

## Treat Others As You Wish

Myanmar's Rohingya people are being slaughtered. The government security forces are tearing babies out of their screaming mothers' arms and throwing them into fires. Women are being hit over the head with machetes and raped, locked in their homes which are then set aflame, bearing the images of their family and neighbors shot in front of their faces, some seeing their sons' and husbands' bodies drenched in gasoline and gone to smoke. This is not war. It's genocide. The United Nations defines genocide as "deliberately inflicting on a group (be it national, ethnical, racial, or religious) conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part ("Genocide")." While genocide haunts the past and present, what is done now will shape its future.

Often associated with the Holocaust and horrific stories in history books, when genocide appears in our current decade many of us discredit it. Some choose not to look or listen, assuming false oblivion. If the world had done this during the Nazi's era of terror, what would Germany be like today? Similarly, if the world as a whole continues to allow the government of Myanmar to eradicate its Rohingya population, what will Burma look like in two years? Reporter Nicholas Kristof writes: "We will never be able to shrug and say: *If only we had known*. We know ("Is This Genocide?")." In the past, there has been more international involvement when facing genocide than is currently given to the Rohingya. By now the facts are out, and there is no ground for skepticism regarding this genocide's validity.

Since August 2017, approximately 700,000 Rohingyans have fled from the Burmese state of Rakhine into Bangladesh. This did not happen overnight. The transformation from peace to hell sprung from a long history of conflict and oppression from the Bamar (Burmese) Buddhists towards all minority groups within their country including the Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya.

The earliest roots trace back to 1785, when the last Rakhine Kingdom was annexed by a Burmese King, Badowpaya. Since then, the Rakhine land was conquered by British ruling India (from 1824-1948), and ruled by kings, prime ministers, and presidents, all primarily non-Rakhine nor Rohingya (MacManus et al. 7-8). Muslims and Buddhists in Myanmar lived in tolerance of each other's ways until the interference of a lengthy government strategy caused the Rohingya to be increasingly excluded from their country. The implementation of this strategy appeared along a gradual timeline: in 1982 Rohingya were officially removed from the list of recognized ethnic minorities and stripped of citizenship; from 1994 onward Myanmar government began denying birth certificates to Rohingya babies; in 2014 Rohingya were excluded from the census; in 2015 Rohingya lost the right to participate in government elections, as well as their rights to healthcare, higher education, and employment opportunities (MacManus et al. 7-8, 19). Even the use of the word "Rohingya" has been boycotted by the government and its use condemned. These many reasons are only the beginning of the story of how Rohingya lost their home.

The gradually heated pot reached its rapid boil on August 25, 2017. A Rohingya rebel force attacked several police and army stations, killing twelve members of the security forces. There are also stories of Rohingya raping Buddhist women on that same day, if the government's accounts are trustworthy. Since Myanmar officials do their best to keep foreigners out of Rakhine, it's difficult to determine the truth and details of what's taking place. This fact alone tells that there must be something to hide. Besides details, the basic scenario is clear. Myanmar security forces retaliated on the Rohingya attacks of August 25th with an ongoing slaughtering of men and children, while raping and burning their wives and houses. It is currently estimated that 345 villages have been destroyed (TASSC). This was not the first time Rohingya were driven from their homes. In 2012 the government cracked down on "illegal immigration" and over

120,000 of these native Muslims were forced out of the country (TASSC). Most of them returned to Myanmar the following year. They returned to their homes or to other vacant corners of their homeland. They returned to a land scheming their demise.

Part of the reason this genocide is able to occur is that it is hidden by people such as the Nobel Peace Prize winner Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Daw Suu was proclaimed a heroine for defying Myanmar's dictators, leading a campaign for democracy, and enduring fifteen years of house arrest ("A Nobel Peace Prize Winner's Shame"). Pressure against the Myanmar government won Daw Suu her freedom, which gives hope for the oppressed Rohingya today. Now that Daw Suu is freed, praised, and raised to the highest tier of Myanmar government, she defends the military's actions and turns a big blind-eye towards their destruction of the Rohingya. Daw Suu is an extreme example of a common reason this genocide continues due to her powerful influence on the Myanmar military force as well as international relations. She continues to discredit international reporters as creating "fake news" regarding the ongoing genocide and uses her allies to hide the slaughter. Daw Suu acts as a shield for the Myanmar military force, refusing to acknowledge that the thousands of Rohingya living in Rakhine have long ancestry there. Ignoring the problem is one way of not dealing with it. But by keeping Myanmar's curtains drawn Daw Suu enables and encourages the persecutors.

Daw Suu could fulfil her role as heroine. She is someone who could make a difference, who could save *a people*. She could grant them citizenship or at least a place on the official list of ethnical minorities within Myanmar. She could influence the military force to stop their lethal persecution. But because she believes that the Rohingya are unwanted trouble makers, she lets them be tortured and drives them extinct. Has she thought about the surge in pregnancies caused by rape from military Burmese to Rohingya women? It's likely she doesn't even think about

Rohingya (or whatever the government officials refer to these people as) as humans anymore. They are not citizens of Daw Suu's country, not hers to look after. Instead, she has discredited international reporters as creating "fake news" regarding the ongoing genocide and used her allies to hide the slaughter. There is a chance that Daw Suu will remember her days in oppression and relate to these people who she strips of their humanity.

The Rohingya survivors can talk, and they speak from wrenching experience. Reporters such as Nicholas Kristof who writes for the New York Times and has covered the Myanmar situation extensively the past few years, travel to meet survivors and coax stories. Here's one Kristof found on the edge of Bangladesh coming from the former village of Tula Toli:

"Consider Shafika Begum, a 15-year-old who may be the only survivor in her family. She said she saw soldiers shoot dead her father and four brothers; they then took her, her mother and her 11-year-old sister into a hut. The soldiers cut her sister's throat in front of her, and she said that when she screamed, the soldiers clubbed her on the head and knocked her out.

Flames and smoke brought her back to consciousness: The soldiers had locked the door of the hut and set it on fire. Her mother and sister were dead, and Shafika's clothes were on fire, but she broke through a wall and fled.

Was she raped? "I was unconscious, so I don't know what they did to me," she said. But she added that someone had rearranged her clothes ("Is This Genocide?")."

The 700,000 Rohingya who have made it to Bangladesh live in sprawling encampments. They cannot live there long; Bangladesh does not want them or permit them to learn Bengali. These people have a hard time living at all, traumatized and destroyed, sustained by aid organizations and the ability to breathe. They know the full value of that. The Rohingya need a place to go, and it can't be back home. Not now, a second time. The fires are still burning, their villages still fields of ashes, their food supply still denied, their eyes still a gun's target. The Rohingya need the means to move on, to a new life without bloodstains, where they're wanted and have space to heal. They need the ability to accept what has happened. Their parents may be

dead. They likely have no home. They may carry children born from rape or live with the pain of recently mutilated genitalia or severe burns. Once the truth is accepted progress will begin. As more people acknowledge this truth, the load becomes lighter and hope burrows its way into hearts, minds, and children's clenched hands.

If earth's majority continues to look at this genocide as Myanmar's problem or as no problem at all, the lessons of the past would be put to waste. Silence and oblivion indirectly feed the fires burning bodies. Although it is monstrous, we all have the power to help end the Rohingya's terror. Add Rohingya to your daily conversation. Daw Suu cannot condemn thousands of international individuals for acknowledging a race with their rightful name.

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