



Department of Political Science  
Master's Degree in International Relations

Course of Diplomacy & Negotiation

# Diplomacy and Religion in contemporary International Politics: the case of Myanmar

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Academic Year 2020/2021

# Table of Contents

## *Introduction*

### **PART ONE**

#### **Chapter One**

##### **Freedom of religion and belief (FORBs) in international law .....5**

Introduction

International treaties and other legal instruments

The role of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief

#### **Chapter Two**

##### **Religion in post-conflict reconciliation.....33**

Introduction

Religion and Politics

The role of religion in political Reconciliation

Conclusion

#### **Chapter Three**

##### **Diploreligio: the role of religion in contemporary diplomacy.....59**

Introduction

Analytical Approach

The religious engagement of Diplomats

Diploreligio

Conclusion

### **PART TWO**

#### **Chapter Four**

##### **Myanmar: historical and sociological context.....73**

Introduction

Historical Background

Ethnic and religious divisions

Religious Armed Conflicts in Myanmar

## **Chapter Five**

### **The role of international community in the Rohingya conflict.....86**

Introduction

Historical roots of the conflict and current evolution

The role of Myanmar in Rohingyas' persecution

The role of United Nations in Myanmar

Conclusion

## **Chapter Six**

### **Diplomacy in Myanmar.....95**

The moral path of Myanmar politics

The international implications

### **Conclusion.....101**

### **Summary.....118**

*List of Abbreviations*

*Table of Treaties, Declarations and other International Instruments*

*List of Figures and Tables*

*Bibliography*

## Introduction

This thesis is focused on the relationship between religion and diplomacy in the Myanmar context, to understand how and in what percentage the religion has an active role in the struggle of ethnic conflicts and how the diplomatic scenario has reacted to the past conflicts and to the most recent ones.

In order to have a comprehensive standpoint the thesis will be divided in two parts, the first part is introductory to the second, focused on the Myanmar case study. In the first three chapters the role of religion is examined in several ways and from several perspectives. It is, indeed, underlined the role of the international human right law in guarantee the right to freedom of religion. Only with a deep knowledge of the international human right law regarding the freedom of religion it is possible to be conscious of the achievements and the challenges of the contemporary diplomacy.

Another aspect to consider for the research plan is the political reconciliation and the role of religion in the scenario of political injustices. Differences between religious approach to reconciliation are underlined with the aim of understanding the religious and ethnic divisions in the second part of the dissertation. These two first chapters will lead to the last point of the first part where the core of the thesis will be tackled. Indeed, the third chapter is entirely dedicated to the *diploreligio*, to its tools and its pivotal role in the contemporary diplomacy.

The second part of the dissertation is composed by three chapters that will follow a critical approach to the past and contemporary events occurred in Myanmar and the role of the international arena to these events. Their attempts and their modalities used to deal with the several crises in the State above-mentioned, will be analysed with a particular attention to religion and its use in the relations between countries. Consequently, the Rohingya crisis will be covered using the lens of *diploreligio*, whose pillars were previously clarified. A final part will be, thus, dedicated to final remarks regarding the path followed by the international community to solve disputes in Myanmar and the crucial role that religion has both in the inherent causes of these crises and, externally, as a tool to solve the same crises.

As result, after having acquired all the instruments and the knowledge required, the future, the analysis, and the critics of the issue in the Myanmar State become more accessible and more predictable. There is, indeed, the need to track a path in order to



prevent the events like those occurred in the last February and the role of this thesis will be, thus, to demonstrate how religion could represent the cause and also the solution of several political events. The religion and consequently the religious leaders should increase their active role in the diplomatic process and should take advantage of the pillars of faith at their disposal, which contains messages of peace, reconciliation, and cooperation. The same goals shared with the diplomacy.

## Part one

### Chapter one: Freedom of religion and belief (FORBs) in international law

#### Introduction

This chapter will be focused on the role of religion in the international human rights law. It is, thus, necessary to understand the role of freedom of religion in the international context to analyse how and in what percentage religion represents a crucial element in the international domain. Moreover, a focus on the path of recognition of freedom of religion is strongly required in order to have a deepened understanding of the achievements and the lacks in terms of equality and protection of freedom of religion.

According to Frances Raday three characteristics are inherent the human rights system and guarantee the “[...]secularity of the human right regime; the universality of human right and the principle of non-distinction[...]”<sup>1</sup>

Following an international human rights law perspective, the right to freedom of religion is based on the Declaration of Human Right and the Vienna Declaration and program of action of 1993 (Brett G. Scharffs, 2018)<sup>2</sup>, moreover it is necessary to take into account other international conventions:

- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR);
- the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)
- the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC);
- the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW);
- the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (known as UNCAT);

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<sup>1</sup> Brett G. Scharffs, A. M. (2018). *Religious Freedom and the Law Emerging Contexts for Freedom for and from Religion*. Milton Park: Taylor and Francis.

<sup>2</sup> Raday, F. (2008). Traditionalist religious and cultural challengers- international human rights responses. *Israel Law Review*, 596-634.

- the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICPRW);
- the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide;
- the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, it is worth mentioning the role of the Special Rapporteur on the freedom of religion or belief established by UN Commission on Human Rights with the resolution 1986/20<sup>4</sup> which is an independent authority appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council.<sup>5</sup> With resolution 6/37 the Special Rapporteur is mandated to pursue several goals listed in art. 18 of the abovementioned resolution which includes, above all, the invitation to implement the measures at all level in order to guarantee the promotion of the right to freedom of religion and belief, to detect obstacles and to present recommendations and proposal to overcome the obstacles identified and finally to check the accordance between the DEAFIDBRB and the measures and actions take in place by governments<sup>6</sup>.

An analysis of all the international instruments listed before will be provided in this chapter with the purpose of depicting the whole international instruments used to promote the respect of freedom to religion and belief and to define their characteristics, possible constraints inherent the system. Likewise, a part of the chapter will be dedicated to the role of the Special Rapporteur and the future of this role will be defined as well as the

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<sup>3</sup> OHCHR | International standards on freedom of religion or belief. (2019). Ohchr.org  
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/freedomreligion/pages/standards.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> <https://ijrcenter.org/un-special-procedures/special-rapporteur-on-freedom-of-religion-or-belief/>

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem

<sup>6</sup> Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, Nov. 25, 1981, GA resolution 36/55 art. 18 [hereinafter DEAFIDBRB]:

Decides therefore to extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief for a further period of three years and, in this context, invites the Special Rapporteur: (a) To promote the adoption of measures at the national, regional and international levels to ensure the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief; (b) To identify existing and emerging obstacles to the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief and present recommendations on ways and means to overcome such obstacles; (c) To continue her/his efforts to examine incidents and governmental actions that are incompatible with the provisions of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief and to recommend remedial measures as appropriate; (d) To continue to apply a gender perspective, inter alia, through the identification of gender-specific abuses, in the reporting process, including in information collection and in recommendations

changes occurred during the years. A critical approach will be used with the aim of promote a strengthening of the role of the Special rapporteur.

Hence, using the case study of Myanmar singled out as a focus in the second part of the dissertation, it is possible to identify crucial drawbacks that need to be solved to avoid violations of fundamental human rights such as the one examined in the thesis. Thus, from the general understanding we will proceed to the particular, using the Myanmar case as a *file rouge* for the purpose of the research.

Yet, it is useful to specify that the international instruments mentioned before represent the legal framework within which several States, including Myanmar, operate in a discontinuous manner. Indeed, a rapid glance to the State Parties to the above-mentioned Conventions and International Treaties demonstrates how in terms of right to freedom of religion need a concrete intervention by the international community with the aim to protect and improve the actions aimed to that goal.<sup>7</sup>

### **1.1 International Treaties and other legal instruments**

It is useful for our purposes to follow the division among the different freedom of religion made by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Hence, it can be identified five main categories in which we can find each corresponding typologies of rights:<sup>8</sup>

- The freedom of religion or belief;
- Discrimination;
- Vulnerable groups;
- Intersection of freedom of religion or belief with other human rights;
- Cross cutting issues

For the aim of the research not all the categories will be analysed in depth, consequently the scope of the research will be restricted to the evaluation of the main articles and International instruments which refer to freedom of religion, the

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<sup>7</sup> Myanmar is state party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/freedomreligion/pages/standards.aspx>

discrimination on the basis of religion and the intersection of these rights with other human rights, notably the provisions regarding the religious conflicts and extremism<sup>9</sup>. Using these international law instruments a comprehensive standpoint of the matter will be reached.

### Freedom of religion and belief

#### *a) The international Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*

Article 18 of the ICCPR establishes the right of freedom of thought conscience and religion. It is an extensive provision which include the right to *adopt a religion* and the right to *adopt a belief* it entails a large number of aspects of linked to that sphere, “[...]the expression of theistic, non-theistic or atheistic belief as well as the right to not profess any religion and belief[...]

” (Taylor, 2020)<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, the right to freedom of religion or belief it is distinguished by the right to freedom of expression contained in article 19 (2) demonstrating the importance to protect the freedom of expression and profession. The crucial role of rights contained in ICCPR is demonstrated by the Article 4 (2)<sup>11</sup> provisions which establish the prohibition of derogation for Article 18. Furthermore, art 18 (1) preserves the right to freedom in its two level, the internal and the external. The internal aspect concerns the right to choose or not to choose the religion or the belief to confess. It is related with the freedom to not be imposed to adopt a religion coercively, under the provisions of the 18 (2)<sup>12</sup>. The external aspect concerns the right to confess his religion or belief in public, to manifest with the limitations provided by 18 (3).<sup>13</sup> As stated in the General Comment by the Human Rights Committee the concept of worship in the Art. 18 (3) includes ceremonials acts as well as observances and customs, dietary regulations, wearing customs, specific rituals associated to a belief or religion and the use

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<sup>9</sup> Ibidem

<sup>10</sup> Taylor, P. (2020). *A commentary on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>11</sup> ICCPR Art 4(2). No derogation from articles 6, 7, 8 (paragraphs 1 and 2), 11, 15, 16 and 18 may be made under this provision.

<sup>12</sup> ICCPR Art 18 (2). No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.

<sup>13</sup> ICCPR Art 18(3) Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

of a particular language spoken by a group. Whereas the right to manifest religion in teaching encompasses the right to choose its own leaders and all those activities linked to the religion and belief spread.<sup>14</sup>

Art 18 imposes limitations in comma 3, stating that freedom to religion and belief should be limited only by law and should be “necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others”<sup>15</sup>. The Human Rights Committee specified that the restrictions must be “*strictly interpreted*”, thus all the restrictions not specifically mentioned in the Covenant will not be allowed and they will be interpreted as a violation of Art 18. As the *ratio* of those principles is inherent the social, philosophical tradition, restrictions on the freedom of religion and belief must be founded on principles rather than on customs. States Parties are responsible for the limitations, and they must communicate the entity of those restrictions and their consequently effects. Moreover, emphasis is put on the term “necessary” in 18 (3) to underline the force of this prevision and the will to define a scope to the right to freedom of religion belief and also the freedom of expression explained in the following article. The right to freedom of religion extends its scope to the teaching of religious belief and creed by parents to their children. Art 18 (4)<sup>16</sup> consequently, states that every person who is legally in charge of their children, has the right to educate them according to their own creed and religious traditions.

Despite the importance of these provisions contained in the ICCPR, the Convention has a limited efficacy due to the limit number of States that ratified it. The limited scope of International Conventions represents, thus, an important obstacle to challenge and arise questions about the role of the international law in the resolution of crucial matters like the one analysed in this dissertation. Consequently, there is the need to find and reach a balance between the respect of human rights and the autonomy and independence of a State. The controversies in these cases concern, thus, the interference of international actors in the regulation of domestic matters. Yet, this balance and, in general terms, an

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<sup>14</sup> UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), *CCPR General Comment No. 22: Article 18 (Freedom of Thought, Conscience or Religion)*, 30 July 1993, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/453883fb22.html> [accessed 12 June 2021]

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem

<sup>16</sup> ICCPR 18 (4) The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions

equilibration of international and domestic instruments must be arranged by both actors. Recent and continuous events, linked to the interconnection of religion with other several aspects, have demonstrated how religion could not be treated as an isolated sphere in the modern world. Moreover, it is fundamental to discern the aspect of personal and individual religious confession to the role of religion in the contemporary international politics. Therefore, since the spread and the creation of the most important religious strains, this distinction has been clearly identified, as wars, incursions demonstrated, and it becomes more steeped in the society with the global interconnection.

