What about the Rohingya?

A study searching for power relations in different levels of society

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Abstract

This study aims to search for patterns that demonstrate power relations. It specifically seeks to identify patterns in the power relations in the Rohingya conflict and understand the established power relations at different levels in society, which could provide a picture of the social world within the context of historical, ethnic, cultural, religious and political circumstances. Moreover, this study illustrates the Rohingya population’s experience with relations of power. The ongoing conflict in Myanmar, which is based on religion, ethnicity and politics, is seemingly without any solution. Myanmar is depicted as a country that has lost both hope and legitimacy for the political system and has reduced chances to establish a society in which all the minorities are included across the spheres of society. Finding a bright future for the Rohingya population might be difficult; nevertheless, this study seeks to enhance the understanding of the ongoing conflict and the underlying power relations.
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For more than a year, this study presented several challenges, which created a fear of not being able to complete it. The challenges included my illness this spring, which further intensified my anxiety. Nonetheless, I pressed on, truly determined to finish this project to the best of my ability.

In the course of writing this study, sometimes the words did not come easily. In fact, writing about such a delicate topic proved difficult and heart-wrenching. The Rohingya conflict with all its oppressive aspects and ensuing pains was a source of personal distress. However, it motivated me to search for answers to the conflict and hopefully help to provide some enlightening insights. In a sense, I felt that my persona as I was completing this study was similar to the state of power relations in the Rohingya conflict: in steady progress.

I am deeply grateful to my family for patiently and consistently supporting not just my University work but my entire journey at this institution. In hindsight, they could not wait for me to close my books forever and leave University. After more than 10 years and a handful of essays, I am finally ready to grant their wish and do them proud.

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With this essay, I bid farewell to University that has given me numerous opportunities to develop and strengthen my intellectual, emotional social well-being. My experience at University has ignited my passion to pursue my interests and contribute to society in some way. I believe that the University has prepared me for a preferred work with politics and structures as well as a constant search for solutions.

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1. Introduction

The topic of this essay came up to me while I was watching the news some years ago. The programme took me to the border between Myanmar and Bangladesh. A crying mother had managed to escape to the border and felt some kind of safety after weeks of walk and harassment along the way. Harassment made by the military of Myanmar. The mother had only her seven-year-old-son with her, and he had been forced to watch when his mother was raped so many times that she lost the ability to count after passing out. The only thing she could remember as she woke up was her son’s scared eye’s watching his bleeding and violated mother. The day before, they had watched her husband and boy’s father have his genitals cut off and after that beaten to death by the military. I can still see the poor mother in front of me her pain and her agony of losing her son after he had played among valley close to the camp, where he probably had been kidnapped and sold as a slave. Now she would not have anything left. She was alone and frightened in camp in a country where she not belong. In her pocket, she had a small photograph of her son and husband when they were celebrating their last Ramadan.

The reason I will write about the Rohingyas is that I am interested in the mechanism behind those violations of human rights. The military and the Buddhist monks seem to have a part in those violations, as well. While searching for answers in a conflict, we need to learn about history-otherwise, it will be hard to learn about the conflict. The fact is that Myanmar is a quite new country that was created and had new borders drawn during the 1800s by British rulers who had an interest in trade in the region. Before the, country was divided into small kingdoms, and the last emperor feared not just the British Commonwealth, but the wise men known as the Buddhist monks as well. In the media, we have seen how monks have set themselves on fire to protest against the military regime. What people are not always aware of is that these monks are also a part of the violations against the Rohingya, who are a minority living in the Rakhine province. The Rohingyas are followers of Islam, which is not the state religion in Myanmar. This essay will examine the fact being a minority in terms of ethnicity, religion and cultural aspects and how the power relations therein are established.
1.1 Aim and purpose

The aim of this study is to explore power relations in the Rohingya conflict. The main reason is the present conflict in Myanmar, which could be defined out of religious and historical, compounded by the issue of a weak state. In a weak state where religion is a part of the juridical system, it could affect the political situation in many ways. Another reason that provides the conflict with more challenges is the fact that there is loss of democracy and political representation. Furthermore, a study of this kind will be interesting to explore themself connecting religion, peace and conflict.

1.2 Thesis

While searching for patterns with discourse analysis as a tool, connected to power relations and knowledge, I have created this thesis:

**What are possible power relations in the conflict?**

**Other questions considered include:**

What kind of power relations could be visible?

In what ways are power relations established?

How are the social world in Myanmar constituted?
3. Background

This chapter focuses on the history of Myanmar and discusses its political instability and the religious institution’s potential to influence the political system. It also describes the issues of a semi-democratic country, including the lack of well-established juridical institutions and political representation of all the citizens. Such issues normally result in the loss of legitimacy, which often offers other parts of society the possibility to affect political decisions to maintain a balance. However, the decisions do not benefit the minorities who lack the potential to influence and speak for their own interest. Meanwhile, this chapter also presents the literature describing the effect of Buddhism on the political system and on people’s daily lives. These topics help to develop some pre-knowledge about Myanmar and its current situation.

3.1 The history of Myanmar or Burma

Myanmar is in Southeast Asia. It was formerly run by kings, until the British army defeated the last emperor at the end of the 19th century. Myanmar is known by the names Burma and Myanmar, both of which were used by the military regime from 1988 (Crouch, 2016, p. 39). The name Myanmar refers to the first settlers of Burma who, according to the military regime, were the first and ‘real’ Burmese people. Historians are questioning this depiction, as they believe it to be untrue and argue that it is an idea that has been developed to adjust to a nationalistic thought about the first settlers and their culture and religion. Myanmar is a country with conflicts at different levels, including political, religious and ethnic, which make these conflicts increasingly difficult to solve. Importantly, Burma has been a near-authoritarian state, and the forms of democracy have never had a chance to be established (Lintner, 2011, p. 262). Nevertheless, hope for a more democratic rule has been raised, and efforts have been made towards change.

Similar to many other countries in Asia, Myanmar has existed for a long time. Myanmar was previously under British rule; furthermore, before the 1800s, the country was divided into separate kingdoms (Lintner, 2014, ss. 29–41). As in many countries, some of Myanmar’s problems started when the British colonised the country. The borders of Myanmar subsequently changed, which triggered enormous tension between ethnic groups (Lintner, 2014, s. 87). This case of the eruption of tension caused by an authority’s creation of new
borders is not the first one in history. It is also a key aspect of an in-depth understanding of conflict (Crouch, 2016, p. 39). However, the unification of different minorities is difficult, especially if they refuse to achieve it by themselves. The image of Burmese as the first settlers is indisputable and nearly impossible to change (Crouch, 2016, p. 39). Therefore, this depiction has become established knowledge.

3.2 Cultural and ethnic aspects

Myanmar has multiple ethnicities. A popular notion is that Myanmar has always been dominated by the Burmese. However, this perspective is not true at all, and it has increased the difficulty for minorities who are not viewed as the real inhabitants of Myanmar (Lintner, 2014, p. 8). A more reliable and objective viewpoint indicates that Myanmar as a unified country never existed before the ‘white’ man came to Myanmar and the territory became a part of the Commonwealth. History has had an impact, and the nationalists and military regime have used it to keep the gains for themselves (Crouch, 2016, p. 159). For example, Wade (2017) examined the making of Islam into the ‘other’ as part of the military regime’s effort to create tension between minorities but clarified that it was used during the Commonwealth; hence, the structures behind the tensions and conflicts were created beforehand (Wade, 2017, pp. 29–30). Laotides and Ware (2013) explained that at the outset, the conflicts were not based on ethnicity, economy and territory. Instead, the conflict was based on the loss of balance between political powers and the non-working democratic institutions (Laotides & Ware, 2013, p. 61).

The Rohingyas had lived in the province of Rakhine for a long period. During the colonial era, the Rohingyas existed in peace and experienced no perturbations (www.ui.se/burma). However, some authors contended that the history of the tension between ethnic groups and religion stemmed from the British rule. Crouch (2016), Wade (2017) and Lintner (2014) all agreed on this aspect. For example, they concurred with fact that the Englishmen had offered Indians to come to Myanmar and work for the British authorities. These Indians were Muslims and embraced power with the British authorities’ approval by running the provinces (Crouch, 2016; Wade, 2017; Lintner, 2014). These people obtained higher positions in society than the Burmese, thereby creating tension between them. They were also offered some areas to live in and permitted to control those areas financially and politically. British rulers used the Indians to control various areas in Myanmar. The tensions between minorities intensified.
The colonial rule caused tension by letting groups belonging to Islam to be stronger than others (Crouch, 2016, pp. 104–105).

This picture also affected the Rohingyas as a minority group. The tension grew during the nationalistic movement that finally liberated the country. The speech of a typical Burmese is certainly based on the nationalistic thought: the same language, religion, culture and history. This common feature was similarly evident in Europe in the 19th century when new nations were established (McKay et al., 2011, p. 278).

For the Rohingyas who seemed to have a different history and religion, this situation further intensified the tension between them and the nation. The Rohingyas were viewed as different and defined as a minority with no similar rights. After the liberation from the Commonwealth, the Rohingyas’ circumstances worsened. The nationalists in Myanmar claimed that the Rohingyas were not real Burmese and therefore should not have a citizenship (Lintner, 2011, p. 262). Similar to Burmese, the Rohingyas were from Bangladesh and belonged to the religion Islam. The creation of a ‘we and them thinking’ is in the structure of the system, and it has also affected political and financial decisions for decades (Laotides & Ware, 2013, p. 61).

Yusuf (2018) suggested that the current Rohingya crisis could be viewed from three different perspectives. The first one is nationalism based on religion, that is Buddhism, the state religion. Second, the rise of Islamophobia throughout Asia, which caused clashes, had not been viewed in the same way before. In the third standpoint, the Rohingya crisis as connected to genocide and as a disaster from a human perspective, is based on years of denying the Rohingya citizenship (Yusuf, 2018, p. 505).
The establishment of a democratic society in any country requires fundamental cornerstones (Coyne, 2006, s. 343). One of these cornerstones is the creation of a juridical system that seeks to protect the population and exemplifies fairness and reliability. The situation in Myanmar is far from such a juridical system, as the military is in charge of the system and the judges. Most of the people working in the institutions are also Burmese, and this aspect denotes that the country is far behind in terms of becoming a democracy (Coyne, 2006). The processes of creating peace are essential to allowing all the minorities and the majority population to become a part of all the spheres in society. In Myanmar, the Rohingyas have no status as citizens. Furthermore, they have lost the possibility to have an identification card since 1980 (HRC, 2018).

After liberation, the elite had control over the legal institutions, and people working in the juridical system during the colonial era were educated in Great Britain (Walton, 2017, p. 130). In the meantime, all the members of established elite families had to leave their positions after the liberation. Building a more democratic society needs support from the elite. The juridical system momentarily relied on colonial laws, but religions later came and significantly affected the new law system (Crouch, 2016, p. 85). Theravada Buddhism particularly exerted an influence on laws (Walton, 2017, pp.130–131). The loss of legitimacy for the juridical system norms and values played a more critical role in Myanmar (Jones, 2003, p. 185).

Theravada Buddhism influenced the morality system and expressed traditional viewpoints (Walton, 2017, p. 130). In Buddhism, the tradition is to establish a state governed by a monarch who is supported by the monkhood, dealing with morality questions (Walton, 2017, pp. 130–131).

