 people.¹⁵ In October 2016, violence broke out again. Myanmar security forces have been heavily present in lockdown areas since several hundred men reportedly attacked three border guard posts. Security forces have sealed off the area, thereby preventing humanitarian organizations, media and independent human rights monitors from entering.¹⁶ The violence continued in 2017 and the situation deteriorated in August, when Myanmar’s military responded unlawfully and disproportionately to an attack by an armed

⁶ UNHRC, “Report of the Special, A/HRC/28/72,” par. 4

⁷ UNHRC, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” par. 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pars. 6-7.

⁹ UNHCR, “Report of the Special, A/HRC/28/72,” par. 4

¹⁰ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Flash Report: Interviews with Rohingya fleeing from Myanmar since 9 October 2016* (February 3, 2017), 5.

¹¹ OHCHR, “Flash Report,” 5.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁵ UNHRC, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” par. 10.

¹⁶ Amnesty International, *Urgent Action: Still no information on hundreds missing Rohingya*, ASA 16/5689/2017 (New York: February 15, 2017).

group of Rohingyas. Up to 400.000 Rohingyas are reported to have fled to Bangladesh in August and September, which has created a shortage of shelter, food and clean water.¹⁷

Because of the conflict, Rohingyas face multiple restrictions and forms of discrimination and harassment. These violations and abuses result from national, State, or local laws, policies and practices.¹⁸ As was stated above, they continue to be denied access to basic rights, including the right to food, healthcare, education, survival, and development, as well as the right to enjoy their culture and be protected from discrimination.¹⁹ They also endure the arbitrary deprivation of nationality and restrictions have been placed on their religious practices.²⁰ Moreover, the Rohingyas face travel restrictions, which also prevent Rohingya students from attending any form of university education.²¹ The restrictions on freedom of movement also impact the access to health care, food, water, sanitation, primary education and livelihoods. Other discriminatory and restrictive local orders include curfews and restrictions on gatherings of more than four people. Permission is required for travel between townships, for Rohingya couples to marry, often with a two-child limitation for couples.²² Furthermore, Rohingyas are vulnerable to human rights violations like sexual and gender-based violence, forced labor, limitations on political rights and documentation, arbitrary arrest, torture, ill-treatment in detention, and denial of due process and trial rights. No independent and credible investigations have been conducted into allegations of serious human rights violations.²³ Nonetheless, these systematic human rights violations have triggered migration flows of Rohingyas from Rakhine State to other countries, facilitated by trafficking and smuggling networks.²⁴

¹⁷ “UNICEF scales-up relief for Rohingya facing critical 'shortages of everything',” *UN News Centre*, September 14, 2017, accessed September 16, 2017, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=57517>.

“Myanmar: UN expert urges efforts to break 'worsening cycle of violence' in Rakhine,” *UN News Centre*, August 31, 2017, accessed September 16, 2017, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=57447>.

“Who are the Rohingyas and why are they fleeing Myanmar?” *Amnesty International, News*, September 7, 2017, accessed September 16, 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/09/who-are-the-rohingya-and-why-are-they-fleeing-myanmar/>.

¹⁸ UNHRC, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” pars. 25-54.

¹⁹ United Nations, Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 44 of the Convention: Concluding observations: Myanmar*, CRC/C/MMR/CO3-4 (March 14, 2012), par. 96.

²⁰ OHCHR, “Flash Report,” 35.

UNHRC, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” pars. 25-54.

²¹ United Nations, General Assembly, *Situation of human rights in Myanmar: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*, A/70/412 (October 6, 2015), par. 36, available from <http://undocs.org/A/70/412>.

²² UNGA, “Situation of human, A/70/412,” par. 39.

UNHCR, “Report of the Special, A/HRC/28/72,” par. 55.

²³ UNGA, “Situation of human, A/70/412,” par. 40.

UNHCR, “Report of the Special, A/HRC/28/72,” par. 38.

UNHRC, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” pars. 25-54.

²⁴ UNHRC, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” par. 11.

1.2. Introduction to religious violence and peacebuilding

It is hard to give a definition for the term ‘religion’. However, for the analytical purpose of this thesis, it is very useful to give one. In this thesis, religion will be defined as ‘the human response to a reality perceived as sacred’, disclosing and celebrating ‘the transcendent source and significant of human experience’.²⁵ This definition is given by Appleby. Appleby is aware of the criticism by Cavanaugh, who states that there is no transhistorical and transcultural concept of religion separate from politics, and that religion does not have a dangerous inclination to promote violence. What counts as religion and what does not in any given context depends on different configurations of power and authority.²⁶ As mentioned, Appleby has recognized this critique and stated that it is indeed wrong to think that a transhistorical and transcultural essence determines the attitudes and practices of religious people, apart from their cultural circumstances.²⁷ In other words, there is no underlying idea of religious practices, for this depends on the cultural setting, in this case Myanmar. In this definition, this means that ‘the human response’ is not a fixed concept, but can be determined by culture and configurations of power and authority.

Religion can be source for both violence and peace.²⁸ However, often it is seen as a source for violence. Nowadays, many people assume they know the ‘who and why’ of religious violence.²⁹ Because of the influence of Westernized global media, a market for books with titles features words like ‘sacred terror’ and ‘holy war’ has been opened up and has been very profitable. However, the subject of religion needs more refinement when discussed in policy circles, since, combined with secularist ideas dominating in North America and Europe, religion is perceived as being exotic and is being connected to fundamentalism - and fundamentalism to terrorism.³⁰

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Protecting peace and prosperity in Southeast Asia: synchronizing economic and security agendas* (February 2016), 37-41.

²⁵ R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and Reconciliation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 8.

²⁶ William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 8, 57-58.

²⁷ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 15.

²⁸ Appleby, “The Ambivalence.”

John D. Brewer, Gareth I. Higgins, and Francis Teeney, “Religion and Peacemaking: A Conceptualization,” *Sociology* 44, no. 6 (2010): 1020.

Marc Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence and Peacemaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 13.

²⁹ R. Scott Appleby, “Religious Violence: The Strong, the Weak, and the Pathological,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding*, ed. R. Scott Appleby, Atalia Omer, and David Little (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 33.

³⁰ Appleby, “Religious Violence,” 33.

Nonetheless, as Fox states, considerable proof does exist verifying a relationship between violence and religion.³¹ He describes four causes of religious violence: instrumental violence, violence to defend the religion, religious doctrines that give instructions to go to war and violence happening when benign religious actions of another group are seen as a threat. Moreover, he asserts that it is easy for religious institutions to mobilize their followers because there can be a higher-order claim in religious violence.³² This higher-order claim gives people a larger-than-life reason to turn a conflict violent and thus justifies religious violence.³³ Because of this higher-order claim, a conflict can be called a ‘cosmic war’. In this case, believers assume that an existential threat to their religion exists. This threat does not comprise of just a threat to the religion locally, but it is believed that the religion itself is in danger.³⁴

Appleby also recognizes this violent side of religion, stating that religion stimulates deadly conflicts. However, he also acknowledges another side of religion, emphasizing that religion can be used for conflict transformation by applying religious peacebuilding. Thus, he recognizes the ambivalence of religion.³⁵ Religion can be violent, but when used in peacebuilding, it could play a very big role in helping to end conflicts in involving religious violence, in the long term.³⁶ The key to this conflict transformation would be to revise the religious traditions that have inspired the conflict.³⁷ He focuses on the militant peacemaker - someone that is dedicated to ending conflicts and violence and to creating harmony.³⁸

Appleby is not the only one who believes that religion matters in peacemaking and therefore needs to be taken seriously in conflict transformation. Authors have several reasons to consider religion in conflict resolution. Firstly, religion still plays an important role in people’s lives. This way, religion can contribute to the construction of shared moral values. This also means that states should not automatically be viewed as secular.³⁹ Secondly, contemporary conflicts are often internal wars, based on religious or ethnic issues.⁴⁰ Therefore, when religion is part

³¹ Jonathan Fox, *An Introduction to Religion and Politics: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 131.

³² Fox, “An Introduction,” 124-129, 131.

³³ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God. The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 7, 146.

³⁴ Fox, “An Introduction,” 130.

³⁵ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 7.

³⁶ Appleby, “The Ambivalence.”

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Megan Shore, *Religion and Conflict Resolution: Christianity and South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 18, 22-24.

⁴⁰ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 17.

of a conflict, it can transform itself into becoming part of the solution.⁴¹ Thirdly, most religions share peaceful values, which are a good alternative to the focus on the violent sides of religion. Therefore, it is necessary that conflict resolution experts understand how religion can help contribute to positive peace.⁴²

For the reasons given above, it would be helpful if the relationship between conflict resolution theory and religion would improve. This way, diplomats and conflict experts would profit from a better understanding of religious motives. Conflict resolution tends to have a more secular approach, but a solution to a conflict must speak to the believers' reality and thus sometimes might have to include religious societies.⁴³ A good example of religious peacebuilding is the conflict in Northern Ireland. As was seen in this conflict, the construction of new ideologies and identities based on religious concepts contributed to the conflict transformation.⁴⁴

Religion cannot only be used in conflict transformation by diplomats and conflict experts, but it can also play a role at the 'middle-range' and 'grassroots' levels. For this, Lederach has created a framework that builds on different levels of peacebuilding.⁴⁵ According to Lederach, approaches that only focus on conflict resolution at the 'top leadership' level are ineffective and thus there must be leadership at the other levels.⁴⁶ Religious leaders can be very prominent at the middle-range and hence can help mediate between different levels. Moreover, because of their moral authority, they can inspire 'peace activism'.⁴⁷ Lastly, it must be noted that all mentioned above will be more relevant to socially cohesive societies or in settings where religion has an implication in the conflict.⁴⁸

In this thesis, the theory that has been described above will be applied to the case study of Myanmar. The thesis will try to analyze to what extent the conflict is a religious conflict by examining religious elements and determine whether these have instigated violence. Moreover,

⁴¹ Brewer, "Religion and Peacemaking," 1033.

⁴² Gopin, "Between," 18.

Shore, "Religion," 17-18.

Appleby, "The Ambivalence."

⁴³ Gopin, "Between," 14-15, 28.

⁴⁴ Gladys Ganiel, and Paul Dixon, "Religion, Pragmatic Fundamentalism and the Transformation of the Northern Ireland Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research* 45, no. 3 (2008): 432.

⁴⁵ Ganiel, "Religion, Pragmatic Fundamentalism," 427.

⁴⁶ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington: United State Institute of Peace, 1997), 38-55.

⁴⁷ Ganiel, "Religion, Pragmatic Fundamentalism," 427.

⁴⁸ John D. Brewer, Gareth I. Higgins, and Francis Teeney, *Religion, Civil Society, and Peace in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 28.

religious peacebuilding will be explored as an idea to see if it would be useful in helping to find a solution to the conflict.

1.3. Aims and research question of the thesis

To analyze the conflict in Myanmar from a perspective of religious violence and peacebuilding is relevant because the conflict has not been analyzed much from a religious point of view, even though it might be seen as a religious conflict. The conflict is one where human rights are majorly violated and it has caused many people to flee. Moreover, the country is currently undergoing a democratic transition, while still violation human rights. I believe that this makes it a very interesting case to study.

This thesis therefore aims to examine conflict transformation, religious violence and religious peacebuilding. It will look at the different sides to religion. Moreover, this thesis will analyze the conflict in Myanmar, with the aim to interpret the history and development of the conflict, and to investigate the influence of religion in the conflict and evaluate the concept of religious peacebuilding regarding the conflict. Furthermore, this thesis will examine how religion can influence the outcome of the conflict.

Thus, the thesis will analyze the conflict in Myanmar, focusing on the religious aspects of both the conflict and conflict transformation, by trying the answer the following question: *To what extent is religion a useful factor to understanding the conflict and its transformation in Myanmar involving the Rohingyas?* To answer this question, the thesis will be divided in several sections.

After this introduction, a methodology of the thesis will follow. Then, the second chapter of the thesis will explain what religious violence is comprised of and analyze conflict transformation and religious peacebuilding, trying to answer the following question: “How does religion influence the choice to pick up weapon, and how can it be used in helping the end the conflict?” The third chapter will thoroughly analyze the conflict in Myanmar, focusing on the history of Myanmar and the origin and development of the conflict. It will also discuss the refugee crisis in the countries surrounding Myanmar. It will answer the question of how the conflict in Myanmar concerning the Rohingya originated and has developed. The fourth chapter will apply the theory to the case study, by answering the question how religious elements influence the conflict and whether religious peacebuilding is an appropriate approach to deal with the conflict. This will be followed by a conclusion.

Methodology

As was stated above, the research question of this thesis is as follows: ‘To what extent is religion a useful factor to understanding the conflict and its transformation in Myanmar involving the Rohingyas?’ This section will now explain the methodology of this thesis as to how it plans to answer this question. I will look more extensively into the way my study is composed, why I chose my case, and the disadvantages of this my data (collection). A constructivist approach will be taken, which works well with qualitative data and text data.⁴⁹ The constructivist approach to research is based on understanding the world of human experience, which is continually shaped through the human interaction with objects and other subjects.⁵⁰

Firstly, I would like to state that the definitions that are used throughout this thesis are introduced in the chapter separately, since this provides more clarity. Secondly, I would like to discuss the fact that the thesis concerns a current conflict. This means that my thesis will not always be up-to-date. Because of time constrictions, at one point I will have to stop updating the information on the Myanmar conflict. I have decided to analyze the conflict up to and including 2017.

For this thesis, a qualitative study will be conducted, in which document research and discourse analysis will be done. The documents that will be used for the analysis of the case study are documents presented by several international organizations, like the UN and Amnesty International. Since I will not have to opportunity to visit Myanmar myself to gather data, these documents were chosen because they provide the most legitimate source instead. The data will be gathered mainly from reports, statements and web pages of these organizations. Even though these documents are the most credible option for this thesis, it is still important to keep in mind the bias of both the creator of the document and of the author of the thesis. The organizations have mostly collected their data through interviews with refugees. This means that the documents provide secondhand sources and it is important to not consider the data as necessarily precise. Many reports by the UN that are used are drafted by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar or based on information gathered by this Special Rapporteur. The Special Rapporteur is part of the Special Procedures of the Human Rights

⁴⁹ Noella Mackenzie, and Sally Knipe, “Research dilemmas: Paradigms, methods and methodology,” *Issues in Educational Research* 16, no. 2 (2006): 193-205.

⁵⁰ Louis Cohen, and Lawrence Manion, *Research Methods in Education*, 4th ed. (London, Routledge, 1994), 36.

Council, an independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanism. The Special Rapporteurs serve in their personal capacities, which means that they are independent from any government or organization. Moreover, they work on a voluntary basis, meaning that they are not UN staff and thus do not receive a salary. This creates their independent status. They report annually to the Human Rights Council and to the State itself.⁵¹ Furthermore, Amnesty International claims it is independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion. It is funded mainly by membership and public donations.⁵² The first report by Amnesty International that is used in this report dates back to 2016 and is based on interviews that have been conducted with victims and eyewitnesses of abuses. For this report, Amnesty International also spoke to human rights monitors, humanitarian workers, journalists and Rohingya leaders. Research was conducted mostly from outside the country, since Amnesty International was not granted access to northern Rakhine State by the Myanmar government.⁵³ For the second report, published in 2017, Amnesty International was able to make field trips to Rakhine State, where interviews were conducted. They met with victims and with township and state level government officials. Moreover, an extensive review of legislation, academic and other literature was done for this report.⁵⁴

As for discourse analysis, I have chosen to work with critical discourse analysis in the chapters where this data will be used, for it provides insight into the interests and power dynamics of the different organizations cited. It studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted and reproduced by text and talk in the social and political context.⁵⁵ This way, it addresses social problems, since power relations are discursive. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory, because discourse is a form of action and constitutes society and culture.⁵⁶ Critical discourse analysis then deals with the relationship between discourse and power.⁵⁷ The Myanmar government uses discourse as power by refusing to call Rohingya by the name they would like to be identified with. Social power can be defined in terms of control.

⁵¹ "Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council," *United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner* (website), accessed January 16, 2018, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/Introduction.aspx>.

⁵² Amnesty International, *"Caged without a roof": Apartheid in Myanmar's Rakhine state*, ASA 16/7484/2017 (New York: Amnesty International Ltd, 2017).

⁵³ Amnesty International, *We are at breaking point: Rohingya: Persecuted in Myanmar, neglected in Bangladesh*, ASA 16/5362/2016 (London: Amnesty International Ltd, 2016), 10-11.

⁵⁴ Amnesty International, "Caged," 16-17.

⁵⁵ Teun A. van Dijk, "Critical Discourse Analysis," in *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, ed. Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen, Heidi E. Hamilton (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001), 352.

⁵⁶ Norman Fairclough, and Ruth Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis," in *Discourse as Social Interaction*, ed. Teun van Dijk (London: Sage, 1997), 271-280.

⁵⁷ Van Dijk, "Critical Discourse," 364.

Groups have power if they are able to control the acts and minds of other groups, as is the case with the Myanmar government.⁵⁸ As will become clear in this thesis, the monks (and their discourse) in Myanmar also have great influence over the acts and minds of citizens in Myanmar. Access to specific forms of discourse is a power resource, because discourse can influence people's minds. The groups who control most influential discourse have more chances to control the minds and actions of others.⁵⁹ In the case of Myanmar, it is important to be aware that the government regulates a lot of the data, by preventing organizations from entering certain areas. Moreover, power relations are shown in the data that is gathered from refugees, for they still fear repercussions from the military or other citizens.

Furthermore, different theories will be used. For these, I will gather scientific, peer-reviewed articles and consult books. Moreover, a case study will be conducted of the conflict in Myanmar, as was explained in the introduction. This was chosen, as was also stated in the introduction, because the conflict has not been analyzed much from a perspective of religious violence and peacebuilding. Moreover, since 2011, the country is undergoing drastic changes to transform into a democracy. However, this conflict still involves many human rights violations, which the government chooses to ignore. This is very odd considering the country wants to become more democratic and makes it an interesting case to study.

There are a few disadvantages to my approach, having to do with my data. Firstly, I will not visit Myanmar and will thus not have any primary material that I collected myself. This means that I will have to rely on other sources. In order to still have the most legitimate and trustworthy sources possible, I chose to use the reports drafted mainly by the United Nations. These reports will be analyzed using critical discourse analysis. Moreover, the information in the reports is all translated. There can be mistakes in interpretation and translation by researchers or journalists in Myanmar. Since I do not speak the language, I do have to rely on translated sources. Here I have chosen to rely on the sources from the UN as well, for similar reasons as mentioned before. I trust that this organization works with skilled translators and interpreters. Another disadvantage is the lack of data about and access to the conflict in Myanmar in general. Because parts of Myanmar, and particularly the Rakhine State, are closed off, it is difficult for everyone to gather information about the conflict. Many reports are made from information that is told by refugees who have fled to other countries. The people who are still in the country might not want to talk, because they are scared of government reprisals if

⁵⁸ Van Dijk, "Critical Discourse," 354-355.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 355

they were identified as having spoken to an international organization. This can pose challenges to the analysis of the conflict concerning the Rohingya in Myanmar and thus I will have to keep this in mind when writing my thesis.

Chapter 2: Religious violence and peacebuilding

For centuries, wars and conflicts have broken out all over the world.⁶⁰ Religion has made a serious contribution to this bloodshed.⁶¹ In this chapter, I would like to find out why this is the case: How does religion influence the choice to pick up weapon, and how can it be used in helping the end the conflict? Therefore, this chapter will focus on religious violence and peacebuilding. It hopes to thoroughly examine the literature on religious violence, conflict transformation and religious peacebuilding. By doing so, this chapter can be of guidance when analyzing the conflict in Myanmar. This chapter will be structured as follows. Firstly, it will focus on religious violence. It will try to determine what constitutes religious violence and why religious violence happens. Then, the chapter will go into conflict transformation, to transform violence to peace. After that, the chapter will go into depth about religious peacebuilding, to find ways in which religion can contribute to the peacebuilding process. The chapter will end by illustrating the example of religious peacebuilding in Northern Ireland.

For this thesis, it is important to examine the theory about religious violence and peacebuilding, because it will be used later to analyze the case study of the conflict in Myanmar concerning the Rohingyas. To be able to properly analyze the case study, it is essential to have created a theoretical framework.

2.1. Religious violence

As was stated in the introduction, ‘religious violence’ will be discussed first. Religion is in everyday discourse often linked to violence, with some even stating that religion has been responsible for more death and suffering than any other human activity.⁶² Even though people

⁶⁰ Lederach gives three sub-categories of ‘armed conflict’. A “minor armed conflict”, as defined by Wallenstein and Axell, is “a conflict between armed forces in which fewer than twenty-five people have died in a given year, and in which at least one of the parties was a state”. An “intermediate armed conflict” can be defined as “a situation in which at least one thousand deaths have occurred over the course of the conflict, with at least 25 deaths occurring in a particular year”. Lastly, a conflict will be called a “war”, when at least a thousand deaths have occurred in a given year. Thus, an “armed conflict” comprises all three of these, being a “conflict that claims more than a thousand lives over its course”.

Lederach, “Building,” 4.

Peter Wallenstein, and Karin Axell, “Armed Conflict at the End of the Cold War, 1989-1992,” *Journal of Peace Research* 30, no. 3 (August 1993): 331-346.

⁶¹ Gopin, “Between,” 13.

⁶² Eric Christianson, and Christopher Partridge, “Introduction,” in *Holy Terror: Understanding Religion and Violence in Popular Culture*, ed. Eric Christianson, and Christopher Partridge (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 1.

Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence* (New York, Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 338.

only started being particularly wary of the dangers of religion after 9/11, religious violence has a long history, having occurred in the form of crusades, inquisitions, holy wars of the past and now jihads and other religious conflicts. Even now, many conflicts, including the one in Myanmar, have a religious aspect to them. Despite the fact that the link between religion and violence is often understudied or underrated, scholars agree that this linkage does exist, even though religious motives are not always clear.⁶³ Nowadays, many societies are based on secularist values, which cast religion as a violent, unreasonable force that must be excluded from all political activities.⁶⁴ Because religious motives can inspire bloodshed, it is important to look into this link at the start of the thesis.

2.1.1. Definitions

To start the sub-chapter, a few helpful definitions will be given. As has been stated in the introduction, the term ‘religion’ is one that is difficult to define. Nonetheless, is it useful to have one to work with for the analytical purpose of this thesis. Cavanaugh writes that most scholars writing on the relationship between religion and violence neglect to give a definition of religion.⁶⁵ He actually does not define the term either, stating that there is no transhistorical and transcultural concept of religion essentially separate from politics. What can be seen as ‘religion’ depends on the context, keeping in mind different configurations of power and authority.⁶⁶ In this thesis, the definition of Appleby will be used, for he himself also recognizes that it is wrong to think that a transhistorical essence determines the attitudes and practices of religious people, apart from their cultural circumstances.⁶⁷ Therefore, one always needs to consider the cultural setting of the author and of the (religious) conflict that is described, in this case Myanmar. Appleby defines ‘religion’ as ‘the human response to a reality perceived as

⁶³ Christianson, “Introduction,” 2.

John D. Carlson, and Matt Correa, “How Shall We Study Religion and Conflict? Challenges and Opportunities in the Early Twenty-First Century,” in *Religion and Foreign Affairs: Essential Readings*, ed. Dennis R. Hoover, and Douglas M. Johnston (United States of America: Baylor University Press, 2012), 234.

Jolyon Mitchell, “Seeing Beyond Fear of Terrorism on the Web,” in *Holy Terror: Understanding Religion and Violence in Popular Culture*, ed. Eric Christianson, and Christopher Partridge (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 11.

Judy Carter, and Gordon S. Smith, “Religious Peacebuilding: From Potential to Action,” in *Religion and Peacebuilding*, ed. Harold Coward, and Gordon S. Smith (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 279.

Philip Jenkins, “The Politics of Persecuted Religious Minorities,” in *Religion and Foreign Affairs: Essential Readings*, ed. Dennis R. Hoover, and Douglas M. Johnston (United States of America: Baylor University Press, 2012), 218.

Seth Kaplan, “Inspiring Development in Fragile States,” in *Religion and Foreign Affairs: Essential Readings*, ed. Dennis R. Hoover, and Douglas M. Johnston (United States of America: Baylor University Press, 2012), 376.

⁶⁴ Armstrong, “Fields,” 344.

⁶⁵ Cavanaugh, “The Myth,” 16.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 8, 57-58.

⁶⁷ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 15.

sacred', disclosing and celebrating 'the transcendent source and significant of human experience'.⁶⁸ As for religious actors, he chooses to include 'people who have been formed by a religious community and people who are acting with the intent to uphold, extend, or defend its values and precepts'.⁶⁹ I prefer this definition because it is very inclusive, for the definition encompasses not just the members of religious communities, but also other people who carry out religious values. Lastly, religious violence can be defined as 'the use of coercion, including lethal force, by religiously motivated individuals, groups, movements, or institutions'.⁷⁰ The term 'religious violence' can be criticized because it can give the illusion of a special kind of violence that is exceptionally dangerous. It can classify religion as irrational and as something that is necessarily more inclined to violence.⁷¹ However, in this definition, the focus is not on the religious *violence*, but on the religious actors. It does not concentrate on the violence being religious, but on the actors having a religious motivation. Religious actors fall in the extremist category when they legitimate violence as a religious obligation or sacred duty.⁷²

2.1.2. Why?

Our global community has a long history of legitimating the use of armed force for reasons of security and defense.⁷³ As established above, religion is also used as a reason for violence. Why does religion turn violent? There are several explanations for this, which will be given in the hope to be able to provide a better explanation as to why Buddhist people started using violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar. For this part, I will use the categories of causes for religious violence as defined by Fox. The first category focuses on instrumental violence. Religious groups can turn to violence when they have a political agenda that they cannot pursue through peaceful means, for instance because they are not powerful enough to create the social change they desire.⁷⁴ Moreover, faith is a major determinant of social exclusion in some countries. In this way, it contributes to poverty, disempowerment and conflict.⁷⁵ This might be the case in Myanmar, a predominantly Buddhist country, which is home to many minorities. The second category, as defined by Fox, is based on individual and group identities. If a believer thinks that a threat to his religion exist, this threat also constitutes a threat to his

⁶⁸ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 8.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 9.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 282.

⁷¹ Cavanaugh, "The Myth," 5, 9.

⁷² David Little, and Scott Appleby, "A Moment of Opportunity: The Promise of Religious Peacebuilding in an Era of Religious and Ethnic Conflict," in *Religion and Peacebuilding*, ed. Harold Coward, and Gordon S. Smith (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 4.

⁷³ Lederach, "Building," 12.

⁷⁴ Jonathan Fox, *An Introduction to Religion and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 124-125, 133.

⁷⁵ Kaplan, "Inspiring Development," 376.

identity, since religion and identity can be intertwined. The believers who feel the threat, will respond by what *they* believe is a normal reaction.⁷⁶ Here, secular modernity, remarkably, plays a role in encouraging religious violence, because, as it seems, religious traditions feel weakened in a more global, secular, world.⁷⁷ Furthermore, religion can inspire a feeling where a believer is taken to another world, out of his everyday life. Religious violence can also create this feeling of ecstasy.⁷⁸ This can be related to the concept of ‘cosmic’ war that Juergensmeyer introduces. In a cosmic war, one’s way of living is perceived as being threatened. This results in a battle between good and evil, transcending the human experience. Here, believers have placed religious images in the service of worldly battles, giving the war moral justifications and sacralizing violence, defending their basic identity and dignity.⁷⁹ The third category of causes for religion to turn violent concentrates on religious laws and doctrines which have explicit instructions to go to (holy) war. In this case, a war can be justified to defend the religion and can include conquering members of other religions.⁸⁰ Regarding the conflict in Myanmar, this cause seems strange, for Buddhism is generally known to be a very peaceful religion. I will try to go into this contradiction more in a later stage of the thesis. The fourth and final category developed by Fox includes religious activities that are in themselves benign, but are not perceived as such by others. An example of this is the building of churches or mosques. Sometimes, even the mere presence of a religion in a certain region can be the reason for religious violence.⁸¹

I would like to add to Fox’s list of causes, by drawing attention to the role of a religious leader. External circumstances can influence one’s decision to use violence religiously. The biggest influencer in this case is the religious leader, who can determine the attitude and behavior of his followers in a conflict. A religious leader forms and mobilizes his religious community.⁸² When a leader sees an injustice in his society, he can mobilize his followers to retaliate against their enemies, thus creating religious violence. In the case of Myanmar, it seems that certain important monks have instigated bloodshed by for giving certain speeches, for example. A leader could of course also use nonviolent discourse.⁸³

⁷⁶ Fox, “An Introduction,” 126-128.