*b) The Declaration on the Elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on Religion or Belief*

When referring to the freedom of religion and belief a relevant position is covered by the 1981 General Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on Religion or Belief. This represents one of the most important instruments supplied by the international law addressed to the protection of freedom of religion.

The convention is the result of an acknowledgment of the need to protect the freedom of religion and expression in their several aspects. After the antisemitic atrocities committed in the half of the XX century, there was the fear to repeat the same mistakes as the ones during the Second World War. Additionally, with the Cold War there was the high risk to exacerbate the division and the contrasts among different ideologies as well as religions.

The result was a Declaration composed by a first preamble in which is underlined the role of the international actors to protect the international community by the violations of fundamental human rights in which the right of freedom of religion is included. Furthermore, the second part of the Declaration is composed by a total of eight articles. The importance of the Conventions resides in the “[...] *comprehensiveness of rights addressed and the degree to which a document is looked to by the international community to define the religious rights that should be respected [...]*” (Davis, 2002)<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Davis, D. (2002). The evolution of Religious freedom as a Universal Human Right: examining the role of the 1981 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. *Brigham Young University Law Review*, 217-236

The provisions concern the guarantee to the right of religion and thought, “[...] *the freedom either individually or in community with others and in public or private [...]*”<sup>18</sup>, the right to not be subject to discrimination at any level and by any actor or group<sup>19</sup>. The importance and the comprehensiveness above mentioned, is clearly expressed starting by the second comma of article 2 in which is specified and underlined the meaning of “*discrimination on religion and belief*”<sup>20</sup> leaving a limited margin of discretion on the content of the Declaration. Furthermore, in article 6 a list of the rights useful to reach the purpose of the Declaration is exposed. Those rights are linked to the several areas of the manifestation of the right to freedom and belief regarding, for instance, the right of assembly, the right to collect financial and material funds for the purpose of the group they belong to.

The manner in which the rights of freedom of religion and belief are produced consent to give substance to a right and consequently to its violation and discrimination that were conceived to be far from the reality and from other forms of intolerance. Yet, the violence based on the religious motivation are a reality and need to be protected by the international community. Otherwise, a crucial and pivotal aspect regarding the international law instruments entails the bindingness of these documents. It is, therefore, a legal limitation of the effective implementation, mainly in the context of violation of the provisions contained therein.

Thus, the DEAFIDBRB as others international legal documents is binding only on those States accepting the legal status, they are not self-executing.<sup>21</sup> It is, hence, addressed to that flaw in the international scenario the proposal raised by several scholars announcing the need to convert the Declaration into a Convention in order to guarantee a deepen protection of those rights above mentioned by using the binding feature of Convention. The continuous and perpetrated violations of fundamental human rights, linked to the right of religion and belief, has shown as there is a lack in the international

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<sup>18</sup> Declaration on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief art. 1 (1)

<sup>19</sup> DEAFIDBRB: art 2 (1) No one shall be subject to discrimination by any State, institution, group of persons, or person on the grounds of religion or other belief

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem

<sup>21</sup> Davis, D. (2002). The evolution of Religious freedom as a Universal Human Right: examining the role of the 1981 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. *Brigham Young University Law Review*, 217-236



instruments used to enforce the provisions entailed. The position of the Special Rapporteurs in 1986 and 1993 can be mentioned to confirm the so called “convention approach”<sup>22</sup>. The Portuguese and the Tunisian representatives<sup>23</sup>, furthermore, underlined the necessity to use a more effective document to give a concrete declination to the respect of this category of fundamental human rights.

Those suggestions were raised at the end of the XX century and after almost 25 years are still valid and have increased their power with the pass of the time and the interconnection of States, cultures, and religions. Violence and persecution connected to religious motivations continue to be a serious matter to be tackled by the international community and in this context the Declaration represents the pillar to define the scope of action of the international law. Yet, as underlined before, there are modifications to approve in order to challenge changes in the interconnecting modern world otherwise the contribution offered by the DEAFIDBRB define a specific path and “[represents] *an important milestone and tool in these efforts [...]*”<sup>24</sup> (Davis, 2002)

### Discrimination

#### *a) International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of racial Discrimination*

When referring to the pillars of the International Human Rights Law, the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of racial Discrimination must be mentioned. It was adopted on 21 December 1965 with a large consent by the Delegates of General Assembly. It is composed by a preamble in which are solemnly condemned all the forms of discrimination, notably those based on some theory of superiority of races and species based on the colour of the skin, cultural or religious motivations. There was, moreover, the need to create rapid process capable of stopping the atrocities linked to all the forms of violence and discrimination. There was the need to complete and integrate the framework of protection of human rights started by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, consequently, to improve the process of preservation by creating a more specific international law’s tool.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibidem

<sup>23</sup> This refers to Angelo d’Almeida Ribeiro, independent expert from March 1986 to 1993 and Abdelfattah Amor, independent expert from April 1993 to July 2004

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem

<sup>25</sup> Thornberry, P. (2016). *The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination: A Commentary*. OUP Oxford.

The Convention, signed by 182 States parties, is composed by 25 articles divided in three parts, thus the structure underlines the differences with other similar legal instruments aiming to the protection of fundamental human rights, notably, the 1981 Declaration. Hence, the Convention has a longer structure with more articles whose provisions directly emphasise the concrete response by the international community to the colonial empire's consequences which represent one of the worst manifestations of human potential. Consequently, the final aim is expressed clearly and in a more precise manner compared to the other Conventions or Declarations.<sup>26</sup>

Returning back to the classification detected at the beginning of this chapter<sup>27</sup>, the OHCHR mentions art. 5 of the ICERD<sup>28</sup> when dealing with the category of discrimination and the consequently description of its rights connected<sup>29</sup>. Therefore, art.5 represents the most intricate and complex article of the Convention which differentiates from the rest of the Convention itself. Hence, this article contains a list of all rights that must be protected in order to reach the goal defined in the preamble. The positive manner in which the article is exposed tries to list all the possible categories of human rights connected to the discrimination. The result is masterfully described by Patrick Thornberry who defines the provisions contained in this article as follow: *“The rights are described rather than defined, without the detailed apparatus of limitation or restriction clauses and specifications of permissible and impermissible derogations found in most other human rights instruments.”* (Thornberry, 2016)<sup>30</sup>

Specifically, the article mentions in the “other civil rights” category the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion<sup>31</sup>. In this article there is specified the distinction between religion and others civil rights, thus, representing an adjunct step for the autonomy of religion and simultaneously the protection of those cases of violation

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<sup>26</sup> Ibidem

<sup>27</sup> See pag. 5

<sup>28</sup> International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), Adopted and opened for signature and ratification by General Assembly resolution 2106 (XX) of 21 December 1965 and entered into force on 4 January 1969

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/freedomreligion/pages/standards.aspx>

<sup>30</sup> Thornberry, P. (2016). *The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination: A Commentary*. OUP Oxford. Pag.308

<sup>31</sup> ICERD art. 5 In compliance with the fundamental obligations laid down in article 2 of this Convention, States Parties undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law, notably in the enjoyment of the following rights: [...] (d) Other civil rights, in particular: [...] (vii) the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.

and discrimination based on faith. As for the 1981 Declaration there is a restrict mention to the protection of atheistic creed that, otherwise, retain an extensive part in ICCPR<sup>32</sup>. Yet it is an arduous objective to create an International instruments entailing all the several religions and those subtleties linked to them. Moreover, the concept of religion is interconnected, and inherent other aspect connected to the culture, the history of the States taken into account. Consequently, defining the right tool to pre-empt future violation and to, thus, protect a community, a group, or even an individual become an arduous challenge to be constantly reviewed and refined in accordance with the recent events and global dynamics.

These characteristics here described will be useful in the second part of this dissertation, dedicated to the Myanmar case. As occurred several times in the history, for instance the ethnic war in Ireland lasted from 1960-1998<sup>33</sup>, 2015 represents a tragic turning point for the history of Myanmar. Hence, the Buddhist-majority country has committed one of the most serious human rights violations in modern history against the Muslim Rohingya ethnic minority. As underlined in the commentary of ICERD by P. Thornberry <sup>34</sup>the line between the ethnic and religious autonomy is very blurred and, consequently, become challenging to identify the nature of the root of the violation and, subsequently, to identify the instrument with which to curb the matter. A further issue concerns, moreover, the manner in which religion, when identified to be the root of the violation or discrimination, is the real cause of the problem rather than an excuse to use religious and faith motivation to achieve purposes far removed from the grounds of creed.

Thus, this double objective is at the basis of this dissertation. On one side it is important to define the autonomy of religion as an independent category to be protected by the international human rights law, otherwise, far from a naïve approach, there is the need to define in what percentage religion is the real cause rather than a mere instrumentalization of this sphere.

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<sup>32</sup> See pag.5

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/event/The-Troubles-Northern-Ireland-history>

<sup>34</sup> Thornberry, P. (2016). *The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination: A Commentary*. OUP Oxford.

*b) Resolution 2005/40 on Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief*

To conclude the study about the international human right law instruments about the “Discrimination” category it is useful for our purpose to mention the Resolution 40 of 2005 on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief<sup>35</sup> adopted by the UN Commission of Human Rights.

The Commission underlines the importance of concrete interventions in the domestic legal system of the States parties to actuate provisions in compliance with the principles expressed in the International Covenant (ICCPR) in art.18 and in the other international human rights instruments used to define the importance of the protection of fundamental human rights, in this case the right to freedom of religion and belief. Considering the continuous and perpetrated violence and episodes of discrimination based on religious motivations, the Commission of Human Rights express the necessity to examine them carefully and addressed to the international community the invite to spread the importance of the “*[...]dialogue among civilizations in order to enhance mutual understanding and knowledge among different social groups, cultures and civilizations in various areas [...] in order to contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms*”<sup>36</sup>.

A particular attention is reserved on the role of States in implementing their legislative systems aiming to reach a complete and comprehensive legal framework. In paragraph 4, hence, the Commission: “*Urges States:*

*(a)To ensure that their constitutional and legislative systems provide adequate and effective guarantees of freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief to all without distinction, inter alia by the provision of effective remedies in cases where the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, the right to practise freely one’s religion, including the right to change one’s religion or belief, is violated [...]*”<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, a concrete action to relevant sphere of religion is entailed in the Resolution mentioned. Hence, the role of the Commission become more concrete and define what the vulnerabilities inherent the States are. The Resolution, thus, aim to:

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<sup>35</sup> Commission on Human Rights Resolution on Elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief, Resolution 2005/40 of 19 April 2005.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem

*“[...] (d) To ensure, in particular, the right of all persons to worship or assemble in connection with a religion or belief and to establish and maintain places for these purposes, as well as the right of all persons to write, issue and disseminate relevant publications in these areas, taking into account the limitations contained in article 29 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights”.* This statement has a crucial importance since the most immediate way to mitigate and discriminate a minority is obstacle the spread of their message and their request of attention to the international community and to the entire world. An example of this kind of limitation will be mentioned in the second part of this thesis referring to the Myanmar recent events occurred starting by February 2021. Otherwise, on the whole, it has become more frequent to exert this kind of violence and limitation by local Governments in order to fight one of the most formidable obstacles: the exercise of the right of speech against impending opposition. Moreover, with the implementation of new means of communication and technology, it has become easier to communicate with the rest of the world in real-time and, consequently, the number of episodes of violation to the right of freedom of thought and speech have acquired new features. This provision contained in the 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph, has thus a predictive nature to what the future of the new kind of rights will required more protection.

