

What really describes the case of Rohingya community in Myanmar?

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Analysis



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By all standards, except perhaps that of the Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, the Rohingya crisis [1] has been a source of deep compassionate concern in recent years. A news channel on December 23 reported [2] that, "The headless body of a Muslim villager has been found days after he spoke to reporters on a rare government-guided media tour of restive northern Rakhine State, Myanmar police said on Friday." How can such despicable acts continue to happen in the 21st century's civilized world?

This is not the only report of brutality that has surfaced. Hundreds of such accounts have appeared since 1982 when Rohingyas were declared non-citizens in Myanmar.

About a year ago, a New York Times article [3] predicted, "Soon the world will witness a remarkable sight: a beloved Nobel Peace Prize winner presiding over 21st-century concentration camps."

Are these results of fanatic nationalism, religious bigotry or some form of global conspiracy? Perhaps all these factors have some role to play in the conflict.

Fanatic nationalism

In Europe the idea of nationalism originally emerged at the end of the 18th century with a human face, but it demonstrated an ugly fanatic façade during the first half of the 20th century. In Africa and Asia this idea had

motivated millions to fight against colonialism but within half a century or so it turned out to be a curse for humanity.

Basil Davidson has rightly pointed out in his profound work *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-state* that the modern African nation-state has meant harsh dictatorships, massive poverty and extreme abuse of human rights. In this process, the minorities have suffered most, and this suffering was not confined to Africa alone; many other parts of the world were adversely affected as well. The Rohingya community in the South / Southeast Asian nation Myanmar seems to have become the worst example of nationalism's curse in recent history. Referring to the plight of the Rohingyas, the Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in a 2013 report, "All You Can Do is Pray" [4].

And the New York based Council on Foreign Relations recommended that, "The United States should be leading an international effort to find a humane solution [5] to their plight, not only in Myanmar but in other countries as well."

Recently news channel Aljazeera has reported [6] that, in an open letter to the United Nations Security Council, 23 global leaders, among them 13 Nobel laureates, expressed their disappointment at Myanmar's Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi for failing to stop the persecution of Rohingyas in her country.

Why has Suu Kyi failed to respond to the international appeal on the issue? Is she afraid of losing support among the majority of Myanmar's population who happen to be Buddhist while the Rohingyas happen to be Muslim? The problem seems to lie in fanatic nationalism. The ethnic Rohingyas who live in Myanmar's Rakhine state, historically known as Arakan, were brought under the Burmese control at the end of the 18th century, and the 19th century British colonial administration legitimized it. By the middle of the 20th century, the Rohingyas became part of the legitimized Burmese/Myanmar state. Now the "champion of human rights" Suu Kyi seems to be convinced that she has to defend the state at any cost, even at the cost of ethnic cleansing.

Religious bigotry

Although Buddhism is generally known for a forbearing approach to life and hold self-suffering as part and parcel of life, Ashin Wirathu, a professional monk, doesn't hide [7] his anti-Rohingya and anti-Muslim mission, branding it as nationalistic and patriotic. And of course, as a professional monk, he brings religion to support his views. "Most Muslims destroy our country, our people and the Buddhist religion," he claims. He has also conducted operations to cleanse his nation of Muslims, which has led to numerous humanitarian crises during the past decades. Although these events have been extensively reported in the international press, what is particularly noteworthy in this Rohingya episode is that most international agencies and institutions, including the UN, NGOs and think-tanks, find fault with the government in Myanmar, but nobody takes into account the fact that the Rohingyas historically did not belong to Burma or Myanmar; they were made part of the nation-state as a result of foreign invasions. Why hasn't the international community addressed this question? This reminds students of history the role of Socrates who lived during the declining days of the ancient Greek civilization. In his lectures Socrates was highlighting double standards of nationalist demagogues such as Suu Kyi and religious bigots like Ashin Wirathu.

Muslims, on the other hand, must also admit that they are not immune from bigotry either. The cases of Daesh and similar other groups always make headlines all over the world. One would find reports of similar acts by the Rohingyas too. Last October, for example, Myanmar authorities alleged that "Rohingya insurgents" killed 9 Myanmar soldiers [8] which resulted in another new wave of violence against the Rohingyas. No independent agency has investigated this allegation, but given the wider world scenario, one would definitely find some sort of Muslim involvement in many fanatic activities.

One author has already pointed out how "The Rohingya issue is fast developing into a security threat [9] that would have an adverse impact on peace in the region." Fanatics carrying Muslim names hardly comprehend the consequences of their angry outbursts. The state of Israel is glaring evidence of such violence in modern history. But Muslims hardly understand that their adversaries exploit their emotional attachment to their suffering fellow Muslims around the world only to harm them.

Conspiracy theory

The idea of recruitment of Muslims for despicable fanatic activities brings us to a question about conspiracy

theories. One would find ample evidence of conspiracies leading to the achievement of desired goals in recent history. That is why some scholars hold to the view that conspiracy theories must not be dismissed and ridiculed. Today every nation maintains at least one spy agency to serve the nation. But unfortunately most of these agencies, instead of gathering information about security threats to their nations, are more interested in creating incidents to serve their “national interests.” And for the sake of their “national interests” they are not transparent in handling information. This lack of transparency is perhaps the main impediment to conflict resolution in the world today.

Is a separate state for the Rohingyas, as has been suggested [10], the solution to the Rohingya crisis? I am not sure; for today many nation-states are on the verge of total collapse and many others have already been identified as failed states. The solution, in our view, lies in the revival of Socratic values. George Sarton in his monumental Introduction to the History of Science notes that, “Greek civilization ended in failure, not because of the lack of intelligence, but because of the lack of character, of morality.”

Will the Rohingya crisis motivate today’s civilized world to learn from history? Only the future will determine the answer to this question.

*** *Opinions expressed in this piece are the author’s own and do not necessarily reflect Anadolu Agency’s editorial policy***

[1] <http://www.cfr.org/burmamyanmar/rohingya-migrant-crisis/p36651>

[2] <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/muslim-man-found-dead-after-speaking-to-media-in-restive-myanmar/3390600.html>

[3] http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/10/opinion/sunday/myanmars-peace-prize-winner-and-crimes-against-humanity.html?_r=1

[4] https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/burma0413webwcover_0.pdf

[5] <http://www.cfr.org/burmamyanmar/rohingya-migrant-crisis/p36651>

[6] <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/12/urged-rohingya-human-crisis-161230202804249.html>

[7] <http://www.latimes.com/world/asia/la-fg-ff-myanmar-monk-20150524-story.html>

[8] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/10/myanmar-nine-police-killed-insurgents-bangladesh-border>

[9] <http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2016/12/07/7-dec-16-world-view-asian-jihadists-become-radicalized-burmas-myanmars-rohingya-slaughter/>

[10] <http://www.forbes.com/sites/anderscorr/2016/12/28/sanction-myanmar-and-give-the-rohingya-a-state-of-their-own/#297bc5c9ce9a>

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