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UNDERSTANDING THE VIOLENCE AGAINST ROHINGYA MUSLIMS THROUGH GALTUNG'S CONFLICT TRIANGLE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the Rohingya conflict in Myanmar's Rakhine State through Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle, analysing how direct, structural, and cultural violence interact and constrain pathways to sustainable peace. The study aims to (i) categorise the dimensions of violence shaping the crisis, (ii) evaluate national and international responses, and (iii) derive policy-relevant recommendations consistent with Galtung's framework. Methodologically, it adopts a qualitative, interpretive, document-based design drawing on peer-reviewed studies and publicly available institutional and human rights reports identified through searches of Scopus and Google Scholar, with priority given to studies published after 2017. The evidence is organised using a framework-based qualitative analysis across the three dimensions of violence, complemented by a descriptive word-frequency analysis to map thematic patterns in the reviewed literature. The findings indicate that existing research places disproportionate emphasis on displacement and the Bangladesh-centred humanitarian dimension, while the structural and cultural drivers of the conflict remain comparatively underexamined. The study further shows that the Myanmar government's resistance to reform and the strategic interests of regional powers—particularly China and, in some contexts, India—have constrained the effectiveness of United Nations initiatives and regional mechanisms such as ASEAN, limiting progress beyond addressing immediate humanitarian needs. The analysis recommends prioritising structural reforms, particularly the restoration of citizenship rights and improved access to basic services, alongside measures to counter hate speech and harmful online content and to promote interfaith dialogue and educational initiatives as part of an integrated approach to achieving durable peace.

Keywords: Rohingya conflict, ethnic cleansing, human rights violations, conflict triangle model, international intervention.

INTRODUCTION

The Rohingya conflict in Myanmar's Rakhine State is widely regarded as one of the country's most significant humanitarian disasters. For decades, the Rohingya Muslim community, a stateless Muslim minority in Myanmar, has faced systematic discrimination and ethnic cleansing. The wave of violence that erupted in 2017 brought the crisis to global attention and increased scholarly interest. By denying the Rohingya citizenship, the Myanmar government has further exacerbated the situation. The rise of Buddhist nationalism and Islamophobia has intensified the conflict, resulting in loss of life and large-scale displacement.

This study analyses the conflict in Rakhine State using Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle model. According to Galtung, conflicts stem from three interlinked forms of violence: direct, structural, and cultural. Direct violence includes physical attacks and killings. Structural violence arises from systemic inequalities and exclusion embedded in institutions. Cultural violence legitimises hatred and discrimination by rooting them in religious, ethnic, or ideological beliefs. Within this framework, the study examines how these three types of violence manifest in the Rohingya conflict and assesses how proposed solutions align with Galtung's peacebuilding approach.

While the reviewed sources largely focus on displacement and humanitarian relief, they pay comparatively less attention to the structural and cultural drivers of violence. This study addresses this gap by applying Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle.

The study also evaluates national and international efforts to resolve the Rohingya conflict and assesses their effectiveness. Reports and research indicate that the Myanmar government's efforts to end the oppression and violence against the Rohingya have been inadequate (UN Human Rights Council, 2018; Creutz, 2020; Ullah, 2016). Likewise, international initiatives, including those of the United Nations (UN), have achieved only limited progress. Regional actors—particularly China and, in some contexts, India—have also constrained peacebuilding efforts because of their strategic interests. China's economic projects and India's security concerns have reduced the effectiveness of international conflict-resolution measures.

Overall, the Rohingya conflict in Myanmar is both a humanitarian disaster and a source of regional stability and security challenges. Ending the violence and achieving lasting peace requires addressing direct, structural, and cultural violence collectively through Galtung's peacebuilding framework. By analysing these forms of violence and the roles of national and international actors, this study proposes comprehensive solutions to support a more sustainable peace process. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to: (i) apply Galtung's Conflict Triangle to categorize the direct, structural, and cultural forms of violence shaping the Rohingya crisis; (ii) evaluate national and international efforts to resolve the Rohingya conflict and assess their effectiveness; and (iii) propose comprehensive solutions grounded in Galtung's framework.

This study addresses the following research questions: (1) How do direct, structural, and cultural violence manifest in the Rohingya conflict in Myanmar's Rakhine State? (2) Which structural and cultural mechanisms sustain and legitimise direct violence against the Rohingya? (3) How have domestic policies and international initiatives responded to each dimension of violence, and what gaps remain? (4) What integrated set of measures, consistent with Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle, can reduce direct violence while addressing its structural and cultural drivers?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive, document-based research design to examine the Rohingya conflict in Myanmar's Rakhine State through Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle framework. The study aims to analyse how direct, structural, and cultural violence intersect in the conflict and to assess national and international responses across these dimensions. No new primary data were collected; instead, the analysis relies exclusively on existing documented evidence to ensure transparency and verifiability.

Data Sources

The research draws on publicly available and verifiable materials. These include (i) peer-reviewed academic studies addressing the Rohingya conflict and related conflict dynamics, and (ii) institutional and policy documents produced by international organisations and human-rights bodies, particularly those documenting patterns of violence, displacement, and governance responses. Relevant materials were identified through searches of Scopus and Google Scholar using keywords such as "Rohingya conflict," "ethnic cleansing," "direct violence," "structural violence," and "cultural violence," together with terms related to Galtung's Conflict Triangle. Search results were screened at the title and abstract level and before being reviewed at the full-text level to retain sources directly relevant to the Rohingya conflict and the study's analytical framework. Open-access materials were prioritised, and studies published after 2017 onwards were given preference to ensure that the analysis reflects the most up-to-date research on the conflict.

Analytical Approach

The analysis followed a framework-based qualitative approach. First, the selected sources were reviewed to extract evidence relevant to the dynamics of the conflict and conflict-management responses. Second, the extracted evidence was organised and interpreted according to the three dimensions of Galtung's Conflict Triangle: direct violence (e.g., physical assaults, killings, and injuries), structural violence (e.g., systematic discrimination and restrictions on access to basic services), and cultural violence (e.g., religion-based hate speech, Buddhist militancy, Islamophobia). Third, national and international efforts were assessed in relation to each dimension of violence, and the applicability of Galtung's peacebuilding recommendations was examined within this analytical framework. In addition, a descriptive word-frequency analysis was conducted to map the prominence of key terms in the reviewed literature (Figure 1).

Scope

The scope of the study encompasses documented evidence on the Rohingya conflict, with particular emphasis on the post-2017 period because of the availability and concentration of research and reporting during and after the 2017 escalation. Given its document-based design, the study does not incorporate primary fieldwork, interviews, or direct observation, nor does it quantify social-media hate speech patterns beyond what is reported in the available literature and institutional documents. The analysis therefore remains interpretive rather than causal and aims to provide a structured understanding of the dimensions of violence and the gaps in existing responses as reflected in the evidence base.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Galtung's Conflict Triangle model is a comprehensive approach that argues that sustainable peace requires the elimination of not only war but also structural inequalities and cultural violence (Galtung, 1990; Galtung & Fischer, 2013). To clarify the scope of this framework for the present study, it is useful to note that the model has been discussed in the literature in relation to different conflict contexts, highlighting both its analytical scope and its limitations. The post-apartheid peace process in South Africa, the Ecuador-Peru border dispute, and the Sri Lankan civil war offer examples illustrating both the application of the model and the challenges encountered.