⁷⁷ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 57-58.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁷⁹ Juergensmeyer, “Terror in the Mind,” 146, 154-155, 161-163.

⁸⁰ Fox, “An Introduction,” 128-129.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁸² Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 27, 284.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 282.

Lastly, Carlson and Correa mention to be cautious when studying religious behavior turning violent. Studies of religion tend to explain religious behavior in two ways. Firstly, the ‘blame’ position involves an anti-religious angle, where religion is seen as the root cause of the violence. The ‘exonerate’ position wants to demonstrate how religious violence is not religious in its core; religion is used for other (political, ideological) ends. However, the reality is more complex than one of these two positions. Therefore, a middle position should be taken, where the concept of religious violence is used to explain how violence can be religious, without arguing that religion is inherently prone to violence or intolerance.⁸⁴ Thus, when analyzing the conflict in Myanmar from a religious perspective, it is still important to keep other aspects and causes in mind.

2.1.3. *Contemporary conflicts and religion*

In contemporary conflicts, religion and nationalism are often entwined, as seems the case in Rakhine State. This subchapter will now discuss contemporary conflicts. Religion plays a big role in shaping national identity.⁸⁵ An ‘ethnic group’ can be defined as ‘those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarity of physical type or customs or both, or because of the memories of colonization and migration’.⁸⁶ Since religion and ethnicity are both important markers for one’s identity and they are often intertwined in a conflict, it is impossible to figure out their precise roles in some conflicts. Therefore, we call these conflicts ‘ethnoreligious’.⁸⁷ Contemporary conflicts are often intrastate, ethnoreligious conflicts, involving an internal struggle for political autonomy.⁸⁸ Because ethnicity and religion are fused in these conflicts, a threat to the nation can be perceived as a threat to religion, which in turn, as explained above, can provide a supernatural justification for violence.⁸⁹ This way, religion is politicized in contemporary conflicts.⁹⁰ It will thus be difficult to establish exactly

⁸⁴ Carlson, “How Shall We Study,” 240.

⁸⁵ Atalia Omer, *When Peace is not enough: How the Israeli Peace Camp Thinks about Religion, Nationalism, and Justice* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 77.

⁸⁶ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 59.

Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, vol. 1, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 385.

⁸⁷ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 60-61, 107, 283.

Harold R. Isaacs, *Idols of the Tribe: Group Identity and Political Change* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).

⁸⁸ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 58-60.

Atsuhiko Katano, “Conflict prevention and peacebuilding,” *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics*, ed. Jeffrey Haynes (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 351.

Eric. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 169-170.

Lederach, “Building,” 8.

⁸⁹ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 60-61, 107, 283.

Isaacs, “Idols.”

⁹⁰ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 164.

what the religious factor is in the conflict in Rakhine State, which is what I will try to do later in this thesis.

One of the reasons for these conflicts is globalization. Because of globalization, encounters between different cultures and religious traditions happen more often than before. These encounters can be harmonious, but can also result in conflicts. The different religious traditions have different worldviews and therefore ethnic conflicts can be framed in religious terms.⁹¹

In these intrastate conflicts between domestic communities, various non-state actors regard their use of arms in the pursuit of social change as legitimate.⁹² The conflicts often have endured for a long time, having installed a deep fear and experience of violence that will sustain the image of the enemy.⁹³ Persecuted minorities are an easy target to create a sentiment of violence.⁹⁴ Religious persecution can then provide massive obstacles to nation-building and produce a vicious cycle of violence.⁹⁵ In Myanmar, the conflict has installed a deep fear in the Rohingya, but they seem to still feel like Myanmar is their home and like that is where their belong.

2.1.4. Ambivalence of religion

Thus far, this subchapter has focused on religion inspiring violence. However, religion also has another side: the one that values human life.⁹⁶ Appleby identifies this ambivalence of religion which can legitimate violent acts, while at the same time limit them. Violence can be viewed as an instrument of the enforcement of religious norms, but it is also something that demolishes.⁹⁷ Religion is ambiguous because it has the authority to both kill and heal.

Religious experiences are filtered through the perception of individuals, which is limited by the (lack of) knowledge of these individuals.⁹⁸ One could therefore say that the ambivalence is not inherent in the sacred, but resides in the imperfect perception of the sacred.⁹⁹ It stems from religious traditions, which are internally plural. This plurality gives a lot of power to the religious leader. This influence is expressed by the power to choose out of many teachings what he defines as good and evil.¹⁰⁰ Many religious leaders are promoting tolerance towards

⁹¹ Haynes, "Introduction," 5.

⁹² Lederach, "Building," 9.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁹⁴ Jenkins, "The Politics," 221.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 224.

⁹⁶ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 10.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 31, 55.

others, but also many leaders choose to use religion as an inspiration to turn to violence.¹⁰¹ This internal pluralism can help religious traditions with their adaptation to changing times and circumstances.¹⁰² In sum, most world religion have created sources to both build empathy for violence and reject violence.¹⁰³

Concluding this subchapter, it can be said that religion does have the ability to inspire violence. Usually, this is inspired by a perceived threat to the religion, and thus to the identity of the believers. People with different religious as well as secularist views are perceived as threatening. Contemporary conflicts, like the one involving the Rohingya in Myanmar, are often ethnoreligious conflicts, where it is not clear which factors exactly have inspired the conflict. However, they are often dubbed as religious conflicts by outsiders. Furthermore, it is hard to identify religious terrorists and to differentiate between religious and secular terrorism. Moreover, the ambivalence of religion has been analyzed, showing that religion can lead to violence, but it can also contribute to peace, which is what this chapter will focus on after it has explained the basics of conflict transformation.

2.2. Conflict transformation

The chapter will now turn its focus to conflict transformation. In the early part of the 20th century, peace research and conflict studies began to emerge as disciplines.¹⁰⁴ In 1992, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, then Secretary General of the United Nations, introduced the concepts of conflict transformation and peacebuilding to the United Nations in a report titled ‘An Agenda for Peace’. In this report, he points to areas through which the peace-related functions of the UN could be strengthened.¹⁰⁵ By doing so, he has increased awareness about conflict transformation.¹⁰⁶ Conflict transformation can help to change a conflict. This subchapter will first go into the objective of conflict transformation: peace. After that it will analyze the concept itself and discuss peacebuilding.

¹⁰¹ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 281.

¹⁰² Ibid., 27, 31, 41.

¹⁰³ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 79.

Haynes, “Introduction,” 6.

Little, “A Moment,” 2.

Stephen Ellis, and Gerrie Ter Haar, *Religion and Development in Africa* (2004).

¹⁰⁴ Lederach, “Building,” 3.

¹⁰⁵ Katano, “Conflict prevention,” 353.

¹⁰⁶ Lederach, “Building,” 63.

Before starting this sub-chapter, I would like to clarify a few matters. In the 1990s, a more nuanced model of conflict transformation was developed, based on the lifecycle of conflicts. This lifecycle goes as follows: it starts with peaceful social change, which turn to conflict formation, to violent conflict, to conflict transformation and back to peaceful social change.¹⁰⁷ Thus, conflict arises out of social change. It is hard to establish the social change that has inspired this conflict in Myanmar, since Muslims have been discriminated against in Myanmar for a very long time. Now, the conflict seems to have started by an incident involving rape and murder, which was around the same time that the democratic transitions started in the country after a long period of dictatorships, which is a peaceful social change. The several phases of the conflict respond to several forms of intervention that might be used in that stage. For social change, peacebuilding is used. To end conflict formation, prevention can be useful. When it comes to violent conflict, it can be effective to practice peacekeeping and lastly, when it comes to conflict transformation, peacemaking will be useful. In this chapter, the focus will be on conflict transformation, since, as will be explained later, it offers a holistic view, and on peacebuilding, because it is important to address the root causes of the conflict through social change. This will also be discussed in this chapter.¹⁰⁸

2.2.1. The concept of peace

This subchapter will start with a thorough explanation of the aim of conflict transformation: peace. It is good to establish what it is exactly that we hope to achieve through conflict transformation. One of the most used distinctions for peace is that of negative and positive peace, as introduced by Galtung. Negative peace concerns the absence of open war and direct violence.¹⁰⁹ This is thus focused on ending the violence, but does not address the root causes of the conflict.¹¹⁰ Positive peace is the ‘achievement of fairness, justice and social redistribution’.¹¹¹ Here, the focus lies on the transformation of underlying systemic violence and relationships.¹¹² Thus, where negative peace is the situation without direct personal violence, positive peace is characterized by the absence of structural violence or social

¹⁰⁷ N.b. A conflict can also take many other paths, it does not have to follow this sequence.

¹⁰⁸ Oliver Ramsbotham, Hugh Miall, and Tom Woodhouse, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 25-26.

¹⁰⁹ Johan Galtung, “An Editorial,” *Journal of Peace Research* 1, no.1 (1964): 2.
Brewer, “Religion and Peacemaking,” 1022.

¹¹⁰ Omer, “When Peace,” 51.

¹¹¹ Brewer, “Religion and Peacemaking,” 1022.

Galtung, “An Editorial,” 2.

¹¹² Galtung, “An Editorial,” 1-4.

Johan Galtung, “Peace,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 11, ed. D. L. Sills (New York: Macmillan and Free Press, 1968), 478-479.

Omer, “When Peace,” 51-52, 68.

injustice, thus creating a situation where resources and roles are allocated in an appropriate way.¹¹³

The distinction between negative and positive peace has received criticism. Holm states that the term ‘negative peace’ is a ‘misnomer’. He believes that the terms positive and negative are not very useful, because what is perceived are two phases of war and peace which succeed each other. In addition, peace is a very complex concept and it is not just ‘not-war’.¹¹⁴ Moreover, Boulding asserts that the term ‘positive peace’ is not the opposite of peace and has little to do with peace. Refraining from doing something bad, does not mean that one produces something good.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, the concepts of positive and negative peace are presented as a continuum. However, when the concept is stretched this far, going from a state of cold war to a utopia, it is hard to see the linkage between the two.¹¹⁶ Galtung himself also recognized that his concept of ‘positive peace’ is a vague one.¹¹⁷ One might say that if there is no clear concept of positive peace, then what is the goal of peace research? Galtung reacted to this by saying that ‘the definition of peace should not stand in the way of realizing new futures’.¹¹⁸ Therefore, I will still use these concepts in my study, since they do provide a guidance as to the goal of conflict transformation, as long as I will keep these points of criticism in mind.

2.2.2. Dimensions of conflict transformation

To achieve the peace described above, conflict transformation can be applied. Conflict transformation can be defined as ‘the replacement of violent with nonviolent means of settling disputes’.¹¹⁹ It is thus a very broad concept, which consists of three dimensions: conflict management, conflict resolution and structural reform.¹²⁰ Even though religious peacebuilding will be reviewed later, I would like to mention that religious educators lay the groundwork for conflict transformation through their long-term service in the classroom, training seminar or the institute.¹²¹ Now, I will first examine the dimensions, where I will also mention the tasks

¹¹³ Hans-Henrik Holm, “Johan Galtung and the Science of Human Fulfilment: From Petal-picking to Mega Research,” in *Johan Galtung: A Bibliography of his Scholarly and Popular Writings 1951-80*, ed. Nils Petter Gleditsch, Odvar Leine, Hans-Henrik Holm, Tord Høivik, Arne Martin Klausen, Erik Rudenk, and Håkan Wiberg (Oslo: International Peace Research Institution, 1980), 30.

¹¹⁴ Kenneth E. Boulding, “Twelve Friendly Quarrels with Johan Galtung,” in *Johan Galtung: A Bibliography of his Scholarly and Popular Writings 1951-80*, ed. Nils Petter Gleditsch, Odvar Leine, Hans-Henrik Holm, Tord Høivik, Arne Martin Klausen, Erik Rudenk, and Håkan Wiberg (Oslo: International Peace Research Institution, 1980), 13.

¹¹⁵ Boulding, “Twelve Friendly Quarrels,” 13.

¹¹⁶ Holm “Johan Galtung,” 29.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 32.

¹¹⁹ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 212.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Little, “A Moment,” 10.

and achievements of religious actors, after which I will turn to discussing a more holistic view of conflict transformation.

Firstly, conflict management can be defined as ‘the prevention of conflict from becoming violent or expanding to other areas’.¹²² The conflict first has to be recognized, so that observers can show their presence to discourage violence, for example to ensure the legitimacy of elections.¹²³ This is a dimension in which religious actors have been very active, by calling officials to account for unjust policies, raising popular awareness of the causes of the conflict and thus helping to prevent further escalation of the conflict.¹²⁴ I believe that work has been done in this dimension regarding the conflict in Myanmar.

The second dimension, conflict resolution, constitutes of ‘removing, to the extent possible, the inequalities between the disputants by means of mediation, negotiation, and/or advocacy and testimony on behalf of one or more parties to a conflict’.¹²⁵ Religious actors can serve as mediators, with the aim to combat prejudice and ethnoreligious hatred through dialogue and education. In any conflict, reconciliation become possible when the different parties stop dehumanizing each other and begin to recognize themselves in their enemy, which has not happened yet in Rakhine State. This is why, in mediation, one is often asked to stand in the shoes of the one’s enemy. People have to start to trust each other and start accepting peaceful solutions. To settle their differences, the different sides need to find a formula to share what they both want.¹²⁶ This dimension is crucial, because it means that individuals or (religious) communities have decided to intervene in the conflict.¹²⁷

Structural reform comprises the third dimension. It can be defined as ‘the efforts to address the root causes of the conflict and to develop long-term practices and institutions conducive to peaceful, nonviolent relations in the society’.¹²⁸ The general objective in this dimension is to replace those institutions that spawn ethnoreligious hostility and violence with new institutions

¹²² Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 212.

Little, “A Moment,” 5-6.

¹²³ Little, “A Moment,” 6, 93.

¹²⁴ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 213-214.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹²⁶ Madeleine Albright, “Faith and Diplomacy,” in *Religion and Foreign Affairs: Essential Readings*, ed. Dennis R. Hoover, and Douglas M. Johnston (United States of America: Baylor University Press, 2012), 539.

Marc Gopin, “Religion as Destroyer and Creator of Peace: A Postmodern on Failed Peace Processes,” in *Religion and Foreign Affairs: Essential Readings*, ed. Dennis R. Hoover, and Douglas M. Johnston (United States of America: Baylor University Press, 2012), 278.

¹²⁷ Little, “A Moment,” 11.

¹²⁸ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 212.

that encourage nonviolence and peace.¹²⁹ Another important factor is the development of relationships, by providing a space for the parties to encounter and engage as people and a place where they can express feelings openly while also recognizing their shared future.¹³⁰ Religious actors have a reputation for long-term commitment to the society and therefore are well-suited to help with the restoration of social relations and political stability after a period of conflict. They can serve, amongst others, as social critics, educators, and institution builders.¹³¹ It is important that the leaders leading the reconciliation have the respect of both sides, instead of someone who stands on the outside or who has been an oppressor or perpetrator of violence.¹³²

Conflict transformation offers a holistic approach that characterizes conflicts as underlying structures and relationships. To transform a conflict, one needs to determine these core conditions and draw a long-term plan for reconfiguring the underlying patterns or deeper roots that have given rise to the conflict, like poverty might be a root cause in Rakhine State.¹³³ The root causes of the conflict can often only be understood through a regional perspective.¹³⁴ Conflict transformation entails the change or movement from a hidden stage to confrontation, to negotiation, to dynamic, peaceful relationships. Hereby, it is valuable to keep the sustainability of the movement in mind and to create a process that can regenerate itself over time, like a spiral of peace and development.¹³⁵ Although it is important to respond immediately to a crisis, one needs to recognize the longer-term vision.¹³⁶ Religious actors have participated in conflict transformation under different sets of sociopolitical circumstances, in which they have worked together with government, nongovernment and other religious actors.¹³⁷

2.2.3. *Peacebuilding*

Whereas peacekeeping wants to achieve negative peace, peacebuilding is used to remove structural violence and achieve structural peace. It thus aims to achieve constructive social

¹²⁹ Little, "A Moment," 13.

¹³⁰ Lederach, "Building," 34.

¹³¹ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 220.

Little, "A Moment," 13.

¹³² Little, "A Moment," 15.

¹³³ John-Paul Lederach, *Little Book of Conflict Transformation; Clear Articulation Of The Guiding Principles By A Pioneer In The Field* (New York: Good Books, 2003), 29-32.

Omer, "When peace," 67.

¹³⁴ Lederach, "Building," 12.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹³⁷ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 212, 230.

change.¹³⁸ The broader field of peacebuilding looks at several things: the root causes of a conflict, crisis management, crisis prevention, a vision for future relationship and transformation.¹³⁹ People and institutions are the basis for peacebuilding, since they serve as a foundation for sustaining the transformation.¹⁴⁰ According to Galtung, it is important to use citizens' initiatives, since raising consciousness is in itself a fight against structural violence.¹⁴¹ The people in Rakhine State thus need to take initiative.

Peacebuilding must thus be inclusive. If it embraces multiple facets and has a broad view, inclusive peacebuilding can contribute to the constructive transformation of a conflict.¹⁴² Peacebuilding consists of three pillars: the long term view of the conflict, an adequate descriptive language, and an understanding of the value paradoxes in the peacemaking endeavor.¹⁴³ Firstly, the long term view of the conflict means that the restructuring of the relationship is remembered throughout the process and that the root causes of the conflict are handled in the peace process. Moreover, the solutions should be accepted by all parties to the conflict.¹⁴⁴ Secondly, conflict transformation provides a holistic understanding of the process, in which relationships are changed. It provides a language that is more appropriate to the nature of conflict and the goal and purpose of the field of peacebuilding, since it suggests a dynamic understanding of the conflict.¹⁴⁵ Lastly, paradoxes can be useful in understanding conflicts and exploring peacemaking. Lederach mentions four valuable paradoxes. He mentions personal and systemic change, justice and mercy, empowerment and independence, and process and outcome. Peacebuilding tries to encompass all of these elements.¹⁴⁶

For peacebuilding, instead of the traditional framework that concentrates on statist diplomacy, we need a strategic, conceptual and responsive framework, so that a comprehensive approach can be used, which centralizes the rebuilding of relationships. The challenge of building peace is to generate an infrastructure for a sustainable transformation, focusing on the deep-rooted

¹³⁸ John Paul Lederach, *The Moral imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5, 175.

Omer, "When peace," 66.

¹³⁹ Lederach, "Building," 79-81.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁴¹ Holm "Johan Galtung," 41.

¹⁴² John-Paul Lederach, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 12.

Lederach, "Building," 66-67.

¹⁴³ Lederach, "Preparing," 12.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 13-16.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 16-19.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 19-22.

causes of the conflict and the divided societies, as well as taking care of the direct needs.¹⁴⁷ Thus, in Myanmar right now, many people in need have to be taken care of, but it is also important to try to figure out the root causes of the conflict to generate a sustainable transformation. One important aspect here is the restoration of relationships, i.e. reconciliation.¹⁴⁸ Relationships lie at the basis of a conflict, which is why restoring the relationship is part of its long-term solution. During reconciliation, ways must be found to address the past without getting into a vicious cycle of mutual exclusiveness. The first step towards peace and rebuilding relationships is the acknowledgement of the other's story. Then, it is possible to look forward and envision a shared future. Reconciliation presents a place where the past and the future can meet.¹⁴⁹

Peacebuilding produces several dilemmas. Firstly, peacebuilding is sometimes seen as a project, where certain kind of activities will lead to certain outcomes. However, peacebuilding is about creating adaptive and dynamic processes. Instead of facilitating, project-oriented thinking might limit the peacebuilding process.¹⁵⁰ Secondly, consecutive to the previous dilemma, the progress of projects is measured by connected task and outcome to a certain time period, but conflicts are dynamic and unpredictable. When trying to solve a conflict, it is important to think about its history. This makes the process slow, but designed for the long-term.¹⁵¹ Thirdly, one needs to take into account that reporting a conflict must be conceptualized, to take care of the sensitivity and confidentiality of the people involved.¹⁵² It might be hard for the victims, in this case the Rohingya, to talk about the conflict. Lastly, the institutional capacity building in a society is often overlooked. Frequently, high-profile individuals are involved in the peacebuilding process. However, they can create an idea about the deeper nature of peacebuilding that is distorted.¹⁵³ I will go into this more when discussing Lederach's vision.

In conclusion, this subchapter has reviewed conflict transformation. This is a basis for the next subchapter. The aim of conflict transformation is to create a long-lasting peace. Conflict transformation is a holistic concept, focusing on the underlying structures of a conflict. It

¹⁴⁷ Lederach, "Building," 24, 146, 152.

¹⁴⁸ Katano, "Conflict prevention," 362.

¹⁴⁹ Lederach, "Building," 26-27.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 130-131.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 132-133.

consists of three dimensions: conflict management, conflict resolution and structural reform. Peacebuilding also focuses on the root causes of a conflict, in which relationships play an important role. Now, the chapter will try to show how religion can contribute towards conflict transformation.

2.3. Religious peacebuilding

As was demonstrated in the previous part of this chapter, the field of peace and conflict studies has offered many secular theories, approaches and techniques for conflict transformation and peacebuilding. This secularist discourse can blind people when trying to determine the root causes of the conflict. Approaches inspired by spirituality are often missing.¹⁵⁴ In the case of Myanmar, the focus is often on ethnicity, while an approach with an emphasis on religion could also be helpful. As we have analyzed above, even though religion has a history of violence, it also has a history of peacemaking.¹⁵⁵ Religious traditions have been involved with helping the poor and the oppressed. Religious actors, including a variety of people, from clerical human rights advocates and development workers to missionaries and international (multi-)religious bodies, now need to incorporate human rights into their religious language.¹⁵⁶ Religious actors can form a bridge between different communities and help to remove the explosive elements from the religious language that is or was used.¹⁵⁷ This chapter will now focus on religious peacebuilding. It will start with a few definitions and an explanation of what religious peacebuilding entails. After that, it will concentrate on why and how religious peacebuilding works.

2.3.1 Definitions and religious leaders

First of all, it is important to establish a few definitions. Religious peacebuilding can be defined as the activities by religious actors and institutions to resolve a conflict, while creating tolerant societies and building social relations.¹⁵⁸ Religious actors are involved at many different

¹⁵⁴ Carter, "Religious Peacebuilding," 281.

Omer, "When peace," 60.

¹⁵⁵ Scott Appleby, "Religion and Global Affairs: Religious "Militants for Peace"," in *Religion and Foreign Affairs: Essential Readings*, ed. Dennis R. Hoover, and Douglas M. Johnston (United States of America: Baylor University Press, 2012), 246.

¹⁵⁶ Appleby, "Religion and Global," 246.

Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 245-248, 254-255, 263, 265, 276.

¹⁵⁷ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 280.

¹⁵⁸ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 212.

Lederach, "Building," 20.

Little, "A Moment," 5.

locations and at various levels of society.¹⁵⁹ They are also present at every phase of the conflict: they try to prevent violent conflict from occurring, to keep conflicts that have broken out from growing more violent, and to resolve conflicts by envisioning a new future and addressed the root causes of the conflict.¹⁶⁰ By doing this, religious leaders have brought visibility and influence to conflict transformation.¹⁶¹ As was written above, religious communities are characterized by internal pluralism. This makes religious peacebuilding a complex activity, involving also the relationship of the religious actors to the parties and the social, cultural and political contexts of the conflict.¹⁶²

Moreover, I would like to quickly explain Appleby's 'militant peacemaker'. Appleby defines a militant as someone who is 'engaged in warfare' or a social organization 'in which efficiency in war is the primary object aimed at'.¹⁶³ However, he also mentions the 'militant peacemaker'. According to Appleby, a militant peacemaker is found in most religious traditions. While a militant can be violent, a militant peacemaker wants to end violence and is committed to finding a resolution to the conflict.¹⁶⁴ Thus, 'militant' in this case does not suggest violent, but it means that in order to obtain peace, the militants' devotion turns into a nonviolent spiritual crusade.¹⁶⁵ Religious groups often have different (peace-related) values. Nonetheless, religious militants look for similarities between the groups. They are more tolerant of different people and behaviors.¹⁶⁶ Secular and religious NGOs often work together with these religious militants.¹⁶⁷ These militants could be useful in helping to find a solution to the conflict in Rakhine State.

Religious leaders have a special role in the religious peacebuilding process, though it should be noted that in the end, all leaders and actors need to take similar steps to promote peace.¹⁶⁸ In order for religious peacebuilding to be effective, religious actors need to be committed to the peacebuilding process, dedicating time and (religious) resources. Moreover, they need to be willing to cooperate with counterparts from outside of their religious community.¹⁶⁹ This is a task for the monks and imams of Rakhine state. Because religion is often important to the

¹⁵⁹ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 211, 221.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 285.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 222, 224.

¹⁶² Ibid., 226.

¹⁶³ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 11.

The Compact Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 1081.

¹⁶⁴ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 13.

¹⁶⁵ Appleby, "Religion and Global," 249.

¹⁶⁶ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 14, 141-142.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 164.

¹⁶⁸ Carter, "Religious Peacebuilding," 299.

¹⁶⁹ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 222, 224, 285.

victims on both sides of the conflict, religious actors can help manage the conflict.¹⁷⁰ By interjecting religious language into the mediation, religious leaders can elevate the negotiations to a higher level, instead of using their position to instigate violence, as the monks in Myanmar have been doing.¹⁷¹ It is very important for the religious leader to set a good example for his followers and his community. The leaders have to remind their followers of the core message of their belief: to be peaceful and to not use faith to justify violence.¹⁷² By preaching compassion and respect, the religious leaders can encourage dialogue and promote resolution.¹⁷³ After the conflict has ended, they can help with the mourning process.¹⁷⁴ Religious leaders play an important part in society. They have a reputation of being honest and compassionate. Furthermore, they have firsthand knowledge of local issues and the locals trust them. This results in them being able to act faster and more efficient than (non-)governmental actors.¹⁷⁵ Because of their role in society, religious leaders can identify the violence early and bring it to the attention of agencies.¹⁷⁶

2.3.2. The success of religious peacebuilding

Now that we have established what religious peacebuilding is and how religious leaders can contribute to this, it is time to explain the success of religious leaders in peacebuilding. First of all, the place of religious actor in the society matters. Religious actors have a reputation for integrity and service through constant and direct contact with the masses and they have a long record of charitable work. This way, religion contributes to the building or sustaining of a robust civil society.¹⁷⁷ Religious communities are widespread organizations, they network at every level of society and they can mobilize the larger community using international funding and moral support.¹⁷⁸ They have, as far as possible, trustworthy relationships with people on every side of the conflict.¹⁷⁹ The religious mediators have detailed knowledge of the language and cultures of the communities in conflict, as someone from Rakhine State would have. They have firsthand information about the conflict as it progresses. Often, they can draw upon political expertise to help end the conflict and envision a long-term vision of peace.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁰ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 222, 224.

Carter, "Religious Peacebuilding," 295.