The rule of Sangha has been established in Myanmar since 1980. It is a judicial system with regulations and manuals referring to the Sangha. Sangha pertains to the monastic order and usually consists of groups of monks and nuns as well as laymen and women. Nearly every village has a monastery. Sangha law has its legal system; in Myanmar, Sangha law functions as a bridge between the secular law system. Sangha regulations are subordinated to the judicial system administered by the government (Tosa, 2013, pp. 275, 277, 279). The monasteries’ teachings played a major role in the uprisings in 2007. The monks also used stories about Buddha.
After the colonial era, a few years passed during which some types of democratic institutions were built. The political system was based on the Marxism ideology, which triggered multiple political issues (Walton, 2017, p. 117). General Suu Kyi intended to create a united Myanmar. Socialism and Buddhism inspired the new rule of Burma (Lintner, 2011, pp. 36–37). Walton (2017) described how a decision was made in a way that allowed Marxism and Buddhism to co-exist. This approach is quite interesting, as Marxism does not have any religious aspects. Thus, a new political system in Myanmar would not have a chance if the religious leaders did not support it, and General Suu Kyi was aware of that aspect. Religion has a significant influence on the political system of weak states (Jones, 2016, p. 185).

The socialistic era would last for only a few years, and one underlying reason was the financial situation that caused political instability. Meanwhile, the Burmese military gained power, and it ruled Myanmar from the early 1960s. Lintner (2016) indicated that the military was in charge of the country until 2011, and the military and the political opposition have since co-ruled the country. Other sources concurred; as the military remained in charge of the juridical system, creating a fair juridical system caused difficulty. Opposition groups have attempted to eliminate the military rulership in the past few decades, but the political parties, religious leaders and other countries have decreased their power. Female leader Aung San Suu Kyi has led the liberation drive for Myanmar, and she has been under house arrest for more than six years. Her father used to be a general during the fight for freedom during the colonial rule, and Suu Kyi is now the symbol of the liberation movement. Suu Kyi is recognised as the current leader of Myanmar; however, some claim that she is not free because the threat from the military is always imminent, and the military still has enormous influence, both financial and political. Moreover, Suu Kyi is believed to be not totally free, and the UN and other organisations have criticised her for not acting against the violence against the Rohingyas (Lintner, 2014, p. 8).

Researchers typically define a weak state as a state in which politicians are unable to supply people with ‘good politics’ (Laotides & Ware, 2013, p. 61). Lack of hope and a total loss of legitimacy consequently ensue. In the case of Myanmar, the military regime cannot provide its citizens with protection, and sometimes the regime itself is a part of the repression of ethnic groups. For instance, in fragile states, the loss of a juridical system that is separated from the constitution is completely missing (Laotides & Ware, 2013, p. 61). In other words,
the people cannot feel secure, and they have lost trust in the system. From another perspective, the importance of creating stability in a country demands that people from different ethnicities are represented in democratic institutions; however, such representation is lacking in Myanmar (Coyne, 2006, ss. 350–352). Other aspects that cause difficulty for Myanmar in becoming a more democratic country; include the effects of low financial growth. Such effects are important for people to believe in both the future and in the power balance.

3.5 Distinction between a religious and a political conflict

A minority with Islam as a religion had been a part of Myanmar’s history. Under the rule of kingdoms, religious aspects did not present any problem. According to Crouch (2016), Muslims had permission to build mosques and live in some areas. The nationalism that emerged during economic pressure under the British authorities created tension that eventually escalated, such that the people belonging to Islam are often viewed as enemies (Crouch, 2016, pp. 159–161). Nationalistic Buddhist monks have raised this aspect; to some extent, they are exploiting people’s fear to persuade them to feel that Islam and terrorism are dangerous. Some studies have examined the Buddhist monks and their action against the Rohingyas. For example, Jones (2013) has indicated that some recognise Buddhism as a tolerant and gentle religion; however, similar to any other religion, Buddhism is affected by cultural and political aspects. In other words, Buddhists do take an active role in the conflict as well. Reports from Amnesty International have confirmed this reality (ASA, 2017).

The movements in Southeast Asia are a response to decades of tyranny and a political situation that had been suffocating people for a long period (Jones, 2013, s. 185). The military regime in Burma is one underlying reason. Zin (2015) stated that the anti-Muslim violence that escalated in 2012 was both religious and political in nature. In fact, nationalist political parties used it as a weapon for creating tension for the Muslim groups. Furthermore, the monks played a part in the violations (Zin, 2015, p. 377). The Buddhists had assumed an active role in painting an image of the Rohingyas as ‘other’ and a different type of humans (Wade, 2017; Zin, 2015).

The background for this perspective can be found in the military that imprisoned the Burmese nationalists during the beginning of its regime (Wade, 2017, s. 32) Wade (2017) further explained that during the British rule, the Buddhists supported the nationalists who
relentlessly worked for Burma’s independence. Suu Kyi had led the opposition against the regime. To reiterate, her father was a renowned general who liberated Myanmar from the colonial Commonwealth. This aspect is significant for these movements in Southeast Asia, that is, a role model for effective leadership and anti-violence (Jones, 2013, p. 191). Suu Kyi herself is a symbol of liberty and is famous for her non-violent profile. Jones (2013) similarly underscores this essential feature for leaders in Southeast Asia. Although leaders have significant leadership, they experience difficulty in running countries that have no democratic institutions, and Myanmar has a considerable scarcity of such democratic institutions (Jones, 2013, p. 191).

Buddhism is a vital part of daily social life in Myanmar (Crouch, 2016, p. 159). Therefore, religion has a strong effect on culture and political life. The kings who previously ran the small kingdoms somehow feared the wise men known as monks because the latter had an extensive influence on the population and the know-how about the use of this influence (Crouch, 2016, pp.159–160). From a sociological perspective, technology and social media play a major role in reducing the tension between Buddhists and Muslims (Zin, 2015, p. 378).
4. Theory

This chapter explains the theory selected for this study. It also describes the application of the Foucault theory of power relations in the process of searching for patterns. It also focuses on discourse analysis and its application in this study as a method for examining the Rohingya conflict.

4.1 Power relations: Michael Foucault

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it does not only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it includes, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network [that] runs through the whole social body, much more than as negative instance whose function is repression. (Foucault, 1980, p. 119)

The preceding quote encapsulates Michel Foucault’s definition of power. Power is not constant, and it needs to be viewed as a process and a product of social. For Foucault, power does not have to be perceived as negative or oppressive, although it is produced in all the situations where relationships exist between social bodies (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 13). In the current study, the patterns in the material revealed a more oppressive character of power, constituted in the relationship between citizens, state, religion and culture. Foucault’s idea of power denotes that the subject reproducing social interactions is expressing power (Knights & Wilmot, 1989, p. 8). In addition, Foucault claims that power must be recognised as productive, that is, power constitutes discourse, knowledge, bodies and subject. He is more interested in investigating power in daily relations and in focusing on the subject:

There are two meanings of the word ‘subject’: to someone else by control and dependence and tied his own identity by conscience or self-knowledge. […] The subject will therefore be subordinated in the creation of the subject and it is referring to the individual person, which will exercise the power through the subject and the person will relate to a special identity. (Foucault, 1982, p. 212)
Power explores its relationship to society (Foucault, 2002b). On the one hand, power is a set of relationships that exist in the intersections between people, society and culture; it is created within a social context, and everyone is involved in a power structure. On the other hand, power is not implicitly negative because it is a part of everything; thus, power can be connected to special positions in society and used for establishing or creating special dynamics of power (Foucault, 2002b). No one could be viewed as passively involved in a power structure because everyone is intrinsically implicated in relationships of power.

Moreover, Foucault is uninterested in the effects of power relations. Instead, he is often focused on the occurrences within power relationships and the types of discourses that are used for establishing these relationships. Meanwhile, power is established in people’s daily lives and other existing structures, which could be connected to the subject’s experience of identity (Foucault, 2002a).

The action of power is the most interesting element to explore (Foucault, 1980, p. 19). The current study therefore focuses on this aspect in the search for discourses or patterns depicting power relationships at different levels and eventually the production and its consequences.

4.2 Power and Knowledge

Foucault (2002) suggests that power and knowledge cannot exist without each other. Knowledge and power are closely related because the rationale for exercising power is chiefly based on knowledge (Foucault, 2002b). Foucault is critical of political theory because it merely focuses on power from one level (i.e. sovereign apparatus), but society is considerably more complex than that aspect (Fraser, 1994, pp. 272–287). In other words, power is everywhere and present in different levels of society where patterns are established.

Furthermore, power is a part of one’s position in society; in particular, it is a component of the subject’s identification, which is therefore an expression of power (Foucault, 2002, p. 5). Knowledge could also be seen in how society defines its norms and values, which can be visible and invisible. Knowledge is thus created within a social context and is part of a society’s values. Knowledge also affects the power relations between people and society (Foucault, 2002a).

For instance, one pattern that emerged while searching for discourses was that norms and values in the society had established a power relationship between the State of Myanmar, the majority population and the Rohingya population. This factor is likewise important because
the identity that the subject defines for itself expresses power. Such an exercise of power could be visible but indirect (Foucault, 2002b).

A discussion of norms and values indicates that they can be viewed as indirect because they are as visible as political decisions, although they affect both the cultural and religious standpoints that organise the relationships between people. For instance, the norms and values close to the majority population, which are also represented in the political sphere and educational system, have a strong influence on knowledge at different levels of society.

Knowledge therefore becomes a part of the power relations of the State of Myanmar, the majority population, cultural aspects, historical definitions and the religious context as a means of influencing the values of society. Power relations are then established based on religious and cultural aspects because all of these aspects are a part of every person’s daily life and an expression of knowledge of who will be a part of power relations.

These norms and values have also affected the majority of the population, which in turn has created a ‘truth’ of the thought of the Rohingyas as ‘the other’ population. This case could also be recognised as a discrete exercise of power used by the rulers to limit the Rohingya population’s ability to change their living conditions. In this study, the analysis using Foucault’s concept of power relations has allowed for the identification of patterns depicting power relations at different levels of society (Foucault, 2002b).
5. Method

5.1 Selection and limitations

This study focuses on the minority Rohingya living in the northern province of the Rakhine State in Myanmar. The reason for the selection of this group of interest is that they are living under circumstances of escaping, and are totally deprived of human rights. Myanmar has many minorities, but the investigation of all of them would be impossible. Therefore, this study explores how power relations in Myanmar have affected the Rohingyas as a minority at different levels in society. The study conducts a discourse analysis and searches for patterns that demonstrate power relations. The use of discourse analysis requires making demarcations to limit the discourses and patterns that are visible (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 70). The present study thus examines the power relations between the state and other ethnicities, religious aspects and indirect power relations that might occur between people. It uses the theory based on Foucault’s power relations, which focuses on how power relations are established according to the relationships between society, people, and cultural and religious aspects (Foucault, 2002, pp. 138–141).

Amnesty International’s reports that were published in 2017 and 2018 have been selected in this study. These reports reveal a situation with consequences and causes for the Rohingyas and describe how the power relations are expressed in reality. They are based on interviews with victims from the northern Rakhine State of Myanmar, who had fled to the border between Bangladesh and Myanmar. To offer a broader and deeper explanation of the power relations, Freedomhouse.org is also selected as a credible source for the investigation of countries from a democratic perspective. Political science researchers typically use and acknowledge Freedomhouse.org as a reliable source. The third report published by the UN details the Rohingyas’ situation and the political instability in the country. It also explains the power relations between the State of Myanmar and its provinces and how historical and religious relations had been used and still affect the conflict between the state and the Rohingya population.
5.2 Discourse analysis

A qualitative methodology is adopted in this study. It forms the basis for the research questions because the answers have to be analysed per the circumstance and social context, of which they all are a part. Moreover, discourse analysis helps to explain the social construction of reality (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 20). In the current study, patterns depicting power relations or circumstances, which would provide or establish power relations, are explored through discourse analysis.