The post-apartheid peace process in South Africa is often discussed as an illustrative case of efforts to address the direct, structural, and cultural dimensions of conflict. Following the end of apartheid, direct violence declined rapidly after the 1994 elections, and politically motivated killings decreased significantly (Clark & Worger, 2011). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is frequently cited as part of the reconciliation process aimed at addressing the cultural dimensions of the conflict.

The Ecuador-Peru border dispute is another example of conflict resolution through addressing underlying issues by means of dialogue and negotiation. In the Ecuador-Peru case, the negotiated settlement and subsequent cooperation initiatives are discussed as mechanisms that supported longer-term stabilization (Mares, 2001).

The Sri Lankan civil war provides another example in which Galtung's model was only partially successful. The conflict is frequently discussed as a case in which the cessation of direct violence and post-war development efforts were accompanied by continuing reconciliation challenges. However, the failure to achieve reconciliation with the Tamil community and the persistence of ethnic tensions indicate that efforts to reduce cultural violence were insufficient (Goodhand, 2012).

While these examples illustrate the effectiveness of Galtung's Conflict Triangle model in conflict resolution, each conflict possesses its own structural, historical, and cultural dynamics. The cases of South Africa, Ecuador-Peru, and Sri Lanka demonstrate successes in reducing direct and structural violence, but challenges remain in reducing cultural violence and achieving sustainable peace. These cases suggest the model's broad applicability while also demonstrating that it may not achieve the same level of success in every context and must therefore be adapted to local conditions.

Overall, these illustrative cases suggest that the Conflict Triangle can support a multi-dimensional understanding of conflict dynamics while also indicating that outcomes may differ across contexts depending on historical, structural, and cultural conditions (Galtung, 1990; Galtung & Fischer, 2013). This supports the rationale for applying the model to the Rohingya conflict, where the interaction between direct, structural, and cultural violence is central to understanding both the persistence of the conflict and the constraints faced by conflict-management and peacebuilding efforts.

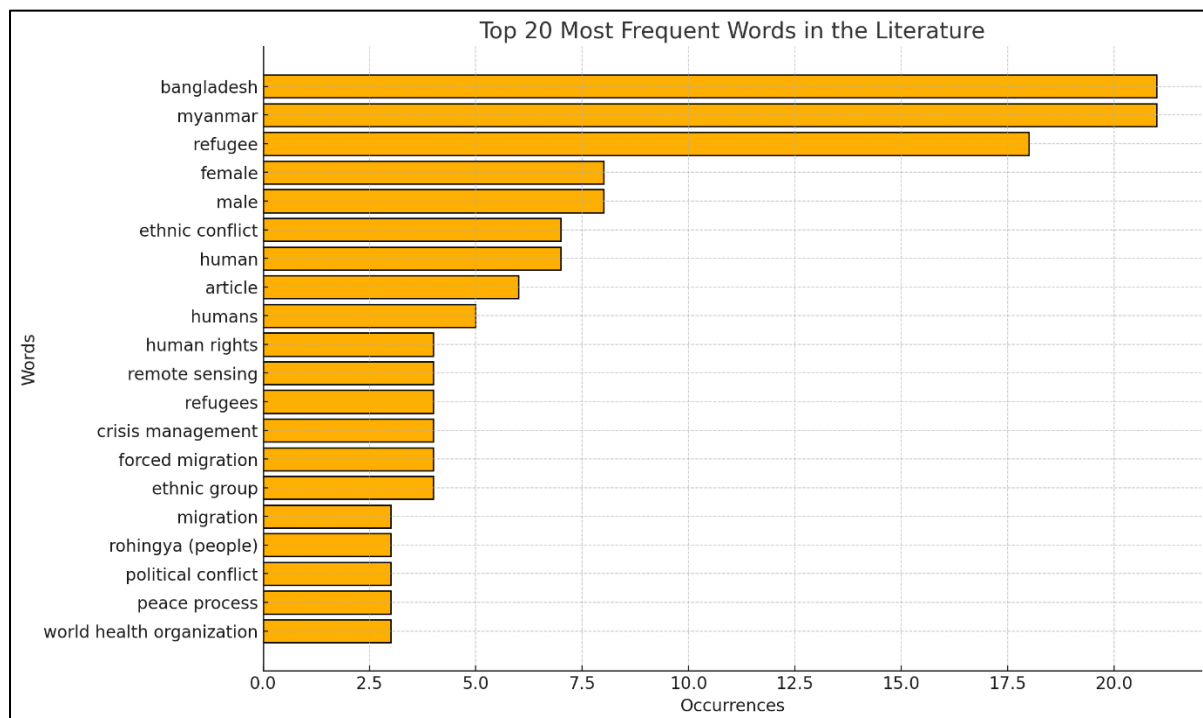
LITERATURE REVIEW

The study began with a detailed literature review to establish a strong theoretical foundation and provide new insights into the Rohingya crisis. It builds on previous research by examining a wide range of sources. These included local and international academic studies, reports from the United Nations and human rights organizations, and analyses by independent research groups. The review also focused on

studies related to Galtung's Conflict Triangle model (Galtung, 1996; Galtung, 2015). To understand the application of Galtung's Conflict Triangle, studies on direct, structural, and cultural violence were analysed. Conflict resolution processes in countries such as South Africa, Ecuador-Peru, and Sri Lanka were also examined to assess how the model has been applied in practice (Clark & Worger, 2011; Mares, 2001; Goodhand, 2012). As an additional descriptive step, a word-frequency analysis was conducted to identify the prominence of key terms in the reviewed literature and provide a broad snapshot of dominant emphasis (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Frequency Analysis of Key Terms Related to the Rohingya Crisis



Notes. This figure illustrates the frequency of specific keywords identified in the analysed literature on the Rohingya crisis. Created by the author.

According to the word-frequency analysis, the term “Bangladesh” (21 occurrences) appears most frequently, indicating that the existing literature on the Rohingya crisis largely emphasizes refugee displacement and migration to Bangladesh, thereby reflecting a strong focus direct violence. However, from the perspective of Galtung's Conflict Triangle, other dimensions, particularly structural and cultural violence, remain comparatively understudied, especially in relation to ethnic cleansing. This suggests that issues such as systematic inequalities in Myanmar, hate speech fuelled by Buddhist nationalism, and the role of regional cooperation mechanisms, such as ASEAN, have not been examined in sufficient depth. Consequently, the strong emphasis in the existing literature on humanitarian assistance and legal accountability has resulted in comparatively less attention being given to the structural reforms and cultural transformation needed for long-term peacebuilding. In addressing this gap, the present study seeks to provide policy recommendations for structural reform and the transformation of cultural violence, offering a multilayered perspective on the Rohingya crisis and contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the existing literature.