¹⁷¹ Carter, "Religious Peacebuilding," 29.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 292-293.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 296.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 295.

¹⁷⁷ Little, "A Moment," 3.

¹⁷⁸ Appleby, "Religion and Global," 247.

¹⁷⁹ Little, "A Moment," 12.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

Secondly, when the reason for conflict lies in the religious sphere, religious leaders will be better suited to help end the violence than secular leaders.¹⁸¹ It can be challenging to understand the religious content in a conflict and to connect this to the other factors that have sparked conflict. It would be good to understand how religion relates to the desire to create structural, economic, political or social change, but this is hard to figure out.¹⁸² Instead of the negotiations favored by businesspeople and military analysts, religious actors will encourage focus on the emotions. Religion gives people an outlet for these emotions through symbolic gestures and rituals.¹⁸³ Lastly, to create a peaceful environment, shared goals and common ground are important. Therefore, we need to find the values and principles that are shared between members of different faiths, like Islam and Buddhism.¹⁸⁴ Because faith plays such a big role in people's lives, it is a good idea to take advantage of its values to transform societies to a more peaceful state.¹⁸⁵ Religious traditions offer great insights for the promotion of peace. They advocate the 'golden rule': Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Virtues as kindness, charity, compassion, honesty, fairness, justice, equality, tolerance, respect, nonviolence, humility, forbearance, self-discipline, moderation, and forgiveness play a big part. It is up to the religious leaders to use this in practice.¹⁸⁶ The failure to recognize the treasures that religion offers for conflict transformation has led to missed opportunities in the past. It is therefore important that the wisdoms and techniques of world religions are integrated in the politics and practice of conflict transformation.¹⁸⁷

2.3.3. Interfaith activities and institutions

In order to achieve peace, it is essential that people from different groups (other religious groups, as well as nonreligious actors) work together. In this case, this would require people from the Rakhine and the Rohingya communities working together, perhaps joined by people from nonreligious organizations. Interfaith activities offer opportunities to collaborate, share the work of building peace and learn from each other.¹⁸⁸ On the road towards reconciliation, joint work and struggle are crucial. It is important to create a space where people in conflict can listen to each other, share their concerns, and learn from each other, so that bridges can be

¹⁸¹ Appleby, "Religion and Global," 249.

¹⁸² Carter, "Religious Peacebuilding," 280.

¹⁸³ Gopin, "Religion as Destroyer," 279.

¹⁸⁴ Carter, "Religious Peacebuilding," 281.

¹⁸⁵ Kaplan, "Inspiring Development," 377.

¹⁸⁶ Carter, "Religious Peacebuilding," 279, 281.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 280.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 290-291.

built and the different communities can work together towards a common goal. If the interfaith activities are successful, they can inspire others to attempt similar projects.¹⁸⁹

Regional institutions that facilitate (interfaith) dialogue are helpful in the process towards transformation. The institutions can combine the expertise of religious and humanitarian agencies with local knowledge. In societies that are undergoing democratization, like in Myanmar, these centers could also function as sites of civil discourse, where midlevel and grassroots community leaders meet.¹⁹⁰ When the centers are built from local resources, this strengthens the self-sufficiency and sustainability of them, thus guaranteeing a long-term peace.¹⁹¹ It is of importance that these faith-based organizations work together. They share resources and each find areas in which they can specialize, for instance in mediation, prevention, or building democracy.¹⁹² This might also be a way to combat fundamentalism: by offering strong alternatives. By strengthening other organizations, they can emphasize cooperation instead of conflict based on incompatible values.¹⁹³ For Rakhine State, such institutions still seem far away, since the communities have been separated.

However, sometimes agreements that are concluded between different religious organizations to promote tolerance mean nothing because they are superficial. According to Gage, if the leaders of two movements have very different intentions, they can only attempt to improve their public relations for their own good, at the expense of the society. Therefore, he concludes that dialogue should take place *within* a religion first, and then perhaps between religions later.¹⁹⁴

2.3.4. Contemporary conflicts and the hermeneutics of citizenship

As was established in the subchapter on religious violence, contemporary conflicts like the struggle in Rakhine State often involve ethnoreligious struggles. These conflicts need to be approached differently than in the traditional statist diplomacy manner. Another factor that is often overlooked, is religious language. States do not use this language, but the communities do. This means that the religious language needs a translation for other people and other religious communities.¹⁹⁵ Diplomats have to go further than just recognize religious

¹⁸⁹ Carter, "Religious Peacebuilding," 291.

Diane D'Souza, "Creating Spaces: Interreligious Initiatives for Peace," in *Religion and Peacebuilding*, ed. Harold Coward, and Gordon S. Smith (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 170, 185-186.

¹⁹⁰ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 300-301, 304.

¹⁹¹ Lederach, "Preparing," 31.

¹⁹² Albright, "Faith," 541.

¹⁹³ Gage, "Choose Peace," 124.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 78-79.

¹⁹⁵ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 150-151.

differences, they have to look into the religious motives.¹⁹⁶ In contemporary ethnoreligious conflicts, it is crucial to establish the relationships between religion and national identity. If possible, the role that religion plays in national identity needs to be reframed.¹⁹⁷ Later in this thesis I will try to figure out what exactly constitutes the religious factor in this conflict. Thus, peacemakers need to recognize the complexity of identities, to be able to solve a conflict.¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, ethnoreligious conflicts often have a long history of violence and injustice, like the discrimination of Muslims in Myanmar, which are entangled somehow in the conflict. This needs to be studied as well.¹⁹⁹ The new approach also needs to involve all levels of society to make sure it can be a long-term commitment. This idea is developed further by Lederach. This subchapter will discuss his theory later. Moreover, the resources for reconciliation need to come from within the society, which will enhance the work of the people from the outside.²⁰⁰

According to Omer, peacebuilding literature is correct to focus on the roots of the conflict. The underlying relationships need to be transformed to be able to move to a holistic understanding of peace. However, this approach needs to focus on listening to and deconstructing narratives of victimhood that seem incompatible.²⁰¹ She also believes that, by isolating the religious aspect of a conflict, one ignores the fact that religion is intertwined in one's identity. Rethinking one's whole identity is important for conflict transformation.²⁰² To solve these problems, Omer introduces the hermeneutics of citizenship, which is a method that is very useful for peacebuilding in ethnoreligious conflicts. It focuses on the reimagining of the relationships between the different components of identity. This reimagination requires an inspection of the religious tradition and communal history, as well as the recognition of the circumstances of others. This makes the method flexible and functional.²⁰³

The reimagining can be defined as hermeneutics because it does not just involve looking at the religious resources of a community, but it also looks at the way by which the community has drawn on these resources to establish, amongst other things, their identity. It thus focuses on the way that the people have experienced the conflict and how they experience justice. If hermeneutics can contextualize different narratives and memories of groups and transfer them

¹⁹⁶ Omer, "When peace," 56.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 97, 101.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 109.

²⁰⁰ Lederach, "Building," xvi.

²⁰¹ Omer, "When peace," 281.

²⁰² Ibid., 107.

²⁰³ Ibid., 93, 95, 104, 112, 131.

into a universal idea of justice, it can be very helpful in the conflicts defined by ethnoreligious claims.²⁰⁴

In order to see how nationalism and religion are intertwined, religious peacebuilding in ethnoreligious conflicts demands an extensive engagement with the violent interpretations of religion, exploring the ways in which certain interpretations of religion, ethnicity and culture contribute to the violence. It will be interesting to analyze the case of Myanmar, since the Buddhist religion is known to be such a peaceful one. Thus, since the hermeneutics of citizenship makes use of reimagining, it can be used to reimagine how religion relates to political identity and thereby used to focus on the root causes of the conflict.²⁰⁵ When people in conflict find a way to reimagine their identity, this long-term reframing can lay the foundation for a peacebuilding process.²⁰⁶

2.3.5. Lederach's multilayered approach to peacebuilding

Now, I would like to turn to Lederach's ideas on – religious - peacebuilding. As was said before, in contemporary conflicts, it is important to involve the whole society in the peacebuilding process, including all layers and religious and secular organizations. This will help to create a long-term solution.²⁰⁷ In this process, the participation of local people helps to identify, understand, and handle the local problems.²⁰⁸ The model of peacebuilding needs to be adaptive to these local settings. Peacebuilding always starts with listening to the local community and this community has to be involved.²⁰⁹ The people play a leading role. In a democratic state, a government cannot install policies without including the will of the people.²¹⁰

Lederach presents a model for peacebuilding that is multilayered, consisting of three layers. The first layer consists of the top level. This constitutes the key political and military leaders in the conflict, who are somewhat removed from the conflict, but highly visible.²¹¹ In Myanmar, the top level would consist of the military leaders and leaders of the country like Aung San Suu Kyi. Their visibility secures the leaders' legitimacy, but the political pressure

²⁰⁴ Omer, "When peace," 272-273.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 102, 117.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 283.

²⁰⁷ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 122, 143, 242-243, 305.

²⁰⁸ Lederach, "Preparing," 32.

²⁰⁹ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 240.

²¹⁰ Gage, "Choose Peace," 98.

²¹¹ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 241.
Lederach, "Building," 38, 83.

and the degree of publicity constrains their freedom to operate.²¹² The second layer is made up of the middle range. The middle range is composed of people who have a leadership position, but who are not defined by authority structures. The middle range can also consist of primary networks of groups and institutions that are respected within the region, or people who are well known, for instance as belonging to an ethnic minority group. Their influence and power is derived from the relationships that they have with people from both sides of the conflict, especially with the first and third layer. Compared to the top level, who undergo more political pressure, the middle range has more flexibility to envision and practice creative ideas. Compared to the grassroots level, they have more influence because of their contact with the top level.²¹³ Thus, because of their flexibility, number, and connectivity, the middle range is in the best position to lead long-term peacebuilding processes.²¹⁴ The third level is the grassroots level, representing the masses. These are the people living in Rakhine State. The leadership in this level operates on a day-to-day basis in the conflict and they have a survival mentality. The leaders understand the fear and suffering of the population and have an expert knowledge of local politics.²¹⁵ Religious actors are present in all three levels, but the religious actors that are active in the local communities - middle range and grassroots level - form the core of religious peacebuilding.²¹⁶ In sum, having a higher position means better access to information about the bigger picture of the conflict and it means having a greater capacity to make decisions that influence the entire population, but it also means that the individual himself is less affected by those decisions. This reveals one of the key dilemmas in the peace process.²¹⁷

Based on these layers, Lederach distinguishes different approaches to peacebuilding. Firstly, he identifies the top-down approach. Here, the peacemakers are prominent figures, who are often backed up by a government or international organization. This approach is based on the assumption that the key to achieving peace is identifying the key leaders in a conflict and getting them to agree. When they agree, the peace process will move down through the rest of the population. In the case of Myanmar, the government might want to make a statement and

²¹² Lederach, "Building," 40.

²¹³ Brian Cox, and Daniel Philpott, "Faith-based Diplomacy: An Ancient Idea Newly Emergent," in *Religion and Foreign Affairs: Essential Readings*, ed. Dennis R. Hoover, and Douglas M. Johnston (United States of America: Baylor University Press, 2012), 257.

Lederach, "Building," 41-42.

²¹⁴ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 241.

Lederach, "Building," 83.

²¹⁵ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 241.

Lederach, "Building," 42-43, 83.

²¹⁶ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 284-285.

²¹⁷ Lederach, "Building," 43.

an agreement with the military and its security forces. The problem or dilemma with this approach is that these people and their negotiations are often subject to close media scrutiny. The focus in this approach is on a cessation of violence as the first step towards building peace.²¹⁸ As for the middle range approach to peacebuilding, Lederach states that literature has not quite developed a theory for this. Lastly, Lederach mentions the grassroots or bottom-up approach. This approach is based on reaching agreements to end the fighting at local peace conferences, by bringing together the lower level leaders of interdependent groups in the conflict. The meetings deal with immediate concerns. When they reach an agreement at the lower level, it is possible to repeat this process at a higher level.²¹⁹ The challenge with this level is the massive numbers of people that are or want to be involved. Moreover, people at this level are in survival mood. Because they experience the problems themselves, it might be harder to come to an agreement about peace.²²⁰ Moreover, the suffering Rohingya seem to not have much influence to make a change. The grassroots level is involved before and after the formal peace structure. The programs that are active to sustain the peace often work through existing networks like churches. They are characterized by helping people deal with traumas and rebuilding relationships.²²¹

2.3.6. Example: Northern Ireland

Lastly, I would like to focus shortly on a conflict in which religious peacebuilding has greatly contributed to creating peace, hoping that this will be a helpful example for Myanmar. I have chosen to go into the conflict transformation process in Northern Ireland, since this process and its outcome offer important lessons to people involved with conflict transformation over the long term. To start, I would like to give a short introduction to the conflict and its history. For hundreds of years, England feared an Irish invasion. They believed that the best way to secure the country's safety was by controlling Ireland. Throughout history, from the Spanish Armada to the Second World War, the English presence in Ireland showed benefits for England strategically.²²² After the Reformation, Ireland remained Catholic, while the English became Protestant. The most rebellious part of Ireland then was the North, so in the 17th century, the English king installed Protestants in the North of Ireland to put down an uprising. These Protestants remained loyal to the English king in exchange for the land that they were given.

²¹⁸ Lederach, "Building," 44-45.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 53, 55.

²²² Patrick Grant, "Northern Ireland: Religion and the Peace Process," in *Religion and Peacebuilding*, ed. Harold Coward, and Gordon S. Smith (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 262.

As a result, the North of Ireland remained mostly loyal to the British crown.²²³ In an attempt to make the Catholics accept the Reformation, the Penal Laws were created, penalizing the practice of Catholicism. As a result, at the start of the 18th century, even though over 75 percent of the Irish population was still Catholic, the Catholics owned only 14 percent of the land. Then, in the early 19th century, O'Connell started to campaign for Catholic emancipation. In this campaign, religion and nationalism were closely intertwined. This connection became even stronger over the course of the century.²²⁴ After an armed rebellion in 1916 in Dublin, a treaty was signed allowing the British to continue governing six counties in the North. The treaty was followed by a short civil war in the South, between pro-treaty and anti-treaty parties. The pro-treaty parties won this war and the anti-treaty parties merged into the Irish Republican Army (IRA). In the North, the treaty was welcomed by Protestant Unionists, who wanted to remain part of the United Kingdom.²²⁵ This division created a divided society. The Troubles started in 1969 and would last many decades.²²⁶ During the Troubles, British military troops were sent to help restore order, while paramilitary organizations resorted to violence. Many were killed.²²⁷ Several attempts to find a political solution failed, until the Good Friday Agreement. This restored the self-government to Northern Ireland and brought an end to the Troubles.²²⁸ Even though the treaty was signed, violence still occasionally erupts in Northern Ireland. Just like in Myanmar, this history shows that the Irish had been discriminated against for a long time.

To be able to create reconciliation between the opposing parties, first forgiveness is needed. After forgiveness, reconciliation can guarantee the removal of the burden of memories of violence, betrayal, and oppression. Thus, the goal in Ireland was to create a 'sense of forgiveness', using an approach of politics of forgiveness. With a culture shaped by opposing variations of Christianity, this was a difficult goal.²²⁹ To achieve this goal, stories of revenge had to be replaced by stories and practices that would connect historically divided people, to create tolerance and a change of heart in the divided society.²³⁰ In the peace process in Northern Ireland, a top-down approach was not successful. The government was not able to solve the

²²³ Grant, "Northern Ireland," 263.

²²⁴ Ibid., 264.

²²⁵ Ibid., 265.

²²⁶ Ibid., 266.

²²⁷ BBC, "The Troubles," *BBC History* (website), accessed April 12, 2018, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/troubles>.

²²⁸ BBC, "The Troubles."

²²⁹ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 168, 170, 194-195.

Steven Schroeder, "Toward a Higher Identity: An Interview with Mairead Corrigan Maguire," *Christian Century* 111, no. 18 (April 20, 1994): 414-416.

²³⁰ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 170-171, 173.

conflict, this had to be done by the community itself. The local communities needed to start connecting with other communities.²³¹ Religious actors played a big part in this, for they provided the cultural foundation and popular support for peace. They presented a space where the communities could come together so that they could build trust. This is important for forgiveness and reconciliation.²³² Moreover, they offered an alternative to the violent discourse of extremists by officially condemning the violence and, if that did not work, by showing the way that the people were suffering.²³³ It is important that the monks in Myanmar will also offer a peaceful alternative to the violence. When trust had built between both sides in Ireland, they could admit that both sides had suffered and both had justifiable claims against the other. Then, the social conditions could be addressed.²³⁴ It then turned out that the root cause of the conflict was not religion, even though commentators were and still are drawn to the labels ‘Catholic’ and ‘Protestant’ as most effective to describe the situation. Instead, the underlying problems were complex, consisting of political discord, unjust policies, poverty and hopelessness, and hatred between neighbors.²³⁵

Even though it turned out that the root cause of the conflict was not religious, the churches have played a big part in the conflict. When the churches realized that, instead of further encouraging the violence, they could be part of the solution, this really contributed to the peace process.²³⁶ As has been established earlier in this chapter, the work of grassroots peacemakers can be essential in creating a lasting foundation for peace. In Ireland, these peacemakers had to convince the masses to pursue forgiveness and reconciliation.²³⁷ The mediations and negotiations in the peace process were very complex, since they were led or initiated by many different groups or individuals.²³⁸ Thus, the churches have done much to counteract the violence and promote peace, especially in loyal communities, but many negotiations were not initiated by religious actors.²³⁹

Even in academic literature, the conflict is often described by using religious characteristics to define the different groups. However, as established above, the conflict had many other sides,

²³¹ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 170, 179.

²³² *Ibid.*, 169, 191.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 182, 184-185, 193.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 188.

²³⁵ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 179.

Grant, “Northern Ireland,” 266.

²³⁶ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 192.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 193.

²³⁸ Grant, “Northern Ireland,” 268-269.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 274-275.

which are neglected when one just looks at religion. It was mainly political, but religion was used for political ends, dividing working people at the expense of their class interest. Grant states that it serves in Britain's interest to present the conflict in Northern Ireland as one between different Irish groups, in which Britain was an unfortunate mediator trying to preserve law and order.²⁴⁰ Recently, views amongst academics have changed and the conflict is now more often described as ethnic. The opposing ethnic identities are constructed by a shared history, mythology, culture, and a sense of destiny. Moreover, the identities were shaped by a negative image of the other, making them interdependent. The key marker of the opposed identities was religion.²⁴¹ This shows that it is important to look into the conflict in Rakhine State to uncover the different aspects of that conflict.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the conflict in Northern Ireland was one with a very long history. This history has contributed to the different identities of the different factions. The identities were complex, but often represented by their religion. Because of this, the churches could play a part in the peace process, but secular parties also helped to create peace. From this conflict, one can learn that a conflict might seem religious from the outside, but actually, deeper root causes exist. The cause of a conflict is rarely just religious, as it is often intertwined with other factors, like identity or nationalism. Therefore, it is important to establish a complex view of the influence of religion, or it will be very easy to misunderstand a conflict.

2.4. Conclusion of the chapter

This complex view is very important to keep in mind when I will be analyzing the conflict in Myanmar. Now, I will conclude this chapter. It has been dedicated to theory behind conflicts and conflict transformation, including religious peacebuilding.

Firstly, it was established that religious violence has a long history and many motivations for the violence can be named. The structure as presented by Fox was introduced, giving four categories of causes for religious violence. The chapter mentions (i) instrumental violence, (ii) a threat to religion that is interpreted as a threat to identity, including a cosmic war where the way of living of a believer feels threatened, (iii) explicit instructions to go to (holy) war, and (iv) benign activities that are seen as threats. Moreover, it stresses the role of the religious leader. Concerning these causes, the chapter emphasizes to be cautious. This can be linked to

²⁴⁰ Grant, "Northern Ireland," 262, 272-273.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 272.

the complex view of the influence of religion in a conflict mentioned above: the cause of a conflict is often not just religious, as is probably the case in Myanmar. Then, the chapter discusses contemporary conflicts, of which the conflict in Myanmar is one. In these conflicts, religion and nationalism are often intertwined, also contributing to the complex view of the causes of a conflict.

Religious motivations can cause violence, but religion can also be helpful for peacebuilding. The chapter touches on this ambivalence, in the hope of religion being a helpful factor to finding a solution to the conflict in Rakhine State. It firstly discusses conflict transformation in general, focusing on the distinction between positive and negative peace and on the holistic approach in conflict transformation, where conflicts are viewed with their underlying structures and relationships. Then, the chapter moves onto peacebuilding, which involves an inclusive approach. Since the secularist discourse in peacebuilding can blind people, the history of peacebuilding in religion can be helpful for *religious* peacebuilding. Several reasons for the success of religious peacebuilding are the reputation of the religious actors, the religious causes in the conflict and the role that faith plays in people's lives. Since contemporary conflicts often involve ethnoreligious struggles, religion can be used in peacebuilding to help end the conflict. Lederach's inclusive view on peacebuilding is also mentioned. Lastly, the example of Northern Ireland is given, since this is a reminder to approach the religious influence in a conflict in a complex and inclusive way.

Chapter 3: The conflict in Myanmar

This chapter will concentrate on the conflict in Myanmar, answering the question of how the conflict in Myanmar concerning the Rohingya originated and has developed. In 2012, a spark of violence ignited a conflict between Buddhists and Muslims in Rakhine State. This came as a surprise for some, as the Buddhist religion is known for its tolerance and promotion of non-violence. The conflict has since deteriorated, having created a crisis that threatens to spread to other parts of the country, thereby undermining the entire democratization process in Myanmar. This conflict is a complex one, with a history, many players and nuances that I hope uncover in this chapter and the next.²⁴² In this chapter, I will first briefly analyze the data. After that, I will go into the history of Myanmar and the exclusion of the Rohingya before the conflict in 2012. I will also touch upon the recent democratic transformation. Then, the actual conflict will be discussed, concentrating on the violations against the Rohingya. Several instances involving religion will be noted here. Lastly, the chapter will introduce the current refugee crisis.

3.1. Analysis of the data

This chapter will start with an analysis of the data used for this thesis. This data consists of the reports that are used by different organizations, the United Nations, Amnesty International and the International Crisis Group. The analysis will be done in the form of a discourse analysis, in order to be critical of the data that has been worked with, because I have not been able to gather my own data. Discourse analysis does not consider meaning as a given that can be read off a text, but views meaning as something that is produced in social practice. Discourse can be embedded in larger socio-historical structures and discursive practices make use of various types of media, empowering people to communicate.²⁴³

For this chapter, mainly reports have been used. The reports by the United Nations seem to not have a political locus. Moreover, they are available to anyone who would like to read them and are provided in several languages, but they are written mainly for the organs within the organization. Most reports are made bi-annually. Since it would take up too many words to

²⁴² Lisa Brooten, and Yola Verbruggen, "Producing the News: Reporting on Myanmar's Rohingya Crisis," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 4, no. 3 (March 28, 2017): 440.

United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana, A/HRC/22/58* (April 17, 2013), par. 46, available from <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/22/58>.

²⁴³ Johannes Angermuller, Dominique Maingueneau, and Ruth Wodak, ed., *The Discourse Studies Reader: Main currents in theory and analysis* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2014), 3.

discuss all fragments of the reports, I would like to give an overall review of them. Most of the reports are written by, or based on information from, the Special Rapporteur. This was also explained in the Methodology. The Special Rapporteur is expected to be unbiased and searches for the facts. The reports are written because the Rapporteur has a mandate to do so. This mandate was commissioned by the Commission on Human Rights in Resolution 1992/58, out of human rights concerns. This mandate has been extended annually.²⁴⁴ The reports are build up in the same way: they focus on the transition to democracy, the situation of ethnic minorities, the human rights situation, truth, justice and accountability, and international cooperation. The situation in Rakhine is since 2012 also included. The reports always end with recommendations. It is hard to say something about the rhetorical means and ideological statements of the reports.

Other reports that have been used extensively are written by Amnesty International. Amnesty International is an independent organization which strives for the compliance of human rights all around the world. Perhaps one could place them slightly on the left side of the political scale. The reports are written because the organization would like to find the facts and present these to the world. They do not come out on a regular basis, but when human rights are violated in a certain region, Amnesty International will start an investigation. The specific authors of the reports are not known, for they write in the name of Amnesty. In the reports, authors make use of photographs as well as text. One of the reports used was written on the basis of evidence gathered outside the country, for the organization did not get the permission to visit certain areas in Rakhine State. For the other report, they did get permission to access. This means that some parts of the reports are based on the first-hand experiences of the authors, and others are based on the stories that refugees have told them. Researching human rights violations is challenging in Rakhine State, because interviewees were concerned that there would be reprisals from government authorities if authorities would find out that they talked to Amnesty International.²⁴⁵ The organization also met with state officials for the report.

Furthermore, a few reports of the International Crisis Group have been used. This is an independent organization that is working to prevent wars and shape policies that will build a more peaceful world. They claim to provide independent analysis and advice on how to prevent, resolve or better manage conflict, combining expert field research, analysis and

²⁴⁴ “Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar,” *United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner* (website), accessed January 17, 2018, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/CountriesMandates/MM/Pages/SRMyanmar.aspx>.

²⁴⁵ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 17.

engagement with policymakers around the world.²⁴⁶ These reports are thus not written on a certain basis, but only when conflicts break out.

3.2. Historic background of Myanmar and the discrimination against the Rohingya

3.2.1. History of Myanmar

First of all, this subchapter will focus on the history of Myanmar, to give the conflict more context. Myanmar has a turbulent history, with leaders often oppressing their people and the minorities living in the country. In the nineteenth century, the British stationed in India decided to extend their power to Burma and by 1886 they had annexed the entire country. Under the British, the whole of Burma was ruled by one government. The extent of the country under British rule can be seen on the map in Figure 1. Even though it appeared as a strong and stable development, the unification actually led to conflicts between the different ethnic groups and it divided the people of Burma. Numerous racial and religious groups lived side by side, but separately.²⁴⁷ During the Second World War, the Japanese also occupied Burma for a few years.²⁴⁸

Figure 1: Map of Burma in 1942



Source: US Army Center of Military History

Then in 1948, Burma gained independence from Britain.²⁴⁹ Afterwards, a civil war erupted.²⁵⁰ In 1962, General Ne Win seized power in a military coup. From then on, Burma was ruled by a military dictatorship, with no respect for human rights. Ethnic minorities across the country endured intensifying discrimination and human rights abuses.²⁵¹ Another coup followed in

²⁴⁶ “Who We Are: Preventing War. Shaping Peace.,” *International Crisis Group* (website), accessed January 17, 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/who-we-are>.

²⁴⁷ J. S. Furnivall, “Burma, Past and Present,” *Far Eastern Survey* 22, no. 3 (February 25, 1953): 22.

²⁴⁸ Furnivall, “Burma,” 23.

²⁴⁹ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 8.

²⁵⁰ Nick Cheesman, “How in Myanmar “National Races” Came to Surpass Citizenship and Exclude Rohingya,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47, no. 3 (March 15, 2017): 464-465.

²⁵¹ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 8.

Brooten, “Producing the News,” 441.

Cheesman, “How in Myanmar,” 465.

