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Political Buddhism and the Exclusion of Rohingya in Myanmar

Exploring targeted religious nationalism using Myanmar's Muslim Rohingya minority as a case study

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Abstract

The Rohingya Muslim minority, originally living in Rakhine state in western Myanmar, has been marginalized and harassed for decades. The Rohingya minority has been stateless since 1982 and they strive to become Burmese citizens. Many Rohingya have been displaced and live in refugee camps in Bangladesh with UNHCR calling them one of the most vulnerable refugee groups in the world. The military junta in Myanmar did not look kindly at rebellious minority groups in the country, brutally beating down all minority opposition. Despite Myanmar is now in a process of democratization, the State-Councilor and President in all but name, Aung San Suu Kyi has refused to address the ongoing violence suffered by Rohingya. Although Myanmar has 135 recognized minority groups, the country is far from being a pluralistic society. Ethnicity and religion have played an important role in creating a national identity in Myanmar; a national identity which systematically excludes Rohingya. This thesis argues that the reason for Rohingya’s exclusion is the so called political Buddhism in Myanmar. Political Buddhism is when excluding Buddhism, the Burmese ethnicity and aggressive nationalism are used to exclude and persecute minority groups perceived as non-Burman. This thesis explores, through an ideology analysis, how political Buddhism can be used to understand the exclusion of Rohingya in Myanmar. Finally, the conclusion is that political Buddhism has been an important element to Rohingya’s exclusion in Myanmar. However, it is not the sole explanation and other factors such as poverty and underdevelopment are also considerable aspects.

Keywords: Rohingya, Myanmar, political Buddhism, ethnicity, nationalism, refugees

Nyckelord: Rohingya, Myanmar, political Buddhism, ethnicity, nationalism, refugees
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# Abbreviations

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARSA</td>
<td>Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>BBC</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>BIA</td>
<td>Burma Independence Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>BPG</td>
<td>(Myanmar) Border Police Guard</td>
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<tr>
<td>BSPP</td>
<td>Burma Socialist Party Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>GNM</td>
<td>Guardian News and Media</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Criminal Court</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Person</td>
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<tr>
<td>KNPP</td>
<td>Karenni National Progressive Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNU</td>
<td>Karen National Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoU</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NLD</td>
<td>National League for Democracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLORC</td>
<td>State Law Order and Restoration Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPDC</td>
<td>State Peace and Development Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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1. Introduction

Myanmar\(^1\) got independent from Great Britain in 1948 and was a parliamentary democracy until 1962 (Kipgen, 2016:32). But in 1962 the military seized power in a coup and the civilian government in Myanmar was overthrown (Kipgen, 2016:33). General Ne Win took power, dissolved the parliament and banned all political parties. This meant that Myanmar became a military dictatorship led by ethnic Burmans with a repressive mindset towards the country’s minorities. Ethnic unrest and pending fragmentation of the country were the reasons the military used to justify the coup (Kipgen, 2016:49). For example, the military blamed the Shan ethnic minority of deliberately plotting to destabilize Myanmar and hard times began for ethnic minorities in the country (Kipgen, 2016:50).

The Muslim minority group *Rohingya* relates to people who identify as Muslim Arakanse, living in western Myanmar which is now called Rakhine state. The word “Rohingya” comes from *Rohang* and was one of the old names of Rakhine state (Ahsan Ullah, 2016:286). Another name of the region was Arakan and it was an independent kingdom before British colonization of Myanmar. There are around two million Rohingya living in Myanmar and 800’000 of them are living in Rakhine state (Farzana, 2017:2). The Rohingya themselves claim they are citizens of Myanmar, but this is not accepted by Myanmar authorities who claim they are illegal immigrants (Albert, 2018).

The identity of Rohingya has become politically infected and there are two strong blocs of both pro- and anti-Rohingya in Myanmar. The history of Rohingya is equally contested and the ones who are positive towards them claim that Rohingya settled in Myanmar in the ninth century, naturally blending with Bengalis, Turks, Moghuls and Persians (Ahsan Ullah, 2016:286). This would go in line with the historically pluralistic demography of Arakan (Rakhine) (Albert, 2018). The anti-Rohingya bloc, on the other hand, claims that Rohingya is a modern, self-created identity constructed by illegitimate Chittagonian Bengali migrants arriving in Myanmar because of British colonial rule. The Myanmar government uses the term *Bengali*, which suggests status as immigrants, to label Rohingya. Furthermore, Rohingya are not recognized as citizens of Myanmar but instead they are called “*resident foreigners*” (Ahsan Ullah, 2016:286). Consequently, they are denied a national identity and citizenship and are effectively stateless.

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\(^1\) Myanmar is also known as Burma, which was the British colonial name and was kept at independence in 1948. The military regime officially renamed Burma to Myanmar in 1989 (Gravers and Ytzen, 2014:2). Predominantly, “Myanmar” is used in this thesis, while “Burma” is used when referring to the time before 1989.
Rohingya has been oppressed by Myanmar for centuries and are equally neglected by Bangladesh who claim that Rohingya are Myanmar’s problem to handle (Farzana, 2017:64). Myanmar is intentionally excluding Rohingya from taking part of the Burmese national identity (Ahsan Ullah, 2016:286). The hypothesis of this study is that Rohingya is targeted by the Myanmar authorities because of their Muslim religion and ethnicity differing from the rest of Myanmar. I call this political Buddhism, which is the politicization of religion and ethnicity in order to get advantages for the Buddhist Burman majority population. I elaborate on that concept throughout this thesis, but first an insight in the modern history of Myanmar is needed to be able to understand how the idea of political Buddhism was able to grow there.

1.1 History of Myanmar
The history of Myanmar is relevant to this study because it gives a context to why the alienation of Rohingya began in the first place. This is a historical process that started with the British favoring Rohingya and other minority groups over the ethnic Burmans during the colonial time. Myanmar has had a violent history with several non-peaceful transformations of power. Thus, the trust of the authorities towards rebellious minority groups has often been low and vice versa. Therefore, it is important to review some of the historical events that have led up the persecution of Rohingya and other minority groups in Myanmar.

1.1.1 1886 to 1948 – British colonization of Burma and Independence
There were several Burmese kingdoms before the time of British colonization of the area, but the time before 1886 is not be outlined in this study. This is because foundations of the political landscape, relevant to this study, in contemporary Myanmar was set up by the British when they colonized Burma. In 1886, Burma was invaded by the British for the third time and they had to surrender to the British might and got annexed as a colony (Kipgen, 2016:9). The monarchy in Burma was suspended by the British rule, but several regions and ethnic minorities such as the Shan, Chin and Kachin remained a strong autonomy. Many of the ethnic minorities were Christian and had developed different cultures and separate identities than the rest of central Burma (Kipgen, 2016:9). Therefore, when the Japanese invaded Burma during the Second World War, the largely Christian minority groups Chin, Kachin and Naga were loyal to the British, while the Burma Independence Army (BIA) led by the national hero Aung San, sided with the Japanese (Kipgen, 2016:10). Burma declared independence from Britain 1947 and General Aung San could unify the different ethnic minorities to form the Union of Burma. Unfortunately, Aung San got assassinated five months after the declaration of independence.
San’s political antagonist U Saw was found guilty of the murder and was subsequently executed (Kipgen, 2016:11). Great Britain recognized Burma’s independence in January 1948.

1.1.2 1949 to 1990 – Brief democracy followed by military rule

Despite the loss of the national hero Aung San, Burma remained a fragile democracy until the military overthrew the elected government in a coup in 1962 (Farzana, 2017:48). The country remained a military dictatorship until the general elections in 2015 (Kipgen, 2016:199). The struggles for ethnic minorities and among them Rohingya got more severe after the military junta’s claim to power (Farzana, 2017:48). During the colonial rule, Britain had favored some ethnic minority groups and the Arakanese (historical name of Rohingya), Karen and Shan among others cooperated with the British against the Burmese state (Farzana, 2017:44). When the military gained power, almost one hundred years later, the Burmese nationalistic factions remembered the allegiances of those minority groups which affected the relationship between them and the state negatively (Farzana, 2017:44).

The military who took power in Burma in 1962 implemented a constitution established on “disciplined democracy”, which essentially meant implementing an authoritarian one-party system (Gravers and Ytzen, 2014:37). Their main reason for creating such a constitution, bringing some form of legitimacy to their illegitimate rule, was the effect of fear; the military was frightened of the thought of revenge from the people and that they would lose their power (Gravers and Ytzen, 2014:37). By their own words the military regime stated they viewed their actions as “an attempt to restore order in an increasingly chaotic political scene” (Taylor 2009:293 in Farzana, 2017:48). Obsessed with securing Myanmar’s borders, the regime performed counter-insurgency measures targeting rebellious minority organizations such as the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) and the Karen National Union (KNU) (Farzana, 2017:48). The campaigns continued until the 1990’s and some Shan groups were also targeted. Furthermore, the regime wanted to consolidate their power and created the Revolutionary Council which was subsequently integrated into the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP) in 1974. In the same year the new Constitution of Burma was passed and it was the first step towards harder citizenship rules. Amendments to the constitution gave some institutional change which involved civil political and administrative inclusion through The People’s Council (Farzana, 2017:48). Even so, the effective political power was kept by the BSPP.