Additionally, open-access materials were prioritized, and a wide range of publicly available sources was included. To incorporate the most up-to-date research on the Rohingya conflict, studies published after 2017 onwards were given priority. Accordingly, academic articles, reports, and book chapters were reviewed and analysed.

In this study, the literature review was designed to identify gaps in the existing research and address these shortcomings. In particular, it seeks to offer a distinctive analytical framework by focusing on issues such as the inadequacy of international interventions, structural reform, and the reduction of hate speech. Although some studies (e.g., Blasi, 2019; Jones, 2017; Lynn, 2020; Kuin, 2018) discuss the political and legal dimensions of the Rohingya conflict, they provide limited practical recommendations for achieving sustainable peace and supporting effective implementation. Consequently, this comprehensive review re-evaluates both Galtung's Conflict Triangle model and the institutional, international, and cultural dynamics of the conflict, thereby highlighting the study's original contribution.

Various academic studies on the Rohingya conflict examine different dimensions of the conflict; however, they often provide limited policy recommendations regarding international interventions, structural reforms, the restoration of citizenship rights, and the reduction of hate speech. This study seeks to address these gaps.

In the context of the conflict in Myanmar, many researchers have highlighted the cyclical effects of structural and cultural violence, as conceptualized in Galtung's theory, on citizenship rights (Jones, 2017; Kham, 2021). At the same time, the Rohingya conflict represents a multidimensional case that can be effectively analysed through Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle (Zahed, 2021; Savu & Timofte, 2019; Taufiq, 2021). The interconnected dimensions of structural, cultural, and direct violence provide a valuable theoretical framework for understanding the discrimination experienced by the Rohingya community.

While Blasi (2019) and Jones (2017) examine the effects of discriminatory laws and institutions on the conflict, they do not offer a concrete framework for international interventions. Given the historical background of the Rohingya and the strategic importance of Rakhine State (Ramakrishna, 2020; Timofte, 2018), discriminatory measures such as the 1982 Citizenship Law deepen the roots of structural violence, while the ideological influence of Buddhist nationalism contributes to the instrumentalisation of cultural violence (The-Thitsar, 2022; Vernon, 2021; Ali & Binyameen, 2023). Similarly, Jones (2017), Kham (2021), and Khan (2024) emphasize that restoring citizenship rights is crucial to this transformation, but that both international and local dimensions must be integrated.

Khan (2024) adopts a "triple nexus" approach to evaluate the Rohingya conflict in the context of humanitarian assistance, development, and peace, drawing attention to the limited integration of peacebuilding elements in interventions in Cox's Bazar. However, Kuin (2018) argues that although peacebuilding efforts are frequently highlighted, insufficient attention has been paid to the direct, structural, and cultural dimensions of violence identified by Galtung. With the dimension of direct violence, the actions of the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw), including mass killings and forced displacement, are particularly prominent. Combined with the inadequate intervention strategies of the international community, these factors further intensify the effects of structural violence (Afriantari & Budiana, 2020; Taufiq, 2021; Shani & Saeed, 2016).

At this juncture, Jitpiomsri et al. (2021) criticize the notion of authoritarian peace, arguing that empowering local actors is essential for sustainable peace. Indeed, when local participation is insufficient, international interventions may prove ineffective or even exacerbate the conflict. Lynn (2020) further demonstrates the interconnectedness of direct, structural, and cultural violence within Galtung's model, arguing that the lack of structural reforms poses significant obstacles to conflict resolution. To address these gaps, various scholars have proposed measures to secure citizenship rights, reduce structural violence, and strengthen international legal mechanisms. Roy et al. (2021) advocate long-term policies to protect citizenship rights, while Kuin (2018) emphasizes a shift from humanitarian assistance towards structural reforms. Zahed (2021) and Hintjens et al. (2023) call for comprehensive strategies to address systemic inequalities, whereas Savu and Timofte (2019) emphasize the value of Galtung's model as a framework for a more holistic resolution.

Kingston (2015), within the framework of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle, demonstrates how structural violence can trigger direct violence, emphasizing the importance of preventive measures and long-term strategies rather than military intervention. While Caballero-Anthony and Emmers (2022) indirectly discuss ASEAN's comprehensive security concept in the context of the Rohingya conflict, they offer limited concrete proposals for transforming structural violence. In contrast, Wilson (2022) and Norman and Mikhael (2023) argue that strengthening regional cooperation mechanisms, regulating social media, and implementing educational reforms are critical policy measures for transforming cultural violence. In this regard, Heggelund (2017) also advocates applying a framework centred on Galtung's model, noting that the careful management of democratic and human rights reforms is essential.

International efforts have generally focused on humanitarian assistance; however, they have lacked long-term strategies to support structural transformation (Kuin, 2018). Jerryson (2018) notes that cultural violence is reproduced through social media and educational systems, while policies aimed at reducing hate speech remain insufficient. Hintjens et al. (2023) emphasize the humanitarian dimensions of the conflict but argue that international policies designed to eliminate structural violence have not been sufficiently developed. Similarly, Wilson (2022) and Norman and Mikhael (2023) propose that strengthening regional cooperation mechanisms, regulating social media, and implementing educational reforms could play a crucial role in transforming cultural violence.

In this context, Mushtaq et al. (2019) discuss the importance of policies that enhance conflict sensitivity in addressing structural violence and link these measures to broader international reforms. Oo et al. (2023) elaborate on how local capacity-building is crucial to peace processes, whereas Boateng (2020) examines the role of structural reforms in reducing direct violence. Lual Diing (2023) draw attention to the local-level impacts of intercommunal conflicts, highlighting how these dynamics shape the effectiveness of reform efforts. Similarly, Kuin (2018) emphasizes the importance of addressing the systemic effects of structural violence on local communities, reinforcing the need to evaluate the broader implications of reforms. Zahed (2021) highlights the potential of international interventions to counter cultural violence, particularly through initiatives aimed at reducing hate speech. Meanwhile, Hintjens et al. (2023) point out that sustainable peace requires not only international efforts but also well-defined, actionable plans to implement structural reforms. Collectively, these perspectives underscore the importance of aligning local and international efforts to achieve meaningful and sustainable progress.

This gap underscores the value of Galtung's Conflict Triangle model. As Kingston (2015) notes, structural inequalities often lead to direct violence. Integrating local perspectives into broader

international frameworks, as advocated by Taufiq (2021) and Rahman (2023), can help address these challenges. At the same time, cultural violence—fuelled by Buddhist nationalism—continues to spread through digital platforms (The-Thisar, 2022; Jerryson, 2018), while long-standing debates over the Rohingya's historical identity and citizenship rights remain unresolved (Ramakrishna, 2020; Timofte, 2018).

Galtung's model offers a comprehensive framework for addressing these challenges. Long-term measures, including educational reforms, stronger regulations to curb hate speech on social media, and robust international legal frameworks, are essential. Strengthening local leadership, galvanizing global political will, and implementing mechanisms to monitor and regulate digital platforms can also play a key role (Roy et al., 2021; Zahed, 2021; Savu & Timofte, 2019). By addressing direct, structural, and cultural violence in an integrated manner, meaningful progress can be made towards lasting peace in Myanmar and the resolution of the Rohingya conflict.