In the following paragraph, moreover, the focus of the Commission will be addressed to the need to spread and share common goals in the International community using, for instance the Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations to *“contribute to the elimination of intolerance and discrimination based on religion and belief [...]”*.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, an important point that need to be underlined is contained in the last part of paragraph 5 which condemn the instrumentalization of religion for different purposes from those expressed in the UN Charter.<sup>39</sup> As stated before, the Commission of Human Rights has underlined the independence of right of freedom of religion and belief from the other human rights and assumes a concrete role in guarantee the respect to the right of religion and pre-empt its misleading using.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibidem

<sup>39</sup> Commission on Human Rights Resolution on Elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief, Resolution 2005/40 of 19 April 2005. 5”(c)The use of religion or belief for ends inconsistent with the Charter of the United Nations and other relevant instruments of the United Nations”

What retained an important space in this Resolution is the constant mention to the role of education and culture in order to enhance the promotion of those values of respect and freedom contained in all the International law instruments. Hence, as John Witte wrote “[...]human rights norms need a human rights culture to be effective[...]” (Lerner, 2016)<sup>40</sup>. Thus, in paragraph 8 the Commission:

*“Urges States to step up their efforts to eliminate intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief, notably by: [...]*

*(b)*

*Promoting and encouraging, through education and other means, understanding, tolerance and respect in all matters relating to freedom of religion or belief;*

*(c)*

*Making all appropriate efforts to encourage those engaged in teaching to cultivate respect for all religions or beliefs, thereby promoting mutual understanding and tolerance”*

With these words there is expressed the aim to complete a concrete change in the protection of human right rather than using a superficial approach lead to actuate resolution after the manifestation of matter of general interests.

#### *Intersection of freedom of religion or belief with other human rights*

This last category will be dedicated to the intersection of freedom of religion or belief with other human rights. It is likewise entailed in the classification operates by the OHCHR and intersects a consistent number of human rights law instruments, including those already mentioned in the previous paragraphs. In this closing part become arduous to track a clear line between the legal tools, as they are interconnected and tackle matters which are strongly linked with each other. Thus, the analysis on those same provisions

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<sup>40</sup> Lerner, N. (2016). *Religion, Secular Beliefs and Human Rights. 25 years after 1981 Declaration*. Leida: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.

will be concisely mentioned in order to avoid a pleonastic approach that would result inefficient to the aim of the dissertation.

Hence, when referring to the right of freedom to religion and belief it is arduous to examine this right and its consequently violation, apart from other human rights for instance the discrimination based on religious motivation on women or the right to life and dignity violated by cultural cleansing, genocide, or further degrading acts.

Furthermore, the Resolution previously analysed <sup>41</sup> tackles several domains in which the intersection of the right to freedom of religion or belief is connected with the protection of other aspect of humanitarian law, for instance the protection to freedom of expression and speech related to extremism and religious conflict. The Commission of Human Rights, thus, stresses the importance to protect this fundamental human right, in particular stresses that certain religious beliefs should not be equated with terrorist movement or movements dangerous to public safety.<sup>42</sup> These phenomena, therefore, have always represented a limit to the free existence of certain religion or ethnic minorities connected to events of global reach. A proper example is undoubtedly the reaction after the 9/11 events which has led to perpetrated islamophobia manifestations<sup>43</sup>. A recent further case is the one linked to the arising hate addressed to the Asian minorities, wrongfully conceived as cause of the spread of COVID-19 pandemic.

#### *a) Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*

The mention of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment<sup>44</sup> is fundamental and preparatory for the second part

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<sup>41</sup> Commission on Human Rights Resolution on Elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief, Resolution 2005/40 of 19 April 2005.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem 11: The Commission on Human Rights, " Also emphasizes that equating any religion with terrorism should be avoided as this may have adverse consequences on the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief of all members of the religious communities concerned"

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26841&LangID=E>

<sup>44</sup> Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (hereinafter CAT), adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 39/46 of 10 December 1984 and entered into force on 26 June 1987. (Farzana, Pero, & Othman, 2020)

of the dissertation. Despite the CAT does not contain explicit provisions concerning the right to freedom of religion and belief, these abuses are frequently use as a tool for committing serious violations of this right in order to eliminate in an outrageous manner the differences at stake. This reality is dramatically confirmed by the persecutions against Rohingya minority in the Rakhine State.<sup>45</sup> They were, thus, coercively confined in detention camps and deprived their liberty and they fundamental rights<sup>46</sup>.

The CAT was adopted by the General Assembly in December 1984 in New York, it counts 181 States Parties and 83 signatories<sup>47</sup>. Since this adoption, the prohibition of torture can be entailed as part of the customary law as stated by the General comment of the Committee against torture<sup>48</sup>.

After the definition of torture, contained in the first Article, the further articles are addressed to the prohibition of all degrading acts. The strict prohibition has no limit or derogation as stated by art 2.2 nor any public authority's authorization who can avoid the application of the Convention<sup>49</sup>. Moreover, the prohibition entails not only the direct involvement by the States Parties in reaching the aim stated by the Convention, but equally it entails the prohibition to the States parties to “[...]expel, return (*"refouler"*) or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture”<sup>50</sup>. Thus, this Article creates and enforced responsibility for States Parties who should be aware of their domestic respect on this customary law and, therefore, should retain a proactive role and a constant monitoring of the consistency between human right principles and their actuation in the States Parties' legislation.

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<sup>45</sup> The author is aware that Myanmar in which Rakhine State is located, has not ratified the CAT, nevertheless the example is used to underline the urgency to implement the international humanitarian law system to avoid atrocities like those occurred in Myanmar.

<sup>46</sup> Farzana, K. F., Pero, S. M., & Othman, M. F. (2020). The Dream's Door: Educational Marginalization of Rohingya Children in Malaysia. *South Asian Journal of Business and Management Cases*, 9(2), 237-246.

<sup>47</sup> [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=IV-9&chapter=4&clang=\\_en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-9&chapter=4&clang=_en)

<sup>48</sup> UN Committee Against Torture, *CAT General Comment No. 2: Implementation of article 2 by States Parties*, 23 November 2007, CAT/C/GC/2/CRP.1/REV.4, available at: [https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cat/docs/CAT.C.GC.2.CRP.1.Rev.4\\_en.pdf](https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cat/docs/CAT.C.GC.2.CRP.1.Rev.4_en.pdf) [accessed 13 June 2021]

<sup>49</sup> Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment Art.2.2 *“No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture”*.

<sup>50</sup> Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment art.3.



Moreover, art 16 of this Convention stated that *“Each State Party shall undertake to prevent in any territory under its jurisdiction other acts of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment which do not amount to torture as defined in article I, when such acts are committed by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. In particular, the obligations contained in articles 10, 11, 12 and 13 shall apply with the substitution for references to torture of references to other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”*<sup>51</sup> with this provision the definition of torture is extended to all other inhuman acts that are not strictly contained in the definition of torture stated in art. 1. Furthermore, it is remarkable the extension of this obligation for the States parties in their territory and also in the territory of their jurisdiction. This provision, mentioned in art.2, is clarified in the General Commentary by UN Committee against torture<sup>52</sup> which introduce the criteria of factual or effective control to identify the State jurisdiction and specified that its interpretation about the definition of the scope of intervention by the Committee its extensive and includes *“[...]not only onboard a ship or aircraft registered by a State party, but also during military occupation or peacekeeping operations and in such places as embassies, military bases, detention facilities, or other areas over which a State exercises factual or effective control[...]*”<sup>53</sup>.

The importance of the elimination of all forms of discriminatory criteria, including religious belief, is emphasized in the General Commentary, in particular in the V part dedicated to the protection for individual and groups made vulnerable by discrimination<sup>54</sup>. The continuous and persistent violation and discrimination towards minorities has led the Commission to implement measures and recommendations to States Parties which *“[...] must ensure that, insofar as the obligations arising under the Convention are concerned, their laws are in practice applied to all persons, regardless of race, colour, ethnicity, age, religious belief or affiliation [...]*”<sup>55</sup>

The Commission’s approach, thus, has led the States Parties to adopt concrete measures to avoid further violations and discrimination episodes. Aiming to that goal, there are several recommendations in the General Commentary including the proper

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<sup>51</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>52</sup> UN Committee Against Torture, *CAT General Comment No. 2: Implementation of article 2 by States Parties*, 23 November 2007, CAT/C/GC/2/CRP.1/REV.4, available at: [https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cat/docs/CAT.C.GC.2.CRP.1.Rev.4\\_en.pdf](https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cat/docs/CAT.C.GC.2.CRP.1.Rev.4_en.pdf) [accessed 13 June 2021].

<sup>53</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>55</sup> Ibidem par.V.21.

methodology to use in order to identify the consistency between their domestic legal framework and provisions contained in CAT.

*b) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*

The intersection between the freedom of religion and other human rights entails, above all, the respect of the equality among gender and the respect of the women's rights. Those objectives, thus, are at the basis of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The link between the freedom of religion and the struggle against women discrimination is dramatically represented by the serious and persistent violation moved by religious practises in some realities where religion dominates the internal dynamics. Young women forced to marry older man or cases of female genital mutilation (FGM) especially in several African countries<sup>56</sup>. Consequently, one of the most crucial challenge the International Community has to struggle with is the elimination of perpetration inhuman treatment which erode the foundation of the International community itself.

The CEDAW was adopted by the General Assembly with resolution 34/180 of 18 December 1979 and entry into force on 3 September 1981 with 189 States Parties and 89 Signatories<sup>57</sup>. The importance of this international law instrument will not be sufficiently analysed in this dissertation and would lead away from the general theme of this dissertation. Notwithstanding, the common points between the freedom of religion and belief and the content of the CEDAW will be evaluated.

Thus, art 5.1 of CEDAW states: *"States Parties shall take all appropriate measures:*

*(a) To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women [...]"*<sup>58</sup>. With this article is underlined the absolute priority given to the implementation of equality among men and women in comparison

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<sup>56</sup> UNICEF states that in certain countries situated in the Horn of Africa the FGM cases reach 90% of female population

<sup>57</sup> [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=IV-8&chapter=4](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4).

<sup>58</sup> Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 34/180 of 18 December 1979 and entered into force on 3 September 1981.

to the cultural and religious traditions. This provision, in addition, where clarified by the Committee which was concerned by the continuous discriminatory events over women's rights and integrity and declared that "[...] *the principles of equality and non-discrimination and respect for women's dignity clearly prevail over claims about the values of religion, culture, or tradition and the wish of States parties to preserve these values*". (Freeman, Chinkin, & Rudolf, 2012)<sup>59</sup>. Yet, must be demonstrated that religious traditions are denying the respect of fundamental rights and entailed an exposure to violations and discrimination for women.

Furthermore, the Committee urges States to implement their action against women's discrimination and to increase relations among States Parties in order to reach a wider perspective of the matter.<sup>60</sup> As mentioned for the previous Resolution analysed, the approach used for the implementation and the extension of the respect for fundamental human rights, aims to a concrete manner to solve these loopholes.

To conclude, in this paragraph an analysis of the principal instruments provided by international law for the protection of freedom of religion and belief has been carried out. Starting from an initial classification made by the OHCHR, a selection and analysis aimed at the analysis of the following case study has been made. Moreover, through the description and commentary of the Conventions, resolutions and additional protocols, an attempt was made to maintain a logical thread to the research work which would tend towards an analytical description of the research question. Furthermore, the role of religion and freedom of belief were analysed, in this paragraph, from a legal point of view and an attempt was made to grasp all the facets and implications in the various domains. With the use of an objective position, the aspect of freedom of religion and belief has been depicted in both passive and active aspects. Hence, the several threats to the freedom of religion have been described, simultaneously with the role of religion as limitation and threat to the fully respect of other human rights.

What emerged from this analysis is the necessity to implement and revise the legal instruments used to handle the continuous violation of human rights in the world. Several strides forward have been made to achieve a more dignity world in contraposition to those

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<sup>59</sup> Freeman, M. A., Chinkin, C., & Rudolf, B. (2012). *The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women: A Commentary*. Oxford Public International Law.

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem.

tragedies which have led to the creation of the United Nations, otherwise the international community must be aware that discriminations, abuses and other atrocities are not entirely distant memories.

## **1.2 The role of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of religion and belief**

After having analysed the most relevant international law instrument aimed to the protection of freedom of religion and belief, the focus will be devoted to the analysis of the role of the Special Rapporteur, a controversial figure whose functions dominate the debates regarding the international law protections. Furthermore, inherent characteristics of the mandate will be depicted as well as drawbacks and implementation to be introduced in order to mitigate the breaches of international law regarding the violation to the freedom of worship and religion.

The examination on the Special Rapporteur's methodologies, outcomes, and failures during the several mandates will result useful for the further analysis conducted on the situation in Myanmar regarding the respect of those fundamental human rights. In this manner, a comprehensive perspective can be reached, and those legal tools can be applied to the case study selected, in order to define in a critical and analytical manner the tragedies occurred in this country.