Critics of constructive social methods argue that such techniques hinder researchers from effectively using their pre-knowledge and experiences of the world. Nonetheless, using a qualitative method as a form of discourse analysis is beneficial for raising awareness of the non-expression of what is right or wrong. The key aspect is the description of the elements expressed in the discourses or patterns (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 21).

All the parts of a study require objectivity; in the present research, an ample amount of relevant information is provided, especially in terms of the steps undertaken. As this study also uses Foucault’s power structures that connect to a socially experienced context, qualitative methods are more adjustable to this type of research. This method and theory need to be described in a manner that allows the readers to be aware of how the process has been conducted while analysing the sources (Lindgren, 2018, pp. 29–30).

The discourse analysis has its roots in post-structuralism and social constructionism. According to Jørgensen and Phillips (2000), social constructive theory encompasses the following description regardless of the part of discourse analysis: Knowledge could not be viewed as an objective truth, as people’s knowledge of the world is a product of how they classify their experienced reality. Another viewpoint indicates that all humans are a part of the cultural and historical contexts in which they are raised. Knowledge therefore reflects how people understand and relate to their world. Knowledge and social processes are hence linked to each other (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 5).

Discourse analysis can be approached differently; however, a common feature of these approaches is that all the languages could not be viewed in a pre-existing reality, and these languages are structured in discourses or patterns (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 12). Thus, a
discourse in one situation could have a different meaning in another discourse because people
do have to see the discourse as a part of the context of which it becomes a part. Another
common feature of diverse approaches to discourse analysis is that the discursive patterns are
initially established but eventually transformed in the discursive practices. Discourse analysis
consequently focuses on all the patterns or discourses requiring an examination from a
specific context of which they are a part, for example, the social world experienced by the
Rohingyas (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 34). Laclau and Mouffe (1990) describe a
discourse as an expression of meaning in a domain (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 26).
Discourse could be defined as giant fishing net with nodal points connected to a special field.
In this study, the fishing net represents the Rohingya conflict and important nodal points
denote those discourses that are expressed in the material. Defining the subjectivities entails
exploring the reality of ‘power relations’ that might arise in the ongoing conflict.

Another individual who had a major influence on the development of discourse analysis is
Michel Foucault (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 13). For Foucault, knowledge is not a
reflection of reality; instead he discusses knowledge in terms of different levels of regimes.
Foucault suggests that the expression of truth must be connected to the discursive construction
as well as regimes of knowledge to verify the truth or falsehood (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000,
p. 13). One of the first steps in trying to understand the discourses is to identify the subject;
for Foucault, the understanding of the subject is created in the discourse, or as Kvale (1992)
expresses it:

    The self no longer uses language to express itself; rather language speaks through
    the person. (Kvale, 1992, p. 36)

From this description of subject arises the depiction of every individual as someone who
speaks for both his or her culture and language. Foucault describes power as a process, and
Laclau and Mouffe concur with this definition, that is, power must be understood as an
element that produces the socially experienced world. Laclau and Mouffe further explain that
power creates people’s knowledge, social relations and identity and constitutes a significant
factor in producing the experienced reality (Laclau, 1990, p. 60).

5.3 Discourse analysis as a tool

In this study, the use of discourse analysis as an analysis tool involves the selection of a
special angle focusing on the power relations that could be revealed in the discourses and
patterns. The discourse is therefore a tool for identifying patterns describing the social context for the Rohingya population in different spheres in society, and these patterns are analysed via Foucault’s definition of power. The possibilities with this method cover social relations as well as historical, cultural, religious and political perspectives (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 69). The usage of discourse analysis enables the search for patterns that repeatedly appear. This aspect is important in the present research because several sources are utilised, which therefore could confirm or declare another viewpoint (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 28). The usage of discourse analysis primarily focuses on exploring the content of people’s opinions and insights and gaining awareness of their views towards the world. Additionally, religious and cultural aspects have to be considered during the process because they affect the social construction of the process of viewing reality. The discourse analysis aims to explain the social construction of reality, which can be explored in every part of society. To provide additional tools, this study employs Foucault’s theory of power relations, specifically examining only the content in the text from the perspective of power relations and within the described social reality (Foucault, 1980, p. 19).

Foucault also suggests that discourses are connected to power – power that no one is able to possess but is able to exercise; some of the actions therefore constitute some frames that create meaning for subjectivity and objectivity. The actions subsequently result in established patterns or discourses, and they are formed by the willingness of power. Therefore, power creates people’s experienced reality and produces limitations in the experienced world (Foucault, 1991, pp. 53–72). The current study searches for patterns and discourses depicting established or limited power relations in the Rohingya conflict. The interest of this study is not in the declaration of what is truth or not but in the description of a reality that is expressed in this material, in the specific context where the subject is created and most importantly, the consequences of expressing reality in a particular manner.

5.4 Categorisation

The use of the qualitative methodology requires the creation of categories to allow for the comparison of the material. First, the material is analysed and different categories are created, under which to classify the gathered data. This step is similar to using a giant fishing net with nodal points. Second, patterns and discourses connected to power relations are identified, which affect the Rohingyas and represent the consequences of the circumstances connected to Myanmar.
Furthermore, the usage of the qualitative method entails the development of categories to enable the comparison of the material. In other words, the material is assessed and various categories are created, under which to classify the collected data. In this step, special power relations at different levels are defined.

The first category, ‘political governance’, describes the political relations between the state and minorities in Rohingya. The category includes patterns depicting the military’s power and restrictions on media, and this matter is significant for the situation of the entire population of Myanmar. Restrictions and dominion over media must be viewed as a means of using control. However, power should not only be defined as oppressive and not simply as political rule, as power relations transpire across all types of relationships, even if this study is more or less focusing in the more negative and opressive aspects. (Foucault, 1982, p. 5). The present study identified a category explaining how the military uses its position to control people; by contrast, Foucault indicated that a position could be used to produce power, which in this case scenario would indirectly affect the Rohingyas and their relations with the people they meet and their ability to change life conditions. Thus, this category might not be reconsidered as direct power relations (Foucault, 1982, p. 5).

Nevertheless, the preceding points were deemed important for understanding the situation in Myanmar and therefore included in the categorisation in this study. Although it might be considered as not a part of the study, the result is still highly significant for understanding power relations between the state, citizens and religious and cultural aspects. According to Foucault (2002), economic circumstances are not necessarily part of power that one possesses. However, the current research describes some parts of how restrictions have triggered financial and economic issues for the population (Foucault, 2002, p. 5). Restrictions in this case scenario are used by authorities and the military to obtain control; moreover, even if these restrictions cannot be connected to a special discourse or a power relationship, they still affect the power relations because both the restrictions and control prohibit people from entering a public sphere, receiving healthcare and education and performing religious practices.
This study revealed that power relations at different levels of society were connected to cultural and religious aspects, and the category of ‘religious norms and values’ was subsequently created. This category encompassed a description of the situation in northern Rakhine, which also helps to enhance the understanding of power relations. Another category explored the use of sexual violation, expulsion, forced labour and confiscation of farmland used to maintain the power relations of being an underdog with no ability to provide for a healthy future.

In one category, the ensuing patterns demonstrate the power of Buddhism and how it renders the possibility to gain power in the conflict. The final category describes the press of the Rohingya and its effects on the use of discrimination as an instrument for establishing an underdog position, which is a part of using political power to oppress while denying the same rights as the rest of the population. This case scenario focuses on restrictions in different social spheres. The violence of a different type is legitimised by the political elite, Buddhism and society. Such power relations can be observed in all the parts of the existing society. As Foucault emphasises, power must always be related to a larger structure of power relations; in this case, these relations involve different sectors of society, including culture, religion, politics and economy. Although Foucault does not consider power to be oppressive, he suggests that it should be viewed from a more positive standpoint. Notably, the power relations in the Rohingya crisis exhibit a more oppressive characteristic.
6. Analysis

This chapter presents the analysis of the themes found in the texts. These themes express situations where power relations are established and maintained, except in categories that focus on restrictions and media control and thus might be considered as important for the Rohingya population. Therefore, these categories are included in the analysis, that is, they are visible in the public, cultural, religious and political spheres. One report was written to serve the Human Rights Council (HRC), Freedomhouse.org and Amnesty International. In the course of analysis using Foucault’s definition of power (focusing on power relations). Power is connected to knowledge, and these definitions work together to produce the reality about whom people meet in their social lives and contexts, of which everyone is a part (Foucault, 1980, p. 19). The discourses and patterns found are categorised headlines that declare power relations connected to the experienced social context; for Foucault, power created in all situations where people meet these are both describing the circumstances behind and direct situation where power is produced and explored as knowledge for subject and bodies (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 13).

The analysis is categorised into the following themes:

**Political Govern, Restrictions, Religious norms and Values, Situation in Northern Rhakine, Sexual violence and expulsion.**

6.1 Political governance of Myanmar

This section provides examples and definitions of the political rule of Myanmar today, starting in 2015, to broaden the understanding of the situation at a political level, as political matters affect all the power relations at different levels of society. Furthermore, power could be part of positions in society (Foucault, 2002a).

6.1.1 Elections of 2015

In the elections of 2015, 86% voted for non-military seats in the Parliament. After the elections, 60 seats were won by non-military political representatives, which primarily explained Suu Kyi’s assumption of the State Counsellor position (HRC, 2018, p. 22). Suu Kyi has a dominant post as State Counsellor, but the commander-in-chief still holds power over the security cabinet ministry (Freedomhouse.org, 2019:a) and it is also supported by HRC
which defines the military unelected members took the 2008 Constitution of being designed of the military to remain in power and 25 seats in both Parliament houses, and they do have a strong veto power. The adoption of a constitutional amendment requires 75% of votes from both Parliament houses (HRC, 2018, p. 24). Additionally, the reports reveal that the military has ample opportunities to influence the outcome of the elections, especially in conflict areas. The main reason is that the military has control over almost all the political affairs, and the northern province of Rakhine is a conflict area (Freedomhouse.org, 2019:a).

Sources also accuse the military of being active in all parts of political affairs, which indicates what HRC makes visible, it is in the Constitution from 2008 (HRC, 2018, p. 22). In the elections of 2015, a massive anti-Muslim campaign was launched, and Muslim candidates were excluded, notwithstanding the declaration that all parts should have the right to be represented (HRC, 2018, p. 22). As Rohingyas lack citizenship, sources mentioned the Rohingyas were denied the right to vote in the elections of 2015 (Freedomhouse.org, 2019:a).

In addition, Amnesty International (2017) reported that the political system has done nothing to stop the violation against the Rohingyas. The government actively supported this drive towards segregation (ASA, 2017, p. 8). Patterns of stigmatization had escalated after 2012. Taking an active part in the political and public spheres is nearly impossible for all the minorities, especially the Rohingyas who lack legal citizenship and therefore the potential to make any impact across political levels (ASA, 2017, p. 90). According to Freedomhouse.org, Myanmar has lost all hopes of legitimacy for democracy. Although Suu Kyi is the State Counsellor, she does not have anything to say because the military decides and acts as it wishes. The democratic institutions and legislative body do not provide people with the security that they might need (Freedomhouse.org, 2018, 2019:1).