This literature reviews not only presents Galtung's model as a theoretical framework but also demonstrates how cultural and structural violence obstruct the achievement of lasting peace in the Rohingya conflict in Myanmar. While many existing studies focus on humanitarian assistance or manifestations of direct violence, this review also examines structural reforms, regional cooperation mechanisms, and the long-term policies required to transform cultural violence. Furthermore, by analysing how the strategic interests of regional actors constrain peace efforts, the study provides a more comprehensive perspective, thereby reinforcing its original contribution. In this respect, the literature review identifies gaps at both the theoretical and practical levels and highlights the need to address direct, structural, and cultural violence in an integrated manner.

FINDINGS: CAUSES OF THE ROHINGYA CONFLICT IN MYANMAR AND ITS ESCALATION TO ETHNIC CLEANSING

Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Myanmar: Historical Process and Systematic Discrimination

This section outlines the historical trajectory of ethnic and religious conflict in Myanmar and explains how state policies and the rise of Buddhist nationalism institutionalised systematic discrimination against the Rohingya. Beginning with the Panglong Agreement of 1947 and the Constitution adopted in the same year, citizenship was defined largely through blood ties. This Constitution officially recognized religious diversity by acknowledging Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Animism. However, the limited implementation of both the Constitution and the Panglong Agreement failed to protect the rights of ethnic minorities in Burma and fuelled demands for greater autonomy, thereby laying the groundwork for prolonged internal conflicts (Walton, 2008; Kipgen, 2011). The rise of Buddhist nationalism and efforts to transform Burma into a mono-religious state further undermined the preservation of religious and ethnic diversity (Za Mang, 2017).

The official recognition of Buddhism as the state religion in 1961, followed by the military coup led by the Tatmadaw in 1962 and the subsequent period of authoritarian military rule, contributed to an institutional environment in which Rohingya Muslims faced systematic discrimination. (Islam Khan, 2019; Ateş, 2017). According to Jacques P. Leider, the plight of the Rohingya gained international attention during the communal violence of 2012, which reinforced their identity as victims (Leider, 2018). During this period, the military regime further restricted the rights of ethnic and religious minorities while strengthening Buddhist nationalism (Crouch, 2020).

Between 2012 and 2013, human rights violations against Rohingya Muslims by Myanmar security forces intensified. Villages and places of worship were destroyed, thousands of people were killed, and incidents of forced displacement and mass arrests were widely reported (Human Rights Watch, 2013). The violence reached its peak in 2017, forcing more than half a million Rohingya to flee their homes. The Myanmar government further exacerbated the violence through the destruction of Rohingya villages (Anwary, 2022). According to Human Rights Watch, the Myanmar military committed widespread sexual violence, including rape, against Rohingya women during the 2017 operations, contributing to their displacement and creating barriers to safe return (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

Despite some national peace efforts, the military coup of 1 February 2021 brought these initiatives to a halt and further worsened the situation (Gorlick, 2023). According to Lindsay Maizland, Myanmar has suffered for decades under repressive military rule, poverty, and ethnic conflict. Although hopes for democratic reform increased after 2011, the military retained significant political power and carried out ethnic cleansing campaign against the Rohingya (Maizland, 2022).

At the root of the violence against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar are rising Islamophobia and Buddhist nationalism. Buddhist nationalism has portrayed the country's ethnic and religious diversity as a threat and targeted groups such as the Rohingya (Bilay, 2022). Furthermore, regional powers such as China and India became involved in the conflict to protect their strategic interests in Myanmar. China, through its substantial investments, has influenced Myanmar's economic and political landscape (Taufiq, 2019). India, concerned with border security and access to energy resources, has cooperated with Myanmar's military regime (Wagner & Stanzel, 2020).

Overall, the long-standing rule of the military junta and the constitutional design of a "disciplined multi-party democratic system"—which preserved the military's dominant political role—contributed to the entrenchment of institutional constraints that later fuelled discrimination and conflict dynamics (Islam Khan, 2019).

Ethnic and Religious Discrimination: Promotion of Violence

This section explains how ethnic and religious discrimination in Myanmar became institutionalised through identity-based nationalism, citizenship policies, and state-tolerated hate mobilisation, thereby promoting and sustaining violence against the Rohingya.

Myanmar is a multi-ethnic country comprising approximately 135 ethnic groups. However, the military junta adopted a nationalist ideology centred on Burman ethnicity and Buddhism. Accordingly, the military-led government promoted the use of a single Burmese language, religion, and culture by implementing policies to advance this vision (Zahed, 2021). The junta also promoted the light-skinned Tibeto-Burman race in an attempt to unite the country's diverse ethnic groups. As a result, the dark-skinned, predominantly Muslim Rohingya came to be portrayed as a threat to national purity (Ibrahim, 2016).

The Myanmar government sought to legitimize its forced migration policies by refusing to recognize the Rohingya as an indigenous people and instead labelling them as Bengali foreigners. Historically, this policy can be traced to the 1964 National Security Law, which banned Rohingya organizations. From 1966 through the 1980s, the Rohingya were denied citizenship rights, and thousands were forcibly displaced. During this period, more than 270,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh (Anwary, 2018, p. 92). Although the revised 1982 Citizenship Law appeared to offer hope for the Rohingya, its implementation

remained ineffective because of the restrictive conditions imposed. The law divided citizenship into three categories: full citizenship, associate citizenship, and naturalized citizenship. To obtain citizenship, the Rohingya were required to prove residence in Myanmar before 1948 and demonstrate fluency in one of the country's official languages (Amayreh, 2022, p. 143; Lowenstein, 2015, p. 7). However, many faced difficulties in providing the required documentation because the Burmese government had confiscated their identity cards in 1962 and never returned them (Parnini, 2013, p. 285).

As a result of these laws, the Rohingya community was deprived of citizenship rights and denied basic fundamental rights such as voting, education, and access to healthcare (Amayreh, 2022). At the same time, many Rohingya were forcibly evicted from their property and subjected to other unlawful practices. In the 2014 census, the Myanmar government used the term "Bengali" instead of "Rohingya," thereby rejecting their recognition as an indigenous ethnic group (Anwary, 2022, p. 403). The Rohingya were even labelled as uninvited guests from Bangladesh, signalling the continuation of discriminatory policies (Zin, 2015).

In addition to ethnic discrimination, religion has played a significant role in deepening the conflict in Myanmar. According to official data from 2014, 87.9% of Myanmar's population is Buddhist, 6.2% Christian, and 4.3% Muslim (Department of Population, 2014). Buddhist nationalism has become a key factor fuelling both ethnic and religious discrimination in the country. In this context, sections of the Buddhist majority have exhibited prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes towards minority religions, particularly Muslims. The rise of Islamophobia in Asia following the 11 September attacks provided justification for radical Buddhist movements in Myanmar to legitimize hate speech against Muslims (Yusuf, 2018).