After the new constitution was passed, the BSPP regime took measures to unite the nation, crush the insurgency groups and made sure that Buddhism would be the state religion (Farzana, 2017:49). As part of this process, the military began to dissolve Rohingya political
organizations. One of the measures to counter insurgencies was called “Operation Nagamin” and it was initiated in 1977. The regime claimed that the operation was necessary to unite the country and it gave the authorities the right to check identification cards and documents of all inhabitants (Farzana, 2017:49). Furthermore, the Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs claimed that the operation was a venture to “take actions against foreigners who have filtered into the country illegally” (Smith 1999:237-241 in Farzana, 2017:49). Operation Nagamin was the first specific sign that showed that the Burmese government did not view Rohingya as legitimate citizens. Also, the government actions in 1978 showed that the struggle of Rohingya has been ongoing for at least forty years. To conclude, Burmese official attempts to unite the country during the late 70’s were through targeting rebellious minorities, which runs opposite to the very idea of a union made up of diverse ethnic minorities (Farzana, 2017:50).

In 1982 the military regime passed the Citizenship Law which created a restrictive policy of who was entitled Burmese citizenship (see detailed description of the Law in section 4.1). The aim of the law was to fit in with the regime’s own identity exclusionist policy and now ethnic exclusion had been stated as law (Farzana, 2017:50). 135 ethnic minorities were recognized under the Law and previously, before 1962, the civil government had recognized 144 ethnic group, among them Rohingya. After 1982, the Citizenship Law considered Rohingya as “resident foreigners” and made them de facto stateless (Ahsan Ullah, 2016:286).

Leader of the BSPP government, General Ne Win and his leadership within the party, became questioned due to Burma’s slow economic growth during the 1980’s. Contrary to other socialist republics in east Asia like China, Burma failed to mobilize governmental revenues and in 1985 the GDP per capita was 556 U.S dollars (Kipgen, 2016:146). In 1987 the United Nations (UN) degraded Burma’s economy to a “Least Developed Country” and now the Burmese population began complaining openly over Ne Win’s leadership. Large protests began, initially started by students in Rangoon, but then spread across the country and Ne Win resigned leadership of the BSPP in July 1988 (Kipgen, 2016:147). The Burmese population had lost their patience with Ne Win because of his “maneuvering with cultural traditions..., and the bursting of the economic bubble under the mounting pressure of inflation and economic stagnation” (Maung 1990:615 in Kipgen, 2016:147). Despite Ne Win’s resignation the prices on basic commodities continued to sky-rocket and the abyss between the elite and the rest became huge. Moreover, the economic stagnation intensified with high inflation and people once again took to the streets to protest (Kipgen, 2016:147).
The protestors shouted for democracy, but they were met with brutal violence from the government forces who fired at the unarmed demonstrators. Thousands were killed by government bullets and hundreds were arrested. Although Ne Win’s reign was over the military regained power in coup after creating a new party: The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) (Kipgen, 2016:147). The violence would be remembered as the 8888 Uprising, but in 1990 SLORC announced multiparty elections would be held in 1990 (Kipgen, 2016:149). The elections in 1990 were considered free and fair by the international community and the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won a landslide victory with 392 out of 485 seats available in the 492 seats assembly (Kipgen, 2016:21). Despite claiming that they would recognize the results, SLORC then turned around deciding not to step down from power (Kipgen, 2016:22). Aung San Suu Kyi and several other newly elected members of parliament were put in house arrest.

1.1.3 After 1990 – Democratic reforms
To keep in power the military regime once again transformed, this time calling themselves the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) (Yinn Mar Oo and Than Lynn, 2011). The SPDC kept power until 2011 and a few years earlier, in 2008, they amended the constitution allowing the NLD to re-register as a legitimate political party (Kipgen, 2016:76). A series of democratic reforms were initiated in 2011, among other things a national human rights body was created on the request of UN (Kipgen, 2016:80). The body was called Myanmar National Human Rights Commission. On October 11th, 2011 an open letter from the Commission was published in the state-owned newspaper The New Light of Myanmar requesting president Thein Sein to release all political prisoners (Kipgen, 2016:81). The letter was published after the government declared they would pardon many prisoners. A few months later at a UN General Assembly meeting, Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin made a statement that over 6300 prisoners would be released (Kipgen, 2016:81). Nevertheless, he did not mention the exact number of prisoners being released or who they were. Aung San Suu Kyi was released from her house arrest a year earlier, in 2010 and she was invited to discuss Myanmar’s political feature with President Thein Sein (Kipgen, 2016:86). In the by-election in 2012 NLD won 43 out of 44 seats available (Kipgen, 2016:125). This time the military recognized the results and NLD could participate in the parliament. Three years later in the general election of 2015, Aung San Suu Kyi was elected State-Councilor. A law stating that persons with children who have foreign citizenship cannot become president, prevented Suu Kyi from assigning the office
(McKirdy, 2016). Even so, Suu Kyi became the acting president in all but name and Myanmar had made important steps towards democracy.

1.2 Problem formulation

The military regime in Myanmar has started a process of democratization in the country and free elections were held in 2015 and NLD won a landslide victory. Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of NLD, became State Counsellor promising a democratic future for Myanmar. Yet, Suu Kyi has not been able to solve minority conflicts in the country and the Muslim Rohingya minority is still excluded and persecuted. Religion and nationalism have been used in Myanmar to create a conception of belonging (Farzana, 2017:46) which effectively excluded Rohingya from citizenship and basic human rights. Religion and nationalism in Myanmar, so called political Buddhism, are used in a way to oppress the Muslim Rohingya minority group. Furthermore, the authorities in Myanmar does not recognize Rohingya as Burmese citizens (Ahsan Ullah, 2016:286).

The oppression of Rohingya is important to study because it is turning into a genocide which no one can stop other than the perpetrators themselves. The brutality towards Rohingya constitute gross violations of their human rights. Additionally, Myanmar does not recognize Rohingya as a Burmese minority group and consider them as “foreign residents”, making them de facto stateless (Ahsan Ullah, 2016:286). This is the current reality for the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar ever since the Burmese “Citizenship Law” of 1982 declared that Rohingya did not count as one of the country’s 135 minority groups (Ahsan Ullah, 2016:291). Since then, the Burmese authorities have alienated Rohingya through nationalistic and religious policies. This study labels these policies as political Buddhism and this concept is explored to analyze how it has been used against Rohingya.

1.3 Purpose and thesis questions

The purpose of this study is to identify the concept of political Buddhism and to explore how it has been used as a tool of oppression against the Muslim Rohingya minority. This is done through an ideology analysis of political Buddhism in a case study where Myanmar is the case. Myanmar is relevant as a case because it is where the majority of the Rohingya minority lives and they have had several violent confrontations with the Buddhist majority population in Myanmar. Furthermore, the concept of political Buddhism has not been explicitly developed. Therefore, I believe a theoretical framework based upon defining political Buddhism will better help understand why Rohingya are being subject to violence in Myanmar. Finally, the brutality towards Rohingya is a gross human rights violation. This study is exploring how political
Buddhism is used and have been used to target Rohingya in Myanmar. Thus, to be able to use political Buddhism as a theoretical framework to understand the exclusion of Rohingya one needs to ask the following main research question: *In what ways can political Buddhism be used to understand the exclusion of Rohingya in Myanmar?* Furthermore, to understand the use of political Buddhism, the concept needs a definition. Thus, a secondary research question is: *what is political Buddhism?* When looking specifically at the legal situation of Rohingya, the most significant aspect is that they are stateless (Farzana, 2017:51). Rohingya have been treated like outlaws, unable to take part of everyday life in Myanmar. Being stateless is stigma and affects your fundamental human rights. Consequently, one also need to ask: *how is political Buddhism expressed regarding citizenship and how is that affecting the political and civil rights of Rohingya?* Finally, neither Bangladesh nor Myanmar want to take responsibility for the Rohingya minority and both countries say they are not nationals of neither nation (Farzana, 2017:60 and 64). Therefore, the final secondary research question asks: *how is the current persecution defining Rohingya’s legal status?*

### 1.4 Limitations

Political Buddhism is an unestablished term which I aspire to define in this study. One might see similarities between political Buddhism and political Islam. Although, political Islam and radical fundamentalism are reviewed within the conceptual framework, the focus of this study is on political Buddhism and how it has been used to oppress Rohingya in the case of Myanmar. A comprehensive comparison between political Islam and political Buddhism has not been made in this study because the Rohingya context is within political Buddhism. Since I do not speak Burmese I use English secondary sources such as news articles from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and The Guardian. Political sciences articles about Rohingya have also been used (previous research is elaborated on in the following section) and the English translated version of the Burmese Constitution from 2008. Furthermore, there is a time limitation for this study which means this research must be finished within two months from the time of writing. Finally, the fact that the violence targeting Rohingya is occurring recently must also be accounted for. Since I am studying a conflict that is ongoing at the time of writing, it is important to acknowledge that the situation on site could change very fast. However, whatever happens in Myanmar after this study is written, the relevant sources to analyze the situation in Rakhine are already available. With that in mind, there is still a lot of previous research on the issue which is reviewed below.
1.5 Previous research

There is previous academic research considering the vulnerability of Rohingya which is connected to research on refugee exposure. There is also considerable research about Rohingya and their statelessness (Ahsan Ullah, 2016; Albert, 2018; Amnesty International, 2017; and Beyrer and Kamarulzaman, 2017). Furthermore, previous research which labels Rohingya’s situation as a humanitarian crisis is also well established (Kaveri, 2017; and Kingston, 2015:1166). However, many scholars mention ethnicity and construction of national identity as causes for Rohingya’s exclusion (Farzana, 2017:21; Cheeseman, 2017:462; Ahsan Ullah, 2016:297). The notion that a form of political Buddhism, a combination of national Buddhist identity and politicized ethnicity, has not yet been comprehensively outlined. This study uses political Buddhism to explain why Rohingya is being subject to continuously maltreatment in Myanmar. In this section I review some of the previous research on Rohingya’s exclusion. Since there are extensive research on Rohingya and to examine the most recent and accurate research I have narrowed it down to some of the newest studies on the topic.