6.1.2 Centralised political system

The people in the State of Rakhine subscribe to authorities, and Rakhine’s political system is distant, causing a failing legitimacy for the ruling politicians and the system. The political system is centralised, which thus grants the military considerable power to establish and control provinces, mainly within the context of security matters (Freedomhouse.org, 2018). The northern province in Rakhine is one of the provinces under military control. One pattern identified by Amnesty International (2017), HRC (2018) and Freedomhouse.org (2019:a) illustrates the fact that the military is in charge and is constantly wielding its power to instil
fear, create tension between people and spread mistrust between different groups of interest. People in Myanmar lack confidence in the political system; they are also deficient in the understanding of the lack of economic growth and benefits, thereby affecting their belief in a truly democratic country and faith in a bright future (Freedomhouse.org, 2018).

In Myanmar, the military strictly controls movements and freedom of speech; even if parties could get registered in the elections of 2015, such move was not a guarantee for freedom of expression; furthermore, the fear of reprimands is constantly a part of daily life (Freedomhouse, 2019:1) for all groups of interest. According to Freedomhouse (2018), the legitimacy and trust in the political system are both extremely low, and people in the provinces have no belief that politicians can change life conditions (Freedomhouse.org, 2018). Although Suu Kyi does have a reputation for standing up for democracy and is a role model for liberty, the fact that the military is still in charge of the juridical system and Parliament causes mistrust for the political system (Freedomhouse.org, 2019:1). One crucial fact is that both Amnesty International and Freedomhouse are highly critical of Suu Kyi, but HRC (2018) is not as disapproving. Additionally, HRC (2018) still seems to have some hope for her ability to build a more democratic society.

Putting pressure on Aung San Suu Kyi could endanger her bargain with the military, but a system that allows ethnic cleansing may not be worth saving. (Freedomhouse.org, 2019:a)

In further explaining the political system in Myanmar, Freedomhouse (2019) describes the balancing act that Suu Kyi has to perform amid the continuance of military power.

Summary
In 2008, the political system in Myanmar was designed in a manner that would allow the military regime to become more democratic and retain its control over the Parliament and other parts of important institutions in the country. Myanmar is a semi-democratic country with a Parliament, with minimum abilities to make any changes in controversial political matters. All the minorities lack citizenship and the capacity to influence political decisions. Rohingyas were denied the right to vote in the elections of 2015 and were excluded from the political sphere. People do experience the political system from a distance, as this system is highly centralised. Restrictions in movements and freedom of speech tend to create mistrust towards the government and authorities, even among the majority population. Populations in provinces express that their life conditions lack financial growth. Suu Kyi remains a role model for liberation, even as her possibility to influence political matters demands support from the military.
6.2. Military control

This section discusses the military’s control over essential areas in Myanmar society by exploring the visible structures of exercising power in people’s daily lives and analysing the military’s position and the justification for checkpoints and restrictions. It also describes the media and its control and restrictions. Media is used and controlled to establish and maintain the military’s power and their position, despite the unclear existence of power relations with the media. These structures are visible but also invisible, as they have a long experience of controlling important areas in Myanmar.

All the armed troops in Myanmar are under the commander-in-chief of the Tatmadaw (the official name of the armed forces of Myanmar), and they have the right to independently administer all of the affairs of the armed forces (HRC, 2018, p. 24). The presence of a democratic society in Myanmar has gradually diminished since the military exercised power, and democracy ratings are decreasing every year (Freedomhouse.org 2018:1). Suu Kyi is often blamed for doing nothing to stop the violence against and restrictions imposed upon the Rohingya population (Freedomhouse, 2018). According to Amnesty International, the military has also maintained its economic power. Furthermore, the military has civilian oversight and control over the juridical departments and courts, thereby allowing it to undertake endeavours as it wishes (Freedomhouse.org, 2019:1).

Even if the National League for Democracy (NLD) won the elections of 2015, a report published in 2019 indicated that NLD had failed to uphold human rights, resulting in the escalation of the situation and prompting 700,000 Rohingya members to flee to Bangladesh due to the military operations in the northern State of Rakhine (Freedomhouse.org, 2019:a). These incidents imply that the juridical system cannot protect its citizens from the military, as holding the military responsible for any of its actions is nearly impossible because it controls the legal system and all the military operations (Freedomhouse.org, 2019:1).
6.2.1 Checkpoints and control

Checkpoints are used in the northern province of Rakhine. People mostly meet authorities represented as the military in their provinces; as the military has deemed that the situation in the northern province to be unstable, it exerts its right to maintain control to ensure the region’s security (HRC, 2018, p. 58). The power relationship between Rohingyas, Myanmar Border Guard Police (BGP) and the military is well established, that is, the Rohingyas have no possibility to change their living conditions. Checkpoints are used for maintaining the stability in the area, but the lines exhibit a pattern of systematic and institutionalised oppression (Amnesty International, 2018). Interviews with Rohingyas and humanitarian workers indicate the BGP’s harassment of Rohingyas at checkpoints (i.e. Rohingyas need to pass through checkpoints for them to move along). The quote below illustrates another situation that several persons have similarly reported.

I was in a bus travelling between Maungdaw and Buthidaung. They [BGP] took all of the Rohingyas off of the bus and slapped one person, [and the incident occurred] at the three-mile checkpoint. The man was put on another bus and sent back to where he had come from. There were about 10 or 11 BGP [members], and they were wearing uniforms. I saw them slap the man, then I looked away. Had I not looked away, they would have asked me questions. If I intervened, I would also have [found myself in] trouble. (ASA, 2017 p. 46)

People are afraid, and crimes and violations of human rights are documented and reported. One report is an account of a man who was shot in the head by a BGP officer after the former had rented a car and driver to travel to another township to buy onions for his family (ASA, 2016, p. 46). This case is also an example of how violence and torture are used in daily practice. As the Rohingyas need to travel through these checkpoints, they inevitably become a target of violence and oppression, thereby confirming Amnesty International’s claims about the military’s resolve to maintain its position in a systematic manner (ASA, 2017, p. 90).

6.2.3 Media control

Aung San Suu Kyi is the most famous person in Myanmar to follow on social media
(Freedomhouse.org, 2018). Meanwhile, no one is allowed to spread information, as Myanmar authorities control it. Accessing information about the Rohingya population is nearly impossible in Myanmar (Freedomhouse.org, 2018) because the military controls the media and the Internet. In Myanmar, Internet service is not free, and the internet is regulated under Clause 68, which stipulates that a person could be punished if he or she spreads information that is untrue or harmful. Moreover, the military has been accused of surveilling Internet traffic and bugging phones. According to Freedomhouse (2018), the regime’s restriction and control of movement and media stem from its fear of small ethnic groups’ capacity to grow. During the elections, an anti-Muslim campaign was launched to spread information on the Internet, which must be seen as impressive (Freedomhouse.org, 2019:1). Freedomhouse (2018) also reported that technology had facilitated the delivery of information, thus supporting the national interest (Freedomhouse.org, 2018).

In Myanmar, social media is used for spreading information and calling for actions (e.g. boycotts) against the Rohingyas. The escalation of violations against the Rohingyas in 2012 prompted Amnesty International to underscore the need for government to prevent these types of accusations against the Rohingyas and the anti-Muslim thoughts. Meanwhile, certain patterns emerged, in which the opinions provided on a nationalistic basis had been deemed to be a part of the government as well. To reiterate, the military controls social media in Myanmar and it has both the power and knowledge to spread information that might fit its interests (Freedomhouse.org, 2018).

**Summary**

Even if the military regime decreased its power, it could still maintain such power and use the juridical system and military operations to reveal themselves and obtain power over the Rohingya population. The exercise of power is thus visible (Foucault, 2002a). All of these institutions, as well as police forces and border affairs, are under the military’s control; additionally, these institutions inflict abusive practices upon the Rohingya population, as several examples illustrate (ASA, 2016, p. 24). In Myanmar, the purpose of restrictions and media control is to maintain order and wield power. Such practices once again illustrate a visible exercise of power (Foucault, 2002a). Media is strictly controlled and described as polarised.
6.3 Religious norms and values

This section describes the anti-Muslim campaign and the influence of Buddhism on society, which reflect the social world of the entire population of Myanmar. As previously mentioned, nearly every village in Myanmar has a monastery, and monkhood is an essential part of life in the country. Hence, this section also explores the influence of monasteries and the rule of Sangha.

According to Freedomhouse (2019:a), Buddhism is used for creating detergents between the minority and the majority populations of Myanmar. The military has constantly used religion for supporting its actions. For example, the monks have conducted different violations against the Rohingyas (Freedomhouse.org). Reports from Myanmar have revealed a substantial increase in the number of anti-Muslim campaigns, and Buddhist leaders have taken an active part in these campaigns, consequently intensifying the tension between the majority population and the Rohingya population. During the election period, anti-Muslim organisations used the Internet to spread information supporting the anti-Muslim agenda. A rumour about Muslims’ alleged rape of a young ethnic woman in the northern province was used as an excuse. Muslims were also called snakes in different campaigns (Freedomhouse.org, 2019:1); although Muslims are not always on the frontlines, they support the majority of Myanmar in actively taking part in the conflict. According to HRC (2018), 87.9% of the Myanmar population are Buddhists. Buddhism and monkhood are a part of the political life in Myanmar; they also significantly influence the daily life in terms of the religious and cultural aspects (HRC, 2018, p. 18). Religion is similarly a daily part of public life; however, Buddhist monks tend to interfere in political matters.

Buddhism covers the rule of Sangha, denoting a critical counterpoint while acting according to the interests of Myanmar citizens (HRC, 2018, p. 20). Meanwhile, Sangha has been connected to the protection of race and religion according to the anti-Muslim organisation, notwithstanding that it refers to Buddhist fellowship and community. In addition, the anti-Muslim organisation has been criticised lately; in 2013, 969 movements started to use Buddhist symbolism to gain power and profit in the anti-Muslim campaign.
Moreover, the rhetoric in the elections of 2015 was strongly anti-Muslim (Freedomhouse.org, 2019:a). The 969 movements lost their position through another political and religious group that took over their rhetorical base on religion and race and lacked support among the grassroots. Spreading points of view of culture, history, education, and social care resolutions on a local level (HRC, 2018, pp. 20–27). The anti-Muslim rhetoric remains an essential element of Myanmar society, and the fear of Islam is widespread.

6.4 The situation of Northern Rhakine State

This part will subscribe to the situation in Northern Rhakine, which is subscribed in the reports and also restriction used against the Muslim population Rohingya. It must be seen as interesting to understand the power relations and circumstances in the area and even if they might not be considered as an direct power relation these restriction will affect all kinds of power relations between Rohingya and the State of Myanmar, other citizens, cultural and religious power relations.

Amnesty is reporting that many of the ethnic groups living in the northern state of Rhakine have lived under discrimination for decades, especially the Rohingyas. The state is dominated by ethnic Rhakine, but the second group is the Muslim Rohingya (HRC 2018 p.99). The province is suffering from under-development and lack of investments have had led to economic marginalization (ASA 2017). Infrastructure is poorly and controlled by the BGP and Military. The ability to livelihood and opportunities is small. Financial growth is very low, and infrastructure is almost not existing. The support for the government is small (HRC, 2018, p.99) HRC (2018) means that tensions in the state of Kahine and Shan state are areas with minority groups who had tried to achieve greater autonomy, though HRC (2018) means that Bamar-Buddhist had been favoured both political and financial and it is also causing tensions. The military is often using the majority population in rides against the Rohingya population. This shows that cultural values are a part of the daily life and the tensions between ethnic groups are used by the military (HRC, 2018 p 99-101).