These religious and ethnic discriminatory policies were further institutionalized through government legislation. For example, in 1989, the government changed the name of Arakan State to Rakhine State, reinforcing the region's Buddhist identity (Yusuf, 2018, pp. 521-522). These policies sought to assimilate non-Buddhist ethnic groups, particularly the Rohingya, into the Bamar way of life, illustrating how religion became a tool for reinforcing ethnic discrimination.

During this period, anti-Muslim violence became increasingly systematic. Some Buddhist groups resisted the liberalization movements that began in 2011, leading to a new period of religious conflict in the country. Buddhist nationalist groups such as the 969 movement and Ma-Ba-Tha emerged during this time. Under pressure from these groups, the military regime failed to curb their activities and, according to some accounts, actively encouraged them. These groups actively also made extensive use of social media to spread hate speech against the Rohingya (Zin, 2015, p. 382; Yusuf, 2018, p. 522; Bilay, 2022).

With the support of these radical groups and the military regime, ethnic and religious discrimination in Myanmar, particularly against Rohingya, became increasingly systematic and entrenched. The denial of citizenship rights formed the foundation for ethnic persecution, while Buddhist nationalism reinforced the government's portrayal of the Rohingya as a persistent threat. These policies contributed to mass migration and forced displacement, with human rights violations extending beyond Myanmar and contributing to a broader regional refugee crisis.

Overall, these institutionalised forms of ethnic and religious exclusion help explain how discrimination culminated in forced displacement, providing a transition to the next section which examines the resulting patterns of mass migration.

Mass Migration

This section examines how institutionalised exclusion and military violence led to the mass displacement of the Rohingya, generating humanitarian, security, and regional stability challenges for host countries.

The policies implemented by the Myanmar government towards the Rohingya reached the level of ethnic cleansing with the enactment of the 1982 Citizenship Law, which effectively deprived the Rohingya of their citizenship rights. As a result, many lost their land, were denied fundamental human rights, and faced systematic oppression. The military operations launched by the Myanmar army forces in 2017 resulted in the forced displacement of a large proportion of the Rohingya population. Widespread human rights violations—including the burning of homes and villages, extrajudicial killings, torture, and systematic sexual violence—forced approximately 700,000 Rohingya to seek refuge in neighbouring countries, particularly Bangladesh (Beyrer & Kamarulzaman, 2017; Fahim, 2022).

United Nations human rights officials described these events as “a textbook example of ethnic cleansing”, noting that more than 200 villages were burned and destroyed. Following the outbreak of violence on 25 August 2017, large-scale human rights abuses accompanied the mass displacement of Rohingya to Bangladesh (Islam et al., 2018). In host areas such as Cox’s Bazar, overcrowded camp conditions and shortages of basic necessities have been widely reported (Islam et al., 2018; Shukri, 2021). Refugees have also been described as lacking legal identity and state protection while facing socio-economic insecurity and deprivation of basic needs (Ali et al., 2020; Islam Khan, 2019; Shukri, 2021). The 2017 violence forced the Rohingya to flee Myanmar for neighbouring countries, including Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia, India, and Indonesia. These large-scale movements created humanitarian, security, social, and economic pressures—particularly in Bangladesh—while posing broader challenges to regional stability (Jayawardhana & Rofii, 2024; Albab, 2022).

Myanmar’s systematic human rights abuses against the Rohingya have created both domestic and international challenges. In host countries, refugees often lack legal status and access to basic rights, exacerbating human rights concerns and contributing to social tensions (Sidhu & Parnini, 2011; MacLean, 2024). These challenges have also intensified security concerns and placed additional strain on host countries.

The ethnic cleansing in Myanmar has forced large numbers of Rohingya to flee, resulting in severe human rights violations and growing security concerns. The mass displacement to Bangladesh has placed considerable pressure on host communities and heightened risks to regional stability (Iqbal, 2017; Winckle, 2018).

This conflict has also attracted the attention of regional powers such as China and India. Both countries have been strongly influenced by concerns over border security and their strategic and economic interests in Myanmar. However, the continued movement of refugees has made it increasingly difficult for these countries to define their roles in responding to the Rakhine conflict. As a result, efforts to achieve a peaceful resolution have become more complex. The prioritization of strategic and economic interests by regional powers has further constrained efforts to resolve the crisis.

Overall, the findings in this section map the Rohingya conflict onto the three interlinked dimensions of Johan Galtung’s Conflict Triangle (Galtung, 1990; Galtung & Fischer, 2013). Direct violence is

illustrated by recurrent military operations and communal attacks, including the destruction of villages, extrajudicial killings, and systematic sexual violence, culminating in the large-scale displacement observed in 2017. Structural violence is reflected in institutionalised exclusion through citizenship and identity regimes—most notably the restrictive implementation of the 1982 Citizenship Law—along with the denial of fundamental rights and access to services such as legal status, voting, education, and healthcare. Cultural violence is reinforced through the legitimisation of exclusion and hostility by Buddhist nationalism and Islamophobia, supported by identity-based narratives that portray the Rohingya as “foreigners” and by state-tolerated hate mobilisation, including the spread of hate speech through organised nationalist movements and social media. Taken together, these findings demonstrate how cultural narratives and structural arrangements have contributed to the persistence of direct violence and mass displacement.

DISCUSSION: CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THE ROHINGYA CONFLICT IN MYANMAR

Direct Violence against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and National-International Efforts to Resolve the Conflict

This section analyses the escalation of direct violence against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar—particularly since 2017—and evaluates why national and international conflict-management efforts have produced limited outcomes. In that year, global attention focused on the direct violence against the Rohingya when the Myanmar army (Tatmadaw) launched major operations against the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). These operations involved serious human rights violations, including the burning of villages, mass killings, sexual violence, torture, and forced displacement. Bangladesh currently hosts nearly one million Rohingya refugees (Ahmed et al., 2021; Hossain et al., 2021; Mallick, 2020; Safaraz, 2021; UNHRC, 2024). Senior United Nations human-rights officials described these actions as “a textbook example of ethnic cleansing” (Ibrahim & Akahsah, 2020; Missbach & Stange, 2021). The Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar further concluded that the Myanmar military’s actions amounted to genocide (Safaraz, 2021).

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres characterized the situation as “the world’s fastest developing refugee emergency” and “a humanitarian and human rights nightmare,” prompting stronger international attention and responses (Ibrahim & Akahsah, 2020; Missbach & Stange, 2021). The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) issued statements and considered stronger measures to halt the violence in Myanmar, but veto politics and the use or threat of vetoes by China and Russia constrained more robust action and enforcement (Mallick, 2020; Sidhu & Parnini, 2011; Nartey, 2022). Seeking to safeguard its strategic and economic interests in Myanmar, China pushed to soften key language in UNSC resolutions and weakened calls for international investigations and monitoring, thereby limiting external scrutiny of the situation (Mallick, 2020). Russia similarly supported the Myanmar government, making it more difficult to prosecute accountability for crimes allegedly committed by the Myanmar military and obstructing international legal processes (Nartey, 2022; Yuwastina, 2020).