A. K. M. Ahsan Ullah is a professor at Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Gadong, Brunei and in 2016 he published Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar: Seeking Justice for the ‘Stateless’ in the Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice. Ahsan Ullah (2016:285) argues “that Rohingyas in Myanmar have been deliberately excluded by its government”. Ahsan Ullah (2016:297), emphasizes the role of politicized ethnicity and how it has been vital for national unity. Furthermore, he argues that Rohingya’s statelessness could be one explanation to regional unrest in Rakhine state (Ahsan Ullah 2016:298). Finally, Ahsan Ullah (2016:298) highlights the importance of a multilateral political solution regarding Rohingya from neighboring countries, the ASEAN and the international community.

Kazi Fahmida Farzana (2017:2) examines the underlying causes to the displacement of Burmese Rohingya in her book Memories of Burmese Rohingya Refugees. She argues that “more attention to the social and political processes of forced migration and identity politics that generate protracted displacement” is needed (Farzana, 2017:3). Farzana targets processes in which the Rohingya identity has been politicized and the consequences it has brought to the Rohingya community. Furthermore, she claims that state policies can make minority groups into “identity-less parasites”, but the persecuted minority can preserve their identity through memories and culture. Farzana (2017:233) emphasizes that this is not an exclusive problem for Myanmar and Bangladesh alone. Similar, examples of inclusion-exclusion politics can be found in relation to Tibetan and Tamil refugees in India, Vietnamese refugees in the Philippines and
Afghan refugees in Pakistan. In conclusion, she believes that the existing literature on identity and multiculturalism have failed to adequately provide schematics which concerns statelessness and forced migration (Farzana, 2017:233).

Nick Cheeseman (2017) presents his thoughts on Rohingya and identity in *How in Myanmar ‘national races’ Came to Surpass Citizenship and Exclude Rohingya*, published in the Journal of Contemporary Asia. He argues that the concept of *national races* has created severe conflict in Myanmar over who is Rohingya and what the Rohingyan identity is (2017:461). Myanmar has 135 different ethnic minority groups and the concept of national races stems to those ethnicities that are part of the Union of Burma (The Constitution of Myanmar, 2008:7). Cheeseman means that the national races has been used as a standard for certain truths of acceptance in Myanmar’s political community (Cheeseman, 2017:461-462). Cheeseman says that Myanmar cannot obtain democracy before the idea of national races is confronted (Cheeseman, 2017:476). Finally, he means that intellectuals and politicians in Myanmar are not ready to contest the truth regime of the national races and even less willing to redefine it (Cheeseman, 2017:477).

1.6 Disposition

The aim of this research is to explore and define political Buddhism and how it has been used to oppress the Muslim Rohingya minority. The first chapter introduce the research problem and purpose of the study. Also, the history of Myanmar is briefly reviewed to show how it has shaped the divisive society that the Rohingya minority is facing. Subsequently, the background of Myanmar leads to the thesis question and some possible limitation for conducting a single-case study and an ideology analysis. Chapter 1 is concluded with a brief review of previous research of Rohingya displacement. Chapter 2 focuses on the method of the study and how the it has been conducted. It also mentions some limitations for the chosen research method. In chapter 3 the conceptual framework of political Buddhism is introduced. These concepts are ideologies, nationalism and religious fundamentalism. This is the theoretical frame of the study, which with the help of an ideology analysis with an ideal type, aims at defining and decoding political Buddhism. Political Buddhism serves both as the theoretical framework and the analysis of the study. In chapter 4 the case of Myanmar is presented and the history of Rohingya and the violence that they have faced is explained. This chapter also presents the legal status of Rohingya and their minority group identity is reviewed. Furthermore, the chapter elaborates on the civil and political rights of the Rohingya minority and describes why their rights have been refused by the Burmese government. Chapter 5 provides further explanation to political
Buddhism and its purposes. Also, some of the international responses to the Rohingya crisis are looked upon. Chapter 5 is concluded with a model of political Buddhism as an ideal type. Furthermore, the final part of the chapter tries to answer some of the factors behind the Rohingya exclusion. Chapter 6 summarizes the factors behind political Buddhism and provides some concluding remarks. Chapter 7 brings a widened reflection on political Buddhism and recommendations for further research. This final chapter provides some other perspectives and tries to look at other possible outcomes of the Rohingya exclusion.
2. Method

2.1 Single-case study
To be able to find out how political Buddhism has been used to target Rohingya, this study has been conducted as an ideology analysis with a single-case study, where an ideal type of political Buddhism has been made with Myanmar as the case. The material reviewed have mostly been secondary sources which consists of academic articles on Myanmar and Rohingya, but I have also used primary sources, such as the English version of the Burmese Constitution. Since the Rohingya crisis has been a recent issue, I have also used relevant newspaper articles and NGO reports from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

A case study is research which emphasizes the description, understanding and exploration of the individual, more specially focusing on one subject to reach an in depth understanding of it (Woodside, 2010:1-2). When I have dissected political Buddhism, Myanmar has been a relevant case because it provided examples of events that gave important information of what political Buddhism represented. Case study research let the individual respond to her own thinking process and considers chain of events that has occurred for a specified amount of time (Woodside, 2010:2).

Furthermore, since Myanmar has been the single case in this research the type of case study has been what George and Bennett (2005:76) called a “Building block” study. A building block research studies a specific phenomenon or identify a common pattern and is typical for a single-case study. Using this method was preferable because a single-case study with a no fluctuation poses a resilient test for researches trying to identify “alternative casual paths to similar outcomes…” (George and Bennett, 2005:76). Moreover, the building block approach gives the case study new subtypes or processes that are relevant for the original case (George and Bennett, 2005:112). Eventually, the building block structure can provide a comprehensive map of many paths to a possible outcome (George and Bennett, 2005:262). The building blocks of this study have been ideologies, nationalism and exclusion/inclusion policies, which have been elaborated on in the following chapter. Importantly, when conducting a single-case study, the goal is to explain a phenomenon being an empirical universal, having no variation in the dependent variable (George and Bennett, 2005:77). Since Myanmar was the most evident example where political Buddhism is occurring, there is no variation in the outcome of cases in this study.
Moreover, the validity of a single case needs to be highlighted because the question of validity is highly depending on which power perspective has been used (Bergström and Boréus, 2012:353). However, when conducting an ideal type, the power perspective is not the primary concern, but even so the issue of validity is still important. If there are doubts of the analytical tools of the ideal type there is an issue of validity (Bergström and Boréus, 2018:172). The issue of validity is reemphasized in the “Method limitations” section.

### 2.2 Ideology analysis

In an idea analysis there is no specific direction given, but one way to classify it is to address the purpose of the study (Bergström and Boréus, 2012:145). As mentioned, the purpose of this study was to explore the term *political Buddhism* and how it has been used to target Rohingya in Myanmar. I have argued that the best way of exploring the concept of political Buddhism has been through an ideology analysis. Consequently, as Bergström and Boréus (2012:148) argue, different elements of the ideology are compared with an outer reality. Thus, the ideology should be made understandable, or rather be exposed (Bergström and Boréus, 2012:148).

There are different directions on how to conduct an ideology analysis. The first is to distinction the differences between political and other ideologies (Bergström and Boréus, 2012:144). Political Buddhism has been a religious ideology based on nationalism and the Buddhist religion. Within an ideology analysis there are analytic tools which can help researchers pinpoint a specific group’s ideology, these are: ideal type and dimensions (Bergström and Boréus, 2012:149). The making of an ideal type has helped to identify and analyze political Buddhism.

The ideal type is connected to Max Weber and is a form of mind construction. It should not be viewed as a model who describes reality and neither can it be interpreted as reality. Weber used the ideal type as an analytical tool to modify specific characteristics to formulate hypotheses. However, it is also possible to use it to reconstruct idea systems (Bergström and Boréus, 2012:150).

Another way to analyze ideologies is to consider the agents, obstacles and goals of the ideology. The agent is the subject of the ideology. It can be an individual, a class, a group, or a nation (Ball et al., 2017:13). The goal is the goal that the agents of the ideology want to accomplish. An example of a goal for a liberal is for the individual to live ones live as he or she chooses without unnecessary interference. The obstacles are the hinderers on the way to reach the goal.
They can vary and be both physical or mental, such as a disability or a social or a political idea (Ball et al., 2017:13).

The agent of political Buddhism has been the Burmese people who identify as Buddhist. The obstacles of this religious ideology were so called “resident foreigners” in Myanmar such as Rohingya and other refugee groups. The goal has been to have a totally Buddhist Myanmar with Burmans as the main “national race”. Political Buddhism has connections to Burmese nationalism; however, Ball et al., argue that nationalism is not an ideology of its own (2017:15). Nationalism takes many different forms and are connected to other ideologies, but in this case nationalism has been directly connected to political Buddhism (Ball et al., 2017:15). Therefore, the parts that have made political Buddhism were not ideologies by their own, but all together they made an ideology that consisted of nationalism, Buddhism and inclusion and exclusion policies.