The laws in Myanmar should prohibit any kinds of violations, and if they are broken, the rule of law will act against to secure the population's rights thus this does not seem to work at all. Especially since both Amnesty and HRC (2018) report are saying the discrimination and reports criminal acts against Human rights and that the State does not seem to provide security for all the people of Myanmar. Local citizens are a part of the attacks against the Rohingya
villages shows a situation; where state does not have control, though it is important to remember all people living in these areas suffering from discrimination, under-development and have huge mistrust against the government (HRC 2018 p.99-102).

The mistrust among the other ethnic groups than Rohingya is fuelled by the lack of opportunities for the future, which causes a great grievance. Amnesty also reported that much humanitarian aid is provided for the Rohingya and Muslim population, which, therefore, also

Meanwhile, BGP is blocking or restricting humanitarian assistance (ASA, 2016 p.107)

Several organisations active in the area are expressing the difficulties of getting permission to give Rohingya supply with lively hoods and healthcare, in some areas in the northern Rhakine (ASA 2017 p.98 ). State communities there are at limitations of starvation. Financially the region is undeveloped, and the restrictions used to Rohingya population are also denying people of having any kind of exchange with them, so they have difficulties providing themselves with supplement.
6.4.1 Restrictions

In Myanmar, restrictions constitute a means of controlling people to maintain the country’s stability. The imposition of restrictions started in 2012; prior to that period, the Rohingyas still had the opportunity to actively participate in public life. Hence, this section explains how restrictions, based on Amnesty International reports, contribute to segregation. Examples of restrictions include subjecting the Muslim minority to checkpoints, requiring members of the Muslim minority to have traveling documents to allow them to move around or travel and keeping them out of the public sphere, given that they are prohibited from entering public areas without such documents in the first place (ASA, 2017, p. 81). Identification cards (IDs) were taken away in 1980, which caused difficulty in situations requiring an ID, including obtaining healthcare, going to school and traveling. Rohingyas therefore need an application card for leaving a township every single time. Restrictions on movement prevent Rohingyas from leaving communities or townships after a certain time of the day. Rohingyas are also disallowed to enter public spheres.

Later in this section, patterns of how these restrictions establish and maintain power relations are discussed. One ongoing pattern of oppression is the restriction on movement, which creates multiple problems for the Muslim minority in their day-to-day life (ASA, 2017, p. 81). According to HRC (2018), members of the Rohingya population find themselves in a situation of systematic and institutionalised oppression (HRC, 2018, p. 110). A critical cornerstone is the Rohingya population’s total lack of legal status; Myanmar is responsible for children’s right to life, identity and survival regardless of nationality (HRC, 2018, pp. 12, 110). The education and healthcare systems are used to ensure that the Rohingya population remains a minority with no similar rights as the rest of the Myanmar population.
Organisations such as Amnesty International report that the Rohingyas are oppressed by a system of apartheid and that all the restrictions prohibit the Rohingya population from actively participating in the public arena (ASA, 2017, p. 90). These restrictions also prevent the Rohingya population from enjoying the political, economic, social and cultural aspects of life (ASA, 2017, p. 90). In one case, an ethnic woman was punished for having a financial exchange with a Rohingya – a behaviour that is considered a restriction. In another case, an ethnic Rakhine woman was caught selling food to Rohingya villages; she was consequently beaten and her hair was cut, and she was paraded around her village in Mrauk-U with a sign ‘traitor’ hung around her neck (ASA, 2017, p. 80). In such situations, the witnesses note that the authorities react to people’s disobedience of restrictions through. Restrictions on any exchange with Muslim communities persist (ASA, 2017, p. 80). Thus, even if the government does not support all these actions, it does not act against them either. Financial and economic problems for the communities subsequently arise; at the same time, humanitarian workers in Rakhine report that human trafficking has significantly increased since 2012 (ASA, 2017, p. 80).

6.4.2 Restrictions on healthcare and education

‘All people living in Rakhine State have access to education and healthcare services without discrimination’ – Aung San Suu Kyi, 19 September 2012

The aforementioned quote was obtained from a television programme in which the State Counsellor underscored the Rohingyas’ right to healthcare and education (www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJkg2_72uUo ). Suu Kyi gave a speech to declare that Myanmar would follow the ICESCR treaty that ratifies the social, economic and cultural rights for all people in Myanmar. However, situations contradict such declaration, especially in the realm of obtaining healthcare. For example, rules governing entry to a certain hospital in Sittwe were established in 2012. The rules included separating Rohingyas from other patients; staff had been threatened for treating Muslim patients (Amnesty International interview with staff members, 2016). When representatives of Amnesty International gained permission to visit the Sittwe hospital in 2016, they found it guarded by police. However, they observed that other hospitals did not have the same security measure. Meanwhile, the hospital has a total of 500 beds, and 24 of them are designated for Muslims.
Reports from the area indicate a totally different viewpoint, claiming that Rohingyas are not totally lacking in these rights. Myanmar has agreed to guarantee every child’s right to childhood according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). However, children who are born in Myanmar do not have any birth certificate, which constitutes a crime according to Article 7 of UNCRC (HRC, 2018, p. 110). Additionally, the reports make a clear distinction about exclusionary matters. Without a birth certificate, an individual is not referred to as a citizen of Myanmar and is lacking proof of any legal identity (HRC, 2018, p. 110). Citing another form of oppression, HRC (2018) reveals Myanmar authorities’ declaration that the country has no Rohingyas and the authorities’ presumption that Rohingya means ‘Bengali’. Hence, the Rohingya population is denied entry to certain areas and locked up in regions (ASA, 2018, p. 67).

The participants in the current study also indicate that the state has not lived up to conventions rights. Aung San Suu Kyi is once again questioned.

The Rohingya crisis could cost her the symbolic value for liberation, as the crisis had become a wedge between her as an international icon of democracy (Freedomhouse, 2018a).

Furthermore, every child’s right to life and identity remains unfulfilled; as a minority population, the Rohingyas miss the same right to education that the majority population has. According to Amnesty International, sanctions against the Rohingyas have been a part of society for such a long time; since 2012, both healthcare and education have become increasingly difficult to obtain (HRC, 2018, p. 183). Freedomhouse.org sources have reported a similar account. In contrast to the majority population, the minority population belonging to Islam does not have the same right to education, work or healthcare (Freedomhouse, 2018 a). Members of the minority population are discriminated against and are not recognised as real citizens of Myanmar. These actions have caused a stigmatisation, and they are used for keeping the minority population out of society. These patterns are well established. As businesses run by the Rohingyas are banned, many Rohingyas are experiencing poverty and expressing a lack of belief for the future. Such incidents have triggered multiple effects on the entire group; in particular, the loss of the right to equal education has increased the difficulty of becoming a part of the society. In addition, the denial of healthcare has resulted in the prevalence of illnesses among the minority group of Rohingyas.
The authorities’ strongest weapon is [the] restriction of education. (ASA, 2018, p. 66)

Muslims and Rakhine children used to get together, but now they are in [separate schools]; we are in our own school and they are in their own schools. It [the separation] was not [a] government order. We [ourselves] separated them because we worry that [not doing so] could spark conflict. (ASA, 2018, p. 67)

The preceding quotes confirm that Rohingyas are excluded and separated from public spheres in society. Such occurrence is not the result of a government order but the decision of the province and the administrators as a means of achieving peace and calmness. For Amnesty International (2018), such approach has instilled fear in teachers, thereby discouraging them from entering the Rohingya areas. Moreover, schools use the language of the majority population as the medium of instruction, thus causing difficulty for the Rohingyas in learning and developing skills (HRC, 2018, p. 348).

Village leaders told Amnesty International that when they tried to negotiate with school authorities and police, they had been told their children cannot attend the mixed schools as it could lead to increased tensions and further violence. (ASA, 2018, p. 68)

Reports also indicate situations where the Rohingyas do not have the right to actively participate in the public sphere. For example, attending a lecture in Sittwe, where the University is located, is nearly impossible due to the restrictions on movement (i.e. access via traveling card). Additionally, the system also renders the impossibility to study law and medicine because Rohingyas are lacking in citizenship. Witnesses note that they cannot take an active part in the school system because they are banned from entering the government-run public school system. Furthermore, the sources observe that public schools prohibit people belonging to Islam from entering public school areas. The school system in Myanmar also uses the majority language as the medium of instruction, thereby causing difficulty for the minority in obtaining an education; learning in a second language that they do not master constitutes a challenge.
Infrastructure is another aspect that renders the near-impossibility for the Muslim minority to obtain healthcare and education. In particular, the poor infrastructure causes difficulty in moving around or traveling. The restrictions on movement similarly create complexities, as they prevent the members of the Muslim minority from moving whenever they need to (ASA, 2017, p. 81). First, members of the Muslim minority have to secure a permit for a travel document before they can leave the township and go to a healthcare clinic or University. As such restriction on moving during the night is in effect, people who need emergency treatment are disallowed to obtain a permit. Members of the Muslim minority therefore have to go to specialised hospitals where they are separated in restricted areas from others. Rohingyas can normally visit a military hospital. Nonetheless, a witness mentioned that they had been beaten and humiliated while they had come for healthcare (HRC, 2018 p.183).

Humanitarian agencies has been providing the Rohingyas with healthcare for years; however, they are restricted because they similarly require travel documents. They are often eventually restricted and therefore unable to provide the Rohingyas with healthcare. Sources also confirm the huge expenses involved in providing healthcare because they often have to bribe staff and the police at the Sittwe hospital (ASA, 2018 p.66).
6.4.4 Restrictions on religion

Several reports and witness accounts indicate that religious freedom is not allowed in Myanmar at all. This case signifies a crime against the freedom of religion, as everyone does have the right to practice religion. These types of restrictions are visible on different levels; for instance, some restrictions on movement prevent Muslims from gathering in groups (ASA, 2017, p. 81). In addition, teachers in madrasas are prohibited from teaching the children. In some townships, the authorities forbid the Rohingyas from using loudspeakers; and if the Rohingyas do use loudspeakers, they have to pay bribes. The administration in the northern Rakhine only allows the repair of mosques that had been destroyed by a natural disaster, but permission is required to do it (ASA, 2017, p. 84). These examples illustrate how authorities demand the Rohingyas to obtain permission for undertaking any activity that is connected to the expression of religion.

Mosques and madrasas that are built or repaired without official permission are at risk of being demolished by the authorities. (ASA, 2017, p. 84)

When a building was close to completion, local Rakhine residents saw it and complained to the village administrator, who then issued a letter informing the community that they would have to demolish the building before 23 March 2016. (ASA, 2017, p. 84)

Praying together and teaching children are difficult for us. Religious teachers are jobless. Children learn the Qur'an in their homes. Some teachers go from house to house, but [this practice] is difficult due to the restriction on movement. (ASA, 2017, p. 81)
In 2012, mosques were closed down, and no one was allowed to enter these mosques. Restrictions on religion and the anti-Muslim agenda are significantly more stringent in the northern Rakhine State (ASA, 2017, p. 80). For instance, the authorities have forbidden the Rohingyas from praying together and risking arrest or extortion. Mosques are also prohibited from undergoing repair. The use of loudspeakers for prayer in Islam is forbidden as well. The media and Amnesty International have reported after speaking to witnesses how authorities had prevented the Rohingyas from celebrating Eid, which is a very important celebration for Muslims. These actions against the practice of Islam are conducted by anti-Muslim groups. Both Hindus and Christians have mentioned that these restrictions are only used against the Muslim population (ASA, 2017, p. 80).