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) appointed an Independent International Fact-Finding Mission to investigate the events in Myanmar, and the report published in 2018 concluded that Myanmar’s security forces had committed acts amounting to genocide against the Rohingya (Morada, 2020). However, the UN’s efforts to intervene were constrained by the vetoes of China and Russia in

the Security Council, preventing stronger collective action, including proposals to deploy peacekeeping forces to Myanmar (Safaraz, 2021; Zahed, 2021; St-Denis, 2019; UN Human Rights Council, 2018).

The International Criminal Court (ICC) held that it has jurisdiction over the alleged crime of deportation (and the related crime of persecution) of the Rohingya into Bangladesh, a State Party to the Rome Statute, even though Myanmar is not a party to the Statute. However, the Court's jurisdiction remains limited, as it could not authorize an investigation into all crimes allegedly committed in Myanmar. Furthermore, Myanmar rejected the ICC's calls for cooperation with its investigation, which hindered progress in the judicial process (Mallick, 2020; Safaraz, 2021).

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has made significant efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. However, while these relief activities have addressed the refugees' immediate humanitarian needs, they have not been effective in preventing or ending the violence in Myanmar (Sullivan, 2022; Ma'arif & Maksum, 2022). Living conditions in refugee camps in Bangladesh remain extremely challenging, and refugees continue to face significant barriers accessing healthcare and education (Hossain, 2021). Although the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union imposed targeted sanctions and other restrictive measures, existing research suggests that these actions have done little to address the underlying drivers of the conflict and have had limited success in reducing forced displacement (Lee, 2021).

ASEAN has taken few significant steps to address the conflict in Myanmar, largely because its principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states limits its ability to intervene effectively (Yuwastina, 2020; Haryono et al., 2024). As founding members of ASEAN, Malaysia and Indonesia have pursued a policy of constructive engagement and have called for stronger collective action within the organization (Shukri, 2021). Indonesia's approach has been characterised by constructive and quiet (soft) diplomacy rather than overt condemnation, exemplified by the launch of the Indonesia–Myanmar Interfaith Dialogue (IMID) in May 2017 (Komarudin & Ayuningtyas, 2024). Nevertheless, these initiatives, together with ASEAN's broader response, have not exerted sufficient pressure on the Myanmar government.

The Myanmar government has denied allegations of human rights violations made by the United Nations and other international organizations, attributing the violence to armed groups such as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). Reports have also indicated that the Myanmar military received financial support from local and foreign companies, which helped sustain its operations (Mallick, 2020; Human Rights Council, 2019). This financial backing enabled the military to continue its campaign of violence.

Investigations initiated by the ICC remain ongoing. However, the judicial process has progressed slowly because of the Myanmar military and government's refusal to cooperate with the international community (Mallick, 2020). Although the UN continues its efforts to promote a peaceful resolution, the Myanmar government has imposed severe restrictions on humanitarian assistance and access for international observers, thereby obstructing the safe, voluntary, and dignified return of refugees (UN Human Rights Council, 2018).

Direct violence against the Rohingya has persisted despite national and international efforts to resolve the conflict. Interventions by the UN, ASEAN, and other international organizations have had limited effectiveness because of vetoes by China and Russia, as well as Myanmar's refusal to cooperate. International efforts have largely been confined to humanitarian assistance and diplomatic initiatives,

with few concrete measures taken to halt the violence (Sidhu & Parnini, 2011; Ma'arif & Maksun, 2022; Mallick, 2020; UN Human Rights Council, 2018). Overall, the limited effectiveness of these responses suggests that addressing direct violence alone is insufficient, leading into the next section's analysis of the structural conditions that sustain the conflict.

National and International Efforts to Address Structural Violence

This section analyses the structural violence experienced by the Rohingya—centred on statelessness and the denial of basic rights and services—and evaluates why national and international efforts to promote structural reform in Myanmar have remained limited. This structural violence stems primarily from the 1982 Citizenship Law, which rendered the Rohingya stateless (Shukri, 2021; Komarudin & Ayuningtyas, 2024). This legal exclusion has entrenched long-term discrimination and restricted access to fundamental rights and essential services, including education (Shukri, 2021). As a result, generations of Rohingya have remained marginalized and vulnerable within a persistent cycle of structural violence (Ahmed et al., 2021; Mallick, 2020).

The structural violence experienced by the Rohingya has been further exacerbated by forced labour, the destruction of homes, and severe restrictions on freedom of movement (Jayawardhana & Rofii, 2024; Ibrahim & Akahsah, 2020). Access to education is extremely limited, with Rohingya children generally permitted to attend only primary school and denied opportunities for higher education (Mohammad, 2017). Access to healthcare and essential medical supplies has also been severely restricted, with reports documenting the withholding of medicine and other basic necessities (Sesariato, 2021). The denial of education and healthcare, compounded by severe constraints on livelihoods and limited access to services under conditions of displacement, has kept the Rohingya trapped in a persistent cycle of structural violence (Sidhu & Parnini, 2011; Mallick, 2020).

The Myanmar government has resisted calls for reform from the international community and has avoided implementing the changes needed to mitigate structural violence (Shukri, 2021; UN Human Rights Council, 2018). International actors, including ASEAN and the UN have sought to exert diplomatic pressure and impose economic sanctions on the Myanmar government (Missbach & Stange, 2021; Mutaqin, 2018). However, ASEAN has largely treated the issue as a migration crisis, and constrained by its principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states, has achieved only limited success in advocating for structural reforms (Mutaqin, 2018; Shukri, 2021).

ASEAN's humanitarian efforts, particularly those channelled through the AHA Center in 2017, were insufficient to promote long-term structural reforms because of the Myanmar government's resistance (Shukri, 2021). Myanmar has been able to resist implementing essential reforms, in part because of support from influential partners such as China and India. At the same time, organizations such as ASEAN and the UN have continued to apply diplomatic pressure and sanctions, but Myanmar has refused to implement the reforms sought by the international community (Ma'arif & Maksun, 2022; UNHCR, 2023).

Indonesia pursued a constructive, quiet (soft) diplomacy approach, and complemented by humanitarian initiatives, including cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and authorising UNHCR to oversee refugee protection matters in Indonesia. (Komarudin & Ayuningtyas, 2024). Nevertheless, Myanmar's reluctance to implement reforms has undermined these efforts. Despite targeted sanctions and sustained diplomatic pressure, meaningful structural change has remained elusive (Mallick, 2020; Nartey, 2022).

The UN and other international actors have developed plans to support the safe and voluntary return of Rohingya refugees, but Myanmar has refused to amend its Citizenship Law (Mallick, 2020; UN Human Rights Council, 2018). At the time, the United Nations Security Council has been unable to take stronger action because of vetoes by China and Russia (Nartey, 2022).

Efforts to facilitate the return of Rohingya refugees have achieved limited success because Myanmar has neither guaranteed their citizenship rights nor ensured their safety. Initiatives by the UN and the Bangladeshi government have made only limited progress. Meanwhile living conditions in refugee camps in Bangladesh remain inadequate, with refugees continuing to face restricted access to healthcare and education (Mallick, 2020; Sullivan, 2022; Hossain et al., 2021).