2.3 Material

In this study I have analyzed the material through an ideology analysis. The material that were primarily used for conducting the analysis were Kazi Fehmida Farzana’s Memories of Burmese Rohingya Refugees, Contested Identity and Belonging; The Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar; the Amnesty International report Myanmar: Rohingya trapped in dehumanising apartheid regime; articles about Rohingya written by The Guardian and BBC; and articles describing the situation in Rakhine state by UNHCR and Human Rights Watch. This material has been used because it described Rohingya’s situation in Myanmar thoroughly and precisely, which is the purpose of investigative journalism and humanitarian non-profit organisations. UNHCR, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are independent international organizations and NGOs that focus on aid, human rights and democracy. Neither of them work to gain profit and their primary agenda is to help people. The Guardian and BBC are both British newspapers who have a very good international reputation. The BBC stated that their mission has been to act in the interest of the public and serve audiences with “impartial and distinctive output and services which inform, educate and entertain” (BBC, 2017:7). Therefore, BBC is considered a reliable source of information. The Guardian is published by Guardian News & Media (GNM) who also owns the Sunday newspaper the Independent. The Guardian has been the organizer of revealing journalism such as the Paradise and Panama Papers tax investigations and the Nauru Files about Australian offshore detentions (The

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2 For further elaboration of the building blocks making political Buddhism see the model in section 5.4, page 31.

2.4 Method limitations
This study consisted of a single-case research design, which did have some limitations. In the publication Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research (DSI), the authors Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba argue that including only a single measurement in a study is precarious because it leaves a possibility of uncertainty for more than one possible explanation. However, DSI points out that a “single case study can involve many observations” (George and Bennett, 2005:32), which according to George and Bennett reduces the problem of outcome uncertainty.

Also, there are some limitations when conducting an ideology analysis or an ideal type. For example, the researcher can be tempted to see the material reviewed from a predetermined perspective, influenced by the ideal type (Bergström and Boréus, 2012:172). Thus, if there are doubts on whether the tools of analysis provide a reliable picture of the material reviewed there is an issue of validity. Additionally, if the construction of the ideal type is too blunt the consequence might be that the analysis becomes roughly sorted into different categories (Bergström and Boréus, 2012:172). To avoid that, the ideal type should be as coherent and consistent as possible. On the other hand, if the ideal type is consisting of too few and general statements, the problem of interpretation can be enhanced since there is uncertainty where each part should fit in (Bergström and Boréus, 2012:174).
3. Conceptual framework

This chapter provides the conceptual framework of the thesis, which is the components of political Buddhism. These concepts are ideologies, religious fundamentalism and nationalism and they are important to understand the construction of political Buddhism.

3.1 Ideologies – the study of ideas

Within a historical perspective, the term *idéa* in Greek has been used in philosophy for thousands of years (Bergström and Boréus, 2012:139). An idea can be seen as a mindset, which contrary to brief impressions or attitudes, is characterized by a stability or continuity (Bergström and Boréus, 2012:140). Furthermore, an idea or a mindset can be a construction, or an imagination of reality, which gives a conception of how to act. Predetermined imaginations of reality can be presented as facts, which is why source criticism is important. Ideologies are perceived as collections of ideas concerning society and politics (Bergström and Boréus, 2012:140). The term *ideology* grew common during the ninetieth century and derives from the Greek. Ideologies are the study of ideas and Ball, Dagger, and O’Neill define ideologies as

> a fairly coherent and comprehensive set of ideas that explains and evaluates social conditions, helps people understand their place in society, and provides a program for social and political action (Ball, Dagger and O’Neill, 2017:6).

Ideologies help to explain social, political and economic conditions and how people react to them (Ball et al., 2017:6). According to Ball, Dagger and O’Neill (2017:6) an ideology does four main functions who are: (1) *explanatory*, (2) *evaluative*, (3) *orientative*, and (4) *programmatic*. The explanatory functions provide meanings for why social, political and economic settings are as they are. The evaluative functions of an ideology work as a tool to assess social conditions (Ball et al., 2017:5). It tries to answer questions such as “*are all wars evil to be avoided, or are some morally justifiable?*” The orientative actions provide an ideology its sense of identity. Who is the person within this ideology, what race, nation, sex does he or she belong to? Finally, the programmatic functions tell the followers of the ideology what they should do and how they should act doing so (Ball et al., 2017:6).

As mentioned, ideologies try to answer questions such as “*Why are there wars?*” and “*What causes unemployment?*” Different ideologies answers differently to each question, but they all try to describe the complex world we live in (Ball et al., 2017:7). Additionally, an ideology seeks to explain what its followers should do and how they should do it (Ball et al., 2017:8). All ideologies give a concept of how the social and the political life is, and how it should strive
to be. This is to give inspiration to the followers of the ideology and give them incentives either to keep their way of life or to change it. Ideologies are not scientific although they often use scientific measures to explain things that happen in the world. For example, both Nazis and liberals have used Darwin’s theories of evolution to their own advantages (Ball et al., 2017:8). Likewise, there is a difference between a political philosophy and a political ideology (Ball et al., 2017:10). Even though they do similar things political ideologies simplifies the world and tries to offer easy explanations, while political philosophies are more abstract and seek no absolute truths or straight-forward answers (Ball et al., 2017:10). If ideologies and political philosophies are different, in what ways are ideologies and religions similar or different?

Religions provide, just like ideologies, descriptive and calculated functions to their worshipers. Furthermore, if ideologies are defined simplistically as belief systems then religions and ideologies are very much alike (Ball et al., 2017:10). Additionally, religions also perform the explanatory, evaluative, orientative, and programmatic functions just like ideologies do. Even so, religions are connected to the divine, sacred and eternal while ideologies focus on what is currently happening on earth. Ideologies focus on how people are living right now and religions prepare people for life after death (Ball et al., 2017:10). Of course, religions also care about the way people live, but it is not their main concern in the way that it is for ideologies.

How is political Buddhism an ideology? As mentioned above, the definition of an ideology is a fairly coherent and comprehensive set of ideas that explains and evaluates social conditions, helps people understand their place in society, and provides a program for social and political action (Ball, Dagger and O’Neill, 2017:6).

However, Political Buddhism is when the Buddhist religion is used in a way to gain political ground. This means that political Buddhism is the politization of a religion. Thus, making political Buddhism not directly an ideology, but a mindset using religion to win power. Furthermore, political Buddhism relies on the togetherness of the Buddhist population in Myanmar. When they feel a strong connection through a common religion and a common nationality the legitimacy of political Buddhism is strengthened. At the same time, those who do not share that religion and nationality become outsiders who subsequently are excluded from the national unity. Inclusion and exclusion strategies are important tools for political Buddhism, since it creates a common incentive. It makes it possible for the users of the movement to say, “we are united as Burmans, and they are not”. Those are the basic characteristics of political Buddhism and they are further analyzed and defined in chapter 5.
3.2 Religious fundamentalism

Political Buddhism has many characteristics of religious fundamentalism. Religious fundamentalism is the reaction to the spread of secularism (Ball et al., 2017:277). There are fundamentalists within both Christianity and Islam, as well as within other religions. All those groups believe that too much attention is given to human lust and that God’s commands are neglected. This means that the political factions of Islam and Christianity, the equivalent to political Buddhism, has a lot in common. Islamic fundamentalists, such as the Islamic State, declared “holy war” on the Western “infidels” and other Muslims who would not share their views (Ball et al., 2017:277). Similarly, Christian fundamentalist crusaders also declared holy war on the Muslim infidels, however this occurred during the 12th century. Political Islam is strongly influenced by Sharia, and the urge to implement Sharia as law in society (Sachedina, 2009:33). Furthermore, Sachedina pictures political Islam as militant in order to dictate political and social change to make them comply with Islamic teachings of the Muslim order, by other words Sharia (2009:33).

Religious fundamentalism basically means believing that every word in a specific religious text is the truth and should be interpreted as “pure” as possible. However, in the Western world radical Islam has been the most portrayed, since it has been considered a threat to Western civilization (Ball et al., 2017:268). As mentioned, it is important to remember that religious fundamentalists are present in all religions and not just in Islam. Radical Islam is an ideology which has been reactive, considering it serves counter to the perceived threat by modernization and secularization (Ball et al., 2017:268). It seems that all religious fundamentalists are afraid of change since they strive for conservative values and preserving an idea that yesterday’s society was preferable.

3.3 Nationalism

One important building block of political Buddhism is nationalism and to understand political Buddhism better one needs to dissect nationalism. The idea of nationalism was born in the 19th century and grew from the thought that people should be categorized naturally into region groups, or nations (Ball et al., 2017:15). According to this mindset, a person’s nationality is determined by birth and cannot be chosen. In fact, the terms “nation” and “nationality” origin from the Latin word natus, which means birth. Consequently, a nation is when people are sharing the same heritage and a sense of a common birth (Ball et al., 2017:15). Therefore, one might think that people having the same nationality would also be sharing citizenship. However, this is not always easy to distinguish since a person’s nationality can be different from her
citizenship. A member of a native American tribe, for example the Navajo nation, can still be a citizen of the United States. For sincere nationalists, nationality and citizenship should be the same (Ball et al., 2017:15). This idea, that people sharing the same birthplace should belong to the same nation, gave the rise of the thought of the nation-state (Ball et al., 2017:16). That a nation-state should be a sovereign political unit, self-governed, which is bound together by the common feeling of a single nation.