According to Amnesty International, authorities are demanding a list of specific animals to be sacrificed during Eid. The organisation considers this act as a means of controlling and oppressing the Rohingya population and an attempt to deny them the opportunity to celebrate Eid. Authorities use this restriction to prevent the population from celebrating one of the most important holidays. As the quote below illustrates, authorities in the villages demand data as a method of imposing restrictions but not as a way of sanctioning their right to celebrate the holiday that they customarily to.

The list was to be submitted ‘without’ fail by 26 August. (ASA, 2017, p. 82)

**Summary**

Authorities mandate data in different situations, and failing to comply with the demand results in punishment. Restrictions on healthcare, education and movement affect the Rohingya population every day. Such restrictions are used to maintain control and oppress the Rohingyas. These restrictions also hinder humanitarian workers from providing assistance because are not allowed to go to the Rohingyas’ areas. Additionally, restrictions on movement and education result in the stigmatisation of the Rohingya population, thus rendering efforts to change their life conditions nearly impossible. Sicknesses and financial problems as well as mistrust in an improved future have become prevalent. Restrictions on religion similarly hinder the practice of religion. Thus, these restrictions affect the power relations between the Rohingya and the State of Myanmar in all the spheres of society.
6.5 Violations and expulsions

This section describes the human rights violations that are part of many Muslim Rohingyas’ lives. These violations have also prompted 700,000 Muslim Rohingyas to flee. The violations described in this section include gender-based violence, expulsion and confiscation of farmland. The sources consider these violations as well-organised and label them as

A schoolbook example of ethnic cleansing (Freedomhouse, 2018a)

6.5.1 Increasing violence

Severe violations of human rights in the Rakhine State have been reported in 2012, and they have escalated in recent years. The reports describe torture and rape as two forms of violations.

In this regard, the State of Myanmar had made a declaration describing its intent to uphold human rights according to the UN Charter (HRC, 2018, p. 11). The declaration stipulated among other factors that the people of Myanmar would have the right to work and join a labour union. However, reports claim contrary circumstances, especially the ones pertaining to equal rights to education, health and clothing and active participation in cultural life (HRC, 2018, p. 13). According to the UN, the State should uphold the rights of individuals belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minority groups, as well as provide the minorities with safety and protect them from any form of discrimination (HRC, 2018, p. 15). Amnesty International contends that the State of Myanmar does not live up to those standards and neither does HRC (2018). In the chapter about oppression in HRC’s report, the introduction starts with a quotation (HRC, 2018, p. 110) that describes the experienced reality for a Rohingya.

In Rakhine State, Muslims are like [beings] inside a cage; they cannot travel outside. There are no human rights for the Muslims in Rakhine. I don’t know why God sent us here. (HRC, 2018, p. 110).
Conversations with many refugees reveal a relatively contradictory situation: the Rohingyas are being discriminated against for a long time (ASA, 2017, p. 20). Amnesty International had spoken to numerous victims describing torture and violence both in the State of Myanmar and during their escape (ASA, 2017, 2018). Humiliation and denial of equal rights are also mentioned as forms of violence. According to Amnesty International, the actions against the Rohingya population are established among the majority and supported by the government. The Human Rights Council similarly confirms this aspect in its report about the situation in northern Rakhine (HRC, 2018, p. 110).

The Amnesty International report described the military assault on Rohingya villages for several months after the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) had attacked its posts in northern Rakhine State in 2016. In an overheard phone call, the military of Myanmar reportedly received an order to burn down the villages. (ASA, 2016, p. 22). Information obtained by Amnesty International indicated that the attacks were well-planned and were depicted as a campaign of violence against the minority (ASA, 2016, p. 10). Out of a power system, ARSA had launched such attacks, working as cells and using knives and sticks in their violations. The regime also used ARSA’s assault as an excuse to search through the villages (ASA, 2016, p. 22).

Meanwhile, the HRC (2018) report made a clarification that ARSA was poorly trained as it launched the assault using sticks and knives. In addition, ARSA did not seem to be well-organised (HRC, 2018, p. 18). According to Amnesty International, the violence escalated in 2017, when ARSA had attacked the security forces at the border. The government later supported the military in the state of Rakhine, thereby legitimating it by claiming how the military was simply reaffirming itself as

Protector of the nation under threat and to cement its political role further (HRC, 2018, p. 27)

Amnesty International further reported that the army’s actions against the civilians must be prosecuted according to international law (ASA, 2017, p. 167). However, such scenario does not seem to be a possibility because the military provides and controls the law system in Myanmar. Meanwhile, humanitarian organisations are collecting evidence of violations of human rights.
6.5.2 Confiscation of farmland and forced labour

As restrictions on movement had undermined the Rohingya population’s livelihood and ability to collect food, sell goods in the market, farm and fish, hence creating an urgent need for support and assistance. The quote below illustrates the military restriction on the Rohingyas’ livelihoods by denying them access to their farmland.

The soldiers came and said, ‘This harvest is not your harvest’. Many people were harvesting there at the time, and all of us were forced to leave. (ASA, 2016, p. 109)

In March 2018, reports indicated that the military campaign brought the Rohingyas to a state of starvation, as the military blocked fields and restricted humanitarian access to the areas (ASA, 2018, p. 102).

No one could go to their paddy fields, no one could work their cows. Our food was gone and we could not move, that’s why we came to Bangladesh. (ASA, 2018, p. 101)

Muslims are starving in their homes. Markets are closed, and people cannot leave their villages, except to flee. There is widespread intimidation by the authorities, who are clearly using food and water as a weapon. (ASA, 2018, p. 101)

Compulsory forced labour in the State of Rakhine has been a part of the Rohingyas’ lives for decades. The Tatmadaw uses forced labour for carrying its weapons and heavy material. Men are been forced to work on the infrastructure, whereas women are compelled to cook and wash for the soldiers. A witness observed that the Tatmadaw views Rohingyas as animals and not humans (HRC, 2018, p. 101). The Tatmadaw refers to the use of forced labour as ‘portery’. The Tatmadaw informs the heads of the villages that the armed forces need some people for portery and demands the village to give them some people.

Forced labour has also been taken to conflict zones where the army had been in conflict with ARSA. Porters are used as targets and minesweepers. Some people have attempted to escape from the troops despite the danger: soldiers pull up their weapons as these people try to elude the fire of bullets. The persons who successfully escape nevertheless continue to be afraid of getting caught because the soldiers frequently return to the villages (HRC, 2018, p. 103).
During the forced labour walk, people are punished if they disobey the troops, and they are prohibited from taking any rest. They are also subjected to both verbal and physical (e.g. beaten with sticks) humiliation (HRC, 2018, p.102). Forced labour has deprived people of food and water and caused sickness. It has also affected the villages in the rural areas. Having lost workers to portery, the families in these villages are compelled to earn money and work in the agricultural sector (HRC, 2018, p. 103).

Another violation pertains to seizing the Rohingya population’s land for food production and infrastructure. A witness recounted how 10 soldiers appeared on a plot of land and stuck their flag into the land as a way of saying that ‘the land is taken’. After forcibly seizing the Rohingyas’ land, the soldiers would put up a fence and destroy every piece of property on the land.

One man came to the office to explain that he owned his land that was worth 900,000 Kyat, but he was only being offered 9 Kyat for it. He then refused to give away his land. The clerk at the office simply replied that the land is the government’s, and they would take it anyway. (HRC, 2018, p. 105)

When I discovered that my land had been confiscated, I went to see the chief of the local military camp. When I complained the first time, I was told that they needed the land for military buildings and crop cultivation. When I went back, I was poorly treated. Two soldiers held me, one from each side, and a third one kicked me. (HRC, 2018, p. 106)

The aforementioned quotations suggest that the people in the province of Rakhine lack possibilities to protect themselves or their land, thus causing problems for the villages and the families to provide for themselves. According to Amnesty International and the witness, such actions have left the Rohingyas with no chance to defend themselves (ASA, 2018, p. 43). Several people also noted that the soldiers are acting beyond the law, and no one would listen to their grievances (HRC, 2018, p. 107).
6.5.3 Burning and bulldozing

Both reports and satellite pictures demonstrate how the Rohingya villages in the northern province are burned down or being bulldozed. According to Amnesty International, approximately 55 villages have been demolished (ASA, 2018, p. 123). The excuse used to explain the acts from the government is that the northern province is underdeveloped and in need of deconstruction (ASA, 2018, p. 123). The witness statements below describe a situation where they are accused of supporting armed groups.

The day before burning [the village], the number of military personnel had increased. We realised they might do something and so we hid … in the hillside. [The next day, the aftermath became] clear. I saw my house burn …. The military and BGP did the burning. They mostly used [rocket-propelled grenade] launchers. They burned every few houses, but many houses are close to one another, so [the burning] spread quickly. (ASA, 2018, p. 120)

The military had warned one or two days before burning that we should leave the village. The soldiers entered the village and told us to leave, because they would burn it all. They said, ‘You people are providing food and shelter to armed groups’. However, we never did that. (ASA, 2018, p. 120)

These attacks occurred on 25 August 2017 when BGP and military forces surrounded Rohingya villages and opened fire. Both military and authorities in the northern province warned the Rohingyas in mid-September that they would drive the population away from the area (ASA, 2018, p. 120). Satellite pictures estimated that 385 structures had been burned down in one village. The period of burning transpired during the rainy season, indicating that the act had been well planned and structured (ASA, 2018, p. 102). The people from the burned down villages had no choice but to flee along the river.

As they fled to Bangladesh, several witnesses noted that the military had planted landmines on the roads along the border. Amnesty International reported that even if Myanmar had signed the Mine Ban Treaty, the country nonetheless used landmines.

Severe injuries [sustained from] landmines would also fall under crimes against humanity, or inhumane acts of similar character, intentionally causing great suffering or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health. (ASA, 2018, p. 100)
Amnesty International’s investigation revealed that Myanmar’s security forces are responsible for using landmines that had been planted along the paths taken by fleeing Rohingyas. By contrast, the authorities put the blame on ARSA. However, several sources contradicted the authorities’ pronouncement, explaining that ARSA lacked the resources and capacity to use anti-personnel landmines (ASA, 2018, p. 99). A surviving witness’ statement below confirmed the presence of landmines along the border and the serious injuries sustained by victims, some of whom had died.

I was trying to slip through the fence at the border. Suddenly, I stepped on a landmine. It exploded and lifted me up high and then I fell. My whole body was shaken, and then I became unconscious. (ASA, 2018, p. 97)

This survivor was later found among the barbed wire unconscious, with her leg ripped.

6.6 Sexual violation and expulsion

The HRC (2018) report claimed that the Rohingya population had been prosecuted for their religion and subjected to extrajudicial executions, torture, arbitrary detention, forced disappearances, intimidation, gang rape, forced labour, robbery, arson, home eviction, land confiscation, population resettlement and destruction of mosques and towns (HRC, 2018, p. 29). Amnesty International corroborated that mosques had been demolished (ASA, 2017, p. 83).

