

A boy sits in a rusted chair on the border of Myanmar with a screwdriver and toothbrush in hand. He fixes phones for Rohingya crossing the border to reach Bangladesh. He only asks in return for what they can afford to give. The Rohingya smuggle their phones past guards to prove what they have seen. The phones he holds in his hand contain all the evidence people need to know that the Rohingya are being hunted and killed.¹ The boy has heard the phrase “us and them” all his life.

Genocides start with the phrase “us and them”.² While the phrase may seem harmless, it is the start of deadly persecutions. The phrase “us and them” makes people only look at how different a group of people is to themselves, whether they are looking at the person’s skin color, religion, or sexuality. Thoughts and ideas of “them” are slowly integrated to create hate and fear. For instance, over the course of a decade, the Nazis passed bans, boycotts, and laws slowly creating a divide between the Jewish and Non-Jewish population.³ Another example, during the Rwandan Genocide, ever since King Kigeri Rwabugiri brought together the Tutsi and Hutus groups in the 1800s, tensions have slowly piled up.⁴ The Rohingya Genocide is no different. From the time of Myanmar’s (formerly Burma) independence, the country’s leaders have not recognized the Rohingya as a group of people. Slowly, Myanmar’s leaders integrated racially

¹ New York Times “Inside the Rohingya Crisis: Capturing Their Genocide on Cellphones” *YouTube* uploaded by New York Times` 27 August 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqNqICFcmto>

² “10 Stages of Genocide.” *Genocide Watch*, 2014, genocidewatch.net/genocide-2/8-stages-of-genocide/.

³ “Timeline of the Holocaust.” *Echoes and Reflections*, timelineoftheholocaust.org. Accessed 25 Apr. 2021.

⁴ BBC News. “Rwanda Profile - Timeline.” *BBC News*, 17 Sept. 2018, www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14093322

based laws to segregate the Rohingya from the rest of the nation.⁵

Another similarity when studying genocides is dehumanization. Dehumanization is dismissal of one's humanity. One way of accomplishing this is calling a group animalistic names to make them feel less human. Many of these names include rats, cockroaches, or even "subhuman." In a podcast by NPR, David Livingstone Smith expresses, "that it's very difficult, psychologically, to kill another human being up close and in cold blood, or to inflict atrocities on them."⁶ It is difficult for a human being to kill another human when thinking of them as the same species. However, if they think of this person as an animal or monster, it is much easier psychologically to kill. This mental state is passed on from generation to generation to create hate and fear and is observed in many genocides.

In conclusion, the Rohingya deserve a chance to thrive. But the phrase "us and them" and dehumanization stop them from doing just that.

⁵ Albert, Eleanor, and Lindsay Maizland. "What Forces Are Fueling Myanmar's Rohingya Crisis?" *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, 2020, www.cfr.org/background/rohingya-crisis.

⁶ "Less Than Human!: The Psychology Of Cruelty." Narrated by David Livingstone Smith. NPR, 29 Mar. 2011.

<https://www.npr.org/2011/03/29/134956180/criminals-see-their-victims-as-less-than-human>

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