The nationalistic ideas grew strong following the Napoleonic wars in the beginning of the 19th century (Ball et al., 2017:16). During the 19th and 20th century nationalism spread across the globe and provoked the tensions lighting the World Wars. Moreover, nationalism spread to Africa and Asia sparking “wars of national liberation” eventually granting independence to former colonies (Ball et al., 2017:16).

Finally, although it might be easy to identify a nationality, many states such as Canada and Switzerland consist of people speaking different languages, having separate nationalities. Even if people in Switzerland speak both German, French and Italian they are still Swiss. How could that be? Despite the concerns that erupts around such questions, nationalism keep pulling people to a common identity and in some instances new nations have been formed where there have been different national ideas. When Czechoslovakia split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in the 1990’s, it was largely because of nationalistic sentiments (Ball et al., 2017:16).

Jobir Alam (2017:191) mentions two different mindsets of nationalism to pursue unity within the country: civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism. The differences between the two are that civic nationalism promotes an objective, political understanding of a nation, while ethnic nationalism advocates a subjective, cultural interpretation of a nation (Alam, 2017:191). In the case of Myanmar, the country has chosen the ethnic type of nationalism, or more precisely Burmese nationalism, which resulted in the exclusion of Rohingya from a national identity (Alam, 2017:192). Furthermore, nationalism requires allegiance to one state. Belonging to a nation is something personal and subjective, while citizenship of a state is an objective fact (Alam, 2017:189). However, it is important to remember that nationalism is a new idea. The concept that people speaking the same language and sharing the same culture should belong to the same nation-state begun in the last 200 years. “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist” (Gellner, 1964:169 in Hylland Eriksen, 2010:117).
Additionally, nationalism is an imagined community because, despite inequalities within every, the nation is perceived as a linear companionship (Anderson, 2006:7). Anderson means that it is this imagined community which made it possible for so many to voluntarily die for “your country” in numerous wars (Anderson, 2006:7). The merge of the dynastic empires and nations developed after and in response to the national movements growing in central Europe during the 1820’s (Anderson, 2006:86). Nationalism and imperialism together became perfect incentives to urge young men to fight and die for your country. Anderson (2006:86-87) calls these “official nationalisms” and were constructed out of the American and French revolutionary nationalisms. These nationalisms developed inside Europe and became possible because of popular linguistic responses from groups in power (Anderson, 2006:109). Nationalism thrived in the name of imperialism, which hid the divergence between “nation and dynastic realm” (Anderson, 2006:110).
4. The case of Myanmar – History of Rohingya

According to the Rohingya themselves they have lived in Rakhine (historically known as Arakan and I use both names in this chapter) for centuries (Ahон Ullah, 2016:286). However, there are no specific evidence tied to archeological discoveries that can say who the first settlers in Rakhine were (Topich and Leitich, 2013:17). The majority of Rohingya are Sunni Muslims and a smaller minority in Bangladesh and India are Hindu (Topich and Leitich, 2013:151). Rohingya have their own language and culture and they represent the top share of Muslims in Myanmar. The largest number of Rohingya live in Rakhine state in Myanmar, but there are also significant populations living in Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Malaysia and India. Those diasporas migrated mainly because of the repressive politics towards Muslims by the Myanmar military regime (BBC News, 2018).

The exact origin of Rohingya is contested, but it is established that the ancestors of Rohingya were Persian and Arab traders who settled in Arakan as early as the ninth century (Farzana, 2017:42). Arakan was naturally separated from the rest of Burma by the Arakan Yoma mountain range, which is one factor explaining why Rohingya developed a different culture and identity than the rest of Burma. Nevertheless, during the Middle Ages Arakan was Buddhist just as the Burmese Kingdom. However, in 1406, the Arakan Kingdom was subdued by foreign invaders and the Arakense King fled to the neighboring Muslim Bengal. With the help of a Bengal army the Arakan King could restore his rule and during the years in exile the king had become influence by Muslim ideas which he brought back to Arakan (Farzana, 2017:42). During the centuries to come Arakan/Rakhine developed a multicultural society where “Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, together with Brahmanism, Hinduism, Animism and other beliefs flourished side by side” (Farzana, 2017:43). The prosperous times ended in 1784 when the Burmese King Bodawpaya invaded and annexed Arakan into his Burmese Kingdom. Widespread unrest followed in the region and thousands of Arakanese fled to the now British colonial Bengal (Farzana, 2017:43). These events explained why Arakanese Rohingya favored the British and the mistrust which has continued between the Rohingya and the Burmese.

4.1 Rohingya persecution

“… the situation seems a textbook example of ethnic cleansing.” – Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN News, 2017).

The first displacement of Rohingya refugees started in 1978 when 200’000 fled to Bangladesh (Farzana, 2017:50). This forced-migration occurred after increased identity policies from the
Myanmar authorities targeting people who had previously been refugees. The involvement in the 1978 displacements has been denied by Myanmar and the authorities stated they are not responsible for people crossing the border to Bangladesh (Farzana, 2017:50). Shortly after the mass-displacements the authorities agreed to let “lawful residents of Burma who are now sheltered in the camps in Bangladesh” return to Myanmar. This clearly did not involve the Rohingya refugees who are not recognized by Myanmar as lawful citizens. After the refugee crisis in 1978, Myanmar authorities became clearly hostile towards Rohingya in Rakhine (Farzana, 2017:50).

The statelessness of Rohingya in Myanmar begun when they were de facto stripped from Burmese citizenship by the Citizenship Law of 1982 (Cheeseman, 2017:471). Although, the Law did not specifically deny Rohingya citizenship, the Law emphasized citizenship through national race as key. The Law made ethnic/national race as the main incentive for Burmese citizenship and made clear that Kachin, Karenni, Karen, Chin, Burman, Mon, Arakanese and Shan, who have lived in Myanmar before 1823, had right to citizenship (Cheeseman, 2017:471). As mentioned above, the Law created three categories of “citizens”: citizens, associate citizens and naturalized citizens (Farzana, 2017:51). The regime did not recognize Rohingya as one of the 135 national races. Moreover, the implications of the Law excluded Rohingya from Burmese citizenship, making them stateless. This meant that no Rohingya child could obtain citizenship, because at least one of the parents must be categorized as one of the three types of citizen for the child being able to obtain citizenship (Farzana, 2017:51). Rohingya do not qualify as citizens in none of the categories.

Riots against Muslims have occurred in Myanmar as expanded protests towards migrant workers as early as in the 1930’s. These movements gave birth to nationalist and religious slogans such as “Burma for the Burmans” and “to be Burman is to be Buddhist” (Ahsan Ullah, 2016:289). Riots targeting Rohingya have occurred on and on, which intensified in 2012 and 2017 (BBC News, 2018). The violence in 2012 begun when Buddhists living Rakhine state targeted Rohingya Muslims because of widespread religious unrest in Myanmar. These riots resulted in 200 dead Rohingya and 140’000 homeless (Ahsan Ullah, 2016:289). The situation in Rakhine has been increasingly difficult for the Muslim Rohingya since the increased hostilities in the region between Muslims and Buddhists in 2012 (Amnesty International, 2017). Moreover, Rohingya’s movement has been restricted by the government so that their freedom of movement is limited within Rohingya villages. Curfews have been issued in the region and only Rohingya who have a permit can travel in northern Rakhine. Even if they can travel they

In 2017, violence erupted again after attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) on thirty police stations in Rakhine state (Albert, 2018). The government retaliated in so called “cleansing operations of terrorists” resulting in 6700 dead Rohingya of which 700 were children. Additionally, according to Amnesty International many Rohingya girls and women were raped as actions of revenge (BBC News, 2018). Another immediate consequence of the latest waves of violence towards Rohingya were the displacement of 650’000 people, most of them fleeing to Bangladesh. The State Councilor of Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi has denied all allegations of genocide and dismissed the international criticism as charging the hate between Buddhists and Muslims (Albert, 2018).

4.2 The legal status of Rohingya – the trap of statelessness

As mentioned, Rohingya became stateless because of the 1982 Citizenship Law (Cheeseman, 2017:471). UNHCR lists four main causes to statelessness and these are: gaps in national laws; people moving away from the country in which they were born; the emergence of new states and changing borders can leave some groups without a nationality; states can deprive former citizens from their nationality through laws which often are based on discriminating criteria such as ethnicity or race (UNHCR, 2018). Another reason could be that the affected person has lived a long time outside of his or her country of nationality and the person then become stateless (UNHCR, 2018). In the case of Rohingya, the fourth explanation to statelessness is very much applicable. The Citizenship Law discriminated Rohingya rights when it simply excluded their earlier recognition as a Burmese minority group. While being stateless, the Rohingya minority have very few legal rights. There are no legal measures that protect the rights of de facto stateless persons (UNHCR, 2012:9). On the other hand, The Final Act to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness includes a statement saying: “that persons who are stateless de facto should as far as possible be treated as stateless de jure to enable them to acquire an effective nationality”. Despite this resolution, the rejection of rights connected to nationality is a result of the current human rights regime (UNHCR, 2012:9).

Nevertheless, UNHCR has set the goal of eradicating statelessness until 2024 (UNHCR, 2018). In order to reach that goal, prevention of statelessness is as important as reinstating a nationality for people already being stateless (UNHCR, 2012:11). For Rohingya, this mindset is vital since every Rohingya child born also becomes stateless. To conclude, the majority of all Rohingya have very few rights while being considered “resident foreigners” in Myanmar (Ahsan Ullah,
2016:286). In fact, the Rohingya who are displaced have more legal rights than those who are left in Myanmar, since the Rohingya displaced outside of Myanmar are protected by the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (Riley, 2018).