Sexual slavery in military captivity (ASA, 2018, p. 95)

Sources also reported the military’s use of all sorts of taxes and sanctions when family could not provide them with some of their harvest. In one case, a 17-year-old girl was raped because of her family’s inability to pay the tax (ASA, 2017, p. 94). Sexual violence is used for creating stigma and destroying the communities. Reports from HRC similarly indicated that sexual violence is used for inflicting psychological damage and defined it as a genocidal act (HRC, 2018, p. 356).
Incidents of sexual violence had been reported from provinces in northern Rakhine. Similar to HRC’s (2018) report, the Amnesty International report cited the intent to destroy the villages and the families and thus create shame and pain for the victims as the reason for using sexual violence and abuse. Members of non-government organisations who had treated Rohingya women concurred that those violations would produce lifetime stigma and emotional distress (HRC, 2017, 2018). The HRC’s reporting of sexual violations (HRC, 2018, p. 384) is reflected in the following quotes:

> Everything was searched. Our bodies, our sacks. I had some food for my children with me, and [the soldiers] took it. They also took my mobile phone. I had no money on me; other people had money, but [the soldiers] took it. Gold jewellery, they also took it…. They took off our clothes. All the young women, including me, they searched us like this: they put their hand inside [on our breasts]; I was really uncomfortable. It was so embarrassing. I was crying. (ASA, 2018, p. 95)

Offensive body searches preceded the rape and sometimes gang rape of Rohingya women. Moreover, children of rape victims were often stabbed and beaten. Amnesty International described gang rape as a part of the ethnic cleansing campaign (ASA, 2017, p. 93)

> Furthermore, reports revealed cases of women repeatedly experiencing rape, falling into unconsciousness and waking up bloodied and damaged. Some instances involved military personnel forcibly bringing young women to schools where they would be later raped.

> By the next morning, the military was gone, so the people went to a school. There they found two of the girls alive, but one of them had been killed. The villagers brought her body to our compound. I saw marks on her face, like scratches. My mother-in-law washed the body before it was buried. She told me that the girl had bite marks on her breast. (ASA, 2018, p. 94)

The Amnesty International report described cases in which women had been dragged into mosques and raped. The perpetrators had ripped off the victims’ earrings and other personal belongings as a form of humiliation. Sexual violations had been a part of the atrocities against the Rohingyas for several years. However, such atrocities had apparently become more organised, reflecting the State of Myanmar’s ethnic cleansing operation (ASA, 2017, pp. 92–94).
A male witness recalled that his hands were tied and his clothes were ripped off. A man from the military subsequently put a lit candle under his penis (ASA, 2017, p. 95).

Men are often taken away and beaten up in front of family members. The witness was beaten and raped. Many of the victims were also tortured after being raped. Other eyewitnesses revealed that thousands of women had been raped to create fear. Some reports described instances in which soldiers had forced women into their camp to commit gang rape. Many of the rape victims had to watch others being raped as well (ASA, 2017, pp. 93–94).

Five or six military soldiers came into my house. Two of them grabbed my husband. I was holding my son in my lap. They snatched him from my arms and threw him to the ground. Two of them took me aside of the house and raped me. I kicked them, and they threatened me with a gun…. Whatever they wanted to do, they did to me. (ASA, 2017, p. 88)

According to Amnesty International, sexual violence is committed in the Rohingya villages in three stages (ASA, 2017, p. 86). In the first stage, women are raped immediately after a military attack on a village. In the second stage, military forces search for ARSA members in the women’s homes. Finally, in the third stage, women who are on their way to Bangladesh are sexually assaulted. Moreover, some victims described how women are forced into marriage and consequently subjected to some form of slavery without any rights. The social stigma created by such violence tends to torment these women for as long as they live ASA, 2017 p.86)

**Summary**
Multiple violations are committed against the Rohingya population on different levels. The armed forces of Myanmar commit such violations as they search for enemies in the villages. The violations include grabbing the Rohingyas’ land and forcing them into starvation. The inhumane sexual violence inflicted on Rohingya women creates fear and stigma, thereby taking away their freedom. Sexual violence is also committed against men, but it is more common among women and girls. Additionally, men are often beaten or killed. Their labour is forcibly used to serve the military, prompting these men’s families to fend for themselves (i.e. earn money and work in the agricultural sector). Violence is used to strengthen the military’s power and change the established power relations with the Rohingyas, while ensuring that the Rohingyas further lose their power and reduce their ability to create a bright future for their families. Such violence also jeopardises and sometimes eliminates the Rohingyas’ capacity to supply food and protect themselves and their families. The reports and witness accounts both confirm the situation confronting the Rohingya population: a textbook case of ethnic cleansing (Freedomhouse, 2019a)
7. Discussion

The aim of this study is to explore power relations in the Rohingya conflict in Myanmar. The analysis indicates that several power relations emerge at different levels, and these power relations affect the minority population. Norms and values, loss of legitimacy for the political system and sexual violence and expulsions are used to establish power, cause fear and destroy families and communities. This chapter presents a discussion of the results of this study and a comparison of the findings with previous research provided in the background chapter.

7.1 Political, judicial and religious power

This study aims to search for patterns and discourses that demonstrate the power relations between the Rohingya population and different spheres and levels in Myanmar society. Several power relations eventually emerged. One relationship aspect pertained to Myanmar’s political situation, particularly its judicial situation. Institutions in Myanmar cannot protect their citizens, especially the Rohingya population (Laotides & Ware, 2013, p. 61). People view Myanmar politicians as distant and the state’s political system as highly centralised. The loss of legitimacy and the fact that not all ethnicities are represented in politics are other factors that hinder Myanmar from becoming a genuinely democratic society. A typical practice for a state such as Myanmar, which is built on authoritarian rule, is to allow religion to considerably influence state issues. Minorities are also often treated poorly; the rulers need support to establish their leading positions, and the majority of the people are key to this goal (Hague & Harrop, 2013, p. 59).

People experience politics as an aspect that is distant from their daily lives. The analysis reveals that Myanmar’s political system is a centralised. The chances of Myanmar becoming a more democratic country are deemed to be unfavourable. As the sources in the analysis chapter indicate, an opposite direction is evident. This viewpoint is also apparent in the elections of 2015, which allowed the anti-Muslim propaganda to depict Muslims as snakes. Furthermore, even if political movements had a chance to register, sources suggest that the military has control over all types of political affairs. Political opposition in Myanmar substantially grew in 2014; nonetheless, the military has an ample amount of power and
control, which has been well-established during decades of authoritarian rule (Lintner, 2014, p. 8).

Efforts to build a stable and peaceful country require that all ethnicities have to be part of the political system. The Rohingyas cannot enter the judicial system because they are prohibited from obtaining the requisite education; hence, a legitimate judicial system in which everyone can feel secure and protected by the state becomes difficult to achieve (Laotides & Ware, 2013, p. 61). Similarly, all religions would have an opportunity to actively participate in public life. However, this case is not apparent in Myanmar, and both Christians and Muslims are aware of it.

In meantime, Aung San Suu Kyi is questioned for her passivity towards the Rohingya crisis. Furthermore, her iconic status as a role model is significant for leaders in countries such as Myanmar (Jones, 2003). Both Freedomhouse and Amnesty International have raised concerns about her inaction towards the Rohingya conflict. To some extent, Suu Kyi lacks the mandate to act, as she is believed to be at the mercy of the military. Results of the analysis suggest that Myanmar is seemingly a semi-democratic country, with the characteristics of an authoritarian state. This depiction appears to be as accurate today as it was in 2008.

7.2 Religious norms and values

Religious leaders are also important for leaders to remain in power; therefore, political leaders in Myanmar rely on religious leaders who are believed to have a major influence on political affairs. Religious leaders are also close to the people, given that the political system is distant from these people. The monasteries are also nearby, and monks interfere in political matters (Tosa, 2013). As experts on the expression of Buddhism and the rules, monks are followed and obeyed by the people; additionally, monks have considerable power in creating norms and values based on their knowledge. The monasteries also have their own law system referring to Buddha. In Myanmar, this law system functions as a bridge between the secular judicial system and the law of Sangha (Tosa, 2013, p. 284).

Buddhist monks have a significant influence on the secular law system (Crouch, 2016). The clerk system is a part of every village; they meet people every day and can therefore make a considerable impact on values and norms. In addition, indirect power relations are used for oppressing the minority Rohingya, and this goal is achieved through cultural and religious methods, given that the Sangha law substantially influences ethnic Burmese daily life. The
monasteries can actively participate in the anti-Muslim campaign and spread information about not having any exchange with the Rohingya population. In other words, Buddhism influences Myanmar’s political system (Jones, 2016, p. 185). Such influence may be considered as problematic for the Rohingyas who follow another religion. The anti-Muslim campaign has significantly intensified over the past years; Buddhism has also affected the cultural development of religions. The monasteries and their views on the Muslims and Rohingya populations are considerably affected as well. Sources claim that Rohingya and the Muslim population are viewed as enemies (Crouch, 2016, pp. 159–161).

In the analysis, several sources mentioned the monks’ active participation in violating the Rohingyas, even if these monks were not at the frontline. Moreover, monks have control over the education of norms and values (Tosa, 2013, p. 274). Norms and values must be recognised as indirect power and knowledge (Foucault, 2002b) because they help to establish knowledge that explains the subjects. Monks took an active part in this creation; at the same time, the Rohingya population had been portrayed as different and inhumane (Zin, 2015, p. 377). For the Rohingyas, these norms and values create knowledge about their oddness and lack of acceptance. The indirect power has relegated them to an underdog position.

**Summary**

Power not only emanates from the government, as indirect power relations could produce or establish a relationship between the Rohingyas and the state (Foucault, 2002a). In this scenario, both direct and indirect power relations are established. Moreover, Suu Kyi and the military belong to the majority of the population and are a part of the political elite. This aspect is also significant. For Foucault, power is a part of positions in society. The ethnic Burmese do have the possibility to become a part of important positions in society, which is not the case for minorities such as the Rohingyas. Even the clerk system provides the religious leaders with power in the form of high positions in monasteries. This analysis and other studies indicate that religion does have an impact on all parts of society in a country such as Myanmar. Except Buddhism, all religions are tolerated, and they have strong power positions that they utilise as well (2002a).

7.3 Use of restrictions as a form of oppression
The restrictions on movement cause serious problems such as illnesses. Despite State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi’s assurance that all the people in Myanmar have the right to education and healthcare, such knowledge is not established for the Rohingyas. Amnesty International has raised pertinent concerns, citing that these systematic restrictions prevent the Rohingyas from obtaining adequate social, financial and healthcare services (ASA, 2017 p.89). Meanwhile, the loss of citizenship had existed for a long time, but the restrictions seemed to intensify after 2012. Amnesty International claims that Myanmar has an apartheid system (ASA, 2017, p.38). For instance, Rohingyas are disallowed to go to any hospital. If they manage to go there, they are separated from the rest due to the restrictions on movement. Furthermore, norms and values are spread among the Rohingyas who often prefer not to go to a hospital for fear of the medical staff’s poor treatment. Therefore, many of them would rather not go to a hospital. Bribes may be necessary even to enter a hospital. A certain hospital in Sittwe is guarded by police and, according to sources, no other hospital has guards. The beds in hospitals are extremely limited. Many Rohingyas search for shelter and healthcare in Bangladesh. Shelter and healthcare are both expensive, the trip to Bangladesh is risky and the chances of being harassed are high.

In a weak state (Hague & Harrop, 2013, p. 59) such as Myanmar, the media’s freedom is restricted, and information is controlled by the authorities and the military. The underlying reason is the fear of being questioned because all authoritarian states’ leaders are fragile and vulnerable. Furthermore, the Rohingya issue is neither explained nor explored in different parts of Myanmar.