1988. This coup allowed the continuity of military control without the somewhat civilian character that the previous government had.²⁵²

In 1989, the name of the country was changed to Myanmar, supposedly because the term 'Burma' only included the ethnic group Bamar, while the term 'Myanmar' should include all national races in the union.²⁵³ However, the military junta was not that inclusive in their definition of *all* national races of Myanmar, since in 1982 the Citizenship Law had been introduced, which stated that ethnic groups had to prove their ancestral residency in Myanmar, meaning that not all ethnic groups living in the country were represented in the law. For the Rohingyas, this implied a deprivation of citizenship. Around this time international sanctions were imposed, which were unfortunately not very effective.²⁵⁴

In 1990, general elections took place. The National League for Democracy (NLD) won by far, but the military government refused to hand over the power, instead imprisoning many NLD candidates, like Aung San Suu Kyi.²⁵⁵ Aung San Suu Kyi is the daughter of Burma's famous and admired leader, Aung San. She appeared in 1988 as the nation's most prominent advocate of parliamentary democracy and basic human rights but was placed under house arrest because she openly opposed the military junta.²⁵⁶ In 1991, despite her house arrest, she won the Nobel Peace Prize for her struggle to bring peace and democracy.²⁵⁷

3.2.2. *Democratic transition*

Myanmar has seen many changes in government system, first from colonialism to democracy, then from isolationist socialism to a capitalist system, to the current democratization.²⁵⁸

After years of military oppression, Myanmar held its first general elections since 1990 in November 2010. Even though the elections were problematic, political prisoners, like Aung San Suu Kyi, were released.²⁵⁹ In 2011, the power was transferred from the military

²⁵² Amaia Sánchez-Cacicedo, *Building States, Building Peace: Global and Regional Involvement in Sri Lanka and Myanmar* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 174.

²⁵³ Brooten, "Producing the News," 441.

Cheesman, "How in Myanmar," 467-468.

²⁵⁴ Sánchez-Cacicedo, "Building States," 174, 176.

²⁵⁵ Amnesty International, "Caged," 8.

Syed S. Mahmood, Emily Wroe, Arlan Fuller, and Jennifer Leaning, "The Rohingya people of Myanmar: health, human rights, and identity," *Lancet* 389 no. 10081 (May 6, 2017): 1842.

²⁵⁶ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 214.

²⁵⁷ Perry Hobson, "Hotel development," 66.

²⁵⁸ J. S. Perry Hobson, and Roberta Leung, "Hotel development in Myanmar: Politics and human-resources challenge," *The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (February 1997): 61.

²⁵⁹ Amnesty International, "Caged," 8.

Brooten, "Producing the News," 441.

Mahmood, "The Rohingya people," 1842.

government to a quasi-civilian government, led a former military general. The new administration began opening up the democratic space, by formulating wide ranging social, political, and economic reforms.²⁶⁰ Moreover, important improvements with regards to freedom of assembly and expression took place, even though the restrictions on democratic space remained severe.²⁶¹ However, in 2012, sanctions were lifted by other countries that had been in place because of the military regime.²⁶²

In April 2012, Myanmar held parliamentary elections for 45 legislative seats. These elections occurred, according to international observers, mostly free and fair. The NLD won almost all seats and Aung San Suu Kyi was elected as a Member of Parliament.²⁶³ At the end of 2012, the government announced to start focusing on administrative reform, transparency, efficiency, good governance and tackling corruption.²⁶⁴

Then in March and April of 2014, Myanmar held its first census since 1982. However, since Rohingya are not allowed to self-identify as such, they were not enumerated during the count. In the same year, the law was amended so that only full citizens were allowed to form political parties and be political party members. These amendments had a big impact on politicians who identify as Rohingya.²⁶⁵ Moreover, the UN expressed concerns about the excessive use of force by the police during this year.²⁶⁶

On November 8th of 2015, historic elections took place in Myanmar, which the NLD won. In March 2016, the power was transferred to a civilian government. The NLD had won 60 percent of the seats in upper house, and 50 percent in lower house. Nonetheless, under the 2008 Constitution, the military retains 25 percent of the seats in each of the legislative houses, which means that they could veto a constitutional amendment. Moreover, the military still has a major influence in appointing the key ministers. These ministries play a central role in creating and enforcing the abusive policies and practices against the Rohingya. The military itself stands above the country's judicial and legal framework and is thus independent of civilian control

²⁶⁰ Amnesty International, "Caged," 8.

UNHRC, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," par. 6.

²⁶¹ UNHCR, "Report of the Special, A/HRC/28/72," par. 4.

²⁶² United Nations, General Assembly, *Situation of human rights in Myanmar: Note by the Secretary General*, A/67/383 (September 25, 2012), par. 33, available from <http://undocs.org/A/67/383>.

²⁶³ Amnesty International, "Caged," 8.

UNGA, "Situation of human, A/67/383," par. 68.

²⁶⁴ UNHCR, "Report of the Special, A/HRC/22/58," par. 62.

²⁶⁵ UNHCR, "Report of the Special, A/ HRC/28/72," par. 22.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, par. 19.

and oversight. The current government is unable or unwilling to stand up to the military when it comes to accountability for the violations in Rakhine State.²⁶⁷ State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and her administration can try to seek a solution, but for the situation to actually improve, they would need the support of the military.²⁶⁸

In his first speech, new President U Htin Kyaw described national reconciliation and peace as one of the four priorities of the government. Aung San Suu Kyi has underlined the importance of national reconciliation and the rule of law for all citizens. Recently, the government has established a few institutions which should contribute to the peace process.²⁶⁹ The government has to address the human rights violations by stopping the discrimination against minorities both in law and practice, otherwise they might undermine the democratic transition of the country. However, the continuing influence of the military in critical areas of governance, as described above, might pose a problem.²⁷⁰

In 2016, the NLD government started the process of citizenship verification, with more flexible rules. However, because the process is based on the 1982 Citizenship Law, it remains discriminatory. Complaints against the verification process come from the Rohingya as well as the Rakhine people.²⁷¹ In August 2017, the government said that it would allow the return of refugees who had been verified, which has raised concerns. The verification process, whether for those inside or outside of Myanmar, is based on a law that is discriminatory on racial grounds, and thus does not respect human rights. Moreover, it is uncertain what will happen to individuals who wish to return but do not qualify for any form of citizenship.²⁷² Unfortunately

²⁶⁷ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 25.

Mahmood, “The Rohingya people,” 1842-1848.

UNHCR, “Report of the Special, A/HRC/28/72,” par. 24.

UNHCR, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” par. 6.

²⁶⁸ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 14.

²⁶⁹ The government established the Ministry for Ethnic Affairs, transformed the Myanmar Peace Center into the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre and established the Central Committee on the Implementation of Peace, Stability and Development of Rakhine State, chaired by Aung San Suu Kyi.

Mahmood, “The Rohingya people,” 1848.

UNHCR, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” par. 13.

United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Note verbale dated 18 June 2016 from the Permanent Mission of Myanmar to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, A/HRC/32/G/9* (July 11, 2016), pars. 4-5, available from <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/32/G/9>.

²⁷⁰ UNHCR, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” par. 14.

²⁷¹ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 30-33.

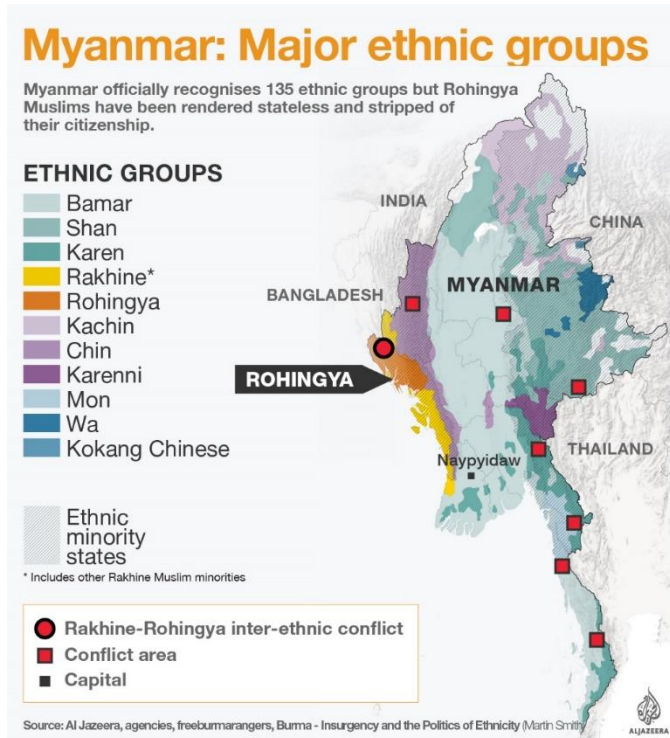
²⁷² *Ibid.*, 34.

lately, the democratization and statebuilding process has been overshadowed by ongoing ethnic conflicts in the country, the Rohingya conflict being only one of them.²⁷³

3.2.3. The Rohingyas and the tale of their exclusion

Rohingyas – and Muslims in general – *Figure 2: Major ethnic groups in Myanmar*

have been discriminated for a very long time in Myanmar. Myanmar is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in Asia. The Citizenship Law of 1982 recognized eight major ‘national ethnic groups’: Bamar (two thirds of the population), Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine and Shan. These eight groups can be broken down further into 135 recognized ethnic groups.²⁷⁴ Figure 2 shows the regions in which the different groups reside in the country. Since its independence in 1948, Burma/Myanmar has been dominated by the Bamar ethnic group. After the military seized power in 1962, ethnic minorities were increasingly excluded from positions of authorities and faced many restrictions.²⁷⁵ The longstanding discrimination against minorities has created historically entrenched inequalities, land and natural resource rights issues, and widespread human rights abuses. This has generated a deep mistrust among the minorities in each other and in the peace process.²⁷⁶



Source: Al Jazeera

In Myanmar around 90 percent of the population is Buddhist, while 4 percent is Muslim.²⁷⁷ The Rohingya Muslims represent the largest percentage of Muslims in Myanmar, with the majority living in Rakhine State. There are probably more than 1.2 million Rohingya within Myanmar, representing more than a third of the population of Rakhine state (this number has

²⁷³ Sánchez-Cacicedo, “Building States,” 3.

²⁷⁴ UNHCR, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” par. 2.

United Nations, General Assembly, *Situation of human rights in Myanmar: Note by the Secretary General*, A/69/398 (September 23, 2014), par. 30, available from <http://undocs.org/A/69/398>.

²⁷⁵ UNHCR, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” par. 5.

²⁷⁶ UNHCR, “Report of the Special, A/HRC/28/72,” par. 33.

²⁷⁷ UNHCR, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” par. 2.

decreased drastically since August 2017 when people fled following the ethnic cleansing campaign). However, it is hard to collect data about the Rohingya, since the government does not recognize them as a distinct and legitimate group. They are thus not included in the national census, because they cannot identify as Rohingya – and did not want to register as Bengali. This and the lack of access to parts of the country pose significant challenges to the analysis of the situation of minorities in Myanmar.

The Rohingya self-identify as a distinct ethnic group, with their own language and culture. They claim a long-standing connection to Rakhine State, citing a long-documented history of Muslim residence and influence in the region, stretching back centuries. Successive governments however have rejected these claims, stating that the term ‘Rohingya’ has no historical or legal basis. The Rohingyas are classified as Bengali and thus as illegal immigrants, a sentiment that is shared by many in the society.²⁷⁸ It should be mentioned that, even though their precise origin is unclear, the overwhelming majority of Rohingya living in Myanmar were born in the country, as were their parents.²⁷⁹

Rakhine State, which was known Arakan State before 1989, borders Bangladesh and the Bay of Bengal, as can be seen in Figure 3. Apart from the Rohingya, the Rakhine people, predominantly Buddhist, reside here. The Rohingya claim their ancestors have settled in Burma in the 9th century already and have since mixed with other ethnic groups, which is in line with the historically pluralistic population of Arakan state. However, others claim that they are visitors from Bengal, who

Figure 3: Map of Myanmar and Bangladesh, showing the position of Rakhine State



Source: Amnesty International

²⁷⁸ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 19-20.

International Crisis Group, *Myanmar: A New Muslim Insurgency in Rakhine State, Asia Report N283* (Belgium: December 15, 2016), 1.

Mahmood, “The Rohingya people,” 1844.

UNHCR, “Report of the Special, A/HRC/28/72,” par. 46

UNHCR, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” pars. 3-4.

United Nations, General Assembly, *Letter dated 17 November 2014 from the Chargé d’affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, A/C.3/69/10* (December 1, 2014), par. 3, available from <http://undocs.org/A/C.3/69/10>.

OHCHR, “Flash Report,” 5.

²⁷⁹ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 19.

temporarily moved to Arakan when the colonial power needed extra manpower or migrants.²⁸⁰

It is not just the Rohingya that have faced human rights violations in the Rakhine State: all communities have had to deal with land confiscations, forced evictions and forced labor by the State. Moreover, Rakhine State, one of the poorest states in Myanmar, continues to suffer from decades of neglect and underdevelopment, lack of investment in infrastructure and economic marginalization. For the inhabitants of Rakhine State, there is a lack of access to livelihood opportunities and limited access to basic services. The communities living in Rakhine State fear losing their ethnic identity, language, and cultures.²⁸¹

On top of the general disadvantages that the people living in Rakhine State face, Muslim communities face additional barriers regarding protracted placement, restrictions in freedom of movement, discrimination, and access to education.²⁸² There have been long-standing grievances in Rakhine State between the Rohingya Muslims and the Rakhine Buddhists.²⁸³ Since the military coup in 1962, the Rohingya saw their civil and political rights falling apart.²⁸⁴ When, after 1982 Citizenship Law was enacted, Rohingya wanted to get re-registered, the registration officers, acting on orders from superiors, refused.²⁸⁵ Since the 1990s, extremist or ultra-nationalist Buddhist organizations have actively promoted messages of hatred and intolerance against Muslims. Groups spread messages based on fear and hatred, comparing Muslims to animals, using derogatory language and presenting Muslims as a threat to the 'Buddhist State'.²⁸⁶ The extreme Buddhist nationalist sentiment has been reinforced by the crisis in 2017. Leading authorities in the Buddhist community have urged the unity between military and monkhood and appear to have provided a religious justification for the mass killing of non-Buddhists. Sitagu Sayadaw, an influential monk and a leading doctrinal authority, gave a lecture to military officers in which he preached about a legend from Sri Lanka, concerning Buddhist king Dutthagamani. In this legend, enlightened beings told Dutthagamani not to

²⁸⁰ A. K. M. Ahsan Ullah, "Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar: Seeking Justice for the "Stateless"," *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 32, no. 3 (2016): 286.

Amnesty International, "Caged," 19.

Mahmood, "The Rohingya people," 1841.

²⁸¹ Amnesty International, "Caged," 26.

Mahmood, "The Rohingya people," 1844.

OHCHR, "Flash Report," 5.

²⁸² OHCHR, "Flash Report," 5.

²⁸³ OHCHR, "Flash Report," 5-6.

UNHCR, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," par. 9.

²⁸⁴ Mahmood, "The Rohingya people," 1841-1842.

²⁸⁵ Cheesman, "How in Myanmar," 472-473.

Mahmood, "The Rohingya people," 1841-1842.

²⁸⁶ UNHCR, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," par. 22.

grieve about the bloodshed he had caused, for the people who had been killed were non-Buddhists and their death would not generate bad karma. This legend is often used in Myanmar to justify violence in defense of the faith. Sitagu informed soldiers that no matter how much they had to fight, they should remember that non-Buddhists killed were ‘not fully human’. This speech has been widely shared on social media, with many Myanmar people expressing support.²⁸⁷ An instance like this shows the example of the influence that a religious leader can have and how his discourse can instigate violence justified by religion. Furthermore, concerns have been raised about social media, where misinformation, hate speech and incitement to violence, discrimination and hostility, particularly targeted against Muslim communities, spreads quickly.²⁸⁸

This subchapter has shown the turbulent history of Myanmar. After becoming independent, the country has been under military dictatorships, until it started a democratic transition several years ago. This transition still needs a lot of work, but is stalled by the human rights violations that still happen in Rakhine State – and other parts of the country. Moreover, this subchapter has revealed that the Rohingyas have been discriminated against for a very long time, and this discrimination has become institutionalized through laws, policies and practices. The next part of the chapter will focus on the current conflict, in which the discriminations against the Rohingya have become severe.

3.3. Origin and development of the current conflict in Myanmar: oppression of a minority

3.3.1. Timeline

In June 2012 violence between Muslims and Buddhists broke out. The violence was motivated by the rape and murder of a Rakhine woman, supposedly by three Muslim men. As an act of reprisal, a group of Rakhine people killed ten Muslim men.²⁸⁹ Afterwards, three Muslim men were found guilty of rape and murder of the Rakhine woman and they were sentenced to death.

²⁸⁷ International Crisis Group, *Myanmar’s Rohingya Crisis Enters a Dangerous New Phase*, Asia Report N292 (Brussels: December 7, 2017), 12.

Matthew J. Walton, “Religion and Violence in Myanmar: Sitagu Sayadaw’s Case for Mass Killing,” *Foreign Affairs*, November 6, 2017, accessed January 17, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/burma-myanmar/2017-11-06/religion-and-violence-myanmar>.

²⁸⁸ United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Rita Izsák*, A/HRC/28/64 (January 5, 2015), par. 42, available from <http://undocs.org/a/hrc/28/64>.

²⁸⁹ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 22.

Mahmood, “The Rohingya people,” 1842.

Concerns were raised about the conduct of the trial and pleas were made to make an inquiry into the suicide of one the men while he was in custody. It is not clear whether the murder of the ten Muslim men has been investigated.²⁹⁰ Moreover, it is questionable whether these instances of violence were motivated by religious justifications.

The spiraling violence that followed quickly spread to other townships in Rakhine State. The president of Myanmar declared the state of emergency in Rakhine State and obtained the military's assistance to help restore the law. Consequently, the violence was sometimes supported by state security forces, resulting in many deaths, the destruction of property and mass displacement.²⁹¹ Rakhine Buddhist extremists attacked Rohingya Muslims and their houses and businesses.²⁹² The Burmese authorities decided to separate communities, to maintain stability and to protect the lives of the people of both communities. The displaced Rohingya were moved to camps where movement was restricted and the condition of and access to food, water, sanitation and health care were bad.²⁹³ Curfews were imposed in several townships.²⁹⁴

Then, in 2013, Buddhist monks from the 969-movement delivered anti-Muslim speeches in various towns, often instigating anti-Muslim violence.²⁹⁵ It should be noted that the Dalai Lama has denounced these attacks.²⁹⁶ He stated that killing in the name of religion was unthinkable.²⁹⁷

Incidents that happened after these speeches include riots near Yangon, where three mosques and seventeen Muslim-owned houses were destroyed, and a massacre in Meiktila where

²⁹⁰ Amnesty International, "Caged," 22.

²⁹¹ Amnesty International, "Caged," 8.

Amnesty International, "We are at breaking," 12.

Mahmood, "The Rohingya people," 1842.

UNGA, "Situation of human, A/67/383," par. 57.

²⁹² Brooten, "Producing the News," 446.

²⁹³ Amnesty International, "Caged," 8.

United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana, A/HRC/25/64* (April 2, 2014), par. 43, available from <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/25/64>.

UNGA, "Situation of human, A/67/383," pars. 58, 60.

²⁹⁴ Amnesty International, "Caged," 8.

²⁹⁵ Mahmood, "The Rohingya people," 1842.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ian Simpson, "Dalai Lama Decries Buddhist Attacks On Muslims In Myanmar," *Huffington Post*, July 7, 2013, accessed January 17, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/07/dalai-lama-decries-buddhist-attacks-on-muslims-in-myanmar_n_3231140.html.

Muslims students were terrorized and killed, while the police stood by and watched.²⁹⁸ In these towns, witnesses have stated that the anti-Muslim sentiment in the area had increased significantly after the 969-movement had made several speeches. Moreover, anti-Muslim and anti-Rohingya leaflets had been handed out, which suggested that Muslims in Meiktila were conspiring against Buddhists and holding shady meetings in mosques.²⁹⁹ The leader of the 969-movement, Wirathu, made similar statements that year, saying that Muslims weaken the country's Buddhist identity. If Muslims build more and bigger houses and mosques this will lead to less Buddhists shrines, he claims. The mosques, according to him, are like 'enemy stations' for Buddhists.³⁰⁰ Statements like this can instigate violence against Muslims, based on their religious identity.

The number of internally displaced people rose even further in 2013, leading up to around 140.000 people.³⁰¹ The camps for internally displaced people have become like detention centers, where the freedom of movement is restricted. As a result, these Rohingya are not able to access food or their livelihoods.³⁰² Moreover, the camps are dealing with a lack of adequate health care, since local and international medical staff are unable to provide medical care in some of the camps due to threats and harassments that they face from local Rakhine Buddhist communities.³⁰³

In January of 2014 alone, already 60 deaths were reported in Rakhine State, on top of mobs destroying Muslim businesses.³⁰⁴ Later that year, humanitarian organizations were attacked, after which several organizations felt like they had to suspend their operations in Rakhine State for safety reasons. This often impacted the wellbeing of the communities living there.³⁰⁵ This displays the danger for NGO staff to work in Rakhine State.³⁰⁶

²⁹⁸ C4ADS, *Sticks and Stones: Hate Speech Narratives and Facilitators in Myanmar* (February 5, 2016), Introduction.

²⁹⁹ C4ADS, "Sticks and Stones," Introduction.

Jason Szep, "Special Report: Buddhist monks incite Muslim killings in Myanmar," *Reuters*, April 8, 2013, accessed January 17, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-violence-specialreport/special-report-buddhist-monks-incite-muslim-killings-in-myanmar-idUSBRE9370AP20130408>.

³⁰⁰ Szep, "Special Report."

³⁰¹ It is not sure whether this number is accurate, because the information is very divergent.

Mahmood, "The Rohingya people," 1842.

UNHCR, "Report of the Special, A/HRC/22/58," par. 47, 49.

³⁰² Mahmood, "The Rohingya people," 1842.

UNHCR, "Report of the Special, A/HRC/22/58," par. 53.

³⁰³ UNHCR, "Report of the Special, A/HRC/22/58," par. 51..

³⁰⁴ C4ADS, "Sticks and Stones," Introduction.

UNHCR, "Report of the Special, A/HRC/28/72," par. 44.

³⁰⁶ UNHCR, "Report of the Special, A/HRC/28/72," par. 45.

Later, in February 2015, the president announced the expiration of the white cards, which the Rohingya used as identification cards. The government did provide the option for the Rohingya to apply for citizenship using greencards. However, since they are not a recognized ethnic group in Myanmar, they would have to use a different term to identify themselves, thereby removing their identity.³⁰⁷ Thus, this action left most Rohingya without any form of identity documents, which resulted in them not being able to vote in the upcoming national elections in November 2015.³⁰⁸

In August 2016, Aung San Suu Kyi established the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State.³⁰⁹ In September 2016, the Rakhine State government dismantled buildings – mostly mosques and madrasas - that were supposedly constructed without permission. The owners and residents were not provided with alternative housing.³¹⁰

In October, the violence spiraled out of control again. On the 9th, several hundred men reportedly attacked three border guard posts in northern Rakhine State.³¹¹ Several further clashes occurred the days afterwards.³¹² The men that attacks the posts are now known as an armed group called the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). The military responded by carrying out what they have described as ‘clearance operations’, marked by widespread and systematic human rights violations. This violence caused a flood of refugees to Bangladesh.³¹³ On the same day as the attacks, the area was reportedly sealed off and people’s movement was restricted. Humanitarian agencies were also denied access to this area.³¹⁴ Rather than isolated, some villages have been systematically destroyed.³¹⁵ Violence escalated again in November.³¹⁶

On August 25, 2017, a day after the government agreed to implement recommendations from a UN independent commission, violence broke out again. ARSA launched attacks on security posts in northern Rakhine State, to which the military responded with a brutal campaign of violence against the Rohingya community.³¹⁷ The campaign included unlawful killings, rape

³⁰⁷ C4ADS, “Sticks and Stones,” Discourse Analysis.

³⁰⁸ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 9.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar: Note by the Secretariat, A/HRC/34/67* (March 14, 2017): pars. 37-38, available from <http://undocs.org/a/hrc/34/67>.

³¹¹ OHCHR, “Flash Report,” 7.

³¹² International Crisis Group, “Myanmar: A New,” 6.

³¹³ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 9, 23.

³¹⁴ OHCHR, “Flash Report,” 7.

³¹⁵ International Crisis Group, “Myanmar: A New,” 9.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 9.

and other crimes of sexual violence, deliberate and targeted burning of entire Rohingya villages, and the laying of antipersonnel landmines.³¹⁸ The violations amount to crimes against humanity under international law, including forced population transfers and deportation, murder, rape and other sexual violence, and persecution.³¹⁹ All this led to mass displacement of civilians and the suspension of most aid activities.³²⁰ Over the next months, over 615.000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh.³²¹ A survey done by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) states that violence was the direct cause of death for the majority of Rohingya who died from August 25th to September 24th. The data shown an ‘exceedingly high level of mortality’.³²² In October, a committee for humanitarian assistance, chaired by Aung San Suu Kyi, was established.³²³

This subchapter has been written in December 2017. I have chosen to not keep updating this chapter, unless severe incidents happen.

3.3.2. Violations and abuses against the Rohingya

This section of the chapter will focus on the violations and abuses against the Rohingya in Myanmar. It needs to be mentioned that this thesis will solely focus on the Rohingyas and not on other minority ethnic groups experiencing abuse in Myanmar. Widespread discriminatory practices and policies targeting them because of their ethnic and religious identity have led to a deprivation of fundamental rights. Many of the acts suggest a widespread and systematic attack against the Rohingya, which might indicate crimes against humanity or ethnic cleansing.³²⁴ For this subchapter, I will follow the structure that is used in a report by the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights (A/HRC/32/18), as to the grouping and sequence of violations.³²⁵

³¹⁸ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 24.

³¹⁹ “Crimes against Humanity by Burmese Security Forces Against the Rohingya Muslim Population in Northern Rakhine State since August 25, 2017,” *Human Rights Watch*, September 25, 2017, accessed December 15, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/25/crimes-against-humanity-burmese-security-forces-against-rohingya-muslim-population>.

³²⁰ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 9.

International Organization for Migration, *IOM Appeal: Rohingya Refugee Crisis, September 2017-February 2018*, 1.

³²¹ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 9.

³²² Médecins Sans Frontières, *Myanmar/Bangladesh: Rohingya crisis - a summary of findings from six pooled surveys* (December 9, 2017), available from <http://www.msf.org/en/article/myanmarbangladesh-rohingya-crisis-summary-findings-six-pooled-surveys>.

³²³ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 9.

³²⁴ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 10.

UNHCR, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” par. 55.

³²⁵ UNHCR, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18.”

1. Deprivation of nationality:

The first violation that I will discuss is the arbitrary deprivation of nationality, resulting in statelessness.³²⁶ Because the Rohingya have no clear legal status in Myanmar, they are stateless.³²⁷

The 1982 Citizenship Law creates three categories of citizens with different rights: full citizens, associate citizens and naturalized citizens. People that belong to one of the national races according to the law are full citizens by birth.³²⁸ When the law came into place, people who were already citizens, could continue to be citizens. However, in practice, state officials in Rakhine State refused to register Rohingya - who had been citizens under the previous law.³²⁹ The Rohingya could then settle for either associate citizenship or naturalized citizenship, having less rights than full citizens, but these forms of citizenship are also hard to acquire. Few Rohingya are in possession of the necessary documents and language requirements form another obstacle.³³⁰ It seems to me that Rohingya would not like to settle for the associate or naturalized citizenship, since this would signal that they agree that they are not allowed to be full citizens.

The law is discriminatory and contravenes the international prohibition of arbitrary deprivation of nationality, violating the right of every child to acquire nationality. Myanmar has one of the largest stateless populations in the world: some 1.090.000 stateless people, predominantly Rohingya. The lack of citizenship of the community increases their vulnerability to human rights violations.³³¹

Government attempts to resolve the status of Rohingya have been problematic, since the process is always based on the 1982 Citizenship law, which is discriminatory on racial grounds.³³² The term 'Rohingya' that they use to self-identify, is rejected by Myanmar authorities. Instead, they call them Bengali', 'foreigner' or 'Muslims living in Rakhine State'. Amnesty International has concluded that the Rohingya do form a racial group, and that the

³²⁶ Talha Burki, "Life in limbo for millions of stateless people worldwide," *The Lancet* 389, no. 10077 (April 8-14, 2017): 1384.