4.3 Minority groups - Rohingya minority identity

“A minority is a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in their society” (Wirth in Alam, 2017:181). Especially religion has a prominent basis of creating a minority identity and it can help further the group dynamic (Alam, 2017:183). Krishnaswami makes three important notions concerning religious minorities which are applicable to the Muslim Rohingya minority. First, the judicial status of the minority religion and the possession of adequate rights under national law are vague in general. Second, the state uses its own criteria defining minority religions, which often are unfair to them, especially if the majority religion has a position as the state religion. Third and finally, the recognition of minority religions is absent, although unequal treatment is still a possibility (Krishnaswami in Alam, 2017:183). All these factors are applicable to the situation of Rohingya, except for the last statement since Islam is a recognized religion according the Burmese constitution (Constitution of Myanmar, 2008: paragraph 362). The Rohingya identity is made on the basis of religion and they are thus considered to be a religious minority (Alam, 2017:183). The identity of minorities is often subject of debate. The current discussion on identity is based on a mixture of racial, ethnic, gender and additional politics. Minority groups on national level that seek to amend for historic repression most often choose two ways of doing so. First, are those movements who seek a fundamental split from the majority society with an aim of creating alternative forms of nationalism in the light of brutal colonial practices and the denial of fundamental rights. Second, are the movements who want recognition within the majority society seeking a life of multiculturalism where individuality is accepted (Alam, 2017:184). The Rohingya do not seek independence, they want Burmese nationality, thus they strive for the recognition described by the second category. There are mainly two concepts for a Rohingya identity. The lack of a national identity for any ethnic minority may lead to consequences such as marginalization and persecution (Alam, 2017:187). Second, long periods of suffering and despair for the same minority group “are directly relating to their politicized and weakened identity” (Taylor in Alam, 2017:187).

4.4 Political and civil rights of Rohingya

The Constitution of Myanmar protects the rights and liberties of all Burmese citizens, but Rohingya are not Burmese citizens and are thus not included within those rights.
Rohingya obtain few political and civil rights, but even so they were still allowed to vote in the 1990 election (Farzana, 2017:52-53). In the general elections in 2008, Rohingya were given temporary identity cards, so called “white cards”, which gave them permission to vote (Albert, 2018). According to the Constitution of Myanmar, the Union (i.e. Myanmar) “shall guarantee any person to enjoy equal rights before the law and shall equally provide legal protection” (The Constitution of Myanmar, 2008: paragraph 347). However, Rohingya are not granted equal rights before the law as a Burmese citizen would and the temporary identity cards were revoked in 2015, denying their right to vote (Albert, 2018). The Burmese Constitution lists persons who are ineligible to vote in the election of the People’s Representatives to the Hluttaws, which is the Burmese parliament. The persons who cannot vote are:

- members of religious orders;
- persons serving prison terms;
- persons determined to be of unsound mind and stands so declared by a competent Court;
- persons who have not yet been declared free of bankruptcy;

None of these measures disqualify Rohingya as an entity to vote, but having to be a citizen, associate citizen or a naturalized citizen do. Without the white cards Rohingya have no proof of being legal Myanmar citizens and are therefore ineligible to participate in elections (Albert, 2018).

Rohingya civil rights have been neglected in other circumstances as well. Rakhine state is one of the poorest regions in Myanmar with 78 percent of the population living below the poverty threshold. The combination of poverty, lack of sufficient infrastructure and scarce employment possibilities have created enormous distrust between the Muslim Rohingya and Rakhine Buddhists in the region (Albert, 2018). Consequently, the whole region is suffering from the mentioned disadvantages, but it is the stigmatized Rohingya minority who has been the most vulnerable. Violence and rape have been used against Rohingya women in Rakhine during the fall of 2017 according to Human Rights Watch (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Under circumstances where life and personal security are at stake, civil and political rights are insignificant and non-existing. Surviving becomes the only priority.
5. Political Buddhism in Myanmar

Political Buddhism is when the Buddhist religion is used for nationalistic and political purposes to exclude non-Buddhists and thereby gain a sense of belonging (Farzana, 2017:46). Ethnicity and nationalism are also used to strengthen political Buddhism and being Burmese has been central for the Burmese society (Farzana, 2015:297). The concept of political Buddhism is not unique for Myanmar and is also comparable to the equivalent of Islam or Hinduism. However, that comparison is not be elaborated on here because, as mentioned, Rohingya are primarily living in the context of a Buddhist majority society. Nevertheless, Rohingya became a target of political Buddhism because they represented a group which did not belong to the Myanmar identity, they were the “others” (Farzana, 2017:46). Noteworthy is that other minority groups, such as the Christian Karen, who because of their faith were favored during the British colonial rule (Farzana, 2017:17), have been targeted by political Buddhism as well.

According to the Burma Citizenship Law of 1982 the population of Myanmar was classified into three different categories: citizens, associate citizens and naturalized citizens (Farzana, 2017:51). The law said that the ones who belonged to the citizen category were the so called “national races” of the country or those whose relatives settled in Myanmar before 1823 (Farzana, 2017:51). There are 135 “national races” in Myanmar who are acknowledged by the government, but Rohingya is not one of them (Farzana, 2015:55). Consequently, this makes it nearly impossible for Rohingya to become legitimized citizens since they are not recognized as a national race and it is very difficult to prove that your relatives have lived in the country since 1823. If there are no evidence provided to qualify as a citizen then that person would be an “associate citizen” and naturalized citizens are those who prove that their parents have lived in Myanmar before the independence in 1948 (Farzana, 2017:51). Additionally, those who are approved for citizenship under the Union Citizenship Act of 1948, but do not qualify under the 1982 Citizenship Law are also qualified as associate citizens. For Rohingya it is practically impossible to qualify for any of the three categories (they do not qualify as associate citizens neither under the 1948 law, nor the 1982 one) (Farzana, 2017:51).

The citizenship issue is not the only way in which political Buddhism is used to target Rohingya. Arbitrary arrests, disappearances, restrictions of movement, destruction of property and police harassment among other things, have been used to make Rohingya victims and destroy their identity (Farzana, 2017:234-235). Regardless of these abuses, statelessness is the primary outlier which creates the largest amount of suffering for the Rohingya population. It
literally isolates them from the accepted Myanmar citizens since Rohingya are forced to live in rural areas with restricted infrastructure and harsh living-conditions. Secondly, being exiled from their ancestral land Arakan (Rakhine) have created a rootlessness that have further eroded the Rohingya identity (Farzana, 2017:235). Additionally, the region of Arakan have connections to ethnic and cultural influences for Rohingya; when their villages were attacked all aspects of their culture and ethnicity were also attacked. Myanmar deliberately targeted the Rohingya existence and identity (Farzana, 2017:236). They did so because it was inherent for the political strategy of the Burmese military authorities. The systematic violence against Rohingya has been institutionalized, carried out during decades (Ahsan Ullah, 2016:291). This use of systematic violence has become an important tool of political Buddhism. Since Rohingya is not part of the Burmese national identity, political Buddhism excludes the minority group and makes them targets of legitimate violence because they are seen as illegal insurgents. Rohingya Muslims say themselves that they will unite in response of the systematic violence. As mentioned, using violence as a tactic has proven to be a useful strategy of political Buddhism (Albert, 2018). The Myanmar government say they conduct counter-terrorism operations as an excuse to the violence against Rohingya (BBC News, 2018). In fact, counter terrorism operation becomes code for targeting Rohingya Muslims in the name of political Buddhism.

Finally, despite the destructive use of political Buddhism, the Rohingya identity has not been shattered and the Rohingya language, their songs and way of life have been kept throughout life in refugee camps (Farzana, 2017:242). The devastation to Rohingya has been called a modern genocide (Albert, 2018). However, Myanmar authorities have created a commission to investigate these allegations who rejected the alleged ethnic cleansing because Rohingya is not a recognized ethnicity in Myanmar. Although Rohingya are not citizens one can ask whether Myanmar still has an obligation to protect human beings residing within its territory, regardless of citizenship (Farzana, 2017:243).

5.1 Political Buddhism in nationalism, religion and ethnicity

Burmese nationalist movements have effectively worked to strengthen the national self-image of the country (Prasse-Freeman, 2017:2). National Buddhist movements enlist supporters as part of their daily routines. For example, campaigns to prohibit eating beef by Buddhist monks affected mainly Muslims who owns many slaughterhouses in Rakhine state. Overall, movements vowing to protect race and religion have even accomplished changing national laws (Prasse-Freeman, 2017:2). Finally, these movements have also served to discredit Islam and associating Rohingya as transnational jihadists. The Burmese nationalists have claimed that if
Rohingya are given citizenship rights they will use it trying to forcibly convert Buddhists to Islam (Prasse-Freeman, 2017:2).

Nevertheless, the diverse ethnic landscape in Myanmar has been formed by the country’s history and the exclusionist policies by the military junta have created the marginalization of the minority groups (Farzana, 2015:298). Therefore, the Rohingya identity has been shaped through a harsh environment and by exclusionary politics by both Myanmar and Bangladesh (Farzana, 2015:310). Political Buddhism has been used as a tool to target ethnic minorities such as Rohingya by the Myanmar government.