The role of Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief has been introduced by resolution 186/20 with the nomination of "Special Rapporteur on religious intolerance" and afterwards changed with the current denomination.<sup>61</sup> This crucial figure for the guarantee to freedom of religion and belief in the international context, has experienced important changes on different stages. Hence, adjustments were approved concerning the structure of the mandate and also concerning the methodological approach adopted by Special Rapporteurs who have succeeded in this role. The former are linked to the changes in the title abovementioned and to the years of mandate modified with other supplementary three years; the latter are linked to the different methodology used in order to fulfil the duties entailed in their mandate that perhaps are influenced by the Rapporteur's professional background.

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<sup>61</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/freedomreligion/pages/freedomreligionindex.aspx>

Changes were made at the Institutional level, since in 2006 the Commission of Human Rights was replaced with resolution 60/251. The Human Rights Council thus was created and become subsidiary organ of the General Assembly<sup>62</sup>.

Since the first introduction of the figure in 1986, four Experts have succeeded:

- Portuguese expert Angelo d'Almeida Ribeiro from March 1986 to 1999;
- Tunisian expert Abdelfattah Amor from April 1993 until July 2004;
- Pakistani expert Asma Jahangir from August 2004 until July 2010;
- German expert Heiner Bielefeldt from August 2010 until November 2016;
- Maldivian expert Ahmed Shaheed from November 2016 and still in charge

The threats, means and types of challenges have changed during the years and consequently the approach by the independent experts, otherwise the number and the extent of the breaches of the right of freedom of religion has continued to jeopardize the principle of peace and stability underpinning the basis of international law context. The role of the Special Rapporteur, thus, concerns the prevention and the protection of this fundamental human right and this double objective is reached with a multiple balance of these two goals according to the personality in charge and by the threats ongoing.<sup>63</sup>

The mission accomplished by the Special Rapporteur becomes, thus fundamental for the purpose of this thesis in that constitutes the only official guarantee on the right of freedom of religion and worship by the international law and should be preserved and implement in the means and tools at their disposal. With reports, official visits and several other instruments, the Special Rapporteurs must identify possible threats and communicate with the State or States responsible for the non-compliance to the provisions contained in the DEAFIDBRB.<sup>64</sup> In this paragraph, moreover, the challenging aspect of the duties entailed in this role will be underlined and what will emerge will be useful to understand the complexity of a system in which multiple legal frameworks are interconnected and should integrate their domestic law, cultural aspects, and religious traditions with the international law system. The role of the independent expert, thus,

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<sup>62</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/AboutCouncil.aspx>

<sup>63</sup> Evans, C. (2006). Strengthening the Role of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. *Religion and Human Rights: An International Journal*, 1 (1) 75-96

<sup>64</sup> Ibidem.

consist in mediate, understand and simultaneously prevent the future and the current menaces linked to the religious and faith domain.

### One role, several perspectives

The complexity linked to the role of the Special Rapporteur is depicted in Carolyn Evans' article about the strengthening the Role of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief<sup>65</sup>. Moreover, the study conducted comparing the several approaches in history is useful for the aim of the dissertation and is crucial to determining the overall perspective.

Thus, the definition of the Special Rapporteur is arduous to schematize in a linear manner in that it entails several variables which has changed with the decades, otherwise attempts will be made in order to clarify this theme.

The first Rapporteur was initially convoked for one year mandate in order to check the violation of human rights based on the religious motivations and to make recommendations to the States in order to ascertain the degree of their duties in the international scenario<sup>66</sup>. This mandate was provisional at the beginning, and it had a broad mission accomplished with provisional means and with general aim, focused on the mission abovementioned<sup>67</sup>. Those features were, hence, highlighted by Mr. Ribeiro in his final report<sup>68</sup> in which he underlined the positive trends that this role could achieve during the years.

On the whole, it can be affirmed that this role has improve and deepen its scope and its range of action, moving from having more global and idealistic tasks to being more focused on concreteness and on the solution of matters. This characteristic can be found on the nature of the report presented which contained general recommendation at the beginning and later become more detailed and precise, underlining the need to concretely contribute to the proper functioning of the international system.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>66</sup> Wiener, M. (2007). The Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religious or Belief-Institutional, Procedural and Substantive Legal Issues . *Religion & Human Rights: An International Journal* , 3-18.

<sup>67</sup> Evans, C. (2006). Strengthening the Role of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. *Religion and Human Rights: An International Journal* , 1 (1) 75-96

<sup>68</sup> Ibidem

As previously underlined after the first mandate, there were modifications which includes, in 2000 the change of the title as we know today. This change was made by the Tunisian Rapporteur in order to promote a different perspective of his role, passing from “Rapporteur on Discrimination and Intolerance” to Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief and giving a more inclusive and optimistic manner to perceive this role.

The same independent expert introduced modifications in the manner in which the mandate should be fulfilled, giving more importance to the context and the environment in which religious traditions should be applied. He, moreover, has improved the dialogue among several traditions and religious culture believing that education and cultural promotion can be a perfect tool to eliminate all forms of discrimination. His approach of “culture of tolerance”<sup>69</sup> was explained since the first moment of his mandate, thus he distributed questionnaires to States in order to understand and ascertain the level of cultural education in the countries and make a recognition on the degree of respect toward the right to freedom of religion and belief.

Furthermore, the means and the strategies used by the Special Rapporteurs during the years has entailed the reports and surveys, as mentioned before, and *in situ* visits which represent the turning point for the effectiveness of the role of Special Rapporteur. With the use of *in situ* visits, implemented with Mr Ribeiro who increased the number of visits in the location selected, the role of the Special Rapporteur has become closer to the realities previously analysed only by reports. Thus, the nature of reports and claims to the States become different and more devoted on the real perspective shared by the population or individual affected.<sup>70</sup>

The following Rapporteur, developed this instrument believing that it could be a pillar for a new approach, establishing a direct contact and, consequently, a more specific communication.

A proper example was linked to the way in which Mr Amor, starting from 1994 tackled the situation connected to the respect of freedom of religion in China<sup>71</sup>. Hence, it could

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<sup>69</sup> Ibidem

<sup>70</sup> Ibidem

<sup>71</sup> Ibidem

be defined a division among the first report and the further ones, drafted after his *in situ* visits.<sup>72</sup>

Another important instrument is the Universal Periodical Review (UPR) an instrument approved in 2008 “*to strengthening national human rights protection systems and to reducing implementation gaps in terms of States’ compliance with international human rights norms and standards*” (Kothari, 2021)<sup>73</sup>. As underlined by Mr Heiner Bielefeldt those diplomatic instruments represent an effective innovation for the accomplishment of the role. Consequently, with a streamlining of bureaucracy process thanks to which a Rapporteur can directly communicate with Govern and start investigations without waiting the national remedies to be exhausted<sup>74</sup>, the efficiency of the interventions has achieved a fundamental step.

In recent years, from a general definition of Special Rapporteur function, the mandate has encountered a specific path, including a strict definition on the indicators of human rights useful to the positive approach.

In the report presented by Mr. Shaheed on 16 October 2020, is contained a list of specific indicators divided by goal to achieve which includes, above all, the aim to guarantee the right to change, adopt or retain a religion of one’s choice, the right to manifestation of Religion or Belief or to ensure non-discrimination.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Evans in her book explained how different were the Reports, firstly in the way they were structured with more details in the second ones.

<sup>73</sup> Kothari, M. (2021). *Study on emerging Good Practices from the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)*. [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/Emerging\\_UPR\\_GoodPractices.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/Emerging_UPR_GoodPractices.pdf)

<sup>74</sup> Bielefeldt, H. (2011). *Protecting and Implementing the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief*: Interview with Heiner Bielefeldt. (J. o. Practice, Interviewer)

<sup>75</sup> UN Human Rights Special Rapporteur of Freedom of Religion or Belief. *Report on safeguarding freedom of religion or belief for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* 16 October 2020 A/75/385. Illustrative FoRB indicators



**Table 1 Attribute/Target of the Right to FoRB**

**Attribute/Target of the Right to FoRB: Ensure against *non-coercion in the freedom to have, adopt, change or retain a religion or belief of one's choice***

**Sources:** ICCPR, Art. (s) 2.1, 17, 18.1, 18.2, 18.4; HRCtee GC 22; 1981 Declaration, Art. 1; GC18 / CEDAW GC31 on harmful practices

Structural Indicators	Process Indicators	Performance Indicators
1. Legal framework respects and protects the right of persons to have, adopt, change or retain a religion or belief of one's choice	1.1. Data on support for access to justice for individuals facing coercion in matters of religion or belief	<p>1.1.1. Reports of state practices that discriminate against persons deemed to be apostates by state and non-state actors (disaggregated by religion, belief, ethnicity, race, gender)</p> <p>1.1.2. Reports of use of threat of physical force or criminal sanctions to compel believers or non-believers to adhere to a specific religion or belief</p>
	1.2. Public reporting of data on the monitoring and processing of incidents of coercion involving religion or belief	1.2.1. Reports of mandatory disclosure of religious or belief identity for the purposes of engaging in public life, accessing benefits, services and opportunities available to the public
	1.3. Training for public officials on international standards on protection against coercion in the enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights	<p>1.3.1. Number of complaints that a person is unable to freely marry in accordance with their religion or belief</p> <p>1.3.2. Reports that the custody of children is determined on the basis of the religious or belief identity of parents</p> <p>1.3.3. Reports that state services are restricted on the basis of religion or belief</p>

	1.4. Data on dissemination of guidance to public bodies on ensuring that people are not compelled to wear symbols or religious dress, or forced to observe rites, rituals, or holidays of religions or beliefs with which they do not identify (e.g. the majority religion or belief of a State)	1.4.1. Reports of mandatory religious dress in schools or other public places
2. Legal guarantees of protection for the right to privacy and expression	2.1. Effective systems for data protection online and offline, including protection for individuals not to disclose their religion or belief 2.2. Provision of training and public awareness programmes on digital literacy	2.2.1. Reports of persons arrested, detained or charged with blasphemy, apostasy or using materials related to a religion or belief
3. Legal guarantee of equality before the law for all persons	3.1. Training for equality bodies on investigating and addressing incidents of discrimination, hostility or violence in the name of, or on the basis of, the perceived or actual religious or belief identities of individuals or groups 3.2. Publication of data regularly by equality bodies on their caseload and performance 3.3. Proportion of victims of alleged discrimination provided with legal aid in any such case that a victim does not have sufficient means to pay for it	3.3.1. Reports of incidents of discrimination, hostility or violence in the name of, or on the basis of, the religious or belief identity of an individual or group 3.3.2. Conviction rate for prosecuted incidents of discrimination, hostility or violence in the name of, or on the basis of, religious or belief identity of an individual or group 3.3.3. Proportion of complaints of forced conversion that are investigated, prosecuted and result in conviction 3.3.4. Proportion of complaints regarding State harassment, including surveillance, intimidation or arbitrary detention of persons for manifesting their religion or belief, that resulted in prosecution (disaggregated by religion, gender and type of complaint)

<p>4. Legal protections to ensure the ability of parents or legal guardians to facilitate the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own views and convictions</p>	<p>4.1. Transparency on the inclusiveness and diversity of religious education provided in state-run institutions of learning</p> <p>4.2. Policies, guidance, training and reviews to ensure that public school curricula are designed to provide neutral and objective instruction in subjects such as the general history of religions, beliefs and ethics</p> <p>4.3. Steps taken to ensure that views of the child regarding freedom of religion or belief are given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child, including the provision of alternative instruction in a religion or belief</p> <p>4.4. Measures to provide for non-discriminatory exemptions or alternatives that would accommodate the wishes of parents and legal guardians where public education includes instruction in a particular religion or belief;</p>	<p>4.1.1. Reports of prohibitions, restrictions or regulations, that are not justified under human rights law, on the ability of parents to facilitate the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions;</p> <p>4.1.2. Reported cases of compulsory instruction of children in a particular religion or belief</p> <p>4.1.3. Reported cases of progress to higher education levels that are dependent on or significant advantage is conferred by education of children in a particular religion or belief.</p>
<p>5. Laws to combat discrimination, hostility or violence in the name of, or on the basis of religion or belief, and/or incitement to such acts;</p>	<p>5.1. Training for law enforcement on processing complaints of discrimination, hostility or violence in the name of, or on the basis of religion or belief</p>	<p>5.1.1. Reports of verified cases of discrimination and/or hostility violence in the name of, or on the basis of religion or belief, and/or reports of incitement to such acts;</p> <p>5.1.2. Reports of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of persons persecuted on the basis or in the name of religion or belief;</p> <p>5.1.3. Proportion of cases investigated, prosecuted and that result in conviction; (disaggregated</p>

		by perpetrator type, i.e. state or non-state actor).
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**Source:** UN Human Rights Special Rapporteur of Freedom of Religion or Belief.