³²⁷ UNGA, "Situation of human, A/67/383," par. 65.

³²⁸ Amnesty International, "Caged," 28.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid., 30.

³³¹ UNGA, "Situation of human, A/67/383," par. 65.

UNHCR, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," par. 26.

³³² Amnesty International, "Caged," 11.

combination of their race and religion seems to be the primary reason for the discrimination that they suffer.³³³

The rejection of the term ‘Rohingya’ stems from the idea that Rohingya Muslims are illegal Bengali immigrants. This is a widely-accepted idea in Myanmar, but the ultra-nationalist Buddhist groups present the immigration as an *existential threat* to the Buddhist majority in the country, stimulating the conflict.³³⁴ Because of the lack of citizenship, other rights, like freedom of movement, access to healthcare, education, politics and work opportunities are restricted as well.³³⁵

2. Restrictions on freedom of movement:

The second abuse that the Rohingya have to deal with concerns the restrictions to their freedom of movement. The authorities in Rakhine State have imposed severe restrictions on the movement of Rohingya, using regulations, curfews, checkpoints, violence and fear to impose them.³³⁶ This is a discriminatory crime that results in a strict deprivation of physical liberty, violating fundamental international laws. According to Amnesty International, since these violations are based on a racial group, they constitute a crime of apartheid.³³⁷

Restrictions on freedom of movement had existed for decades but were tightened after the violence in 2012.³³⁸ They were established for security reasons. During the 2012 violence and after the attacks in 2016, these grounds were justified. However, the application of the restrictions for several years, in predominantly Rohingya areas and during periods with no reported violence, seems disproportionate and discriminatory.

In northern Rakhine State, official authorization is necessary to move between – and often within – townships. Furthermore, Rohingya can no longer travel beyond northern Rakhine

³³³ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 95.

³³⁴ C4ADS, “Sticks and Stones,” Discourse Analysis.

³³⁵ Burki, “Life in limbo,” 1384.

C4ADS, “Sticks and Stones,” Discourse Analysis.

UNHCR, “Report of the Special, A/HRC/28/72,” par. 22.

³³⁶ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 42, 92.

³³⁷ Ibid., 92.

³³⁸ Ibid., 11, 42.

State except in the case of a serious medical emergency.³³⁹ Moreover, a curfew is imposed, that prevents people from being outside their home or travelling at night.³⁴⁰

Many Rohingya live in camps for internally displaced persons, where serious restrictions on movement, in the form of strict control on access by checkpoints, are in place.³⁴¹ These security checkpoints are installed throughout the state as well.³⁴²

It should be stated that Rohingya communities have also imposed limitations on movement themselves, motivated by fear of violence, considering that Rohingya who violate the restrictions are subject to years of imprisonment, disappearances, torture, forced labor, displacement, and sexual violence.³⁴³

The restrictions have several implications. Firstly, obviously, it makes travelling very difficult. The procedure to obtain authorization to travel is very time-consuming and bureaucratic.³⁴⁴ Secondly, the restrictions implicate that Muslims do not have the ability to worship and practice religion freely.³⁴⁵ Thirdly, the curfew has an impact on the access to emergency medical treatment at night and on the ability to undertake certain forms of work, such as farming and fishing.³⁴⁶ Other restrictions on the freedom of movement also constrain Muslims' access to livelihood, food, water, health care, and education, which are basic rights.³⁴⁷ The Rohingya stationed in camps have to rely on humanitarian organizations for food and other materials.³⁴⁸

3. Threats to life, liberty, and security:

The third section of violations against the Rohingya concerns patterns of serious human rights violations, disregarding the rights to life, liberty and security. These rights are violated by State

³³⁹ Amnesty International, "Caged," 44-45.

UNHCR, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," par. 28.

³⁴⁰ Amnesty International, "Caged," 12.

UNHCR, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," par. 29.

³⁴¹ UNHCR, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," par. 30.

³⁴² Amnesty International, "Caged," 46-47.

³⁴³ Amnesty International, "Caged," 11.

Mahmood, "The Rohingya people," 1845.

³⁴⁴ Amnesty International, "Caged," 12.

UNHCR, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," par. 28.

³⁴⁵ UNHCR, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," par. 29.

³⁴⁶ Amnesty International, "Caged," 50.

³⁴⁷ Amnesty International, "Caged," 73.

OHCHR, "Flash Report," 34.

UNHCR, "Report of the Special, A/HRC/28/72," par. 38.

UNHCR, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," par. 31.

³⁴⁸ Amnesty International, "Caged," 53.

security forces and other officials. Violations include summary executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrest and detention, extortion, torture and ill-treatment, sometimes leading to deaths in custody, sexual humiliation and abuse, no fair trial, and forced labor.³⁴⁹

Threats to the lives of Rohingyas have even been made by prominent figures in Myanmar. For instance, a high-profile member of a political party has addressed a crowd encouraging to ‘kill and bury’ all Rohingyas, to which the crowd cheered.³⁵⁰ Statements like this can form an incentive to kill the Rohingya population.³⁵¹ These kinds of incidents occur in a context of the proliferation of negative stereotyping and discrimination, displaying hate speech and instigating hatred and violence, mainly against Muslims. This trend can also be seen in the media, fueling intercommunal tensions by using anti-Rohingya discourse and showing inaccurate and provocative images of the violence.³⁵²

Nationalist Buddhist movements also help to instigate the bloodshed.³⁵³ The 969 Movement constitutes a movement that campaigns for ultranationalist ideas. They use elements of the Burmese monkhood to protect Myanmar and Buddhism against an apparently existential Muslim threat. The grassroots movement started in Mon State in 2012, but the message quickly spread across Myanmar. The monks were able to package the grievances and prejudices that had been held against Muslims for centuries into easy-to-understand ideas, helping to fuel the violence. Even though the message of the 969 Movement appealed to the public, the organization itself was not big enough to create a meaningful change. Late 2013, it was banned by a government body.³⁵⁴

The Ma Ba Tha (translation: Organization for the Protection of Race and Religion) filled this vacuum. This organization is more coherent than the 969 Movement and has grown into a big force in Myanmar.³⁵⁵ It is the driver behind the popular anti-Muslim narrative. In its actions, it has come close to violating the laws of Buddhist monkhood, like being involved in politics.

³⁴⁹ UNHCR, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” pars. 32-33.

³⁵⁰ United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Communications report of Special Procedures: Communications sent, 1 June to 30 November 2015; Replies received, 1 August 2015 to 31 January 2016*, A/HRC/31/79 (February 19, 2016), p. 37, available from <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/31/79>.

³⁵¹ Yanghee Lee, Izsak Rita, and Mutuma Ruteere, *Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar; the Special Rapporteur on minority issues; and the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance* (July 7, 2015), 1.

³⁵² Lee, “Mandates of the Special,” 1-2.

UNGA, “Situation of human, A/67/383,” par. 61.

³⁵³ Lee, “Mandates of the Special,” 1-2.

³⁵⁴ C4ADS, “Sticks and Stones,” Introduction.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

The Ma Ba Tha has been able to put religious and social issues on the political agenda, and with success: the laws regarding the protection of race and religion, which they have helped draft and which target the beliefs of the Burmese Muslim society, have been installed in 2015.³⁵⁶ These nationalist Buddhist movements increase the amount of outright hate speech directed against the Rohingya, consisting of violence and deeply offensive phrase.³⁵⁷

The organization has big grassroots support. Most members do not see it as a political entity, but as an organization that helps with an enormous range of activities, next to promoting shared Buddhist values.³⁵⁸ Activities like legal aid and education, provided by the organization, are seen by international analysts as a vehicle for propagating ultranationalist views. However, the grassroots support is flourishing in areas where the government lacks in providing basic services such as education or access to justice, showing that people seem to value the social work of the organization.³⁵⁹

An organization with a large grassroots support can, as was seen in the example of the peacebuilding process in Ireland, be very helpful in peacebuilding. Therefore, if the Ma Ba Tha would try to change its message, a hard task, it could contribute to peace. It would also be important to provide alternative structures through which the monasteries can work.³⁶⁰

What has been described above could be classified as a process of securitization, which means that an object – or in this case ethnic group - is turned into a security threat. This securitization justifies politicians to take extraordinary measures, going beyond the law. The securitization theory claims that any matter can become successfully securitized, when the audience is convinced that the issue or object constitutes an existential threat.³⁶¹ More research would have to be done in this field, but I think that this would be an interesting case to make. In the reports and articles that I have read, it seems that the nationalist Buddhist groups have securitized the Rohingya, claiming that they are an existential threat to the country. However, since I do not

³⁵⁶ C4ADS, “Sticks and Stones,” Introduction.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ International Crisis Group, “Buddhism,” 20-22.

³⁵⁹ Ibid, 26-27.

This also shows that the government might have to step up in these places. The NLD used to be a party that embodied the struggle against authoritarianism, but since it came into government, it has not been able to channel the energy of those at the grassroots who supported their cause. This has created a vacuum which the nationalist organizations are filling.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Barry Buzan, and Lene Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 34.

speak the language, it is hard to really perform discourse analysis on this. Moreover, it seems that the issue is prioritized above the reform process, which means that the issue is dealt with before others, another requirement for securitization.³⁶² Further research into this case would be appealing.

The violations of the right to life have been grave. They have been so serious, that early warning signs of genocide have been mentioned. Studies have presented these early warning signs and shown that the first four stages of genocide have already been passed, now being on the verge of mass annihilation.³⁶³ The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has also stated that the Myanmar security forces may be guilty of genocide against the Rohingya Muslims, after having described the campaign before as a ‘textbook case of ethnic cleansing’.³⁶⁴ He cited various reports demonstrating acts of ‘appalling barbarity’ committed against the Rohingya, like deliberately burning people to death inside their homes.³⁶⁵ Myanmar denies committing these atrocities against the Rohingya.³⁶⁶

4. Sexual and gender-based violence:

Another violation concerns sexual violence by security forces against the Rohingya. In this conflict, sexual violence by members of the armed forces or military officers is not uncommon: 52 percent of the women interviewed by the OHCHR stated to have survived rape or experienced other forms of sexual violence. In these cases, the women and girls were punished for not knowing where their male relatives were, for supposedly supporting the ‘insurgents’, or simply for being Rohingya. This suggests that rape was being used as a form of torture.³⁶⁷

However, sexual violence has probably been underreported, because of a lack of access to justice, cultural barriers, stigma or fear of reprisal. The shame surrounding sexual violence has

³⁶² Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework For Analysis* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 5, 12, 29.

³⁶³ Penny Green, Thomas MacManus, and Alicia de la Cour Venning, *Countdown to Annihilation: Genocide in Myanmar* (London: International State Crime Initiative, 2015).

³⁶⁴ Stephanie Nebehay, “Myanmar forces may be guilty of genocide against Rohingya, U.N. says,” *Reuters*, December 5, 2017, accessed December 5, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-rohingya-un/myanmar-forces-may-be-guilty-of-genocide-against-rohingya-u-n-says-idUSKBN1DZ14J>.

³⁶⁵ Nebehay, “Myanmar forces.”

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁷ OHCHR, “Flash Report,” 20-21.

resulted in women often being unable to speak out. Moreover, many cases are not reported out of fear. When cases are reported, policy hesitate to hold the military accountable for fear of reprisals. Furthermore, cases take years to pass through the legal system.³⁶⁸

5. Denial of the right to health:

The fifth violation against the Rohingya concerns the denial of the right to health. The availability, accessibility, affordability and quality of health facilities, goods and services are extremely poor across Rakhine State in general. Only five health workers are available per 10.000 people, compared to sixteen per 10.000 people nationally and compared to the minimum of 22 per 10.000 people that the World Health Organization recommends.³⁶⁹ This has several consequences: delays in treatment are formed, alternative health care becomes the only option for people, and preventable diseases, like polio, keep prevailing.³⁷⁰

For the Rohingya community, discriminatory barriers have made access to health care even worse. This has a considerable impact on the right to health, in particular regarding the access to emergency and life-saving care. The OHCHR has received reports of deaths that were caused by a lack of access to health facilities or a lack of timely treatment.³⁷¹ When the Rohingya *are* able to reach a hospital, they are treated in a discriminatory way.³⁷²

All these factors lead to a general reluctance to seek care in a facility.³⁷³ As a result, humanitarian agencies have been the main providers of limited primary health care. However, because of intimidation and attacks, they have had to reduce their operations.³⁷⁴ If the denial to health care leads to death, it constitutes a violation of the right to life.³⁷⁵

³⁶⁸ Amnesty International, "We are at breaking," 25.

UNHCR, "Report of the Special, A/HRC/28/72," par. 35.

UNHCR, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," par. 36.

³⁶⁹ Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, *Towards a Peaceful, Fair and Prosperous Future for the People of Rakhine: Final Report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State* (August 2017), 42.

World Health Organization, *A Universal Truth: No Health without a Workforce* (France: World Health Organization, 2014).

³⁷⁰ Amnesty International, "Caged," 60.

UNHCR, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," par. 38.

³⁷¹ UNHCR, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," par. 39.

³⁷² Amnesty International, "Caged," 12, 63-64.

UNHCR, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," par. 39.

³⁷³ UNHCR, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," par. 39.

³⁷⁴ Mahmood, "The Rohingya people," 1845.

³⁷⁵ UNHCR, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," pars. 38-40.

6. Denial of the right to education:

Now, the denial of the right to education will be discussed. As is the case with health care, access to education in all of Rakhine State is poor: the adult illiteracy rate is approximately 50 percent higher than the national average.³⁷⁶ This is due to poverty, distance to schools, and a lack of qualified teaching staff and other resources.³⁷⁷

Discrimination and policies of segregation imply that for Rohingya children, obtaining education is even more difficult. Rohingya are not allowed to attend mixed government schools with ethnic Rakhine children, resulting in a violation of the right to equal access to education. What is more, the lack of interaction between Rakhine and Rohingya children may impact the stability of the State in the long term, for it creates fear and mistrust.

Moreover, official government teachers have refused to teach at schools in Muslim villages.³⁷⁸ Some Muslim communities have responded to this by installing more educated members of the community as teachers. However, these people are often not trained and are sometimes unpaid volunteers, who do not come to school regularly because they do not get paid. Furthermore, because of these community ‘teachers’, children are often not taught the Myanmar language, stalling the integration process further.³⁷⁹

Accessing higher education at university is problematic because of restrictions on the freedom of movement. The lack of citizenship also means that the Rohingya have been unable to study for some specific professions. Because of these restrictions, young Rohingya do not get the chance to earn a living and lift themselves and their families out of poverty.³⁸⁰

7. Other restrictions based on local orders:

Now, this subchapter will focus on other restrictions that were imposed on the Rohingya, based on local orders. Especially in northern Rakhine State, a number of local orders targeting the

³⁷⁶ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 66.

UNHCR, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” par. 41.

³⁷⁷ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 67.

³⁷⁸ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 67-68, 72.

UNHCR, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” par. 42.

³⁷⁹ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 12, 69-70.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 12, 66.

Rohingya are discriminatory in intent and effect. These local orders often do not have a legal basis, but they constitute of policies and directives declared by the authorities, supposedly to prevent illegal immigration, and to control movement and population growth.³⁸¹

Some restrictions differ between townships or some orders, like ones restricting the number of children a couple can have or restricting religious practices and rituals, are only local.³⁸² These restrictions make the Rohingya more vulnerable to human rights violations.³⁸³

It seems that the Rohingya villages closest to the Rakhine communities that were affected by the 2012 violence have stricter local orders because of certain tensions. There are some towns which Muslims are not allowed to visit at all. When such a town houses the Immigration Office, this means that Rohingya can also not get a permit to go somewhere else.³⁸⁴

These local orders constitute a violation of fundamental rights, like the principle of non-discrimination, the freedom of movement and religion, the rights to privacy, to marry and to start a family, and the rights of the child.³⁸⁵

8. Limitations on political rights and documentation:

This violation involves an issue that has been mentioned before, namely that the Rohingya often lack documentation, which has consequences for their political rights. In 2015, the government announced the termination of the use of temporary identity cards, which were the main form of identification for many Rohingya. Later, a new identity card was announced, but this card was viewed with suspicion and thus not many people hold this new card. As a consequence, many stateless people do not have a valid identity card to confirm their legal residence in Myanmar.³⁸⁶

In Myanmar, every household is required to keep a list of its residents: a household list. For many Rohingyas in Rakhine State, this list is their main form of documentation, since they often do not have identity cards.³⁸⁷ Concerns have been raised about the fact that a large number

³⁸¹ UNHCR, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," par. 43.

³⁸² UNGA, "Situation of human, A/67/383," par. 64.

UNHCR, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," par. 43-44.

³⁸³ UNHCR, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," par. 44.

³⁸⁴ Amnesty International, "Caged," 49.

³⁸⁵ UNHCR, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," par. 45.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., par. 46.

³⁸⁷ Amnesty International, "Caged," 34.

of children remain unregistered. They remain unregistered because of a general unawareness about its importance, restrictions on marriage (permits), and the administrative hassles that go along with registration.³⁸⁸

Furthermore, the household lists can intensify anti-Muslims sentiment in the country. People have been stating that Muslims have a very high birth rate and that therefore stricter controls should be imposed on their reproduction. Because the household lists have not been updated for some time, new registrations of Rohingya babies could be manipulated to ignite communal hostility and strengthen anti-Muslim sentiment across the country.³⁸⁹

People are afraid that if no restrictions are placed on the reproduction of Muslims, the growing Muslim population will form a threat to the Myanmar identity, an identity that is intertwined with Buddhist religious identity. The attacks by ARSA have validated many citizens' belief that Islam is inherently violent and poses a threat to Buddhism. As a result of anti-Muslim sentiment that is spread through (social) media and lectures of influential monks, Myanmar's citizens now see the Rohingya as undesired: they are both national and religious 'others'.³⁹⁰

9. Forced labor:

Another violation against the Rohingya is forced labor. Credible reports continue to surface that forced labor continues to exist in some parts of the country, where it particularly affects minority groups.³⁹¹ In these reports, the amount of forced labor is probably underreported, because independent observers do not have access to all areas, people are not aware of the procedure for complaints and there is a general fear of vengeance.³⁹²

10. Trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling:

The next violation that will be reviewed is the trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling. Because of all the other violations against the Rohingya, many try to flee. They are persecuted

UNHCR, "Report of the Special, A/HRC/34/67," par. 15.

³⁸⁸ United Nations, Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 44 of the Convention*, CRC/C/MMR/CO/3-4 (March 14, 2012), par. 43, available from <http://undocs.org/CRC/C/MMR/CO/3-4>.

³⁸⁹ Amnesty International, "Caged," 37.

³⁹⁰ Walton, "Religion and Violence."

³⁹¹ UNHCR, "Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18," par. 48.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, par. 49.

in Myanmar and the standard of living is poor. However, because of the threat of refoulement – the sending back of refugees to a place where they are likely to be persecuted - in Bangladesh, many Rohingya now rely on human traffickers to undertake the unsafe and long maritime journey in small, poorly built boats under dangerous conditions to seek shelter in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, or across land in India. During these travels, many people die. Other human rights violations include unlawful confinement to boats, and sexual and gender-based violence.³⁹³

Myanmar is party to some declarations that want to tackle human trafficking by improving the conditions that make people flee. Thus, in order to fully address the human trafficking problems, efforts are required to improve the circumstances in the country, so that fleeing will not be necessary anymore.³⁹⁴

11. Protracted displacement and denial of an adequate standard of living:

This last section will go into displacement and the denial of an adequate standard of living. The latter is a comprehensive term for many violations occurring. Firstly, I will discuss the issues concerning displacement. Many people remain, since the outbreak of violence in 2012, internally displaced in Rakhine State. They often live camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), where they have limited access to basic services, like food, water, sanitation and health care, and they are not able to move freely. Moreover, the camps lack several economic and social rights, including the right to education and the right to an adequate standard of living. Because it can be hard to establish who exactly is an IDP, help is not always adequate. The restrictions also have consequences for those that are not among the IDPs, like remote communities, which do not receive adequate assistance either.³⁹⁵ The authorities do not have a plan to help the IDPs.³⁹⁶

During the wave of violence in October 2016, hundreds of Rohingya have been picked up by Myanmar security forces and taken away to unknown destinations.³⁹⁷ As has been said before,

³⁹³ Mahmood, “The Rohingya people,” 1845.

UN, Committee on the Rights of the Child, “Consideration of reports, CRC/C/MMR/CO/3-4,” par. 79.

UNHCR, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” par. 50.

³⁹⁴ UNHCR, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” par. 51.

³⁹⁵ UNGA, “Situation of human, A/67/383,” par. 60.

UNHCR, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” par. 52.

³⁹⁶ UNHCR, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” par. 54.

³⁹⁷ OHCHR, “Flash Report,” 19.

the forcible displacement of persons from an ethnic or religious group as a consequence of acts of violence committed against them such as killings, torture, arbitrary detention, rape and sexual violence and the destruction of houses and places of worship has been described as ethnic cleansing.³⁹⁸

An adequate standard of living is not just denied in the camps for IDP, but also in the Rohingya villages. Rohingya houses, schools, markets, shops and mosques have been deliberately burned by the army, police and Rakhine mobs, possibly instigated by anti-Muslim sentiment spread by Buddhist monks or the Ma Ba Tha.³⁹⁹ This was done on a systematic basis, to destroy property, kill people, and drive them away from their villages.⁴⁰⁰ Furthermore, because gatherings are forbidden, the Rohingya are prevented from practicing their faith in their village.⁴⁰¹ The security forces and mobs have also targeted sources of food.⁴⁰² Food insecurity can lead to malnutrition, especially amongst children and women. What makes it even more difficult, is that many areas are sealed off for humanitarian workers.⁴⁰³

Restrictions on movement, curfews and checkpoints make that the Rohingya have trouble to keep their businesses open.⁴⁰⁴ Communal tensions can also create other difficulties in livelihood opportunities, for example because Rohingya might not be hired anymore.⁴⁰⁵ Moreover, because the Rohingya cannot access their fields, forest, rivers and coastal areas to farm and fish, they are unable to generate an income and thus create an adequate standard of living.⁴⁰⁶ Lastly, land confiscations play a role in reducing access to livelihood. This is true for all of Myanmar; the country has a long history of land confiscation, often at the hands of the military.⁴⁰⁷

In conclusion, the current conflict is characterized by violations against the Rohingya. This sub-chapter has focused on violations in the form of the deprivation of nationality, restrictions on the freedom of movement, threats to life, liberty and security, sexual and gender-based

³⁹⁸ OHCHR, “Flash Report,” 42.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁰¹ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 12.

⁴⁰² OHCHR, “Flash Report,” 33-34.

⁴⁰³ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 79.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 73-74.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 76.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 75.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 76.

violence, denial of the right to health, denial of the right to education, restrictions based on local orders, limitations on political rights and documentation, forced labor, trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling, and protracted displacement and denial of an adequate standard of living. These violations against the Rohingya are so severe, that the terms ‘genocide’, ‘ethnic cleansing’ and ‘crimes against humanity’ have been mentioned. They cause the Rohingya to flee, which is what this next sub-chapter will go into more detail about.

3.4. Refugees

The last part of the chapter will focus on the refugee crisis that is currently taking place in Myanmar and neighboring countries. Because of the circumstances in Rakhine State, which have been described above, many Rohingya choose to flee the country.⁴⁰⁸ In the 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is defined as ‘a person with well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion’.⁴⁰⁹ However, most countries hosting Rohingya refugees have not signed the 1951 Convention. This means that the countries lack international obligation, and a legislative and administrative framework to address refugee matters.⁴¹⁰

Most Rohingya flee to Bangladesh, since Rakhine State borders the country. In October 2017, the refugee population in Bangladesh existed of 836.000 people, with 536.000 of those people having arrived since August 25th. This means that the Rohingya refugee population in Bangladesh has tripled over the course of a few weeks, while Bangladesh was already dealing with needs and pressures of its own. What is astonishing, is that now more Rohingya live in Bangladesh than in Myanmar. The people that have arrived in Bangladesh since August live in spontaneous settlements, with an increasing need of humanitarian assistance, shelter, food, clear water and sanitation. It is difficult to reach the new arrivals, who are in need of urgent care.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁸ OHCHR, “Flash Report,” 6-7, 32.

⁴⁰⁹ Chantal Thomas, “Transnational Migration, Globalization, and Governance,” in *The Oxford Handbook of The Theory of International Law*, ed. Anne Orford, and Florian Hoffman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 905-906.

⁴¹⁰ Ahsan Ullah, “Rohingya Crisis,” 295.

⁴¹¹ Asrar, “Rohingya crisis.”

International Organization for Migration, “IOM Appeal,” 2.

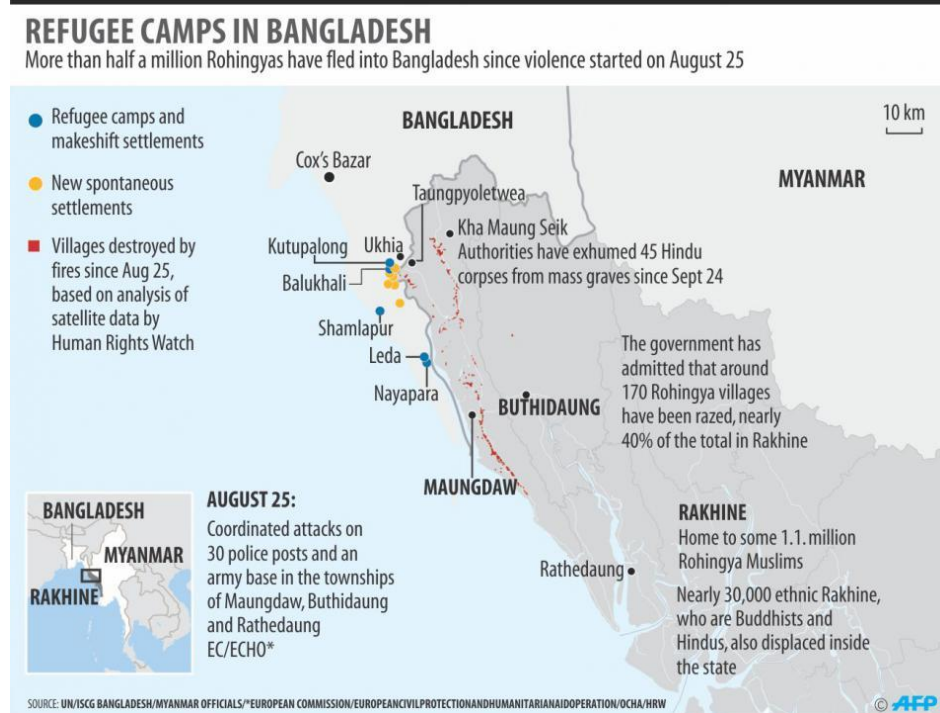
International Organization for Migration, *Rohingya Crisis Report* (October 12, 2017).

Inter Section Coordination Group, *Situation Update: Rohingya Refugee Crisis* (Cox’s Bazar: December 7, 2017).

United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Rohingya Refugee Crisis,” *OCHA* (website), accessed December 11, 2017, <https://www.unocha.org/rohingya-refugee-crisis>.

The speed and scale of the influx of refugees have resulted in a humanitarian emergency. It is one of the fastest refugee exoduses in modern times and has created the largest refugee camp in the world. Close to 750,000 displaced people are depending on humanitarian

Figure 4: Refugee camps in Bangladesh



Source: *The Daily Star*

assistance for life-saving needs.⁴¹² Figure 4 shows the refugee camps that have been created to house all the refugees.