Another example of the use of political Buddhism has been by Buddhist monks in Myanmar seeking to protect “the Burmese race” against the supposed threat of Islam (Nilsen, 2015). The Buddhist nationalist group Ma Ba Tha gained influence in Myanmar in 2012 when they used the Buddhist religion to gain political power. The movement is committed “to use its religious power to exercise political pressure” and to protect the so-called Burmese race (Nilsen, 2015). The Ma Ba Tha group also wants to restore ancient Brahman-Buddhist Kingdom, who are now predominantly Muslim, to their former Buddhist supremacy. Nielsen argues that the current infected political climate in Myanmar is hurting the national unity and therefore the national ideology should be revised. A new national policy in Myanmar which aims at inclusion and respect for religious and ethnic minorities would be beneficial for the whole country (Nilsen, 2015). Unfortunately, this is not in the interest of the Myanmar state and would perceivably undermine the power balance in the country.

5.2 Violence against Rohingya in 2017

According to UNHCR the Rohingya minority is one of the most vulnerable refugee group in the world (Albert, 2018). During the autumn of 2017, 650’000 Rohingya fled Myanmar and crossed the border to Bangladesh to seek refuge in the area around Cox’s Bazar in eastern Bangladesh. The large number of refugees crossing the border was due to renewed unrest in Rakhine in August 2017 (UNHCR, 2017). The turmoil started when Myanmar security forces retaliated after the ARSA militia had attacked police stations in Rakhine state. The Burmese security forces burned down Rohingya villages and hundred thousand people became homeless (Amnesty International, 2017). To shelter the large flow of refugees the Bangladeshi government have discussed creating a new refugee camp on the low-lying, uninhabited island

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3 Ma Ba Tha is a Burmese acronym for “The Organization for the Protection of Race and Religion” (Nielsen, 2015).
Bhasan Char in the Bengal Bay (Paul et al., 2018). The camp that would be able to host 100’000 refugees is planned to relieve pressure on the over-crowded camps around Cox’s Bazar. However, the suggestion has received criticism by humanitarian relief organizations such as the Amnesty International who claim that the island is exposed to cyclones and is not suitable to host thousands of refugees. Furthermore, many Rohingya who already living in refugee camps in Bangladesh are skeptical towards the Bangladeshi government and do not want to be moved (Paul et al., 2018). The distrust towards the authorities is widespread and Rohingya are afraid they won’t be able to return to their ancestral home in Rakhine if they are continuously moved around. Nevertheless, Bangladesh has made statements that they will soon be ready to harbor the new refugees and claiming no help from any foreign NGO’s is needed. Even so, Chinese and British companies have been employed to build embankments which can withstand cyclones. Chinese technicians have said that “confidentiality agreements” have been made between Bangladesh and the Chinese engineering company Sinohydro to build the necessary buildings on Bhasan Char (Paul et al., 2018).

The assistant secretary-general for human rights of the UN, Andrew Gilmour, visited the refugee camp in Cox’s Bazar in late February 2018. After visiting the camp Gilmour said that Myanmar’s ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims is ongoing and made a statement saying: “I don’t think we can draw any other conclusion from what I have seen and heard in Cox’s Bazar” (Lewis and Aung, 2018). The statement continued that Gilmour had spoken to refugees in the camp who described abductions by Myanmar security forces. Both the UN and the United States have stated that the actions made by the Myanmar security forces equaled ethnic cleansing. Furthermore, Gilmour said that the widespread and systematic brutality towards Rohingya remains. Although Myanmar made a deal with Bangladesh in November 2017 to accept refugees to return, Gilmour added that “safe, dignified and sustainable returns are, of course, impossible under current conditions” (Lewis and Aung, 2018). Myanmar has responded to the reports saying they deny ethnic cleansing and that the country does not drive out refugees.

5.3 International response

President Barack Obama lifted the American sanctions on Myanmar in December 2016 claiming the country had improved their human rights records. Obama’s actions received criticism for being premature and only a year later personal sanctions were targeted by the U.S on a Burmese general for his involvement in attacks in Rakhine (Albert, 2018). The UN views Rohingya’s situation mainly as a humanitarian crisis where urgent relief action is needed. The primary agency involved in the area is the UNHCR who has three main solutions concerning
refugee issues: voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement. Concerning the Rohingya crisis the UNHCR has mainly used the voluntary repatriation alternative (Farzana, 2017:71). However, not all Rohingya refugees have expressed a desire to return to Myanmar (refugees currently residing in Bangladesh). In fact, less than 30 percent wished to be repatriated to Myanmar according to a survey made by the UNHCR. In November 1993, UNHCR signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the government of Myanmar which gave the organization access to Rohingya villages in Rakhine state (Farzana, 2017:72). The UNHCR received criticism for the non-voluntary process, but they claimed that both Bangladesh and Myanmar were difficult to cooperate with during the repatriation process (Farzana, 2017:72-73).

Aung San Suu Kyi met with Australian prime minister Malcolm Turnbull in March 2018 to discuss the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Rakhine state (Karp, 2018). Turnbull advised Suu Kyi to come up with a resolution for resettling the people displaced in the area. Australia has provided aid and money to Bangladesh and Myanmar for sheltering refugees and for repatriation programs. Despite these efforts, Amnesty International Australia urged the Australian government to show more “more leadership”. The Australian Amnesty branch criticized Australia for not cutting military funding to Myanmar like the United States and the European Union have done. The national Amnesty director for Australia, Claire Mallinson, said that Australia still is “giving assistance to the Myanmar military despite all the evidence of ethnic cleansing” (Karp, 2018). Furthermore, Mallinson commented on Suu Kyi’s and Turnbull’s meeting saying that it would be challenging to reach a resettlement agreement until the UN would be allowed to investigate in Rakhine state.

As late as April 2, 2018, and a couple of weeks after Suu Kyi’s Australia visit, news came that the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) would be allowed into Myanmar (Hogan and Safi, 2018). A few weeks later, on April 30th, 2018, confirmation came from Myanmar authorities that the UNSC would be allowed to visit Rakhine state on May first (UN News, 2018). The delegation from the Security Council first visited refugee camps in Bangladesh during April 28th and 29th and then met with Aung San Suu Kyi and Burmese military officials in Naypyidaw the following day. Recently, a MoU was signed between the UNHCR and Bangladesh vowing that the repatriation process of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar must be “safe, voluntary and dignified, in line with international standards” (The Washington Post, 2018). During the visit, the delegation from the Security Council urged Myanmar to sign the memorandum. Furthermore, the delegation reminded Myanmar that being a member of the UN and state party
conventions means that you must abide by international law, which among other things overseeing the return of refugees in line with international standards. Great Britain’s ambassador to the UN, Karen Pierce said that giving unconditional access to Rakhine for UN agencies would be the best thing to do given the scale of the problem (The Washington Post, 2018).

While meeting the refugees in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, the Security Council was approached with several demands by the Rohingya refugees (Ellis-Petersen, 2018). The list of demands included 1) the restoration of their own homes; 2) stopping the building of IDP camps in Rakhine which Rohingya believe will function as detention centers for returning refugees; 3) for Rohingya to become recognized as Burmese citizens and; 4) action to be taken by the International Criminal Court (ICC) to prosecute Myanmar for genocide (Ellis-Petersen, 2018).

It is still early to draw any conclusions form the visit and the response from Myanmar authorities to the demands made by Rohingya are not yet known. However, it remains unlikely that Myanmar will agree to all the demands made.

5.4 Figure of Political Buddhism

Red = Procedure
Blue = Actor and goals
Green = Foundation

Physical violence
Segregation
Inclusion/Exclusion

Politcal goals: Homogenous Myanmar
Actor: Burmans (ethnicity)

Authoritarian history
Buddhism as national religion
The green represents the foundation of political Buddhism, the history that has led up to the present time making it possible to become an ideology. Myanmar’s authoritarian history, its military rule and Buddhism as the national religion have made it possible for political Buddhism to develop. The blue represents the actors and the goal of political Buddhism. The actors are the Burmese nationals that identify as ethnic Burmans and their goal is to have an ethnically homogenous Myanmar. The actors were those of made the history of Myanmar and what it has led to. Finally, the red represents the procedure of action, how political Buddhism is used. First, it excludes those who are not ethnically Burman; then it segregates ethnic minority groups from the rest of society, restricting their movement. Third, the use of physical violence is the last stepping-stone and a means to get rid of the opponents of political Buddhism. The violence is legitimized by claiming its recipients are “terrorists” or “illegal immigrants”, people without rights. Furthermore, violence can work as a scaring tactic and an attempt to reach political goals. These political goals can be to diminish the perceived threat from the minority group not sharing the values of political Buddhism. Consequently, physical violence becomes means to an end: to reach a homogenous Myanmar and make sure all minority groups remain in line, marginalized and outside of the national identity.

5.5 Answering the factors behind Rohingya exclusion.

Neither nationalism nor religion, which are the building stones of political Buddhism, are ideologies. Therefore, Political Buddhism is not a complete ideology, but rather a semi-ideology used in similar ways as an ideology to gain advantages for its supporters.