*Report on safeguarding freedom of religion or belief for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* 16 October 2020 A/75/385. Illustrative FoRB indicators

This renewal introduced contrasted to the consistent number of weaknesses underlined by several scholars. Thus, the most relevant critical issues can be divided in three major points<sup>76</sup>:

- The limitation of financial resources;
- Lack of cooperation between States and Special Rapporteur;
- Importance of visits in the countries concerned.

The first weakness mentioned was initially underlined further times by the first Special Rapporteurs who complained about the lack of resources especially for *in situ* visits. Mr. Amor, for instance, in 1994 interrupted his visits to China earlier due to financial causes. On the whole, financial restrictions combined with the limit period of mandate and moreover, the volunteer commitment to the role<sup>77</sup>, had their effects on the outcome of the final reports and consequently on the respect of right to freedom and belief.

Regarding the lack of cooperation between States and Special Rapporteur, improvement have been made since the first introduction of this role. Thus, is worth mentioning the report in 1993 by the special rapporteur on the treatment of Muslim in Myanmar where in a very meticulous manner were listed all the people's name and their violations and rapes were described.<sup>78</sup> In response, the government of the Union of Myanmar was general and vague with no interest in implement the communication with Special

<sup>76</sup> Evans, C. (2006). Strengthening the Role of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. *Religion and Human Rights: An International Journal* , 1 (1) 75-96

<sup>77</sup> Mr. Bielefeldt underlined in his interview this aspect, specifying that their personal commitment to their previous career are not disappearing with the role of Special Rapporteur

<sup>78</sup> Commission on Human Rights, *Implementation of the Declaration on the elimination of all forms of intolerance of discrimination based on religion or belief*, 6 January 1993, E/CN.4/1993/62, available at: <https://undocs.org/E/CN.4/1993/62>

rappporteur and improve the situation in their country which is still a problem and a threat for the respect of basic human rights.

Conversely, with the development of methodological instruments above mentioned, the relations among States and Special Rapporteur incremented and become more specific and effectives. An important role, moreover, is linked to the support by several NGO's and interests' groups which contribute to the fact-finding missions and to keep more concrete the role of Special Rapporteur in the preventions and protection of fundamental human rights linked to the role of religion and belief. Those instruments applied by several actors and, furthermore, with the spread of culture of religion could represent a successful strategy for the main goal.

Yet, the definition of a clear autonomy of right to freedom of religion still creates issues on several stages, including the limit of religion freedom of expression and other human rights, or on the contrary the limit of other human rights in relationship with freedom of religion. Thus, as long as there is a conflict over the intersection of religious freedom with other human rights, every change made at institutional level will be inefficient and will remain a lack for a fundamental part. In conclusion, a comprehensive approach is at the basis of the real change and a focus on the Special Rapporteur would be just a tiny piece of this mosaic.

## **Chapter two: Religion in post-conflict reconciliation**

### **Introduction**

After having analysed the legislative procedures and technicalities linked to the role of international law and more precisely human right law, it is fundamental to analyse the theoretical part dedicated to the role of religion in the political of reconciliation. It is, thus, crucial to define and underline how religion does not strictly concern about the question of faith and personal belief, on the contrary could represent an instrument to be used for political reconciliation and that, is often uses at the core of political debate to justify several political actions.

The definition and the analysis conducted in the first chapter on the Treaties and other legislative instruments aimed to the protection of the freedom of religion and belief has underlined how arduous the distinction between religious freedom and other human rights is, moreover with the global interconnection and the technological development, the boundaries among those rights become more blurred and a compartmentalise analysis could no longer be proper.

Thanks to the examination of the previous Resolutions, Articles and Reports, the need to reach a comprehensive approach has become a priority, hence, only with a strategy that include politics, education, and relation with all the aspect of the society, changes could be achieved. As the number and the nature of the episodes of discrimination on religious ground become progressively serious, a reconsideration of the role of religion should be effectuated not only as a cause of episodes of violence and discrimination but also on the active side as tool to conduce to the political reconciliation.

This chapter, consequently, will be dedicated to the study of the sociological perspective entailing the role of the religion in the global context. From this point of view of religions, there has been talk in recent years of a focus on religions in the political and cultural spheres. We could mention the events of the Arab Spring in North Africa, and then move on to the unresolved Arab-Palestinian question, the Kurdish question in Turkey or the religious minorities in Myanmar. Even the West, which has always blamed populations that do not belong to its geographical and cultural context, has in recent years approached (in a totally instrumental way) religion. We are talking about extreme right-wing movements that are now widespread throughout Europe and a large part of the West, which use religious symbols to justify the repression of freedom and to implement greater

control over populations. I would argue, in a non-overall way, that the use of religion to reaffirm certain values has been decisive in most of the cases mentioned. Rather than an increase in the spread of religion, one should rather speak of an increase in the instrumentalization of religion as an excuse for the implementation of extremist policies. Consequently, this chapter will be divided into 2 paragraphs. The first one will be dedicated to the role of religion in the modern political context, analysing the new perspectives about the politicisation of religion with a focus on the interfaith dialogue and its role in the creation of a peaceful context. The second paragraph thus will be dedicated to the role of religion in the political reconciliation and more specifically to the empirical analysis done by experts on religious armed conflict. Thanks to the support of charts and data, the theoretical background will take a clear shape and concreteness.

## 2.1 Religion and politics

Starting from the religion's etymology it can be ascertain how the religion sphere is distant from the concept of violence and wars, title gained in the last years especially referring to particular religious creed.

Thus, the word religion came from Latin *religare* which means bind together<sup>79</sup> (Philpott, 2012)<sup>80</sup> meaning that religion concerns a personal and public sphere which connect several elements together, not necessarily limited to soul and private reflection.

In the course of history, several definitions are referred to the term "religion" and several meaning are linked to it, configuring a blurred concept which changes by the time and with the course of events. However, it can be identified a substantive part and functional part of the notion of religion<sup>81</sup>. The former is linked to the core of religion, its sacred writings, its pillars which are at the basis of the doctrine and found the fundamental notions and the beliefs. The latter, otherwise concerns the sociological approach of religion, thus the influence of religion on the faithful and the role that religion plays in

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<sup>79</sup> On the etymology of the word religion there are still uncertainties on the right version. Some historians connect the modern word religion to the Latin words connected to how the believers should act before gods or a negative meaning linked to the paganism.

<sup>80</sup> Philpott, D. (2012). *Just and Unjust Peace - an ethic of political reconciliation*. New-York: Oxford University Press. Pag 99

<sup>81</sup> Fleischmann, L., & Valdmir, K. (2015). *The role of Religion in conflict and Peacebuilding*. British Academy.

connecting people sharing the same values together and the collective effects that these religious community have on the external world<sup>82</sup>. It is in this last definition that we should focus for the purpose of this thesis, underlining the cumulative effects of religion, the different perspectives which define religion as cause of conflict or as an asset to be used in order to implement the interconnection among cultures and provides thus instruments to conflict resolution.

The connection between religion and politics dates back to the ancient years and is not a modern aspect of the world. Thus, several examples could be mentioned to explicate this connection between religion and politics for instance the Roman empire or the Crusades and the religious war which have been fought ages before the recent events occurred in the modern world. Hence, this demonstrates how the connection is inherent in global dynamics and therefore cannot be ignored or separated. Moreover, in order to avoid a naïve approach, it would be appropriate to consider the religious sphere as a useful tool for achieving the objectives of peace and stability, the pillars on which every religion is founded.<sup>83</sup>

Several scholars over time have tackled the issue of religion and the concept of civilization and the relationships that exist and have existed between them in order to clarify and identify the *file rouge* linking civilisation and the current dynamics. Moreover, the concept of civilisation has always had an uneven profile due to its intrinsic characteristics which include fluidity and mixed notional margins. As a result, from its first use in Illuminism, the concept of civilisation has been outclassed several times by more theoretically strong concepts. Examples are the studies of human geography by Pierre Gourou or Braudel on the spatial dimension of civilisations<sup>84</sup>, however in many cases the pure concept of civilisation did not have an autonomous existence, it always needed to be endorsed by other theories. The recognition of the concept of civilisation became important from 1996 onwards, thanks to the work of Samuel Huntington who reintroduced the discourse on civilisation to explain ethnic conflicts. However, the use of the concept was used in a controversial way by several authors who criticised the strict

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<sup>82</sup> Ibidem pag. 5

<sup>83</sup> Philpott, D. (2012). *Just and Unjust Peace - an ethic of political reconciliation*. New-York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>84</sup> Claval, P. (2013). L'idée de civilisation dans la pensée contemporaine. L'apport de la géographie et de l'histoire. *Anatoli*, 57-76.



nature of his theories, making the process of using the concept of civilisation in the social sciences complex.

Conversely, the events of the Arab Spring have brought back S. Huntington's Clash of Civilizations discourse, but what needs to be emphasized is the need to renovate Huntington's theory because of the multitude of factors that are involved in these events. The rigidity of the theory does not explain many of the geopolitical events in the MENA region, which is one of the most contested sets of states between international political forces. The sole element of civilisation contrast cannot explain today's conflicts because the economic and political elements still have a very important place in the geopolitical chessboard. On the contrary, it is the vision of civilisation that has been instrumentalised to join the political and economic objectives. One manifestation of this is the conception of Muslim practice in the West and the terrorist movements that have exported a distorted vision of Muslim civilisation.

Despite the focus of this chapter is linked to the role of religion in the diplomatic context, it is useful and crucial to depict the role of religion from a broader perspective, analysing multiple aspects in order to reach a comprehensive understanding of the matter. Thus, only through this study the goal of this dissertation can be achieved.

As a reaction to the several events occurred in the years, several scholars and political experts started to consider interfaith dialogue as an instrument to reduce the religious contrasts and to make changes for a more peaceful world aiming to the elimination of conflict. This approach has changed during the years, after 2001 in a more consistent manner<sup>85</sup>, involving experts and political personalities as attempt to improve the current situation. As stated before, religion and faith dialogue cannot be confined in a single and strict notion, thus theories linked to interfaith dialogue has changed perspectives and mixed their forms several times. In the table 2 below the three main approaches are showed and compared. The table is useful to have a compact view of the multiple shades that interfaith dialogue can reach and show how conflicting the positions could be. Consequently, it is fundamental to mention that the approaches and perspective linked to the role of religion in politics are not going to the same direction. Thus, there are theories linking religion sphere to violence and conflict as a cause of conflict or as a

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<sup>85</sup> Neufeldt , R. C. (2011). Interfaith Dialogue: Assessing Theories of Change . *Peace & Change* , 344-372.

crucial component of it<sup>86</sup> A further distinction is, moreover, focused on the distinction between actors and the analysis changes if the focus is on the religious leader or on the religious Institutions<sup>87</sup>.