Even in a crisis like this, neighboring countries of Myanmar should still keep their responsibilities under international law by respecting and protecting the human rights of all the people within their borders, regardless of whether they might be stateless.⁴¹³ As early as 2013, reports surfaced that urged surrounding countries to help with the Rohingya that were risking their lives at sea.⁴¹⁴ The non-refoulement principle, agreed on in international law, declares that, as mentioned before, states cannot return anyone to a place where their life or freedom would be at risk. In practice, this means that governments should ensure that the rights of Rohingya are respected and the refugees can seek asylum anywhere. State should not send the Rohingya back or arrest them.⁴¹⁵

World Health Organization, Regional Office for South-East Asia, *Situation Report: 7, Bangladesh/Myanmar: Rakhine Conflict 2017* (October 16, 2017), 1.

⁴¹² International Crisis Group, "Myanmar's Rohingya Crisis," 7.

World Health Organization, Regional Office for South-East Asia, "Situation Report: 7," 1.

⁴¹³ UNGA, "Situation of human, A/67/383," par. 66.

⁴¹⁴ UNHCR, "Report of the Special, A/HRC/22/58," par. 60.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*

It is hard however, to refer to international law when most countries surrounding Myanmar have not signed the 1951 Convention and have a lack of national legal framework. More so, Bangladesh has had a long-standing policy of sealing the border with Myanmar and has tried to push the refugees back. The countries around Myanmar abstain from becoming party to the Convention because they say that it may lead to an increase in the number of refugees arriving in their country, which leads to a heavy financial burden.⁴¹⁶ Nonetheless, the refoulement principle is a principle of international customary law, and is thus binding on all states, regardless of whether they are party to the 1951 Convention.⁴¹⁷

In Myanmar, the military and the government have no intention of accepting returnees as national minorities, but instead continue to classify them as foreigners or illegal migrants. The Rohingyas are left with little or zero assurances about their future back in Myanmar.⁴¹⁸ Accordingly, it would not be safe to send the refugees back, and the refoulement principle is in place.

There are some recent developments in this field. Myanmar and Bangladesh signed a repatriation agreement on 23 November 2017. In the agreement, it states that Rohingya refugees will begin returning to Myanmar by January 23, 2018. However, the statement should be seen as a sign of intent, and not as a sign that the refugees can really return. It creates an impossible timetable for safe and voluntary returns. On paper, the criteria for returnees are not very hard, but the biggest obstacle would be that the refugees most likely do not want to return. Lastly, the Buddhist leaders and communities form an obstacle, since they do not want the Rohingyas to return. It is also questionable whether the authorities in Myanmar will indeed be capable and willing of a repatriation effort this big, since they have denied UN support.⁴¹⁹ This all shows how complex the problem is.

⁴¹⁶ Ahsan Ullah, "Rohingya Crisis," 296.

Amnesty International, "We are at breaking," 9.

⁴¹⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Advisory Opinion on the Extraterritorial Application of Non-Refoulement Obligations under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol* (Geneva: January 26, 2007), pars. 15-16.

⁴¹⁸ Kaveri, "Being Stateless and the Plight of Rohingyas," *Peace Review* 29, no. 1 (January 31, 2017): 33.

⁴¹⁹ "Burma: Rohingya Return Deal Bad for Refugees: Burma, Bangladesh Need to Redraft Agreement, Involve UN," *Human Rights Watch*, December 11, 2017, accessed December 15, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/11/burma-rohingya-return-deal-bad-refugees>.
International Crisis Group, "Myanmar's Rohingya Crisis," 10.

Voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity as required by international law will not be feasible until the Burmese government demonstrates its willingness and ability to ensure full respect for returnees' human rights and equal access to nationality and security.⁴²⁰

Thus, many Rohingyas are fleeing the violence and human rights violations in Rakhine State. They often come to Bangladesh, which cannot handle this many refugees, but they are not allowed to send them back to Myanmar under international law. Humanitarian assistance is needed to help all the people that are currently stuck in the refugee camps in Bangladesh. Of course, ultimately, they should be able to return to their homes in Rakhine State. Therefore, first and foremost, a stable and safe environment to return to should be created in Myanmar.

3.5. Conclusion of the chapter

This chapter has focused on the conflict in Rakhine State in Myanmar, that started in 2012. It concentrated on the history of the conflict and how the conflict has development. The conflict started between Buddhists and Muslims, and quickly state security forces became involved as well. Today, persecution of Rohingya is a phenomenon that has become institutionalized.⁴²¹

Myanmar has a turbulent history, with many shifts in government structure. After it became independent, several coups followed. The country was ruled by a dictatorship for a long time, but started opening up the democratic space recently. All this time the Rohingya have been discriminated against, through laws, policies and practices. The 1982 Citizenship Law lays the basis for many of these policies.

After discussing the history, the chapter turned to the current conflict. The conflict started in 2012, amidst democratic reforms. Rakhine State is a very poor state already, but during the conflict, Rohingya have had to deal with many extra violations to basic human rights. These violations have caused them to flee, creating a humanitarian crisis in Bangladesh. Currently, more Rohingya live in Bangladesh than in Myanmar. Bangladesh cannot handle all these refugees, but is not allowed to send them back, because Myanmar is not safe for Rohingya.

⁴²⁰ "Burma: Rohingya Return Deal Bad for Refugees: Burma, Bangladesh Need to Redraft Agreement, Involve UN," *Human Rights Watch*, December 11, 2017, accessed December 15, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/11/burma-rohingya-return-deal-bad-refugees>.

⁴²¹ Ahsan Ullah, "Rohingya Crisis," 291.

Therefore, it is important to make Myanmar a place that is safe for the Rohingya to live. To do so, it would be good to find the structural causes for the conflict.

Chapter 4: Religious influence in the conflict

This chapter will explore the influence of religion in the conflict in Rakhine State and evaluate the concept of religious peacebuilding regarding the conflict. It answers the questions of how religious factors are influencing the conflict and to what extent religious peacebuilding can be an approach to deal with the conflict. The chapter will focus on the way religion influences the way that people think, how it creates identities and how it influences the violence and peacebuilding. Hereby, it is important to not assume that it is a religious conflict. Firstly, an introduction to the main religions present in the conflict, Buddhism and Islam, will be given. After that, the influence of (religious) identity on the conflict will be discussed. Then, the influence of religion on violence in the conflict will be reviewed, followed by the possible root causes of the conflict and the possibilities of religious peacebuilding in the conflict.

4.1. Buddhism

The Buddhist tradition, mainly its understanding of ethics, focuses on the law of ‘karma’.⁴²² This shows in the principle of non-harm and non-violating any living creature, instead choosing compassion, for harming has negative karmic consequences. When reading this, one would expect that all Buddhist societies seek peace and peaceful conflict resolution, but the reality in Myanmar proves differently.⁴²³ Nonetheless, Galtung calls Buddhism the system of faith that is best suited for the creation of peace.⁴²⁴

4.1.1. *The relationship between Buddhism and violence*

A method of meditation and mindfulness can be helpful to let people see past the aggression and explore the underlying cause of the violence.⁴²⁵ Moreover, by providing lessons on pacifism, nonviolent opposition, tolerance and the acceptance of other religions, Buddhism can offer important insights to conflict prevention. Stressing empathy and compassion can be a useful approach in conflict management.⁴²⁶ It is important that Buddhist conflict transformation

⁴²² Eva K. Neumaier, “Missed Opportunities: Buddhism and the Ethnic Strife in Sri Lanka and Tibet,” in *Religion and Peacebuilding*, ed. Harold Coward and Gordon S. Smith (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 70.

⁴²³ Neumaier, “Missed Opportunities,” 71.

⁴²⁴ Richard L. Gage, trans., ed., *Choose Peace: A Dialogue between Johan Galtung and Daissaku Ikeda* (London and Chicago: Pluto Press, 1995), 79.

⁴²⁵ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 136.

The Dalai lama of Tibet, *The Joy of Living and Dying in Peace*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Sr. (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 93.

⁴²⁶ Carter, “Religious Peacebuilding,” 287-288.

focuses on the individual's struggle against hatred and greed that have led to violence, as well as on the effort of the community to change the setting that caused these feelings. Again, mindfulness could help here to discover the structural preconditions of the conflict.⁴²⁷

The Buddhist ethics thus lend themselves very well for building peace between individuals, social groups and nations. However, too often Buddhist societies have fallen into personal hatred, which has resulted in a history of missed opportunities to build peace. For example, Buddhist societies did nothing to improve the fate of women or underprivileged groups, and beggars and disabled people are thought to be this way because of bad karma. This logic can make Buddhists relentless and in this way interrupt the peace process.⁴²⁸

There are other disadvantages to the Buddhist approach to peacebuilding. Firstly, monks have chosen to live an isolated life and are thereby preventing themselves from using their power to better the situation in the world.⁴²⁹ However, in Myanmar, the monks have already gotten involved in politics. Therefore, the isolated status of the monks should not be of concern here. Still, perhaps the monks that wish to stay true to the peaceful values of their religion also wish to stay true to the Buddhist tradition of living as a recluse. Secondly, in Buddhist society it can be difficult to recognize poverty, inequality, social strife and war as problems that need a concrete solution. Instead, Buddhism tends to see social problems only as the result of (bad) karma, and thus as one's individual responsibility. When looking for peacebuilding initiatives in Myanmar, it is important to keep in mind that the Buddhist ideas of peacebuilding favor an individualistic interpretation of inner peace and harmony. If peace is understood as a mental status that can be acquired through meditation, and not as a social responsibility, this can present an obstacle for Myanmar in realizing the potential of Buddhist ethnics for building harmony and peace between different social groups.⁴³⁰ The last disadvantage is the trend in Buddhist societies to adopt a 'mytho-historic' narrative as national identity, which can lead to fundamentalist positions in Buddhism.⁴³¹ As can be seen in Myanmar, if Buddhist violence does occur, it is often joined with ethno-nationalist extremism.⁴³²

⁴²⁷ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 137.

Thich Nhat Hanh, "Transforming Our Suffering," *Parabola* 18 (spring 1993): 49.

⁴²⁸ Neumaier, "Missed Opportunities," 86-87.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 73-74.

⁴³⁰ Neumaier, "Missed Opportunities," 74.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴³² Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 133.

4.1.2. Myanmar

Buddhism reached the area of Myanmar in the fourth century.⁴³³ Many Buddhist kings afterwards ruled the region, serving as the main patron and defender of the ‘sasana’.⁴³⁴ During this period, Buddhist concepts were intimately linked to power in the social, political and economic sphere.⁴³⁵ Buddhism was the common factor that held the society together, providing it with a worldview, a cosmology, and even a sense of identity as a people and a nation.⁴³⁶ The ‘sasana’ was integrated into a hierarchical social order.⁴³⁷

This social order was destroyed when the British transformed Burma into a rationalized, bureaucratic and modern colonial state. This also resulted in a decline of importance of the monks and traditional education for Buddhist boys.⁴³⁸ After colonization, Buddhism was often implemented in state programs, even though the military has also suppressed and manipulated the tradition.⁴³⁹

Currently, there are about 41 million Buddhists in Myanmar.⁴⁴⁰ The country is often seen by its inhabitants and governments as the stronghold of pure doctrinal Theravada Buddhism.⁴⁴¹

Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar, now highly present, first occurred during the colonial period. It was fueled by a drive to protect the Buddhist tradition against the perceived threat that was posed by colonialism. Associations of laypeople prepared the ground for the later development of self-conscious national identity and anti-colonial nationalist political radicalism.⁴⁴²

When the British separated the state administration from religion in Burma, this was a sign to many laypeople that their religion was in decline. Hence these laypeople started a movement

⁴³³ Niklas Foxeus, “Contemporary Burmese Buddhism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Buddhism*, ed. Michael Jerryson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 214.

⁴³⁴ Foxeus, “Contemporary Burmese,” 213, 215.

The ‘sasana’ refers to Buddhist texts, textual knowledge, moral observations, and so on, showing Buddhism as a social fact, including the material, social, and embodied dimension of the religion.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁴³⁶ Bruce Matthews, “The Legal of Tradition and Authority: Buddhism and the Nation in Myanmar,” in *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth-Century Asia*, ed. Ian Harris (London and New York: Continuum, 1999), 27-28.

⁴³⁷ Foxeus, “Contemporary Burmese,” 213.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁴³⁹ Foxeus, “Contemporary Burmese,” 216.

Friedlander, “Buddhism,” 18.

⁴⁴⁰ Friedlander, “Buddhism,” 16.

⁴⁴¹ Foxeus, “Contemporary Burmese,” 212.

⁴⁴² Foxeus, “Contemporary Burmese,” 217-218.

Jobair Alam, “The Rohingya of Myanmar: theoretical significance of the minority status,” *Asian Ethnicity* 19, no. 2 (2018): 193.

to strengthen shared religious and cultural values.⁴⁴³ The anxiety about the loss of religious and cultural education and discipline in the Buddhist society was further incited by the fact that most of the colonial government positions were filled by Indians bureaucrats, many of whom were Muslim, rather than local elites. Indian businessmen also came to dominate the economic sector. This created enormous tensions between the Burmese and Indians, which shows that the mistrust in the Burmese society has existed for a long time.⁴⁴⁴ As a result of these tensions, anti-colonial movements often focused on religious, rather than political mobilization.⁴⁴⁵

After the period of colonization, Buddhism was often at the center of Burmese governance. Legislation was adopted to produce an ethnically inclusive national identity drawing from shared Buddhist heritage, excluding others.⁴⁴⁶ Post-independence nationalism is therefore based on ethnicity, which can be problematic. In Myanmar, a sense of national identity has been constructed by the political leaders through ‘Burmanization’, which has affected the minorities in the country negatively.⁴⁴⁷

Since start of the democratization in 2011, Buddhist nationalism has become more visible again. After years of oppression, a new freedom of expression has allowed individuals and the media to articulate their complaints – to a certain extent.⁴⁴⁸ A movement that started during the colonization is now sustained by regional demographic shifts and contemporary global politics. Moreover, a millenarian current in Theravada Buddhism believes that the religion will inevitably decline and disappear, which strengthens the desire for a movement in defense of the religion.⁴⁴⁹ Furthermore, many Buddhists are scared, because they believe that Buddhism is an inherently peaceful religion, and therefore very vulnerable to oppression by more aggressive faiths, especially Islam. This upsets Buddhists who believe that their religion has suffered because of its tolerance of other religions.⁴⁵⁰

In conclusion, it can be said that Buddhism values many peaceful principles. The basic principle of its ethics, ‘karma’, results in several principles of non-harming and non-violence.

⁴⁴³ International Crisis Group, *Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar, Asia Report N290* (Brussels: September 5, 2017), 4.

⁴⁴⁴ International Crisis Group, “Buddhism,” 4.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁴⁶ Alam, “The Rohingya,” 193.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁴⁴⁸ International Crisis Group, “Buddhism,” 6.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

Mindfulness can be a useful method to achieve peace. However, if situations and problems are only seen as a result of karma, and not as a problem that society can find a solution for, Buddhism will not be helpful in finding a solution. Furthermore, this chapter has stressed how ingrained Buddhism is in Myanmar society, as is Buddhist nationalism.

4.2. Islam

The universal message of Islam entails that there should be equal concern and care for the whole universe.⁴⁵¹ The religion values ethics, and its texts acknowledge other religious paths and promote equality among humans.⁴⁵²

4.2.1. *The relation between Islam and violence*

Islam prohibits every kind of war, except holy war.⁴⁵³ There is a general principle of deterrence, which advises Muslims to stay away from war.⁴⁵⁴ Yet, in the Islamic worldview, nonbelievers should never be in a position of superiority over Muslims.⁴⁵⁵ This idea can lead to conflict.

In the Quran, there is no universal teaching about military violence.⁴⁵⁶ The now-popular concept of ‘jihad’ is only mentioned a few times. When mentioned, it often relates to war within oneself, or war to defend the faith when Muslims are actively prevented from practicing their religion – as in Myanmar. In the latter case, there has been a ‘fatwa’, a legal opinion issued by legitimate authorities.⁴⁵⁷ The gradual evolution of the concept into an attempt to justify armed struggle against political oppression is a response in political discourse and practice to authoritarian governments at home and to the impact of imperialism.⁴⁵⁸

Yet, the scriptures also show an explicit invitation for adopting a peaceful path. The ultimate goal of existence of humans on earth is to thrive through the establishment of communities that interact peacefully.⁴⁵⁹ Peacebuilding is thus a very important duty in Islamic tradition, but the focus hereby has been on intra-Muslim matters, rather than on relations with non-Muslims.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵¹ Hisham Soliman, “The Potential for Peacebuilding in Islam: Toward an Islamic Concept of Peace,” in *Religion and Foreign Affairs: Essential Readings*, ed. Dennis R. Hoover, and Douglas M. Johnston (United States of America: Baylor University Press, 2012), 292.

⁴⁵² Denny, “Islam,” 129.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, 134-135.

⁴⁵⁴ Soliman, “The Potential,” 294.

⁴⁵⁵ Denny, “Islam,” 138.

⁴⁵⁶ Armstrong, “Fields,” 184.

⁴⁵⁷ Andrea Teti, and Andrea Muti, “Islam and Islamism,” in *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics*, ed. Jeffrey Haynes (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 98-99, 102.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 99, 102.

⁴⁵⁹ Soliman, “The Potential,” 295.

⁴⁶⁰ Denny, “Islam,” 136.

However, there exist plenty Islamic scriptural references that provide hope for continuing and extending the peacebuilding practices of Islam both within and beyond the boundaries of the Muslim community.⁴⁶¹

In Islam, peace is achieved through limiting people's greed that prompts them to violate the rights of their fellow human beings.⁴⁶² This can be related to the idea of inner peace in Buddhism as explained above. Perhaps that linkage can be useful when thinking of peacebuilding involving the two religions. Furthermore, the religion advocates mercy and forgiveness.⁴⁶³ This can be very relevant in the case of Myanmar, since forgiveness will most certainly be needed if there is to be peace between the Rohingyas and Rakhine people.

Unfortunately, most of these concepts are theoretical principles that lack genuine utilization in many contemporary Muslim societies.⁴⁶⁴ Nonetheless, this does show that there is hope for Islamic peacebuilding. Moreover, Islam suggests that in peacebuilding, religion can be used to raise discussions to a new, spiritual level, which can help superordinate values and inspire opponents to make concessions they would otherwise not make.⁴⁶⁵

4.2.2. Myanmar

The history of the Muslims, and especially the Rohingyas, is one that is disputed both in academics and in the Myanmar society, resulting in a denial of ethnic identity by the Myanmar government.⁴⁶⁶ The state government has called them 'illegal immigrants' and 'Bengali. However, the Bangladeshi government issued statements that the Rohingya are not from Bangladesh.⁴⁶⁷

Very little is actually known about the Rohingya, and when stories about them exist, often no time period is given.⁴⁶⁸ Nonetheless, Islam is thought to have arrived in Myanmar in the seventh century with the arrival of Arab, Moorish and Persian traders and, as they blended with the

⁴⁶¹ Denny, "Islam," 142.

⁴⁶² Soliman, "The Potential," 296.

⁴⁶³ Carter, "Religious Peacebuilding," 286.

Soliman, "The Potential," 298.

⁴⁶⁴ Soliman, "The Potential," 301.

⁴⁶⁵ Carter, "Religious Peacebuilding," 285.

⁴⁶⁶ Siegfried O. Wolf, "Genocide, exodus and exploitation for jihad: the urgent need to address the Rohingya crisis," *SADF Working paper*, no. 6 (September 2017): 6-7.

⁴⁶⁷ Kazi Fahmida Farzana, *Memories of Burmese Rohingya Refugees: Contested Identity and Belonging* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 2.

The Rohingya were not known in Bangladesh until 1977, when they first moved to the country, fleeing from the discriminatory and violent practices that were already existent in Myanmar. Hence, the government of Bangladesh labels them 'refugees'.

⁴⁶⁸ Farzana, "Memories," 20-21.

local population, has been growing ever since.⁴⁶⁹ It must be noted that there are other Muslims living across Myanmar that are not Rohingya.⁴⁷⁰ Muslims have had a well-established presence in northern Arakan since the twelfth century.⁴⁷¹ Arakan has not always been part of Myanmar, but was once an independent kingdom. The Muslim influence was enormous there, as Buddhist kings also adopted Islamic principles.⁴⁷²

The Muslim traders were later followed by migrants coming from the Indian subcontinent, mainly from Bengal into Arakan, when both regions were under British colonial rule and therefore did not have fixed borders.⁴⁷³

To conclude, peace promoting motifs can be found in Islam. This is hopeful for the conflict in Myanmar, if the peaceful concepts are not just seen as theoretical ideas, but actually turned into practice. In Myanmar, the history of the Rohingya is contested, but it is suggested that Muslims have been present in the country for a long time now.

4.3. The influence (religious) identity in the conflict

In this conflict in Rakhine State, identity seems to play a very important role. In this part of the chapter, I would like to see to what extent identity is influenced by religion, and how the creation of identities has separated different groups in society, which might have been a stimulant for conflict.

According to Erikson, individuals construct a sense of identity as they make choices, decisions and commitments within their societal contexts. In turn, this sense of identity creates a sense of well-being and a sense of 'knowing where one is going'.⁴⁷⁴ From a constructivist point of view, identity is seen as a structure or framework out of which individuals interact in the world, which is continually updated as new experiences and information are encountered.⁴⁷⁵ For

⁴⁶⁹ Mohammad Mohibullah Siddiquee, "Who are Rohingyas and How? Origin and Development of the Rohingyas in Arakan," in *To Host or To Hurt. Counter-narratives on Rohingya Refugee Issue in Bangladesh*, ed. Nissan Uddin (Dhaka: Institute of Culture and Development Research, 2012): 28.

⁴⁷⁰ Nehginpao Kipgen, "Conflict in Rakhine State in Myanmar: Rohingya Muslims' Conundrum," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 33, no. 2 (2013): 300.

⁴⁷¹ Farzana, "Memories," 42.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Wolf, "Genocide," 6.

⁴⁷⁴ Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the life cycle* (New York: Norton, 1980), 127.

⁴⁷⁵ Harold D. Grotevant, "Assigned and Chosen Identity Components: A Process Perspective on Their Integration," in *Adolescent Identity Development*, ed. G. R. Adams, T. P. Gullotta, and R. Montemayor (Newbury Park, London, New Delhi: Sage, 1992), 74-75.

Erikson, this framework ultimately provides a sense of consistency and coherence to the self.⁴⁷⁶ Thus, identity provides one with a coherent perspective.

There are a few different kinds of identity that are important to consider for this chapter. Firstly, social identity refers to the group that one identifies with. Moreover, it relates to the extent to which this identification leads one to favor the ‘ingroup’ and to distance oneself from the ‘outgroups’, encompassing the ways by which individuals identify with the groups to which they belong, as well as the psychosocial consequences of these identifications.⁴⁷⁷ Othering, then, is related to social identity and forms a comprehensive term for defining alterity - every ‘us’ excludes a ‘them’ - and excluding those that are different.⁴⁷⁸ This happens when one sees people as outsiders, and thus as ‘others’.⁴⁷⁹

Cultural identity and ethnic identity are both types of social identity, which can create feelings of belonging to a certain group and of solidarity, resulting in behaviors that are manifested towards one’s own and other cultural groups.⁴⁸⁰ The characteristics of these groups can be very pervasive and provide guidelines for one’s personal identity.⁴⁸¹ These kinds of identity are very important for the conflict in Myanmar, since it gives one a sense of solidarity, but also, because of this solidarity, a way to look at other groups. This thus influences the way that the Burmese or Rakhine people view the Rohingya. The Rohingya ethnic identity is a disputed one, which results in people wishing to deny them the status of a minority.⁴⁸²

4.3.1. Othering

Social identity can lead to othering and defensive localization. Defensive localization concerns the treasuring of a local identity that excludes others. Such stereotypical common perspectives create a fabricated unity by reducing complexity and closing off the self, often as a reaction to too much uncertainty and feelings of insecurity.⁴⁸³ The Rakhine people in Myanmar are a

⁴⁷⁶ Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968).

⁴⁷⁷ Seth J. Schwartz, and Marilyn J. Montgomery, and Ervin Briones, “The Role of Identity in Acculturation among Immigrant People: Theoretical Propositions, Empirical Questions, and Applied Recommendations,” *Human Development* 49 (2006): 6-7.

⁴⁷⁸ Gerd Baumann, “Grammars of Identity/Alterity: A Structural Approach,” in *Grammars of Identity/Alterity*, ed. Gerd Baumann, and Andre Gingrich (Oxford, Berghahn, 2004), 18, 46.

⁴⁷⁹ Sunil Bhatia, “Acculturation, Dialogical Voices and the Construction of the Diasporic Self,” *Theory & Psychology* 12, no. 1 (2002): 66.

⁴⁸⁰ Rebecca L. Malhi, Susan D. Boon, and Timothy B Rogers, “‘Being Canadian’ and ‘Being Indian’: Subject Positions and Discourses Used in South Asian-Canadian Women’s Talk about Ethnic Identity,” *Culture Psychology* 15, no. 2 (2009): 256, 258.
Schwartz, “The Role,” 6.

⁴⁸¹ Malhi, “‘Being Canadian,’” 256, 258.

⁴⁸² Alam, “The Rohingya,” 195.

⁴⁸³ Hubert J. M. Hermans, and Agnieszka Hermans-Konopka, *The Dialogical Self: Positioning and Counter-Positioning in a Globalizing World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 29.

minority themselves. Even though they are recognized by the 1982 Citizenship Law, they have suffered from Burmese oppression over time. Moreover, the Rakhine State suffers from chronic underdevelopment and abuse by the central state. This creates uncertainty and feelings of insecurity. To deal with those feelings, the Rakhine people have created a unity, cherishing their local identity, but excluding others, like the Rohingya. The Rohingya, living in the same area in large numbers, might be a factor in creating those feeling of insecurity.

Hermans points to the dangers of this defensive localization, because of the stereotyping, the ‘othering’, and the exclusion mechanisms that it produces. Here, the sense of a secure self and identity is built on the dichotomy between ‘us’, who are considered to be superior, and ‘them’, the inferior ‘others’.⁴⁸⁴ The self is part of a larger process of identity construction, where one’s identity is compared to others.⁴⁸⁵ If traditional religion is what creates an ‘ingroup’, this serves the needs of continuity and certainty, according to Hermans. Here, othering presents a defensive strategy for coping with the increased level of uncertainty in the global world, by sharpening boundaries, reducing the heterogeneity of positions, and giving prominence to one powerful position.⁴⁸⁶ Zock agrees with Hermans that this is the basis for many violent conflicts.⁴⁸⁷

Thus, one factor that can give rise to uncertainty is globalization. Globalization can be destabilizing by challenging simple definitions of who we are and where we come from.⁴⁸⁸ Moreover, democratizing forces are threatening traditional or hierarchical structures in many societies, which leaves some feeling suspicious of this transformation and creating insecurity. The fear of losing work, status, or other privileges is constantly felt and generates the growth of new local identities in response to the effect of globalization.⁴⁸⁹ Furthermore, the structures that identified the community and had bounded it together, in pre-colonial Burma this was

⁴⁸⁴ Hetty Zock, “Religious Voices in the Dialogical Self: Towards a Conceptual-Analytical Framework on the Basis of Huber Hermans’s Dialogical Self Theory,” in *Religious Voices in Self-Narratives: Making Sense of Life in Times of Transition*, ed. Marjo Buitelaar and Hetty Zock (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 20.

Kinnvall, “Globalization,” 763.

⁴⁸⁵ Catarina Kinnvall, “Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security,” *Political Psychology* 25, no. 5 (October 2004): 749.