International sanctions and diplomatic efforts have done little to change Myanmar's policies. In 2019, the UN appealed for US\$921 million to support Rohingya refugees but received only US\$650 million, indicating that available financial assistance fell short of humanitarian needs (Mallick, 2020). International engagement has combined humanitarian relief with diplomatic initiatives, but Myanmar has continued to resist substantive reform. UNHCR's role has centred on protection and humanitarian assistance, while UN human-rights mechanisms have recommended stronger measures, including targeted sanctions and an arms embargo. However, these recommendations have not been fully implemented because of political constraints within the Security Council (UNHCR, 2023; UN Human Rights Council, 2018; Mallick, 2020).

In short, addressing the structural violence experienced by the Rohingya requires restoring their citizenship rights and ensuring access to fundamental services. However, Myanmar continues to resist international calls for reform, and global efforts have produced only limited results (Maziyyah et al., 2023a; Albab, 2022). Attempts to facilitate the return of Rohingya refugees have also been unsuccessful, while international assistance has not significantly reduced the impact of the violence (Ahluwalia & Toby, 2018). Overall, the persistence of statelessness and the limited leverage of external pressure suggest that durable progress requires addressing not only legal and institutional barriers but also the cultural dynamics that legitimise exclusion—an issue examined in the next section.

National and International Efforts to Address Cultural Violence

This section examines how cultural violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar—driven by hate speech, Islamophobia, and Buddhist nationalist mobilisation—has been addressed through both national and international initiatives, and why these efforts have remained limited. In Myanmar, cultural violence has been reinforced by religious hate speech and Islamophobia propagated by Buddhist nationalist groups, which portray the Rohingya as 'foreigners' and a 'threat.' Social media has further intensified this problem, with the Myanmar military and nationalist groups using online platforms to disseminate anti-Rohingya messages (Lee, 2021). In 2012, following the rape and murder of a Buddhist woman, widespread attacks against the Muslim community erupted, fuelled by the rapid spread of hate speech (Mohammad, 2017). These events contributed to the systematic marginalization and targeting of the Rohingya. Organizations such as the 969 Movement and MaBaTha further amplified this hate speech, turning Islamophobia into a national issue (Islam Khan, 2019; Lee, 2021; Ahmed et al., 2021). As a result, societal tensions escalated, and the spread of hate speech transformed localized conflicts into a broader crisis (Ahmed et al., 2021).

Rather than curbing the activities of Buddhist nationalist groups, the Myanmar government indirectly supported them by tolerating anti-Rohingya rhetoric. Nationalists used derogatory language to

dehumanize the Rohingya, while Buddhist militants attacked places of worship (Ahluwalia & Toby, 2018). This hate speech and violence were further reinforced by Buddhist ultranationalism and the role of extremist monks in fuelling anti-Muslim sentiment, deepening societal divisions (Mallick, 2020; Ibrahim & Akahsah, 2020).

Although solidarity initiatives and public appeals—often framed in religious terms—were voiced, these efforts remained largely symbolic and domestically oriented and therefore did not translate into effective protection for the Rohingya (Missbach & Stange, 2021). The communal violence in Sittwe in 2001 resulted in attacks on Rohingya villages, with the state’s inflammatory policies contributing to the spread of the conflict (Sidhu & Parnini, 2011). The international community also made various efforts to reduce hate speech; however, the Myanmar government’s failure to take sufficient action limited the effectiveness of these initiatives (UN Human Rights Council, 2018; Amnesty International, 2022).

In 2017, Indonesia initiated the Indonesia–Myanmar Interfaith Dialogue (IMID), bringing together representatives from diverse religious backgrounds to promote dialogue and de-escalation. (Komarudin & Ayuningtyas, 2024). However, these initiatives proved ineffective in the face of Myanmar’s nationalist policies. Similarly, Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia criticized Myanmar’s actions, but these responses remained largely symbolic (Missbach & Stange, 2021).

The role of social media in spreading hate speech drew strong reactions from the international community, leading to calls for stricter regulation of social media platforms. However, these initiatives were insufficient to curb the spread of online hate speech and efforts to reduce its influence remained largely ineffective (Lee, 2021; Amnesty International, 2022).

The UN Human Rights Council has undertaken efforts to address hate speech and encourage intercommunity and interreligious dialogue as part of durable solutions to the Rohingya crisis. However, the influence of militant Buddhist groups, together with the Myanmar government’s failure to take effective deterrent measures, has allowed cultural violence to persist. The Human Rights Council’s Independent International Fact-Finding Mission concluded that the government’s response to hate speech was “inadequate” and that hate narratives were spearheaded by extremist Buddhist groups such as MaBaTha, while state authorities fostered a climate in which hate speech and incitement to discrimination and violence could thrive. (UN Human Rights Council, 2018; Ibrahim & Akahsah, 2020; Ma’arif & Maksum, 2022). In 2022, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution emphasizing the need for dialogue among religious and ethnic communities; however, little concrete progress has since been achieved (UN Security Council, 2022).

National and international efforts to address cultural violence in Myanmar have remained limited because of the influence of nationalist policies and Buddhist nationalist groups. International initiatives to counter hate speech have achieved only limited success, and it is evident that Buddhist nationalism and religious hatred continue to impede sustainable solutions. The roots of cultural violence run deep, and this continues to pose a threat to international peace and security (Hossain et al., 2021; Sidhu & Parnini, 2011). Overall, the persistence of hate-based mobilisation suggests that sustainable conflict management requires integrating cultural interventions with structural and legal reforms, an issue considered in the next section.

Assessing National and International Efforts to Resolve the Conflict

This section evaluates national and international efforts to resolve the Rohingya conflict in Myanmar by synthesising the findings on direct, structural, and cultural violence through Galtung's Conflict Triangle framework (Galtung, 1990; Galtung & Fischer, 2013). Overall, efforts to address these three dimensions have largely been insufficient. Efforts to stop direct violence have been undermined by the Myanmar military's continued operations and the limited willingness of national and international actors to restrain or hold the Tatmadaw accountable. The 'ASEAN Way' diplomatic approach—characterized by non-interference, dialogue, and consensus—has not provided an effective means of ending the violence. In addition, ASEAN's internal divisions have further constrained regional cooperation (Mallick, 2020; Missbach & Stange, 2021; Roy et al., 2025). The UN and some international actors, including individual states and regional blocs, have sought to increase pressure on Myanmar through diplomatic engagement and targeted economic sanctions. However, ASEAN's response has remained constrained by its principle of non-interference. These initiatives have also faced major obstacles because of Myanmar's resistance and the geopolitical interests of major powers. At the UN Security Council level, the positions of China and Russia—supported by their veto power—have constrained stronger collective action, while Myanmar's restrictions on international access have limited the presence of observers and the verification of conditions on the ground (Mallick, 2020; Lee, 2021; Sesarianto, 2021). The strategic interests of China and Russia have also impeded the adoption of stronger sanctions against Myanmar, thereby limiting the UN's ability to pursue a more effective response (Nartey, 2022; Morada, 2020).