**Table 2: Perspectives on religion, Conflict and Interfaith Dialogue**

	<b>Theological and Religious Studies</b>	<b>Political Science and International Relations</b>	<b>Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding</b>
<b>Religion</b>	The focus of scholarly inquiry. Living culture; composed of creed, cult, code and community. Mediates human spirituality and relationships with Ultimate Reality.	Dismissed in most western political theories and models (modernization, secularization, international relations theory). Important only when they affect social and political problems.	Source of deep meaning, beliefs and identity for individuals and communities. Religious actors and how they manifest their beliefs are implicated in identity and value conflicts.
<b>Religion and politics</b>	Religion and religious claims supersede political claims on individuals and communities.	Political claims over individuals and communities are privileged over religious claims. Separation of church and state. Religion potential threat to international order. Religion, religious leaders and institutions can <i>support</i> democracy.	Religious and political claims over individuals linked to collective identities and values. Negotiation and mediation models minimize role of religion. Potential role in Track II peacebuilding processes.
<b>Religion and violent conflict</b>	Religion does not cause violent conflict, although its resources can be used to support violence if the faith is in danger (e.g. holy war to protect the faithful).	Religion <i>causes</i> conflict (defines end-goals, inspires repression). Religion <i>exacerbates</i> conflict (manipulated to rally supporters; legitimates insurgency; helps motivate insurgents; identifies sacred objects and holy sites for protection; encourages followers to discount physical survival).	Religion as <i>cause</i> of and <i>contributing factor</i> for escalating of conflict; Religious and political claims over individuals linked to identity and value conflicts (e.g. ethno-nationalism and “protracted” or “intractable” conflicts).
<b>Religion and formal peace processes</b>	Religious actors and institutions can facilitate individual and community healing and reconciliation (outside of political and legal structures).	Religion, religious leaders, and religious institutions can <i>support</i> peace processes, particularly national reconciliation processes.	Religious actors in “Track II” diplomacy. Multiple roles for religious actors and institutions in peacebuilding (lead or support). Emerging focus on interfaith dialogue.
<b>Purpose of interfaith dialogue</b>	Increase understanding of doctrines, beliefs, values and practices Establish common values Probe theological differences Dialogue as active theology – mutual enrichment, growth, search for truth Develop relationships of mutual respect between religious	Increase awareness and understanding of the other Educate the other Increase trust in, or legitimacy of, political processes and/or actors Expand political options and de-legitimate violent interpretations of religious beliefs	Transform attitudes and perceptions of the other Transform exclusionary identity Access and draw-upon deep spiritual motivations Broaden participation in peacebuilding processes Counter negative dimensions of religion Develop platform for joint action to address roots and consequences of conflict.

<sup>86</sup> Ibidem

<sup>87</sup> Ibidem

**Source:** Reina C. Neufeldt Addressing Religion and Identity in Conflict: Assessing the “State of the Art” of Interfaith Dialogue<sup>88</sup>

What is important to remind is that religion could be the cause of conflicts and discrimination episodes, otherwise the entire dialogue about religions and the Convention with the Religious Leaders would be inappropriate. Conversely religion must not be considered violent *per se* and, moreover, there are no distinctions between violent religions and peacefully ones.<sup>89</sup> After 9/11 episodes, the public representation by media and consequently, in the public thought has represented Muslim religion as the only inevitably reason for the events occurred, creating a division between two different types of faiths. Conversely, in every sacred writing there are referring to violence and episodes that could be associated to brutal acts. The Bible itself can be mentioned as it contains episodes liked the *Cleansing of the Temple*<sup>90</sup> or the Binding of Isaac where Abram was forced to kill his son to prove his faith<sup>91</sup>. Thus, the sacred writing’s content does not justify the inherent violence linked to the religious groups in that the pillar of a real comprehension is inherent the interpretations and the connection between religion, its Institutions and the surrounding world. As Natalia Vlas argued, we are experiencing changes on religious plan due to the developing of globalisation which has created a more individualistic approach to the religious Institutions. Moreover, the classic version of religious community has decreased its cohesive power and has given way to self-made version of creed<sup>92</sup>. Consequently, those extremisms that become common in the recent years, are the consequence of a private interpretation of religion without referring to religious Leaders’ guide.

Thus, no religion could be identified as a threat to the international community if considered separately to their faithful and from the context in which it operates. Every religious precept from every religion can be exaggerated and could lead in a final phase

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<sup>88</sup> Neufeldt , R. C. (2011). Interfaith Dialogue: Assessing Theories of Change . *Peace & Change* , 344-372.

<sup>89</sup> Vlas, N. (2010). Is religion inherently violent? Religion as a threat and promise for the global security . *Politics and religion*, 297-314.

<sup>90</sup> Matthew 21:12-17

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+21%3A12%E2%80%9317&version=NRSV>

<sup>91</sup> Genesis 22:2-8 <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gen+22%3A2-8&version=NRSV>

<sup>92</sup> Vlas, N. (2010). Is religion inherently violent? Religion as a threat and promise for the global security . *Politics and religion*, 297-314.

to extremism and violent episodes, yet those precepts are not inherent the religion considered, they reflect a representation of what people pretend to show and to extract from those religious precepts. As Ferrara underlined, one solution to this contrast based on the role of religion and its inherent influence on the global dynamics is to avoid to consider religions as cultural elements and rather to make them as a fundamental and structural part of the international systems. Therefore, dwelling on the influence that religions can have on other aspects of politics or international relations increasingly distances the focus from what is the main objective of such studies.

Finally, given the proactive role that world religions can play in international relations, it is necessary to consider them as “[...]primary elements within the international system (though with no claim of exclusivity or centrality), rather than as mere (epi)phenomena only capable of exercising a derivative or secondary influence on the global order”<sup>93</sup>.

With the advent of new changes and phenomena that have changed global dynamics, there has certainly been a need to revise the nation-state model, which is now considered unsatisfactory and unsuitable for global dynamics that are interdependent on various levels, from the economic to the social.

In recognition of this political-ethical-institutional crisis, alternative projects of global politics have been initiated and discussed in recent years. The objective of these projects lies in the desire to go beyond the centrality of the sovereign state to achieve forms of political participation that include new types of actors who have remained excluded from political participation. These new actors fall into the category of non-state actors, which includes religious groups that are considered of fundamental importance for the creation of a new transnational network.

The need for this renewal on a global scale has certainly suffered the consequences of the dynamics of globalisation, which have involved state actors. through globalisation, the uniqueness of states as actors on the international stage has been accentuated, leaving room, sometimes in a turbulent manner, for non-state actors to claim their existence on the political, social and economic levels. In this context, there is talk of a new '*global public sphere*' (Mazzei, Marchetti, & Petito, 2010)<sup>94</sup> in which the old ways of international

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<sup>93</sup> Ferrara, P. (2014). *Global Religions and international relations, A Diplomatic Perspective*. Palgrave MacMillan.

<sup>94</sup> Mazzei, Marchetti, & Petito. (2010). *Manuale di politica internazionale*. Milano: EGEA S.p.A.

politics interface with new demands from non-state actors. The result is a clash between a traditional vision and new ideological approaches that cause different visions of global politics at the theoretical level.

In this part of the chapter, therefore, it will be necessary to understand what the new perspectives on global politics are and what is the role of religious leaders in this new interpretation of the world political system.

Furthermore, it is necessary to understand the broader framework in which religious actors are placed. Each new political actor appearing on the international scene shapes the various ideological readings in an attempt to propose their own plan of political action. The result is, therefore, an intersection of several elements from different models. The choice, of course, will never be fixed and anchored to a single selection, yet changes over time and according to the context in which the actors are called upon to operate. In this regard, Marchetti <sup>95</sup> has proposed a taxonomy that succeeds in better clarifying what has been discussed above and, thus provides four key interpretations of the notion of a world political system:

- the vision of world capitalism associated with a global free market and private economic actors;
- the project of democratisation of international institutions as formulated in the cosmopolitan model with reference to individual actors and supranational Institutions;
- the radical vision advocated by a large part of social movements in terms of alter globalism associated with civil society groups;
- the discourse on dialogue between civilisations, which is of interest to us, in which reference is made to macro-regional actors often defined in religious terms

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<sup>95</sup> Ibidem

**Table 3: Alternative model of global politics**

		Formazione del potere politico	
		<i>Dal basso</i>	<i>Dall'alto</i>
Atteggiamento verso la globalizzazione	<i>Positivo</i>	Cosmopolitismo	Neoliberalismo
	<i>Negativo</i>	Alter-globalismo	Dialogo tra civiltà

**Source:** Marchetti 2009.<sup>96</sup>

Without going into excessive clarification of the four models of Cosmopolitanism, Neoliberalism and alter-Globalism, we will continue by delving into the previously mentioned dialogue between civilisations.

Although it has only emerged in recent decades, and rather slowly, as a model of global politics, the dialogue of civilisations constitutes one of the most relevant elements of the global political debate after globalisation. this model has as its pillar the supremacy of religious and cultural ties and refers to civilisations and religious leaders as key actors in the political system. consequently, the core of political governance is managed in a decentralised manner by religious and cultural elites and political leaders. Pluralism and heterogeneity are seen as a goal to be safeguarded through the key actors of this system that includes religions and macro-regional bodies. as can be seen from Table 3 above, this perspective is positioned in a 'negative' perspective towards the phenomena of globalisation towards which a conservative approach is envisioned in view of a multipolar world.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibidem

The centrality of the notion of civilization within the context of international politics dates back to the establishment of the Parliament of the World's Religions in 1893 and later in the 20th century with the creation of the World Congress of Faiths in 1936. However, it was in the period between the 1970s and 1980s that the cruciality of the civility factor was understood within the world political context and as an essential factor in international relations. As previously mentioned, the publication in 1993 of Samuel Huntington's article "Clash of civilizations" provided space for the political discussion of a topic that was previously relegated only to religious issues.

Eight years later, with the events of September 11, the theses expounded by Huntington have certainly had a greater echo, drawing more attention to the role of religion within the interglobal debate and creating a series of debates on the actual concreteness of his theses. The emerging role of religious diplomacy will be analysed in the following chapter dedicated to the nexus between them and in what degree could religion be used to achieve the goals set. Otherwise, it is useful to mention several occasions in which this new trend is showed especially in the institutionalised context like the centenary of the creation of the Parliament of the World's Religion in 1993, the World Faiths Dialogue<sup>97</sup>, the G8 in Rome in 2000 or the most recent Pray for Peace by Pope Francis in 2014 for the peace in the Middle East<sup>98</sup>. These events showed the positive approach embodied by UN firstly which define religion diversity as fundamental asset for the development of humankind. The core of this approach retains that religion could be useful to the progress in that every religious dogma aspire to the same goals identified by the international community, thus the interaction between them could represents the right combination toward a real change in this post secular world.

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<sup>97</sup> Vlas, N. (2010). Is religion inherently violent? Religion as a threat and promise for the global security . *Politics and religion*, 297-314.

<sup>98</sup> Ferrara, P. (2014). *Global Religions and international relations, A Diplomatic Perspective*. Palgrave MacMillan.

## 2.2 The role of religion in political reconciliation

After having focused on the role of religion in its facets more related to sociology and international relations, it is necessary to take a further step within the thesis work. In this paragraph, therefore, we will try to focus on the concrete role of religion in peace building processes and more specifically on the role of political reconciliation. The paragraph will be structured as follow, in the first part a theoretical analysis on the nexus between religion and political reconciliation will be depicted, furthermore the second part will be dedicated to the research conducted to prove this nexus and to define if there is a concrete role of religion in the process of conflict settlement. With this purpose, the research done by Isak Svensson<sup>99</sup> based on Uppsala Conflict Data Program<sup>100</sup> will result appropriate for the research question of this thesis.

Therefore, before analysing the aspects of reconciliation and the religious influence to the process of appeasement, it is necessary to briefly define the characteristics of religious conflict and thus move to the further aspect of reconciliation and settlement thanks to religion.

Defining religious conflict represents an arduous objective to reach in that it entails several aspects which change constantly over the time and, moreover, includes aim and actors which are not clearly deployed as in other conflicts. Thus, the definition of religious conflict needs to take into account several number of variables which are not scientifically defined and could change according to the parameters include in the analysis. Attempt to clarify these concepts will be done in this paragraph describing firstly the general elements entailed in these conflicts, what are the fundamental characteristics identified by scholars<sup>101</sup> that helps in defining the scope of religious conflicts. Furthermore, elements of differentiations from other conflicts will be depicted in order to better describe them and define a clear path to follow for the further part of the thesis.

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<sup>99</sup> Svensson, I. (2007). Fighting with Faith- Religion and Conflict Resolution in Civil Wars. *Journal of conflict resolution*, 930-949.

<sup>100</sup> Hereinafter UCDP

<sup>101</sup> Mayer, W. (2013). Religious conflict: definition, problems and theoretical approaches. *Religious conflict from Early Christianity to the Rise of Islam*, 1-20.



Religious conflicts are defined in the SAGE Handbook of Conflict Resolution (Ayse Kadayifci-Ornellana, 2009)<sup>102</sup> as “[...]those conflicts which involve parties that are defined along religious lines, societies where religion is an integral aspect of social and cultural life and where religious institutions represent a significant portion of the community and possess moral legitimacy as well as the capacity to reach and mobilize adherents throughout the community”<sup>103</sup>. Thus, this definition would result useful to better analyze the content of these conflicts. Moreover, starting from this definition it can be identified constitutive elements which include a cohesive element represented by religion which create a bond within the religious community, and furthermore creates a sense of unity for the purpose identified as object of the conflict. Thus, these communities are identified internally according to the common faith and religious precepts shared, which create an identity shared sense. This characteristic, unlike the other form of conflicts make people/groups/communities more connected and decrease the possibility of separation between them as the link bonding them resides in values which are the pillar of their creed. This crucial aspect will be analyzed in the second part of the chapter where the difficulty to settle religious conflicts will be depicted and the indivisibility of religion will constitute an important feature in the study and the comparison of religious based conflict and other kind of identity-based conflict<sup>104</sup>.