Daniel M. Ogilvie, and Richard D. Ashmore, “Self-with-other representation as a unit of analysis in self-concept research,” in *The relational self*, ed. Rebecca C. Curtis (New York: Guilford, 1991), 286.

⁴⁸⁶ Hermans, “The Dialogical,” 44-47.

⁴⁸⁷ Zock, “Religious Voices,” 21.

⁴⁸⁸ Eric Kolodner, “The political economy of the rise and fall(?) of Hindu nationalism,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 25, no. 2 (1995): 239.

Kinnvall, “Globalization,” 742-743.

⁴⁸⁹ Kinnvall, “Globalization,” 742-743.

Kolodner, “The political,” 239.

Buddhism, are removed, which has a disintegrative effect.⁴⁹⁰ There is therefore a relationship between globalization and - the feeling of - security, which is further proven by the extent to which migrants and refugees are currently framed in terms of security threats.⁴⁹¹

In Myanmar, the hierarchical structures were already destroyed by the British colonization. This made people cling to Buddhism, creating an 'ingroup'. Another change in the structure of society occurred in 2011, when the country's democratization process started. This again created feelings of insecurity, since now apart from democracy, the country was also opening up to the global world, which can challenge one's identity. This feeling of insecurity might have given rise to the current conflict in Rakhine State. People have also been guilty of 'othering'. This can be linked to the theory about conflict about lifecycle of conflicts.⁴⁹² The social change which gave rise to this conflict can be the democratization and opening up to the world, and thus exposure to globalization. I believe that this might also be a root cause of the conflict, which will be discussed later.

When one excludes the other, this is part of a self-construction that is built on the difference between 'superior' and 'inferior'. Beliefs that resemble one's own national, religious, or ethnic group then represent purity, order, truth, beauty, good and right, in contrast to those of the 'outgroup', who represent pollution, falsity, ugliness, the bad and wrong.⁴⁹³ Individuals have a tendency to positively look at themselves and their group in relation to other groups.⁴⁹⁴ When someone from the 'outgroup' is seen as inferior, it is harder to break down the barriers between the groups.⁴⁹⁵ Creating an identity in this sense can be very dangerous, for it is what terrorist organizations use to psychologically distance themselves from the other humans that they intend to destroy.⁴⁹⁶ It is therefore important to oppose a categorization of the world into groups like us-versus-them or good-versus-evil, because these categorizations support the views of fundamentalists and increase the chance that more individuals will turn violent.⁴⁹⁷ In Myanmar,

⁴⁹⁰ Kinnvall, "Globalization," 743.

Kolodner, "The political," 239.

⁴⁹¹ Kinnvall, "Globalization," 743.

⁴⁹² The lifestyle of conflicts goes as follows: it starts with peaceful social change, which turn to conflict formation, to violent conflict, to conflict transformation and back to peaceful social change. Nonetheless, a conflict can also take many other parts, it does not have to follow this sequence.

⁴⁹³ Fathali M. Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Explanation," *American Psychologist* 60, no. 2 (February-March 2005): 166.

Hermans, "The Dialogical," 44.

Kinnvall, "Globalization," 763.

⁴⁹⁴ Kinnvall, "Globalization," 750.

⁴⁹⁵ Hermans, "The Dialogical," 44.

⁴⁹⁶ Moghaddam, "The Staircase," 166.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 167.

this defensive localization and othering has created a deep rift in society. Categorizing the ‘other’ in this way makes it easier to, as was explained above, turn to violence. In the previous chapter, the speech by influential monk Sitagu Sayadaw was highlighted.⁴⁹⁸ Sitagu distinguished very clearly between the ‘ingroup’, the Buddhists, and the ‘outgroup’, namely non-Buddhists, creating a scenario of us-versus-them, where it is then justified to harm the ‘outgroup’, because they are ‘othered’. What is more, the State is using an exclusionary ideology and the construction of identities in terms of us-versus-them to accentuate the differences between Rohingyas and others.⁴⁹⁹

4.3.2. Nationalism and religion

As individuals feel vulnerable and experience existential anxiety, they often wish to reaffirm a threatened self-identity. A collective identity, like the cultural or ethnic identity explained above, can provide this sense of security. Therefore, it is attractive for people to adhere to such an identity group. For leaders, it is attractive to unite people around causes like nationalism and religion. They are two causes or identity-signifiers that are more likely than others to give answers to people, because they provide particularly powerful stories and beliefs and can produce a picture of stability, security and simple answers.⁵⁰⁰ This way, they create a picture of a ‘home’ safe from intruders. In this view, the world consists of a direct relationship between a certain territory - the ‘home’ - and certain god(s). Hence nationalism and religion, as identity-signifiers, are likely to increase ontological security while minimizing existential anxiety, but are likely to decrease security for those that are not included in the discourse. Therefore, to combat this, it is crucial to recognize the hidden power structures that are concerned with the supposed creation of one exclusionary identity, and with that identify the real structural insecurities that come with living in an increasingly complex and globalized society.⁵⁰¹ It seems that the combination of nationalism and religion is used in Myanmar to create an exclusionary identity, perhaps an identity that is classified by citizenship. Since this powerful combination seems to be at play in the examined conflict, this sub-chapter will now delve a bit deeper into this subject. Although religion shares many of the characteristics of nationalism, the religious

⁴⁹⁸ International Crisis Group, “Myanmar’s Rohingya Crisis,” 12.
Walton, “Religion and Violence.”

In this speech, Sitagu cited a legend which stated that if non-Buddhists are killed, this does not generate bad karma. He even added to this stating that non-Buddhists killed are ‘not fully human’.

⁴⁹⁹ Alam, “The Rohingya,” 193.

⁵⁰⁰ Kinnvall, “Globalization,” 742.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 763.

elements in the study of nationalist movements are often neglected.⁵⁰² This is why this thesis is focusing on exactly those elements.

When nationalists are attempting to unify and mobilize people, religion is a useful tool. By disguising their actions as moral acts in the name of religion, nationalist leaders can increase the legitimacy of their decisions.⁵⁰³ These tactics are being executed by the Ma Ba Tha as well as ARSA, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, in this way increasing their authority and creating a cosmic war. Furthermore, religion often delineates the boundaries of violence and constructs conditions under which killing is permitted, as is the case with a ‘fatwa’ issued for defending their Islamic religion and when Situgu created the condition that non-Buddhist can be killed.⁵⁰⁴ Leaders who then exploit this religious ideology possess a powerful weapon. Moreover, many of the core elements of a religious ideology, like salvation and sacrifice, are closely associated with nationalist ideas. If nationalists are able to use certain components of a society’s religious consciousness and direct these towards nationalist goals, they have an even more terrifying weapon. In the hands of nationalists, religious myths and rituals can serve as cooperative structures and collective opportunities for dissatisfied people to unify.⁵⁰⁵ When insecurity increases, religion provides a stable basis for personal and communal identity.⁵⁰⁶

Moreover, for nationalists, it is important to have a verification of archaeology and historical evidence to consolidate an identity. Hence, in areas experiencing violent conflicts, an increase can be seen in the manipulation and reinterpretation of historical and archaeological evidence to support claims of precedence to land and rights for particular identity groups.⁵⁰⁷ This is a very important point for the conflict in Myanmar. Because the history of the Rohingya is contested, the Burmese government and the people of Rakhine have interpreted their history in a way that coincides with their interests. Because literature failed to mention the Rohingya, the Rakhine and Burmese are able to tell the story as if the Rohingya were immigrants from Bangladesh, to support their claims to Rakhine State and the rights for the Rakhine people – and the lack of rights for the Rohingya. Thus, in this case the *lack* of archaeological evidence is manipulated for the Rakhine people.

⁵⁰² Kinnvall, “Globalization,” 758.

⁵⁰³ Kolodner, “The political,” 248.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 249.

⁵⁰⁷ Kinnvall, “Globalization,” 756.

Religion can be used as part of a larger social movement seeking wider public influence.⁵⁰⁸ The Ma Ba Tha has provided a way in which religion can help to answer feelings of insecurity. In these cases, often racism is disguised in political discourse as being simply a matter of religious and/or cultural differences.⁵⁰⁹ This is the case with the speeches by Buddhist politicians or monks from the Ma Ba Tha as well. The tendency, which has recently been seen across the world, to link the religion of Islam with terrorist practices, is a good example of how different groups can become homogenized in religious and racist terms.⁵¹⁰ Racism is a historical phenomenon that emerges within the discourse of nationalism. It is, just like nationalism, based on separateness and the need for greater exclusivity.⁵¹¹ This can be linked to the ideas of othering and creating a superior self or ‘ingroup’ based on the inferior other or ‘outgroup’.

In conclusion, it can be said that identity formation can very much contribute to the creation of conflict. By adhering to a group or social identity, one excludes and demonizes others, which can lead to violence. In Myanmar, history has created separate identities, which, because of heightened feelings of insecurity, resulted in ‘ingroups’ and ‘outgroups’. When someone from the ‘outgroup’ is seen as inferior, this provides a basis for conflict.

4.4. Influence of religion on violence

Above, it has been discussed that a social identity can have a great influence in creating hostile feelings towards other groups, since ‘othering’ can make one see people from another group, or the ‘outgroup’, as inferior. This makes it harder to break down the barriers between two groups and makes it easier to turn to violence. Religion is an important identity-signifier that can create a picture of security by providing stability, security and answers. A religious identity can thus be very powerful in a conflict. Other influences of religion on violence in the conflict will be discussed now.

⁵⁰⁸ Kinnvall, “Globalization,” 759.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 760.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 761.

⁵¹¹ Étienne Balibar, “Racism and nationalism,” in *Race, nation, class: Ambiguous identities*, ed. Étienne Balibar, and Immanuel Wallerstein (London: Verso, 1991), 37-38.

4.4.1. Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA)

Harakah-al-Yaquin (HaY) - ‘faith movement’ in Arabic - was formed in the aftermath of the 2012 violence.⁵¹² The active recruitment of local leaders began in 2013, and after that the training of villagers started.⁵¹³ A few Rohingya from Saudi Arabia, including the leader Ata Ullah, are leading operations on the ground in Rakhine State.⁵¹⁴ HaY has been rebranded in English as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, ARSA.⁵¹⁵ Since the attacks on 9 October, many young men have joined the fight. The main fighting force is made up of Muslim villagers in northern Rakhine State, who are organized into village-level cells to limit risks. They are mostly led by young Islamic clerics or scholars from those villages and they thus have religious leaders.⁵¹⁶

On the October 9, 2016, the attacks on border posts by ARSA showed the first major organized violent resistance move from the Muslim population.⁵¹⁷ After these attacks, the security forces of Myanmar started ‘clearance operations’ and sealed off the area.⁵¹⁸ Another escalation on November 12 demonstrated that the attacks were not random and that ARSA could still perform, despite a month of the exhaustive clearance operations.⁵¹⁹ After these clashes, the military intensified its operations. However, the violence and abuse probably increased the support for the armed group, instead of decreasing it.⁵²⁰ On August 25, 2017, ARSA again launched attacks on security posts. These attacks were ordered mostly by communications by respected local Islamic clerics or scholars.⁵²¹ As was explained in a previous chapter, a religious leader can have great influence in instigating religious violence. The fact that religious authorities were cell leaders, makes the conflict more of a religious one; it gives religious legitimacy to the conflict. This might take it to another, sacred level for the people who are involved.

Even though the organization does not appear to have religious *motivations*, it has sought religious legitimacy for its actions, which can increase its legitimacy.⁵²² Senior Rohingya

⁵¹² International Crisis Group, “Myanmar, A New,” 12.

⁵¹³ Ibid., 15.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁵¹⁵ International Crisis Group, “Myanmar’s Rohingya Crisis,” 1.

⁵¹⁶ International Crisis Group, “Myanmar: A New,” 13.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 9.

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁵²¹ International Crisis Group, “Myanmar’s Rohingya Crisis,” 6.

⁵²² International Crisis Group, “Myanmar: A New,” 13.

Kolodner, “The political,” 248.

clerics and several foreign clerics have ruled that, given the persecution that Muslim communities are facing in Rakhine State, a campaign against the security forces is legal in Islam, and anyone opposing it is in opposition to Islam.⁵²³ By creating this distinction, the conflict gets a religious dimension for the ARSA fighters. ‘Fatwas’ – religious rulings – have been obtained shortly after the October 9 attacks. They had a substantial effect in persuading many Muslim religious leaders in northern Rakhine State to authorize the organization, despite preferring nonviolent actions earlier.⁵²⁴ The issuing of ‘fatwas’ thus seems to have been decisive in convincing many to support the organization.⁵²⁵ This shows the earlier explained influence that religious leaders can have. Moreover, the leaders had been living with local people. Because like this the villagers could view and experience their strong commitment, they started to trust and support the leaders.⁵²⁶

Information from members of the organization and analysis of the method by the International Crisis Group reveal that the approach and objective of ARSA are not in line with transnational jihadist terrorism.⁵²⁷ The main motivation for the founding of the organization thus does not seem religious. However, it is possible that its aspirations could develop, given its appeals to religious legitimacy and links to international jihadist groups. Therefore, it is essential that the government does not just focus on military approaches, but also addresses the root causes of the conflict and the community grievances and suffering and stronger, more positive ties are built between the Muslim communities and the Myanmar state.⁵²⁸

4.4.2. 969 Movement and the Ma Ba Tha

The 969 Movement started as a grassroots movement in 2012, formed by a group monks attempting to protect race and religion in Myanmar.⁵²⁹ The nationalist perspective of the movement made it more popular.⁵³⁰ The ideas of the 969 Movement circulated rapidly, and it is widely thought that they have incited violence.⁵³¹ A pattern was even found concerning the sermons given by the monks and the following anti-Muslim riots.⁵³² Influential monks like

⁵²³ International Crisis Group, “Myanmar: A New,” 13.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 17-18.

⁵²⁷ Ibid., 13-14.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 13-14, 22.

⁵²⁹ Justice Trust, *Hidden Hands Behind Communal Violence in Myanmar: Case Study of the Mandalay Riots*, Justice Trust Policy Report (2015), 2.

⁵³⁰ Benjamin Schonthal, and Matthew J. Walton, “The (New) Buddhist Nationalisms? Symmetries and Specificities in Sri Lanka and Myanmar,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 17, no. 1 (2016): 84, 100.

⁵³¹ Justice Trust, “Hidden Hands,” 2.

⁵³² Ibid.

Wirathu led the movement, which was particularly outspoken in its extremist discourse, alleging a Muslim conspiracy existed wanting to seize the country. This was combined with a 'Buy Buddhist' boycott of Muslim-owned businesses.⁵³³ However, while the message of the organization spread, the organization itself lacked the infrastructure necessary to create any meaningful change on a national scale. In late 2013, the organization was banned by the Sangha Council.⁵³⁴

The formation of the Ma Ba Tha may have been a response to this ban, as it immediately picked up where the 969 Movement had left off, lobbying for race and religion laws and increasing awareness of nationalist ideology.⁵³⁵ Ma Ba Tha (translation: Organization for the Protection of Race and Religion) is a more coherent organization than the 969 Movement. It has become the representative of the anti-Muslim narrative and has grown into one of the country's most powerful socio-political forces. In its operation, it has come close to breaking the rules of monkhood. Monks are directed by the mandates of the Buddhist Sangha that demoralize involvement in politics. Nonetheless, monks have been concerned with Burmese politics before.⁵³⁶ The question with the Ma Ba Tha is thus to what extent they are actually promoting Buddhist values, since they are so close to violating Buddhist rules.

The organization has casted most of its energy towards social and religious issues, particularly those associated with Islam's role in Myanmar. It has pushed religious and social matters to the forefront of the 2015 political agenda. Even though the Ma Ba Tha is not the only organization that is spreading anti-Muslim sentiments, it is most likely the most effective one. Its media network is very powerful and well-organized, and the organization has demonstrated that it is able to transform its message into policy and laws. Its most notable success consists of the four 'Protection of Race and Religion Laws' in 2015.⁵³⁷

4.4.3. The causes of religious violence applied to the conflict

In the second chapter, several reasons as to why religion might turn violent have been discussed. The first category of causes given by Fox focused on instrumental violence. When a religious group cannot pursue their political agenda through peaceful means, they might

⁵³³ International Crisis Group, "Buddhism," 10.
Schonthal, "The (New) Buddhist," 84.

⁵³⁴ C4ADS, "Sticks and Stones," Introduction.
International Crisis Group, "Buddhism," 10.

Schonthal, "The (New) Buddhist," 84.
⁵³⁵ Schonthal, "The (New) Buddhist," 84.

International Crisis Group, "Buddhism," 11.

⁵³⁶ C4ADS, "Sticks and Stones," Introduction.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

resort to violence.⁵³⁸ When ARSA was not able to achieve their goals of stopping the persecution of Rohingya through nonviolent means, the group turned to violence. However, this was after the current conflict had already started. It does not seem like instrumental violence caused this conflict.

The second category of causes for religious violence is based on identities: if believers believe that a threat to their religion exist, this is in turn also a threat to their identity, and they might react in a violent way.⁵³⁹ This is related to the idea of a cosmic war: a conflict is given moral justifications and violence is sacralized, on the premise that one's identity is threatened.⁵⁴⁰ This category can certainly give more insight to the violence in Myanmar concerning the Rohingya. A review of the data has revealed that the Buddhists feel as though their religion is threatened. According to scriptures and legends, the Theravada tradition should currently be in decline and thus Buddhists feel threatened and want to stop this decay. They are especially intimidated by Muslims, because of the history of the relationship between the two communities in Myanmar and in Rakhine because of the enormous Muslim population – at least before the flood of refugees at the end of 2017. The nation is closely intertwined with religion, which means that with religion, the nation is also threatened, since many Buddhists seem to feel that to be Burmese is to be Buddhist. Both the nation and religion are strong identity-signifiers, so together a threat to these can result in a feeling of a substantial threat to one's identity, and to combat this threat, one might turn to religious violence.

The third category of causes for religious violence focuses on the religious laws and doctrines which have explicit instructions to go to war.⁵⁴¹ This does not seem to be at play in this conflict.

The last category concentrates on religious activities that are in themselves benign but are not perceived as such by others. Sometimes, even the mere presence of a religion can be the reason for religious violence.⁵⁴² The mere presence of Muslims seems to cause violence and riots all across Myanmar. Wirathu, a prominent monk, gives an explanation for this. He explained that more land and houses for Muslims means fewer Buddhists shrines. Moreover, he stated that mosques are 'like enemy base stations for us'.⁵⁴³ More mosques mean more enemy bases, so

⁵³⁸ Fox, "An Introduction," 124-125, 133.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Juergensmeyer, "Terror in the Mind," 146, 154-155, 161-163.

⁵⁴¹ Fox, "An Introduction," 128-129.

⁵⁴² Ibid., 129.

⁵⁴³ Szep, "Special Report."

that is why he would like to prevent this, for example by restrictions on gatherings in mosques and permits needed to repair or build mosques.⁵⁴⁴

Another cause that is mentioned in the second chapter is the religious leader. He can determine the attitude and behavior of his followers in conflict.⁵⁴⁵ In this conflict, religious leaders play a very important role. Monks have instigated violence in their speeches, which might have influenced Buddhist to turn violent. For Islam, authorities have issued ‘fatwas’ to legitimize the violence. After these were issued, many regional leaders were convinced of ARSA’s violent strategy to obtain their goals. This shows the great influence that religious leaders can have in instigating religious violence.

In conclusion, ARSA has been created by religious leaders, but does not seem to have religious motivations, even though authorities within Islam have issued ‘fatwas’, which state that the campaign is legal in Islam. This gives the conflict a religious dimension for ARSA fighters, and in this way religion is influencing the violence. Furthermore, the 969 Movement and the Ma Ba Tha certainly have had an influence on the communal violence in Myanmar. Research has shown that there is a correlation between towns where Ma Ba Tha monks have preached and anti-Muslim violence in those towns. Lastly, this part has explained how religion might have caused violence in the conflict. When analyzing the influence of religion in a conflict, a middle position should be taken, where the concept of religious violence is used to explain how violence can be religious, as is done above, without arguing that religion is inherently prone to violence or intolerance.⁵⁴⁶

4.5. Root causes of the conflict

The different elements of religious violence in the conflict have just been discussed. However, contemporary conflicts are often not just about religion. Religion and ethnicity are generally intertwined in these conflicts.⁵⁴⁷ Other factors are thus at play as well and it is difficult to find out the exact influence of these different issues. Nonetheless, in this sub-chapter I would like to try to find out what the root causes for the conflict might be. In order to create a long-lasting

⁵⁴⁴ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 81-82, 84.

Szep, “Special Report.”

⁵⁴⁵ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 27, 284.

⁵⁴⁶ Carlson, “How Shall We Study,” 240.

⁵⁴⁷ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 60-61, 107, 283.
Isaacs, “Idols.”

positive peace and a peaceful society with peaceful institutions, the root causes need to be addressed. In positive peace, the focus lies on the transformation of underlying systemic violence and relationships.⁵⁴⁸

4.5.1. Poverty in Rakhine State

The first root cause that has been recognized is the poverty in Rakhine State. Rakhine State is one of the poorest states in Myanmar and continues to suffer from decades of neglect and underdevelopment, lack of investment in infrastructure and economic marginalization. All communities in Rakhine State have had to deal with decades of human rights violations, land confiscations, forced evictions and forced labor by the Myanmar State. For the inhabitants of Rakhine State, there is a lack of access to livelihood opportunities and limited access to basic services.⁵⁴⁹

This has resulted in Rakhine State having one of the lowest literacy rates in the country – adult illiteracy is approximately 50 percent higher than the national average. Furthermore, nearly half of its inhabitants live in poverty, compared to a quarter nationally.⁵⁵⁰ The distance to schools and a lack of qualified teaching staff and other teaching resources have a bad influence on education.⁵⁵¹ Without proper schooling, it is hard to break the cycle of poverty. Moreover, the availability, accessibility, affordability and quality of health facilities, goods and services are extremely poor in Rakhine State. Only five health workers are available per 10.000 people, compared to sixteen per 10.000 people nationally and compared to the minimum of 22 per 10.000 people that the World Health Organization recommends.⁵⁵² Moreover, the staff and hospitals are poorly equipped.⁵⁵³ As a consequence, delays in treatment are formed and preventable diseases, like polio, keep prevailing.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁴⁸ Galtung, “An Editorial,” 1-4.

Galtung, “Peace,” 478-479.

Omer, “When Peace,” 51-52, 68.

⁵⁴⁹ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 26.

Mahmood, “The Rohingya people,” 1844.

OHCHR, “Flash Report,” 5.

⁵⁵⁰ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 26, 66.

Mahmood, “The Rohingya people,” 1844.

OHCHR, “Flash Report,” 5.

UNHRC, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” par. 41.

⁵⁵¹ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 67.

⁵⁵² Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, “Towards a Peaceful,” 42.

World Health Organization, “A Universal.”

⁵⁵³ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 60.

⁵⁵⁴ Amnesty International, “Caged,” 60.

UNHCR, “Situation of human, A/HRC/32/18,” par. 38.

Myanmar is a highly centralized state, and most economic and political power lies with the country's leaders, who are mainly Bamar. Even though the Rakhine form a recognized ethnic group, they still form a minority in the country. This results in fears of losing ethnic identity, language, and cultures. Furthermore, they are very frustrated with the central government for the failure to improve the situation in their state and have complained about the lack of political autonomy, as they believe they are neglected by the central government.⁵⁵⁵

The sense of political, cultural, historical, economic, demographic and religious besiegement from the Bamar and from Bangladesh has caused many Rakhine to be extremely prejudiced against Muslims.⁵⁵⁶ Therefore, understanding and addressing the ethnic Rakhine grievances and ending human rights violations against the Rakhine people will be crucial to developing long-term stability in the State, and it is important that ethnic Rakhine groups are incorporated in deciding on future plans for Rakhine State.⁵⁵⁷

Other economic motives that might be at play can be traced back to the social memory of the colonial period, which is installed in their identity. Indians, mainly Muslims, came to dominate the colonial economy. They had the best jobs in the colonial administration and constituted the majority in the largest cities, while the Buddhists were largely excluded from the capitalist economy.⁵⁵⁸ Muslims are nowadays often thought to be more prosperous than their Buddhist neighbors.⁵⁵⁹ Therefore, Muslims are regarded as a threat by many Buddhists, although the economy is actually dominated by Burman and Chinese business elites.⁵⁶⁰ These ideas are also confirmed by the successful boycott on Muslim businesses in 2013, which was a response to the common perception that Muslims only do business with each other.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁵ Amnesty International, "Caged," 26.

Mahmood, "The Rohingya people," 1844.

OHCHR, "Flash Report," 5.

Trevor Wilson, "Why a National Peace Agreement Is Important for Myanmar," *Asia & The Pacific Policy Studies* 4, no. 1 (2017): 142.

⁵⁵⁶ Kyaw San Wai, "Myanmar's Religious Violence: A Buddhist 'Siege Mentality' at Work," *RSIS Commentaries*, no. 37 (2014): 2.

⁵⁵⁷ Amnesty International, "Caged," 27.

⁵⁵⁸ Foxeus, "Contemporary Burmese," 229-230.

⁵⁵⁹ Szep, "Special Report."

⁵⁶⁰ Foxeus, "Contemporary Burmese," 228.

⁵⁶¹ Gerry van Klinken, and Su Mon Thazin Aung, "The Contentious Politics of Anti-Muslim Scapegoating in Myanmar," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47, no. 3 (2017): 362-363.

Physicians for Human Rights, *Massacre in Central Burma: Muslims Students Terrorized and Killed in Meiktila* (Cambridge: PHR, 2013), 14.

4.5.2. Social change and institutionalized discrimination

As was established previously, social change is often involved at the start of a conflict. The social change that is important for this conflict is the democratization of the country. Since the start of the political transition in 2011, Buddhist nationalism has become significantly more visible. As authoritarian controls were lifted after years of repression, deep-seated grievances emerged into the open, and new freedom of expression allowed individuals and the media to voice these grievances in ways that were not possible before. Newly available telecommunications combined with access to social media accelerated the spread of nationalist narratives, rumors and hate speech.⁵⁶² This is how the democratization process can be seen as a root cause of the conflict. It has allowed Buddhist nationalists to be more vocal, which has spread an anti-Muslim sentiment and instigated violence.

Perhaps Muslims also got a chance to voice their opinions more openly. It is also possible that they had high hopes for change with a democratic government, but the restrictions only became tighter. The state systematically discriminates against Rohingya. Even with a democratic government, this is shown in the passing of the four laws that restrict individuals' rights in regard to one's choices in the area of family planning, religious conversion and marriage.⁵⁶³

It is hard to understand that a social change as a democratic transition can ignite a conflict with so much (state-sponsored) violence, discrimination and violations of human rights. The Rohingya have been excluded from being citizens of Myanmar for a long time, and it was thought that the new government, especially under Aung San Suu Kyi, who fought for freedom herself, would make a difference. The social change might have given rise to the Buddhist nationalism, but the exclusion had already existed for decades. This social and legal exclusion might thus also be seen as a root cause of the conflict.

4.5.3. The perceived threats caused by prejudices and the influence of Theravada Buddhism

As it seems, hate speech is no longer necessary in order to construct a narrative of Muslim threat, because a series of anti-Muslim fears and prejudices are so instilled in Burmese Buddhist society that many see a credible existential threat from the Muslim population, which is unlikely to exceed 5 to 10 percent of the population of Myanmar. This fear has lowered the barriers for violence against Muslims, since it is now supported by a rationalized necessity to protect Burmese race and religion from the Muslim threat. The proliferation of anti-Muslim

⁵⁶² International Crisis Group, "Buddhism," 6.