ASEAN has sought to contribute primarily through humanitarian assistance and support for conditions that would enable the safe and voluntary return of refugees. However, these efforts have been insufficient because of the Myanmar government's resistance to reform. Efforts to encourage the Myanmar government to address structural violence, particularly through reforms to the Citizenship Law, have been undermined by support from strategic partners such as China and India (Ma'arif & Maksum, 2022; Morada, 2020; Mallick, 2020).

In the context of cultural violence, the influence of Buddhist nationalism and Islamophobia has intensified hate speech against the Rohingya. While the international community has made efforts to combat the spread of hate speech on social media, the Myanmar government's failure to take effective measures to deter these narratives has allowed cultural violence to persist (UN Human Rights Council, 2018; Nartey, 2022; Sidhu & Parnini, 2011; Sullivan, 2022). Although the UN Security Council adopted a resolution in 2022 calling for dialogue among religious and ethnic communities, little progress has been achieved (Al-Nashif, 2023).

The UN and other international actors have provided humanitarian assistance to Rohingya refugees, but these efforts have had limited success in halting direct violence, advancing structural reforms, or mitigating cultural violence. At the UN Security Council, the vetoes of China and Russia have prevented the adoption of stronger sanctions against Myanmar, thereby weakening international efforts to promote peace (Ma'arif & Maksum, 2022; Hossain et al., 2021).

Some progress has been made in improving security in refugee camps and enhancing access to education services. However, overall efforts to resolve the conflict have remained incomplete. The autonomy of the Tatmadaw (Myanmar army) and its avoidance of accountability have weakened international pressures, while the failure to develop effective policies to address Buddhist nationalism and hate speech has allowed cultural violence to persist (Morada, 2020; Sullivan, 2022).

In conclusion, national and international efforts to address direct, structural, and cultural violence in Myanmar have achieved only limited success, and reform processes have been obstructed. Peace initiatives and structural reform efforts have stalled because of Myanmar's resistance and the geopolitical interests of major powers. In particular, China's veto has constrained decisive action by the UN Security Council. The persistence of Buddhist ultranationalism and anti-Muslim sentiment has further impeded progress towards a lasting solution (Iqbal, 2017; Mutaqin, 2018; Mallick, 2020; Ibrahim & Akahsah, 2020). Overall, this synthesis demonstrates why effective conflict management cannot be sustained through isolated measures, and provides the analytical foundation for the integrated set of measures advanced in the Conclusion to address direct violence alongside its structural and cultural drivers.

CONCLUSION

The Rohingya conflict stands as one of Myanmar's gravest humanitarian catastrophes, exemplifying the interconnected effects of direct, structural, and cultural violence. Direct violence includes physical attacks, forced displacements, and mass killings carried out by Myanmar's military, resulting in widespread loss of life and the displacement of hundreds and thousands of people. Structural violence, manifested through the denial of citizenship and entrenched socio-economic inequalities, has led to profound social and economic marginalization. Meanwhile, cultural violence—fuelled by Buddhist nationalism and Islamophobia—continues to sustain this cycle through pervasive hate speech.

This study examined sustainable peace initiatives for the Rohingya conflict using Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle model. The findings indicate that achieving lasting peace requires addressing all three forms of violence simultaneously. Structural reforms should restore citizenship rights, reduce socio-economic inequalities, and promote interfaith dialogue and reconciliation. In addition, comprehensive educational programmes and public awareness initiatives are essential to counter hate speech and foster a more inclusive society.

The Rohingya conflict has been widely recognized under international law as involving ethnic cleansing and genocide. However, efforts by the UN and the ICC to hold Myanmar accountable have been hindered by Myanmar's refusal to cooperate and by the vetoes by China and Russia in the UN Security Council. Initiatives aimed at protecting refugee rights, facilitating safe and voluntary return of refugees, and providing humanitarian assistance have largely focused on meeting immediate needs without delivering sustainable long-term solutions.

This conflict poses serious threats to regional security and stability. Poor living conditions in refugee camps across Bangladesh, Malaysia, and India have further exacerbated the humanitarian situation and increased security risks for the region. ASEAN's response through regional cooperation has so far proven insufficient. Without timely and coordinated intervention, continued instability may create conditions that extremist groups could exploit. To mitigate these risks, ASEAN should adopt a more proactive approach to security and humanitarian issues while strengthening regional cooperation to address the root causes of the conflict and promote long-term regional stability.

This study highlights Galtung's Conflict Triangle as a broadly applicable framework for peacebuilding across diverse conflict settings. Illustrative cases such as post-apartheid South Africa, the Ecuador-Peru border dispute, and the Sri Lankan civil war demonstrate the model's value in guiding structural reforms

and supporting societal transformation. Likewise, the Rohingya conflict can benefit from the model's emphasis on addressing not only direct violence but also its structural and cultural causes.

Resolving the Rohingya conflict requires sustained international and regional cooperation. The UN and ICC should continue efforts to hold Myanmar's military accountable for violations of international law. Although the strategic interests of China and India complicate these efforts, stronger international policies and closer regional coordination remain essential. ASEAN also has an important role to play in promoting regional security, facilitating humanitarian assistance, and supporting conditions conducive to sustainable peace.

This study proposes several recommendations. To end direct violence, Myanmar's military operations must cease, and international observers should be granted access. The UN should adopt stronger resolutions, and the ICC should continue to strengthen accountability efforts related to alleged genocide and ethnic cleansing within the limits of its jurisdiction. Protecting the rights of Rohingya refugees is also essential, requiring sustained humanitarian assistance to support their safe, voluntary, and dignified return and reintegration.

To address structural violence, the Rohingya should regain their citizenship rights and have equitable access to education and healthcare. International pressure should encourage legal, institutional and economic reforms that promote equal rights and opportunities. Cultural violence can be addressed by countering hate speech, promoting interfaith dialogue, and strengthening efforts to regulate harmful content on social media. Sustained international cooperation and continued pressure on Myanmar remain essential to achieve lasting peace and fostering harmony among religious and ethnic communities.

In conclusion, resolving the Rohingya conflict requires stronger and more comprehensive international engagement. The United Nations, ASEAN, and other international organizations should complement humanitarian assistance with sustained diplomatic pressure and other appropriate measures to encourage meaningful reform in Myanmar. Lasting peace depends not only on ending direct violence but also on addressing the structural and cultural violence that sustain it. These conclusions should be interpreted in light of several limitations.

This study has several limitations. Because the study did not employ primary data collection, field observations and interviews could not be conducted, limiting deeper insight into local perspectives. The document-based research design also constrained access to up-to-date evidence on certain regional strategic dynamics, particularly those involving China and India. Limited access to social media data restricted a more comprehensive assessment of online hate speech and its broader impacts. In addition, evidence regarding the effectiveness of some international interventions remains uneven, including the implications of United Nations Security Council veto dynamics for the implementation of sanctions. Finally, the analysis focuses primarily on the post-2017 period and does not examine in depth the longer historical roots of discrimination and violence, including the implementation of the 1982 Citizenship Law and the role of earlier military regimes. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating primary data where feasible, expanding the analysis of social-media hate speech, and adopting a broader historical perspective.

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