Furthermore, another element identified in the above definition concerns the role of religious Institutions as active players in the context identified. Yet, this definition is not properly correct in that it identifies the Religious Institutions as primarily actors in the domain considered. Thus, a clarification on the identification of actors in the religious conflicts needs to be mentioned since the role of the religious Institutions has changed during the time and has assumed different forms which have constantly contribute to the deconstruction of the religious hierarches.

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<sup>102</sup> Ayse Kadayifci-Ornellana, S. (2009). Ethno-Religious Conflicts: Exploring the Role of Religion in Conflict Resolution. In J. Bercovitch, V. Kremenyuk, & W. Zartman, *The SAGE Handbook of Conflict Resolution* (pp. 264-284). London: SAGE Publications Ltd

<sup>103</sup> Ibidem pag. 2.

<sup>104</sup> Svesson, I. (2007). Fighting with Faith- Religion and Conflict Resolution in Civil Wars. *Journal of conflict resolution*, 930-949, pag 937.

Not surprisingly, the recent trends about the new waves of religion approach<sup>105</sup> shows a more individualistic attitude which led to a self-interpretation of religious precepts creating, finally a division from the classic religious Institutions. Those effects, developed and increased with the globalization have created new actors on the global scenario and, consequently, on the religious conflict domain. Thus, the focus on the actors inherent the religious conflict should be addressed to the role that gives to people the power to be considered as leader and to play an active role in the conflict rather than on the traditional Institutions and hierarchy considered as classical manner of transmitting power. Yet, it is necessary to consider the role of the religious actor depending on the context and on the conditions in which the analysis is effectuated. Moreover, considering that every context has its own development and reaction to the exogen factors and considering the characteristics inherent every religion,<sup>106</sup> a sole interpretation cannot be effectuated and would not adhere to the research question.

According to the definition aforementioned, there are eight elements which define the separation between the religious based conflicts and other kind of conflicts. This distinction will be useful in order to define the scope of them and will achieve an introductive role for the following chapters contained in the second part of this dissertation dedicated to Myanmar.

Thus, the points identified concern:

- the Centrality of identity issues;
- Intra-state conflict;
- Civilian casualties;
- Intractability;
- Centrality of religion and religious institutions;
- Use of religious language;
- Impact of colonization;

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<sup>105</sup> Vlas, N. (2010). Is religion inherently violent? Religion as a threat and promise for the global security . *Politics and religion*, 297-314.

<sup>106</sup> I am referring to the division between hierarchic religion (such as shi'ite tradition) and nonhierarchic tradition (like Buddhism). For this distinction and further analysis see Timothy D.Sisk (2011) in *Between Terror and Tolerance- religious Leaders, Conflict and Peacemaking* Georgetown University Press

- Crisis of legitimacy<sup>107</sup>

The first point reveals the nexus among religious issues and identity defining a compelling perspective which analyses the inherent role of religion as one of the pillars of humankind. The concept of religion, thus, become not only anchored to the group or the community, otherwise become an inseparable part of a person and after of a community. Consequently, this vision donates a wider perspective to understand the root of religion conflicts rather than a mere semantic distinction. Considering the personal and psychological effects of religion on the single part of a community, become evident how the effects of a lack of freedom and protection of religious freedom can turn into a source of conflicts. These aspects create a crucial distinction among other kind of conflicts (economic or territorial for instance) where the disputed object could be negotiated and exchanged with other goods with similar values, on the contrary of religion that results an irreplaceable good.<sup>108</sup>

Additionally, the religious conflict is divided form the other forms disputes for a particular feature that possibly make them intra-state conflicts. This means that in contrast to other types of conflicts, the religious disputes could be located in the same territory or in neighboring ones. This phenomenon is even more evident in those territories where the choose of borders does not correspond to the religious or ethnic division. This is the African case where during the decolonialization period those territories where divided regardless cultural, religious and ethnic traditions already existing and this lead to a consistent number of religious conflict in those areas. Thus, we can mention several cases like the Rwanda genocide, the recent and continuous conflict in the Sub-Saharan Africa, the attacks on Christians in Central African Republic. Otherwise, mention the religious based conflict and their increase with the time will not be sufficiently explicit as data collected by Svesson and Nilsson on Religion and Armed Conflict (RELAC in hereafter) from 1975 to 2015<sup>109</sup> that show how the African countries are particularly affected by an increasing number of RELA

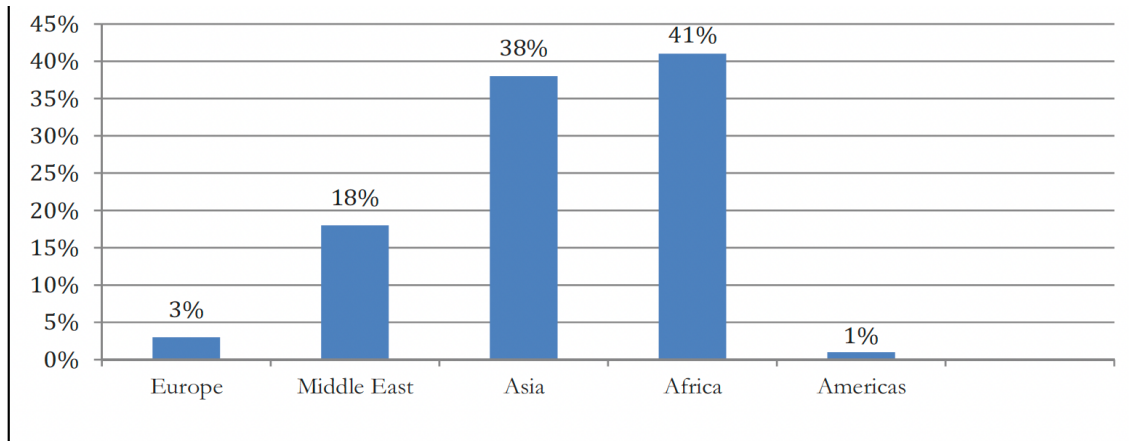
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<sup>107</sup> Ayse Kadayifci-Ornellana, S. (2009). Ethno-Religious Conflicts: Exploring the Role of Religion in Conflict Resolution. In J. Bercovitch, V. Kremenyuk, & W. Zartman, *The SAGE Handbook of Conflict Resolution* (pp. 264-284). London: SAGE Publications Ltd

<sup>108</sup> Ibidem pag. 3

<sup>109</sup> Svensson, I., & Nilsson, D. (2018). Disputes over the Divine: Introducing the Religion and Armed Conflict (RELAC) Data, 1975 to 2015. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 62(5), 1127-1148.

**Table 4: Religious Issue Conflicts by Region, 1975-2015**



**Source:** Religion and Armed Conflict Data- Svesson/Nilsson

Regarding the methods used in disputes, the religious conflicts are more prone to the use of particularly violent instruments and practices<sup>110</sup> which become, according to some scholars, more frequent after the collapse of ideologies with the Cold War<sup>111</sup>. As it will be showed in the further paragraphs with the case study, the Rohingya minorities experienced a case of ethnic cleansing which represents one of the most unacceptable brutalities toward a human being.

The fourth element of differentiation form conflicts based on different aim from religion, concerns the difficulties linked to the resolution of religious conflicts compared to others. As underlined before, the religious features do not permit to settle them with the same modality and timing of others disputes. As clearly underlined by Svesson (Svensson, *Fighting with Faith- Religion and Conflict Resolution in Civil Wars*, 2007) in his research, when those kind of conflicts begin, a sense of indivisibility of their object of dispute is created and, thus, the resolution become harder in that the subjective value will

<sup>110</sup> Ayse Kadayifci-Ornellana, S. (2009). Ethno-Religious Conflicts: Exploring the Role of Religion in Conflict Resolution. In J. Bercovitch, V. Kremenyuk, & W. Zartman, *The SAGE Handbook of Conflict Resolution* (pp. 264-284). London: SAGE Publications Ltd pag 3.

<sup>111</sup> Ibidem

increase and there is no space for negotiation without perceiving a loss of benefit deriving from the full enjoyment and effective exercise of the right of freedom of religion<sup>112</sup>. The result reflects on the timeline for the resolution of conflicts and as mentioned in the previous point, on the manner in which these conflicts are fought<sup>113</sup>.

In addition, considering the role that faith retains in the people's lives and considering the influence that religion exerts on several domains from politics to economy and traditions and cultural life; it become clear that religious disputes are differentiated from other types for the crucial role that religious institution could retain on those conflicts. This aspect is considered a pillar for the distinction of both conflicts in that religion and consequently religious institutions, or Leaders have always had a leverage that is not comparable to other political or economic power not for its intensity but rather for the period of this same influence. Furthermore, it is important to notice that this influence on several aspects and dynamics of the world extends its scope not only in those territories where the right of freedom and religion is under threat, but also in the opposite front influencing several aspects including the relationship with the guarantee of other rights. Those phenomena, become more frequent in those contexts where all the struggles and the internal divisions are not inherent the State structure, for instance in the western part of the World specifically with Catholic religions. Thus, since the first sociological studies on religion influence by Max Weber (1905)<sup>114</sup> on the nexus between Protestantism and the development of Capitalism, the same correlation has continued to exist. It can be mentioned the role of the Catholic Church in several domains (the last for instance concerns a public manifestation of reservation by the Vatican diplomatic on the approval of Gay Rights Bill<sup>115</sup>).

The use of symbolic elements referred to the root of religious tradition, is useful to define a border between the religious conflict and non-religious based disputes. As

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<sup>112</sup> Svesson, I. (2007). Fighting with Faith- Religion and Conflict Resolution in Civil Wars. *Journal of conflict resolution*, 930-949. Pag. 931.

<sup>113</sup> See Tusicisny A. (2004). Civilisational conflicts: More frequent, longer and bloodier? *Journal of Peace Research* 41 (4): 485-98

<sup>114</sup> I am referring to the book "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" (1905)

<sup>115</sup> See article at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/22/world/europe/vatican-italy-gay-rights.html>

showed in the Handbook of conflict resolution<sup>116</sup>, the use of symbols and the reinterpretation of sacred writing or the revocation of traditional element inherent the faith are signals of recognition. What is relevant to mention is the differentiation to effectuate when defining religion as a cause for the extremist interpretation of the religious text or precepts, whereas in those case religion become a pretext to justify violent acts and outrageous conducts.

The last two points left can be identified as common part of a wider discourse linked to the effect in most former colonized countries<sup>117</sup> and thus regard the impact of colonization and the crisis of legitimacy as element of distinction for religious conflicts. As previously specified, the role of colonisation has provoked serious effects on the territories leaved by colonizing Countries, creating thus structural wounds connected to political instability, ethnic and religious conflicts and other several events which are still part of our ordinariness. Regardless the will of population, several Countries were created, political boundaries were placed where sociological and geographical differences indicated differently.

The result thus was mixed creed forced to coexist under the same territory. Moreover, several Imperial colonies adopted with the time different approach depending on minorities (religious or ethnic) that were more akin to their ideology<sup>118</sup>. A further element used in the colonization context regards the inadequacy of the colonised countries to adapt to the changing global dynamics. Due to the higher bargaining power of the colonising countries, these countries found themselves unable to respond to the economic and social needs of their own population. As previously stated, these fractures within the domestic context led to increased conflicts and clashes, including religious ones. Thus, the combination of these factors creates fertile ground for the phenomena in question with negative effects on the civilian population, the last link in this chain.

After having analysed the theoretical approach linked to the definition of religious conflict and the differences with other kind of disputes, all the tools underlining the several features are collected and thus, it is possible to proceed to the description of

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<sup>116</sup> Ayse Kadayifci-Ornellana, S. (2009). Ethno-Religious Conflicts: Exploring the Role of Religion in Conflict Resolution. In J. Bercovitch, V. Kremenyuk, & W. Zartman, *The SAGE Handbook of Conflict Resolution* (pp. 264-284). London: SAGE Publications Ltd. Pag. 4.