⁵⁶³ Ullah, "Rohingya Crisis," 291.

stereotypes and narratives has created sectarian tension, where small triggers like rumors or false information can cause violence.⁵⁶⁴

One aspect that scares the Buddhist population is illegal immigration, which they fear might turn the country into a Muslim one.⁵⁶⁵ This fear that the country will lose their culture and become Muslim is based on the historic fact that it has happened before in many parts of modern Central Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan, which were majority Buddhist before the arrival of Islam. Often, the arrival went hand in hand with the destruction of Buddhism.⁵⁶⁶ Thus, claims that the country is being taken over by Muslims bring a lot of fear. According to influential monks like Wirathu, Muslims have a conspiracy to conquer Burma through economic exploitation, focusing again on the economic aspects, and by interfaith marriage. They are supposedly gradually taking over Burmese society and economy, with the end goal of destroying the Buddhist race and religion.⁵⁶⁷

Muslims are often described as a ‘cancer within’. Buddhists feel like, unlike other faiths, Muslims are unwilling to reciprocate the religious freedoms they demand, and therefore are a threat to Buddhism.⁵⁶⁸ They believe that Islam is inherently violent and are at discomfort with violent aspects of Abrahamic religions in general. Other aspects of Islam, like the slaughter of cows on specific holidays and Quranic passages on conversion are also often mentioned by people. Moreover, male Muslims are a topic of prejudices in Myanmar. They are characterized as rapacious and greedy. Parents have long painted them as monsters to scare children, keeping the prejudices alive.⁵⁶⁹ Furthermore, the fears of Islam are part of the wide-ranging narrative of the global war on terror.⁵⁷⁰

The nationalist discourse in Myanmar only contributes to these prejudices. Even though communal tensions have existed for a long time, nationalism has provided a powerful tool against Muslims. The Muslim minority has been blamed for far more complex social, political,

⁵⁶⁴ C4ADS, “Sticks and Stones,” Introduction.

⁵⁶⁵ International Crisis Group, “Buddhism,” 7.

⁵⁶⁶ Akhilesh Pillalamari, “Buddhism and Islam in Asia: A Long and Complicated History,” *The Diplomat*, October 29, 2017, accessed January 19, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/10/buddhism-and-islam-in-asia-a-long-and-complicated-history/>.

Klinken, “The Contentious,” 362.

⁵⁶⁷ Matthew J. Walton, and Susan Hayward, *Contesting Buddhist Narratives: Democratization, Nationalism, and Communal Violence in Myanmar* (Honolulu: East-West Center, 2014), 17.

⁵⁶⁸ International Crisis Group, “Buddhism,” 7.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

⁵⁷⁰ Walton, “Contesting Buddhist,” 18.

and economic problems that the country is facing.⁵⁷¹ This condemnation of the Muslim minority was easily accepted because of the pre-existing prejudices described above.

What is more, a strong millenarian current in Theravada Buddhism predicts that the religion will inevitably gradually decline and disappear.⁵⁷² It is widely believed that Buddhism will disappear 5000 years after Buddha's passing. As 1956 is considered the halfway point, it is believed that Buddhism is already in decline. This decline has created the idea that Islam is Buddhism's 'nemesis' and will be decisive in Buddhism's prophesized destruction.⁵⁷³ Buddhists might feel a responsibility to protect and defend the 'sasana' against this decline.⁵⁷⁴ Moreover, they feel anxious about this allegedly unavoidable extinction. This anxiety creates the feeling that the Buddhist community is threatened by 'outgroups', like the Muslim community.⁵⁷⁵

Buddhist nationalism has played big role in the conflict, as stated before. Nationalists seem to blame Muslims instead of addressing the real problems. The rise and importance of nationalist Buddhism is probably driven by other factors, like poor Rakhine who feel scared and need someone to blame, the government policies which already favored Buddhists and the pre-existing prejudices that are the driving force behind nationalist organizations. Naturally all these elements are linked to each other and influence each other.

In conclusion, to stop the immediate violence, an intervention needs to take place. However, to create positive peace, it is important to look at the root causes of the violence and the conflict. The government needs to address the prejudices that exist against Muslims, instead of promoting them by institutionalizing discriminatory procedures. This is necessary to change the perspectives on Muslims in all of Myanmar. Furthermore, the underdevelopment of Rakhine State needs to become a government priority. The government should try to lower the poverty rate in Rakhine State, because then there is less reason for conflict. All of this shows that Myanmar still has a long way to go in its transformation.

⁵⁷¹ Foxeus, "Contemporary Burmese," 228.

⁵⁷² International Crisis Group, "Buddhism," 3.

Lorraine M. Gesick, *In the Land of Lady White Blood: Southern Thailand and the Meaning of History* (Ithaca, Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1995), 32-33.

⁵⁷³ San Wai, "Myanmar's Religious," 1-2.

⁵⁷⁴ Foxeus, "Contemporary Burmese," 214.

⁵⁷⁵ Walton, "Contesting Buddhist," 40-41.

4.6. Peacebuilding in the conflict

The chapter has just tried to discover the root causes of the conflict. Conflict transformation offers a holistic approach that tries to change these core conditions or deeper roots that gave rise to the conflict.⁵⁷⁶ Unfortunately, the conflict has not been recognized yet, which is necessary for conflict management, to prevent the conflict from expanding to other areas. Religious actors can then discourage the violence.⁵⁷⁷ Even though the Rohingya conflict has been picked up by international media, the Myanmar government has been denying the human rights violations and might not recognize the conflict yet. This makes it hard for conflict resolution to take place, where the inequalities between disputants are removed by means of mediation and negotiation.⁵⁷⁸

Religious actors have participated in conflict transformation, where they have worked together with government, nongovernment, and other religious actors.⁵⁷⁹ However, in Myanmar it seems as though they have mainly contributed to the violence. There have not been many peace talks in which they have been able to act as mediators. Perhaps religious leaders could initiate these talks, since the religious institutions are highly involved in the Burmese society and religious leaders have a big influence. Religious educators can lay the groundwork for conflict transformation through their long-term service in the classroom, training seminar, or in the institute.⁵⁸⁰ By preaching compassion and respect, the religious leaders can encourage dialogue and promote resolution.⁵⁸¹

Furthermore, it can be advised that even though the Buddhists and Muslims in the conflict might have different (peace-related) values, religious militants still search for similarities between the groups.⁵⁸² Religious actors need to be committed to the peacebuilding process, dedicating their time and resources, and need to be willing to cooperate with counterparts from outside of their religious community, in other for the peacebuilding to be effective.⁵⁸³ Thus, the leaders in Myanmar need to open their heart to the idea of peace and start looking for

⁵⁷⁶ Lederach, "Little Book," 29-32.

Omer, "When peace," 67.

⁵⁷⁷ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 212-214.

Little, "A Moment," 5-6, 93.

⁵⁷⁸ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 212.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., 212, 230, 237, 239.

⁵⁸⁰ Little, "A Moment," 10.

⁵⁸¹ Carter, "Religious Peacebuilding," 296.

⁵⁸² Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 14, 141-142.

⁵⁸³ Ibid., 14, 141-142, 222, 224, 285.

similarities between the two groups, instead of only pointing out the differences. It is important that identities are created that are not based on ‘othering’ and ‘defensive localization’. Omer’s hermeneutics of citizenship can also be helpful in this context. This focuses on rethinking one’s whole identity, including the religious parts.⁵⁸⁴ The re-imagination of relationships between the different components of identity requires looking at the religious traditions and communal history, as well as the recognition of the circumstances of others.⁵⁸⁵

Lastly, in this conflict, peace has to come from the grassroots mostly. Peacebuilding has to start with listening to the local communities, and these communities need to be involved.⁵⁸⁶ Firstly, it is important that political and military leaders will end the violence, which could be a top-down approach. However, in order to create a long-lasting peace, the people who have experienced the conflict need to agree about peace. They can create programs that sustain peace, through their religious networks, in order to help people deal with traumas and rebuilding relationships. The grassroots are very important in this conflict in Myanmar.

4.6.1. Interfaith initiatives

Interfaith activities offer opportunities to cooperate, to share the work of building pace and to learn from each other.⁵⁸⁷ It is important to create a space where people in conflict can listen to each other, so that bridges can be built and the different communities can be united towards a common goal.⁵⁸⁸ Thus, an important part of the peacebuilding process consists of interreligious dialogue between the Muslims and the Buddhists.⁵⁸⁹

Several initiatives for interfaith dialogue have been established in Myanmar: KACIID, the Peaceful Myanmar Initiative, the International Dialogue Centre, The People’s Dialogue Initiative, Women Peace Initiative for Peace, and Religions for Peace Myanmar are all examples of these kinds of organizations.⁵⁹⁰ However, leaders from the Ma Ba Tha and ARSA need to be involved in the activities to make a difference. As an alternative, large grassroots interfaith initiatives could start a bottom-up peace movement.

⁵⁸⁴ Omer, “When peace,” 107.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., 93, 95, 104, 112, 131.

⁵⁸⁶ Appleby, “The Ambivalence,” 240.

⁵⁸⁷ Carter, “Religious Peacebuilding,” 290-291.

⁵⁸⁸ Carter, “Religious Peacebuilding,” 291.

D’Souza, “Creating Spaces,” 170, 185-186.

⁵⁸⁹ “Supporting inclusive dialogue in Myanmar,” *KACIID* (website), accessed January 19, 2018, <https://www.kaiciid.org/what-we-do/supporting-inclusive-dialogue-myanmar>.

⁵⁹⁰ “People’s Dialogue Initiative,” *Centre for Peace & Conflict Studies* (website), accessed January 19, 2018, <http://www.centrepeaceconflictstudies.org/interventions/peoples-dialogue-initiative/>.

The government might state that it prioritizes peace in Rakhine State, but so far little has been achieved. During the several peace conferences that have taken place in Panglong, certain ethnic groups were present, but the Rohingya were never even mentioned.⁵⁹¹ The government has established the Committee for Implementation of the Recommendations on Rakhine State, which has to implement the recommendations of Advisory Committee Rakhine State, work towards ensuring the law, ensuring sustainability of ethnic villages, closing the IDP camps, creating more job opportunities, and managing allocation of humanitarian aid.⁵⁹² It seems as though this Committee has not established much yet. Furthermore, during a meeting with the Japanese Foreign Minister, the State Counsellor said that development works on mainly infrastructure had started in Rakhine State.⁵⁹³ This information was found on the website of the State Counsellor, but I have not seen it mentioned elsewhere. Moreover, the NLD organized an interfaith prayer event in October 2017, during which religious leaders from different faiths took the stage, preaching harmony. Even though the ceremony was organized partially in response to the violence in Rakhine State, the Rohingya were not discussed during the event.⁵⁹⁴

Thus, there are many initiatives for peace, but none seem to have had an influence yet. It must be mentioned that, even though many initiatives state that they involve on conflicts in Myanmar, this does not have to involve the conflict in Rakhine State, since more conflicts are taking place on Burmese soil.

It is time for the leaders of Myanmar to move beyond mere political rhetoric about the importance of peace, and start a serious program to achieve genuine peace, from which everyone in the country would benefit. Economic endorsement is especially important in Rakhine State, since this region has in the past not received adequate central funding.⁵⁹⁵ The

⁵⁹¹ International Crisis Group, *Myanmar's Peace Process: Getting to a Political Dialogue: Crisis Group Asia Briefing N149* (Yangon/Brussels: October 19, 2016), 1.

⁵⁹² "NCA signatories committed to achieving results at Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong," *National Reconciliation and Peace Centre* (website), last modified December 20, 2017, accessed January 19, 2018, <http://www.statecounsellor.gov.mm/nrpcen/node/146>.

"State Counsellor meets ethnic armed groups," *National Reconciliation and Peace Centre* (website), accessed January 19, 2018, <http://www.statecounsellor.gov.mm/nrpcen/node/134>.

⁵⁹² "Establishment of the Committee for Implementation of the Recommendations on Rakhine State," *National Reconciliation and Peace Centre* (website), October 9, 2017, accessed January 19, 2018, <http://www.statecounsellor.gov.mm/nrpcen/node/129>.

"Japan aid for peace, upgrading railways, reconciliation," *National Reconciliation and Peace Centre* (website), last modified January 13, 2018, accessed January 19, 2018, <http://www.statecounsellor.gov.mm/nrpcen/node/147>.

⁵⁹³ "Japan aid."

⁵⁹⁴ Florence Looi, "Rohingya Crisis: Inter-faith events push for peace," *Al Jazeera*, November 1, 2017, accessed January 18, 2018, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/rohingya-crisis-inter-faith-events-push-peace-171031203911138.html>.

⁵⁹⁵ Wilson, "Why a National," 145.

government also needs to address the hate speech and discrimination, as was established previously, to ensure a safe and secure environment for all. The promotion of tolerance, intercultural understanding and interfaith dialogue, and the deconstruction of stereotypes are crucial elements in countering hate speech.⁵⁹⁶

In countering this hate speech, it is important to also pay attention to the Ma Ba Tha and recognize the enormous support that the organization has. This support also comes from the role the organization has in religious and civic education, service delivery and dispute resolution. The Ma Ba Tha thus provides a great range of services, which generates support. This needs to be recognized in order to produce a productive policy response.⁵⁹⁷ The Ma Ba Tha is more popular in areas where the government lacks to provide services. Therefore, it is important that the government improves its provisions in all areas of the country.

4.6.2. Example: Northern Ireland

Lastly, this chapter will shortly focus on the peacebuilding example of Ireland. In the peacebuilding process in Ireland, forgiveness was very important, since this could lead to reconciliation.⁵⁹⁸ To achieve this, stories of revenge had to be replaced by stories and practices that would connect people, to create tolerance.⁵⁹⁹ A top-down approach to peacebuilding was not successful, because the communities needed to start solving the conflict by connecting with other communities.⁶⁰⁰ When the communities could admit that both sides had suffered, the social conditions, the roots of the conflict, could be addressed.⁶⁰¹

Religious actors provided cultural foundation and popular support for peace, and they presented a space where people from both communities could come together.⁶⁰² Furthermore, they offered an alternative to the violent discourse by extremists.⁶⁰³ Thus, even though it turned out that the core of the conflict was not religious, but ethnic, the churches still played a big part by realizing that they could be part of the solution, instead of further encouraging the violence.⁶⁰⁴

⁵⁹⁶ UNGA, "Situation of human, A/67/383," par. 55.

UNHCR, "Report of the Special, A/HRC/28/72," par. 10.

⁵⁹⁷ International Crisis Group, "Buddhism," 29.

⁵⁹⁸ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 168, 170, 194-195.

Schroeder, "Toward," 414-416.

⁵⁹⁹ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 170-171, 173.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 170, 179.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 169, 182, 184-185, 191, 193.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, 169, 191.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*, 182, 184-185, 193.

⁶⁰⁴ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 192.

Grant, "Northern Ireland," 272.

The work of grassroots peacemakers can be essential in creating a lasting foundation for peace. In Ireland, these peacemakers convinced the masses to pursue forgiveness and reconciliation.⁶⁰⁵

This example shows that it is important to create dialogue between the different communities that are fighting in the conflict in Rakhine State. They have to create new stories, finding their shared history and values. The hermeneutics of citizenship could be useful here. Then, when both the Muslims and the Buddhists can admit that they have all suffered, the poverty and prejudices that have instigated the conflict can be addressed.

Religious actors could, as is seen, play a very important role in this, even though the essence of the conflict is not religious. If the monks were to start preaching peace instead of violence, and tolerance instead of hate, this could have a big influence on the people. This way, the monks can help to create a solution to the conflict, instead of contributing to the violence. The laypeople can help to convince the masses to pursue forgiveness.

To summarize, the conflict in Rakhine State is still in the beginning phases of the peacebuilding process. Religious actors could play a big role in peacebuilding, but I believe that it is also necessary for the government to act. They have to first recognize the conflict in order to be able to make an end to it.

4.7. Conclusion of the chapter

This chapter has tried to find out how religious factors are influencing the conflict in Rakhine State, and to what extent religious peacebuilding can be an approach to deal with the conflict, focusing on the way religion influences the way people think, how it creates identities and how it can influence both violence and peacebuilding in the conflict.

Firstly, the chapter has explored the different religions that are on both sides of the conflict, Buddhism and Islam. Both religions value peaceful principles and both have been present in the area of Myanmar for centuries. This means that, since they are so involved in the Myanmar society, they would be very helpful for peacebuilding. However, for Buddhism, the principle of 'karma' makes that many problems are seen as a consequence of an individual's bad karma,

⁶⁰⁵ Appleby, "The Ambivalence," 193.

and not as a problem of the society. As for Islam, it is important that the peaceful concepts are turned into practice and not just seen as theoretical.

Then, the chapter established that religious identities have influenced the conflict by excluding and demonizes the 'outgroup', the people with whom you do not share your social identity. This 'othering' provides a basis for violence and conflict, since it becomes harder to break down barriers. Furthermore, the combination of religion and nationalism in one's identity is shown to be very powerful.

The organization ARSA does not seem to have religious motivations, but its actions are legitimized by religious leaders in Islam. In this way, religion is influencing the conflict for the Muslims. The focus of the Ma Ba Tha seems to be on Buddhism nationalism, especially on preaching an anti-Muslim narrative. Religion is used to legitimize violence here as well. However, it needs to be kept in mind that the Ma Ba Tha provides the citizens of Myanmar with basic services where the government lacks to do so. Therefore, the support for the organization does not necessarily coincide with the support for the anti-Muslim narrative. The chapter then explain how religion might have been a cause for violence, through identities, benign actions, and religious leaders.

The root causes of the conflict are thought to be the poverty and underdevelopment of Rakhine State, along with other economic motives, the social change in the country and the institutionalized discrimination, and the perceived threats caused by prejudices and the influence of Theravada Buddhism. With all these causes, Buddhist nationalism also plays a big role.

Lastly, the chapter has explored the role that religious peacebuilding can play. It is demonstrated that the conflict is a long way from a sustainable peace. While the conflict is recognized by the international media, it is important that is recognized by the Myanmar government as well. Religious actors could play a big part in discouraging the violence and initiating peace talks, since the conflict has a religious dimension to it and religion is so instilled in Myanmar society. The example of Ireland shows that it is important to establish this dialogue between the different communities, so that shared history and values can be recognized, and the real problems can be addressed.

Thus, even though the conflict does have religious aspect, the root causes do not seem to be religious. However, religion could play a big part in peacebuilding in the conflict in Rakhine

State, since both religions have a peaceful fundament. This needs to be recognized and used by religious actors, as well as by the government.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis has aimed to examine conflict transformation, religious violence and religious peacebuilding, especially focusing on the influence of religion in the conflict in Myanmar and evaluating the concept of religious peacebuilding regarding the conflict. The thesis has tried to answer the following question: ‘To what extent is religion a useful factor to understanding the conflict and its transformation in Myanmar involving the Rohingya?’ To be able to answer this question, the thesis has been divided in various chapters, which will be shortly summarized now.

The second chapter has focused on religious violence and peacebuilding. It has demonstrated the four categories by Fox of causes for religious violence. Moreover, it has drawn attention to the influencing role that a religious leader can play. The chapter has also shown the complexity of contemporary conflicts and the part that religion might play in this. As is the case in Rakhine State, religion and nationalism are often intertwined in these intrastate conflicts. The religious persecution of a minority can provide massive obstacles to nation building and produce a vicious cycle of violence. The hermeneutics of citizenship might be a way to deal with this, by reimagining the relationships between the different parts of one’s identity, examining both the religious tradition and communal history, as well as recognizing the circumstances of the other. In the chapter it is then explained that religion does not just have a violent side, but also a side which reject violence and can thus be useful for conflict transformation.

Through conflict transformation, one hopes to achieve positive peace, where a society is created that is characterized by the absence of structural violence or social injustice. Conflict management, conflict resolution and structural reform are all dimensions of conflict transformation. It is important that the root causes of a conflict are addressed and that the institutions that generate violence are replaced with new institutions that encourage peace.

Religious actors can participate in conflict transformation and in such manner help contribute to the peace process. They can do so because they have a reputation for integrity and service through constant and direct contact with the masses. Moreover, they often have detailed knowledge of the conflict, the cultural setting and the language. When the reason for conflict is religious, religious leaders will be better suited to help end the violence than secular leaders. Because faith plays such a big role in people’s lives, it is a good idea to take advantage of its

values to transform societies to a more peaceful state, by looking for shared values and principles between the different faiths. In order to achieve this, it is important that people from different groups work together. Interfaith activities can offer these opportunities to collaborate, to share the work of building peace and to learn from each other. Regional (religious) institutions can help to facilitate dialogue. Lastly, the chapter focuses on Lederach's different levels of society that can be involved in peacebuilding. The case study of Northern Ireland shows that it is important not to assume that a conflict is a religious conflict, but to look into the root causes, so that societal changes can be made to create a peaceful society.

The third chapter illustrates the conflict in Myanmar. It first shows the history of the country, which was under colonial rule until 1948, after which military governments and dictators ruled the country until 2011, when the democratic transition of the country started. In 1982, the Citizenship Law was enacted, which stripped the Rohingya of their citizenship. Ethnic minorities were increasingly excluded from society during the military rule. Although the Rohingya claim a long-standing connection to Rakhine State, successive governments have rejected this claim, a sentiment that is shared by many in the Myanmar society.

There have been long standing grievances between the Rakhine people and the Rohingya. In 2012, violence broke out, motivated by a rape. The violence spread quickly to other townships in Rakhine State. The president then obtained the military's assistance to help restore the law and consequently the violence was sometimes supported by state forces. Many Rohingya were displaced and curfews were imposed in several townships. In 2013, Buddhist monks started to deliver anti-Muslim speeches in various towns, which instigated violence. The Buddhist nationalist 969 Movement played a big part in this. In October 2016 violence spiralled out of control again, after several hundred men attacked three border guard posts in northern Rakhine State, followed by clearance operations by the military, involving widespread and systematic human rights violence. This violence caused many to flee. In 2017, monks have given speeches which justified the killing of non-Buddhists. These speeches, as well as misinformation, spread quickly on social media. In August of that year attacks by ARSA were again followed by a brutal campaign of violence against the Rohingya community. This time, over 615.000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh.

The violations against the Rohingya have consisted of the deprivation of nationality, restrictions on the freedom of movement, threats to life, liberty and security, sexual and gender-

based violence, the denial of the right to health, the denial of the right to education, other restrictions based on local orders, limitations on political rights and documentation, forced labor, trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling, and the protracted displacement and denial of an adequate standard of living. All these violations have caused many people to flee to Bangladesh. The country was already dealing with problems of its own, but over 830.000 refugees settled in a poor area of the country anyhow. Nowadays, more Rohingya live in Bangladesh than in Myanmar. The spontaneous settlements are increasingly in need of humanitarian assistance, shelter, food, clear water and sanitation and the situation in Bangladesh now concerns a humanitarian emergency. Legally, Bangladesh is not allowed to send the Rohingya back, but an agreement has been made between Myanmar and Bangladesh to start returning the Rohingya.

The fourth chapter concentrates on the religious influence in the conflict. Firstly, the chapter established that the Buddhist ethics are based on the principle of 'karma', which means that it values the principles of non-harming and non-violating living creatures. However, it also means that it can be difficult for Buddhists to recognize poverty, inequality, social strife and war as problems that need a concrete solution, since they tend to see those social problems only as the result of 'karma' and thus as one's individual responsibility. Buddhist nationalism arose during the colonial period and is currently very strong in Myanmar. Islam prohibits every kind of war, except holy war. There is no universal teaching about military violence, yet a general principle of deterrence exists. Peacebuilding is a very important duty in Islamic tradition, even though the focus has been mostly on intra-Muslim matters. Moreover, the peacebuilding concepts are mostly theoretical. Muslims have been present in Myanmar for centuries, but they have not always got along with the Burmese and/or Arakanese.

Identity is contributing to the conflict in Myanmar in the following way: by adhering to a group or social identity, one excludes and demonizes others, which can lead to conflict. In Myanmar, othering and defensive localization, where a group creates a unity which cherishes their local identity but excludes others, has created a deep rift in society. The sense of a secure self is built on the dichotomy between a superior 'us' and inferior 'them'. Religion can be a factor around which an 'ingroup' is created, serving the need for continuity and certainty. It can be a strategy to deal with globalization bringing increased uncertainty. Nationalism and religion, the combination used to construct identity in Myanmar, are two strong identity-signifiers which

are a powerful combination when one wants to rally people. They provide answers to people and it is easy for leaders or groups to unite people around this simple cause.

The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army has been created with the aim to stop the persecution of the Rohingya and to secure their rights. Although the group has been created by religious leaders, it does not seem to have religious motivations. However, religious authorities have issued 'fatwas', which legitimize the campaign in Islam, truly giving the conflict a religious dimension. The 969 Movement, succeeded by the Ma Ba Tha, has had a major influence on the conflict. The organizations have a strong anti-Muslim rhetoric, encouraging communal violence in Myanmar. The monks have lobbied for laws that are seen as anti-Muslim and have given nationalistic speeches.

It does not seem like instrumental violence was a reason which started the conflict in Myanmar. However, the second cause by Fox, focusing on identity, is important. Buddhists might believe that a threat to their religion exists, which in turn constitutes a threat to their identity and has resulted in a violent reaction. Moreover, religious activities that are in themselves benign, like the building of mosques, might not be perceived by others as such and in this way instigate violence. Furthermore, 'the religious leader' seems to have played an important role in the conflict.

The poverty in Rakhine State, the social change concerning democratization and the institutionalized discrimination, as well as the perceived threats caused by prejudices are recognized as root causes in the conflict, which should be tackled in order to create positive peace. Religious actors could be very helpful by starting to discourage the violence instead of advocating it. It is important to establish dialogue between the different communities, so that the real problems can be addressed.

Overall, combining the different chapters and trying to answer the research question, it can be said that religion can be a useful factor to understanding the conflict and its transformation to the extent where it provides great insight into the conflict. It shows the big role that religious actors play and gives more insight into the role of identity formation in the conflict. However, the root of the conflict is not religious, but ethnic, where religion is mostly used as identity-signifiers, as was the case in the conflict in Northern Ireland.

Knowing the impact that religion has had in the conflict, it can be stated that religion could be very useful for peacebuilding, but the conflict transformation process in the conflict in Myanmar has not developed that far yet. Religious actors could start initiating peace by encouraging harmony and arranging (interfaith) dialogue, so that the root causes can be addressed.

Although this thesis has focused on the religious aspect of the conflict, it has not concentrated much on the legal aspects of the conflict. It would be interesting to do further research on the implications of the Responsibility to Protect, for example. The non-refoulement principle, which has been discussed in this thesis, is also interesting in this conflict, which has caused such an enormous flood of refugees. Moreover, the influence of regional institutions could be linked to this Responsibility to Protect. ASEAN has a principle of non-interference concerning domestic issues. It is interesting to look into this principle in relation to the Responsibility to Protect and the conflict in Myanmar. Hereby, one could focus on the religious aspect of the countries, since the Islamic countries in ASEAN seem to have been more eager to help the Rohingya and interfere in Myanmar than the other countries. Lastly, as was mentioned in the thesis, it would be interesting to use the framework of the securitization theory to study the conflict.

Returning to the statement of Ban Ki Moon at the start of this thesis, I believe that Myanmar still has a long road ahead. Not just the Rohingya community deserves a right to self-identify, but all people living in Myanmar do, whatever their ethnicity. All groups in Myanmar should be able to live in harmony. In order for this to happen, it is important that the government recognizes the conflicts and stops all human rights violations. It needs to start dialogue and address the root causes of the conflicts. As for the Rohingyas, it is necessary that the central government makes Rakhine State a priority, and thereby turn it into a place that the Rohingya can come home to. This will probably take a long time, since laws will have to be changed, in order for institutionalized discrimination to stop, and the mindset of the people of Myanmar has to change, to stop the prejudices that instigate violence. Focusing on the religious factor in the conflict can help the Myanmar government to start the peace process and continue its transition to a democratic, peaceful country.

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