The Rohingya population is constantly under certain restrictions that are decided by both government and village authorities. Checkpoints are used for restricting people and making everything increasingly difficult for the population, and the authorities use checkpoints as a form of oppression. Checkpoints and bureaucracy also cause issues for humanitarian workers who enter these areas; as a result, the Rohingya people are not provided with healthcare and food supplements. Witnesses also describe incidents of violence and harassment at these checkpoints, which similarly causes difficulty for the Rohingya population in buying food for their families. People who have permission to enter the checkpoints can be ordered to leave and go back home without recourse to questions. Therefore, visible power relations emerge, in which the Rohingyas are in an underdog position. Moreover, as both society and culture are changing, the anti-Muslim campaigns have intensified the tension, and the relationship between the state and the Rohingya has ensured that they cannot affect their situation at all.
The Rohingyas are denied equal education and are unable to actively participate in the political sphere; hence, they could not change or improve their living conditions. Their lack of power in society has rendered the impossibility to change their living conditions in any situation. Therefore, their power relations are stuck and often regulated by laws and established norms and values in the nearby society and on a political level. As Foucault underscores, power is connected to positions, and a minority group without citizens’ rights will not be able to change its position because it is trapped in its existing position and power structure. Therefore, Rohingyas will experience difficulty in changing their living conditions, as demonstrated in the analysis.

The government and the authorities contributed to years of oppression against the Rohingya population. This move could be seen as a part of their persecution and equal rights denial for the Rohingyas. It is also common in states such as Myanmar, where the majority population’s oppression of minorities is necessary to retain power and maintain the minority’s underdog position.

The discourse patterns that emerged in the reports demonstrated the systematic escalation of oppression using restrictions from 2012. The increase in the tension between groups in northern Rakhine State had been cited as the reason for the need to intensify the oppressive practices. In the analysis, the reports describe restrictions on religion. Particularly, the restrictions on movement constantly cause issues for the Rohingyas in their daily lives. The restrictions prevent them from practicing their religion, and mosques are demolished or forbidden from making any reparations. Established power relations subsequently occur, in which the Rohingyas have to seek permission for nearly everything that they do. Such relations also affect their ability to stay together. According to Amnesty International, all these restrictions are preventing the Rohingyas from being involved in government decisions. In addition, walking out of areas is impossible due to the restrictions on movement, and reports reveal that the Rohingyas are denied entry into public spheres.

The loss of education is another restriction. The analysis indicated patterns of the Rohingyas being denied entry into school areas and teachers refusing to teach Muslims. The Rohingyas are prohibited from entering the juridical and medical spheres because they are disallowed to pursue the required education. Even if some education programmes are open to Rohingyas at the university, restrictions on movement and the bureaucracy of permission to enter the university take a long time that people hardly manage to come to classes. This process also
keeps the Rohingyas out of the system and prevents them from changing or improving their life conditions; it is undertaken through both direct and indirect power.

The restrictions on movement similarly cause difficulty in conducting religious teaching, and this factor is least important for Muslims to go to Quran school. As Tosa (2013) stated, one of the most essential aspects in 2007 when the monastery leaders demonstrated against the military regime and the financial situation was the act of teaching their followers in the monastery (Tosa, 2013 p.274). Hence, fear of allowing this Muslim population to grow strong arises, and restrictions are used to maintain an apartheid system and avoid an uprising.

**Summary**

Direct power (Foucault, 2002b) is evident in the authorities’ decisions on different restrictions for the Rohingya population. The restrictions on movement also illustrate how power relations could change the living conditions of the population by denying its members entry to public spheres. Power is everywhere in society; moreover, to become a part of society, knowledge is very important (Foucault, 2002a). No one could be passive in a power relationship. Nevertheless, for the Rohingyas, the reality is that changing their life conditions in the context of their constant underdog position is nearly impossible.

The Rohingyas relate to these power relations everywhere. They are not allowed to walk in all public areas as they might wish. They are denied healthcare, education and the ability to practice their religion. The power relations are expressed, both directly and indirectly, from authorities, as well as in different parts of daily life. They are not free to travel wherever they prefer. These measures are a means of using oppression to keep the Rohingya population in a constant underdog position, with no ability to influence the future or any political decision. This pattern is likewise visible, ensuring that the Rohingyas maintain their underdog position in the political, cultural and religious spheres. The fear of Muslims growing strong in Myanmar is prevalent, and such apprehension is also established in several countries in Asia. Buddhism might seem calm and gentle, but it is similar to power relations changing over time and it is somewhat progressive. The Rohingyas simply need to follow the authorities’ decisions; otherwise, they face reprimands or punishments.

**7.4 Expulsion and violence**

The politicians in charge are distant from the province of northern Rakhine; consequently, the local authorities make their own decisions that are unfavourable for the local population, as
the analysis indicates. Even if the government and Aung San Suu Kyi do not support the actions, they can only do so much about the situation (Lintner, 2014). The area is recognised as a zone that must be controlled by the military; thus, the military and BGP can act as they wish. This case could be viewed as problematic for Suu Kyi; that is, punishing Myanmar’s military personnel for the criminal acts could be difficult for the government. As the military also has control over political affairs and financial matters, it can act as it wishes. Evidence of criminal acts against human rights in the area is extensive. Furthermore, violence has continued, and witnesses are expressing their stories. Some witnesses had managed to reach the border and cross into Bangladesh. Moreover, stories abound regarding landmines along the paths, planted by the military, which are tearing bodies apart. The injuries of people who have the misfortune of setting off landmines are painful, to say the least. The military blames ARSA for planting the landlines. However, several witnesses convey a contradictory account; that is, the military of Myanmar is responsible for landmine usage.

Witnesses have reported criminal acts by the military with regard to gender-based violence. For instance, men are beaten and taken away from their families, some of them never to return, whereas women are raped and forced into marriage. The systematic campaign involves inciting fear, humiliating victims and tearing families and communities apart. These methodical and well-planned actions often start with soldiers collecting people from the Rohingya villages, and proceed to the burning down of houses.

The systematic oppressive campaign is similarly apparent in demographic decisions, in which Rohingya villages are bulldozed and farmland confiscated to persecute the Rohingyas and force their starvation. Sources also contend that ethnic Rakhine villagers are used in acts of violence and oppression. The oppression is systematic and well-planned in all areas. Raising their voices is difficult for the people because the media does not report the issues in the northern Rakhine State. Both the HRC (2018) and Amnesty International (2017, 2018) reports highlight the need for a political decision to urge the Rohingya population to abandon the region, as all of these reports show the burning of villages and the well-organised and legitimised acts of violence. The anti-Muslim campaigns are well-established and the Rohingya are viewed as snakes; thus, other ethnicities find difficulty in reacting to such a depiction. Additionally, the analysis and the background sources reveal that the media is controlled by the military; hence, information that is spread suits the military’s own interests.
Summary
Power relations exist as soon as people meet, and they are present at different levels (Foucault, 2002a). The use of forced labour and sexual violence could be viewed as a tactic for compelling the Rohingyas to remain in an underdog position by tearing them and their families apart. The military’s use of such punishment consequently affects and sometimes eliminates the Rohingyas’ ability to improve their lives and create a bright future. Sexual violence is systematically committed not only to destroy families, communities and livelihoods but also inflict lifelong psychological distress on the victims. Forced labour and confiscation of land are similarly acts that drive the Rohingyas to starvation. Moreover, landmines are planted on escape roads, thereby causing serious injuries and even death.

All of these violent and inhumane atrocities against the Rohingya population constitute a systematic and oppressive campaign that is supported by the Myanmar military. Although no one could charge the military for its crimes against humanity and human rights violations, the UN and Amnesty International have collected multiple witness accounts and other pieces of evidence that point to the military’s culpability. Thus, the Myanmar military could be eventually held accountable for all these criminal acts against the Rohingya population.

7.5 Conclusion

The power relations (Foucault, 1982 p.5) between the Rohingya population and the State of Myanmar have been established by authoritarian and political decisions. Authoritarian rule is still a part of the political system, which causes difficulty for minorities in changing and improving their living conditions.

Aside from being well-established, these power relations are also direct and indirect (Foucault 1980 p.19). On the one hand, direct power relations are evident in the military and authorities’ restrictions on numerous aspects of the Rohingyas’ daily life. On the other hand, indirect power relations are expressed in terms of the cultural and religious aspects, consequently placing Rohingyas in an underdog position. Information about the Rohingyas as an underdog, inhumane and non-Burmese is spread in Myanmar society and included in the country’s collective knowledge. As these structures are difficult to change, the indirect power relations between the Rohingyas and society are expected to remain. A key point to consider is that the Rohingya conflict comprises different levels.
Aung San Suu Kyi is a role model of liberation, but she seemingly lacks the political power to effect change. Interestingly, people and the UN continue to have faith in her; however, such a reception could be an expression of the belief that Suu Kyi is currently the best leader.

As the Rohingyas are restricted in key areas such as healthcare, education and free movement, their ability to change their power relations according to the state, cultural norms and values, and religious values remains limited. Moreover, the belief that the Rohingyas are inhumane persists, as harassment and violence continue. Hope for a bright and fair future is expected to materialise when the majority of people of Myanmar express a desire for change and pursue efforts towards creating a more democratic society, and start building a state where all the ethnicities are represented in all types of public spheres without discrimination. The undertaking is anticipated to be challenging yet worthy of consideration, notwithstanding the slight chance of success.

7.6 Further research

Similar to any study, this research has some limitations that further investigations can help to address. The influence of the monastery on developing norms and values in the context of the Rohingya population constitutes the research interest. Exploring Buddhism’s influence on political matters is also of interest in this study. A meaningful research direction would be to monitor the development in the region and determine any possibility to build a more just and democratic society in Myanmar.

7.7 Evaluation of theory and methodology and empirical reflections

This study aimed to search for visible and indirect power relations in Myanmar, particularly the ones between the state, culture and religious spheres established in relation to the Rohingya population. The research questions focused on how the established relations rendered the visibility of different patterns.

Restrictions on movement apparently affect the Rohingya population on both the public and social levels. The Myanmar society illustrates a country that is significantly influenced impacted by the monastery, which also has a major effect on the creation of norms and values that describe the social reality of the majority of populations. As media is polarised and controlled by the military, public knowledge and power relations must be viewed as well established.
I used multiple sources in this study, which sometimes caused difficulty in identifying the limitations. Even in the final days of this study, I found new angles that seemed to be interesting to further analyse. Taking into account the limitations is a key step in such situations. The sources also referred to the situations from different viewpoints; nevertheless, their diverse perspectives proved to be valuable.

The method of discourse analysis is an effective tool that could be used in multiple ways. To reiterate, I believe that an ever-present resource such as power is worthy of investigation, as Michael Foucault expresses. Foucault’s definition of power is both interesting and useful. The use of the discourse analysis method was suitable for this study. This method is similar to a giant fishing net with nodal points connected to a special field. In this study, the fishing net represents the Rohingya conflict and important nodal points denote those discourses that are expressed in the material.

Furthermore, qualitative methods are useful techniques for analysis. Although qualitative methods could be difficult to describe because they are not as static as quantitative methods, they are opening up unexpected possibilities. A thought and a belief in the ensuing outcomes emerge at the outset. Meanwhile, power relations seem to achieve steady progress, and this subject constitutes a worthwhile direction for further research.

The most challenging part of my study was the need to remain objective, especially in the analysis of gender-based violence. Sometimes I had to walk away and gather myself before proceeding with the research. I consider this conflict as a horrible one, without a decent solution in the near future. At other times, I felt some frustration and revulsion, particularly about the Rohingyas’ torture and rape experiences. Nevertheless, this study provided me with numerous insights into and a profound understanding of the Rohingya conflict and the power relations therein.
8. Literature list


Lintner, Bertil (2014). Burmas historia. Lund: Historiska media


Links:

PDF:s from Amnesty International:
“WE WILL DESTROY EVERYTHING” MILITARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY IN RAKHINE STATE, MYANMAR Amnesty International 2016