Political Buddhism has been used to exclude the Muslim Rohingya minority because they are not, in the eyes of the oppressors, part of the Burmese heritage and the ethnic nationality. Although, the Burmese Constitution recognizes Islam as an existing religion in Myanmar Muslims have been targeted and the government burned forty mosques in Rakhine state in 2002 to build Buddhist pagodas in their place (Gier, 2014:86). The violence against Muslims in Myanmar has been persistent since 2001, but the first large displacement of Muslim Rohingya due to state sanctioned violence took place as early as 1978 (Farzana, 2017:50). Many refugee groups have of course experienced similar violence as Rohingya, but few diasporas other than Palestinian refugees have been stripped from their citizenship (Ahsan Ullah, 2016:291). Inclusion-exclusion policies have often been initiated to discredit refugee groups, but in the case of Rohingya they are targets of having the “wrong” religion, nationality and ethnicity. Their exclusion from the rest of Burmese society has become institutionalized (Ahsan Ullah, 2016:291) and the state sponsored violence proves that they are target of a national exclusion
policy. Political Buddhism works effectively to isolate Rohingya which makes them financially vulnerable, politically outmaneuvered and limit their freedom of movement. Naturally, Rohingya try to seek shelter elsewhere to neighboring countries such as Bangladesh, Thailand and Malaysia (Ahsan Ullah, 2016:292). The UN passed a resolution in November 2003 putting pressure on Myanmar to grant Rohingya citizenship (Gier, 2014:87). However, the resolution was not respected and in the regional capital of Rakhine state, Sittwe, which used to have a population of 75’000 Muslims, has now fewer than 5000 Muslim inhabitants (Gier, 2014:87).
6. Conclusion – Reconciliation in Myanmar?

6.1 Conclusion

History shows that Rohingya Muslims have lived in in Myanmar for centuries, yet they are denied inclusion in the Burmese society. To be able to enjoy all entitlements of rights within a sovereign state, having citizenship is a requirement (Ahsan Ullah, 2016:287). When Rohingya are denied citizenship, they are automatically denied the most basic human rights. Political Buddhism is not the only reason for the Rohingya exclusion, other factors such as poverty and disparity are also driving factors, but political Buddhism remains an identity-driven force fueling violence and divisiveness. Myanmar has historically been an ethnically diverse society, where different religions have lived side by side regardless of who has been in power. Even so, with the country’s current policies there is little hope that a reconciliation process with Rohingya can take place any time soon.

Rohingya’s persecution can somewhat be explained by the influence of political Buddhism, however that is not the complete story. Farzana argues that children who have grown up in refugee camps have memories that affects their adult life which shapes their experiences of people and society (Farzana, 2017:237). Being resident in a refugee camp for years or longer, clearly affects life and creates a self-awareness and a “refugee identity” which becomes part of the person’s personality (Farzana, 2017:238). This is what is happening to Rohingya: their refugee identity does not allow them to reconcile with their history of rootlessness and pain. While living in refugee camps, they are continuously reminded of the limited nature of their existence (Farzana, 2017:238). Nevertheless, the reasons behind this refugee identity must be considered and those underlying factors have been outlined above: religious nationalism in the shape of political Buddhism has created a society in Myanmar which has excluded Rohingya and allowed them to be met with violence.

When the UNSC could enter Rakhine state, a glimpse of hope that the precarious situation for Rohingya could be resolved emerged. Obviously, a tremendous amount of work remains integrating Rohingya into the Burmese society. Consequently, this cannot be done without guaranteeing Rohingya Burmese citizenship, which does not look very likely for the time being. Furthermore, political Buddhism as an ideology, will continue to persist and that is not a positive prerequisite for a Rohingya-Burmese reconciliation process.
Finally, the inaction of Aung San Suu Kyi and her resolute desire not to condemn the violence endured by Rohingya, has further worsened the conflict. Suu Kyi made an off-the-record statement in connection interview with a BBC: “no one told me I was going to be interviewed by a Muslim” (Saul, 2016). Obviously, such comments only generate more hatred fueling the already difficult situation. One explanation to Suu Kyi’s reluctance to condemn the Rohingya violence could be that she has strived for power for a very long time and now when she finally has it she does not want to upset her Buddhist, ethnic Burmese constituents. Clearly, the infected conflict between Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar will not end if the divisive climate of political Buddhism persists.
7. Discussion and reflection

7.1 Discussion

To understand how political Buddhism has excluded Rohingya examining its parts give some answers. Also, the main research question of this study has been: *In what ways can political Buddhism be used to understand the exclusion of Rohingya in Myanmar?* The secondary questions sought to define: *what is political Buddhism(?)*; understand the effect of political Buddhism on Rohingya’s citizenship and human rights, *how is political Buddhism expressed regarding citizenship and how is that affecting the political and civil rights of Rohingya(?)*; and set the judicial status of Rohingya, *how is the current persecution defining Rohingya’s legal status?*

As mentioned, some of the main reasons to the Rohingya persecution has been the fragmenting nationalism in Myanmar and not being part of the Buddhist religion. Not surprisingly, these factors are also the building blocks of political Buddhism. Nationalism is a uniting and divisive force in Myanmar. It creates togetherness and pride with the promotion of national Burmans, which is personified by the radical, national, pro-Buddhist group Ma Ba Tha (Nielsen, 2015). At the same time, the Ma Ba Tha group also generate hatred towards Muslims with proposals of banning headscarves in Burmese schools. Nationalism and Buddhism are very much interlinked in Myanmar. Together with the Burmese majority culture, these factors have been essential creating a national identity (Nilsen, 2015). This identity has only existed for those considered to be Burman, something that of course not included Rohingya. Despite the fact Myanmar has had military rule for most of its independence, monks have had societal and religious power shaping the Burmese religious identity (Ahsan Ullah, 2016:287). The strong Buddhist presence of the monks in Myanmar has made it difficult for other religions to be accepted. As mentioned, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Animism are recognized religions under the Burmese Constitution, but Buddhism hold a “*special possession… as the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens*” (Constitution of Myanmar, 2008 paragraph 362 and 361). Therefore, anyone who worships any other religion than Buddhism becomes indirectly stigmatized since Buddhism has become such an important factor of the Burmese identity. This Burmese identity has become an incentive to discriminate those in Myanmar who are not included in this identity (Cheeseman, 2017:461). The Burmese identity, nationalism and the aggressive use of Buddhism are the reasons Rohingya has been excluded and targets of violence. As mentioned, these factors are important bedrocks of political Buddhism. Of course,
it is important to remember that Buddhism do not call for violence. However, when Buddhism is mixed with nationalism and exclusion policies it can become violent and aggressive. Meanwhile, acts of violence between Buddhists and Muslims do not necessarily have to be associated with religion at all. A person’s identity can never be reduced to consisting only of religion. People have always been afraid of those who are different and nationalism and exclusion enhances these fears.

### 7.2 Recommended further research and reflection

Political Buddhism is a relatively unestablished term and therefore needs to be further researched to cast light upon its uses. The faith of Rohingya is far from settled and their history is still being made. Nevertheless, more research on possible solutions to the Rohingya statelessness is vital. The permission for the UNSC to enter Myanmar and Rakhine state to monitor the situation for themselves is very welcomed.

Although the UNSC now has been allowed into Rakhine state it is still too early drawing any conclusions to the outcome of the visit. Hopefully, Myanmar agrees to sign the memorandum of understanding signed by Bangladesh and UNHCR to repatriate Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar. If they do so, it would bring hope that the UNSC and Myanmar together will come up with a resolution that would stabilize the situation for Rohingya. Still, as mentioned, the outcome of UNSC’s visit is needed to be evaluated and examined to create a largeened understanding of the Rohingya situation. Also, the Burmese response to the Council’s actions needs to be carefully reviewed. Trust between the involved parties is a very important first step, but the commitment from the Burmese authorities to repatriate Rohingya refugees must be sincere and the issue of statelessness remains. Since the conflict in Rakhine is still ongoing further research on the coming events is very important in order to find solutions to the conflict.

Compared to other religious ideologies, political Buddhism also has characteristics of radical fundamentalism. However, within all religions there are elements of extremism and Buddhism is not an exception. I have argued that combined with nationalism and the Burmese ethnicity, radical political Buddhism has excluded Rohingya in Myanmar and flung them into a limbo of statelessness. As mentioned above, the precarious situation for Rohingya is still ongoing and future research might find additional causes to the Rohingya exclusion and call them something else than political Buddhism. One possibility is that poverty and underdevelopment have played a larger role in Rohingya’s exclusion. Rakhine state, where most Rohingya live, is Myanmar’s most underdeveloped and poorest region with 78 percent of the population living below the
poverty limit (Albert, 2018). Thus, it could have been poverty and disparity that sparked the violent uprising and Muslim Rohingya and Rakhine Buddhists were equal victims of violence in the area. This explanation of the violence in Rakhine state goes more in hand with the official Myanmar statements that not only Rohingya have been targeted by the violence (BBC News, 2018). Of course, multiple reports show that the violence have been one-sided and that it has been the Rohingya population who has suffered the most violence and persecutions (Amnesty International, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2017).

The faith of Rohingya is the result of much more than the destructive use of political Buddhism. Historical divisions between the Burmese military government and several minority groups made life difficult for Shan, Karen, Karenni, as well as Rohingya. Poverty and underdevelopment are indirectly results of failed policies by the old socialist military regime. Despite, the democratization process that begun in Myanmar in 2015, the Rohingya population is still persecuted, displaced and extremely vulnerable. The outcome of the visit of the UNSC in Myanmar in 2018 is important, however, the chances are slim that they will come up with a concrete solution to the Rohingya crisis that Myanmar will accept. Statements by the UNSC have not deescalated the situation in Rakhine state. A sustainable solution must come in steps: first the one-sided violence needs to stop; second, Rohingya villages in Rakhine need to be rebuild and; third, eventually Burmese government representatives must be able to negotiate with a Rohingya delegation. After these steps of conflict resolution are fulfilled a reconciliation process can start, but that is still far away.
References