<sup>117</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>118</sup> Ibidem.

evidence at the basis of statistic studies aiming to define religious conflict and to track a trend of this phenomenon over the time.

The mere description of several and, often contrasting, scholars' thesis would result a partial description of the object analysed and consequently would offer an incomplete perspective. Otherwise, using empirical data the highest degree of objectivity will be reached and thus, the path will be defined in a more deepen manner. This process is crucial due to the consistent number of variables defining the religious conflicts.

For this purpose, the study conducted by Svensson and Nilsson will be used. Their study is based on the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)<sup>119</sup> whose last version found refers to data until 2016. The study is structured as follow:

- 420 dyads <sup>120</sup>referring to the “actors” involved which are the government and a rebel group;
- The presence of armed conflict over a government or territory;
- The presence of a threshold of 25 deaths on RELAC over a calendar year;
- Period selected 1975-2015.

Moreover, what result remarkable from that study is the manner in which the incompatibilities of the religious claims are depicted over the time of the RELAC. It is useful for the purpose of this research mention the concept of Religious Incompatibility (Svensson, *Fighting with Faith- Religion and Conflict Resolution in Civil Wars*, 2007) that represents a crucial and recurrent element. It is defined by Svensson as “[...] *the conflict issue that the belligerents themselves have expressed, indicating the aspirations and motivation of why they fight.*”.

Furthermore, there is the attempt to compare the initial *religious issue*<sup>121</sup> declared by the belligerent and if the same issue is maintained during the armed conflict. In this manner it is possible to identify the real religious conflicts from those instrumentalizing religion

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<sup>119</sup> Svensson, I., & Nilsson, D. (2018). Disputes over the Divine: Introducing the Religion and Armed Conflict (RELAC) Data, 1975 to 2015. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 62(5), 1127-1148.

<sup>120</sup> The dyad consists on the unit of analysis selected which correspond to the government and rebel group in this study

<sup>121</sup> Religious conflicts entailed both if the conflicts are fought for religious issues and when the conflicts derives from the conflict of two different religious' creed.

to reach other goals. In order to define this misleading use of religious issues, Svensson and Nilsson have divided the groups of belligerents according to the claims they arise.<sup>122</sup>

**Table 5: Different Types of Religious Claims**

Type of Religious Insurgency Claims	Examples of Groups
Islamist	
Separatist Islamist	Hamas (Israel–Palestine), MILF (the Philippines)
Revolutionary Islamist	GIA (Egypt), AIS (Algeria)
Transnational Islamist	Al-Qaida, IS
Secularist	
Separatist secularist	LTTE (Sri Lanka), KIO (Myanmar)
Revolutionary secularist	CPN-M (Nepal), MEK (Iran)
Evangelist	
Separatist evangelist	NLFT (India), BDK (DRC)
Revolutionary evangelist	LRA (Uganda), forces of Paul Joseph Mukungubila (DRC)
Other religious claims	
Sikh separatist	Sikh insurgents (India)

Note: For all group names, see our data set. LRA = Lord's Resistance Army; IS = Islamic State; MILF = Moro Islamic Liberation Front; GIA = Armed Islamic Group; AIS = Islamic Salvation Army; LTTE = Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam; KIO = Kachin Independence Organization; CPN-M = Communist Party of Nepal - Maoist; MEK = Mujahideen e Kalq; NLFT = National Liberation Front of Tripura; BDK = Bundu-dia-Kongo; DRC = Democratic Republic of Congo.

**Source:** Religion and Armed Conflict Data Svensson/Nilsson <sup>123</sup>

From the table above it can be noticed that the types of conflicts are divided into three categories which correspond to other corresponding typologies of claims. *Islamic claims* concern the request from rebel group to an increasing role of Islam in the state. This category is further divided into *separatist Islamist*, *Revolutionary Islamist* and *Transnational Islamist*. Furthermore, *Secularist* category aspire to obtain less influence of religious laws in the state structure, and they are divided into two further typologies corresponding to *Separatist secularist* and *Revolutionary secularist*.

<sup>122</sup> Svensson, I., & Nilsson, D. (2018). Disputes over the Divine: Introducing the Religion and Armed Conflict (RELAC) Data, 1975 to 2015. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 62(5), 1127-1148 pag 1133.

<sup>123</sup> As showed from the table above, Kachin Independent Organization is entailed in the Separatist secularities religious claim



Finally, *Evangelist claims* asked for a more influence of Christianity in the State and as the previous categories there are divided into Separatist evangelist and Revolutionary evangelist. The last category includes all those religious requests that cannot be included in the categories above, for instance the Sikh conflict in India (Svensson & Nilsson, Disputes over the Divine: Introducing the Religion and Armed Conflict (RELAC) Data, 1975 to 2015, 2018).

Another aspect to consider for the research is showed by Svensson Nilsson and is linked to the concept of “*saliency of the claims*”. In order to be high salience, the conflict must respect two criteria:

- The conflict is based on religious claims
- The actor that presents the claim must be single actor whose primary goal is based on religious claim, otherwise alliances of actors with a broader goal- which include religious claims- are not considered for the saliency of the conflict.<sup>124</sup>

After having analysed and depicted the variables considered in the research done in the Sweden Department of Peace and Conflict Research, it is easier to define the data that will be showed here below linked to number and typologies of religious conflicts. Furthermore, it is crucial to mention that those data refer to the period between 1975-2015 thus all the data will represent a partial description of the phenomena, otherwise all the updates are included in the UCPD<sup>125</sup> database.

In order to show the trends and the outcome of the research, it is useful to have a wider picture of the situation of RELAC worldwide. The graph here below shows the situation in 2016 which define in a clear manner the repartition of conflicts and their nature<sup>126</sup>.

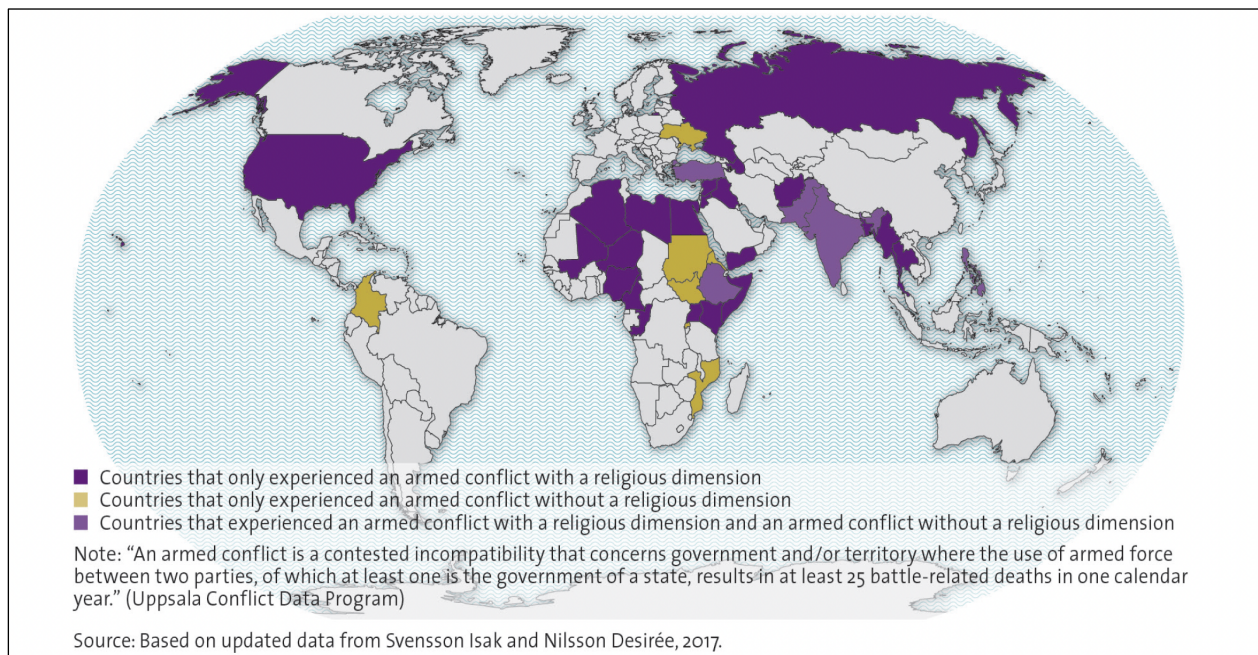
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<sup>124</sup> Svensson, I., & Nilsson, D. (2018). Disputes over the Divine: Introducing the Religion and Armed Conflict (RELAC) Data, 1975 to 2015. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 62(5), 1127-1148 pag 1136.

<sup>125</sup> See the link: <https://www.ucdp.uu.se/encyclopedia>

<sup>126</sup> Baumann, J., Finnbogason, D., & Svensson, I. (2018). Rethinking Mediation: Resolving Religious Conflicts . *Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich*, 1-4.

**Figure 1: Countries that experienced Religious Armed Conflict in 2016**



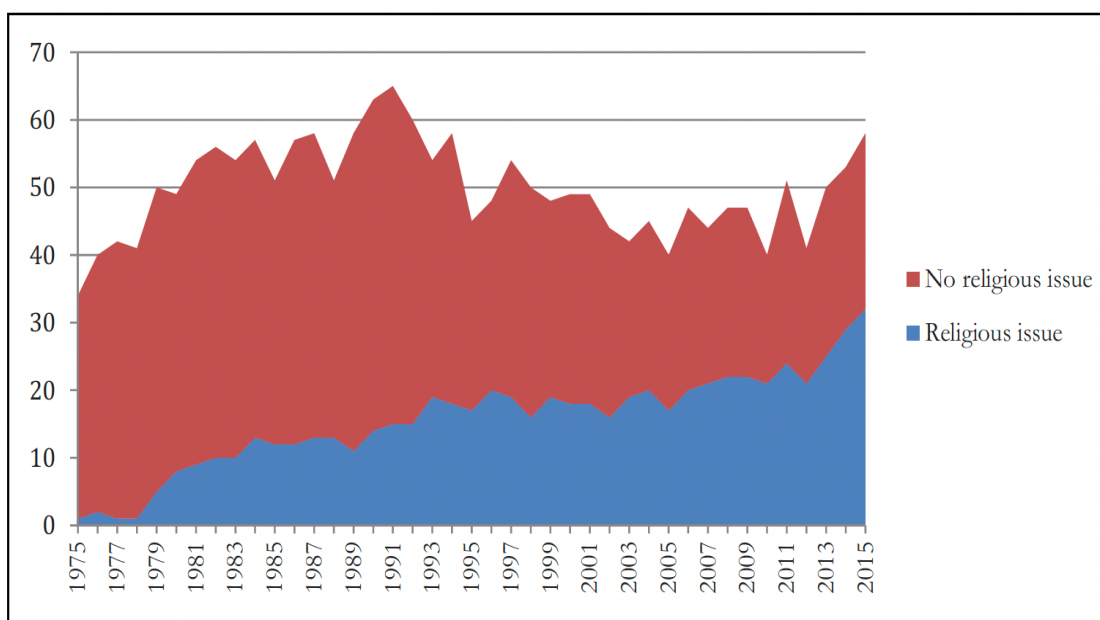
The yellow zones, identifying armed conflicts without religious dimension are present in a small percentage compared to the dark purple zones which represent armed conflict with religious claims. The overview is remarkable in a negative way, considering that division among the developed<sup>127</sup> and underdeveloped countries represent an issue to challenge.

The trend reaches a negative level considering the empirical numbers collected in the UCPD which define an increase in terms of number of dyads involved in conflicts and the number of religious conflicts have reached an increment of more than 90% in the period selected. Furthermore, the trend shows a significant increment in the period from 2013-2015 (see Figure 2) where the conflict dyads reached the peak of 32 with a variation of 28% in a short lap of time<sup>128</sup>.

<sup>127</sup> Except for United States

<sup>128</sup> The statistics and calculation are based on the UCPD data. Those data that are not present in the report mentioned are extrapolated by the author from the database abovementioned

**Figure 2: Number of Conflict dyads per years**



**Source:** Based on data from Svensson Isak and Nilsson Desirée, 2017.

A further important element to consider from the RELAC studies concerns data collected on the division between conflict fought within the same religion and, on the contrary, dyads referring to different religious creed. Those data remain almost stable during the period considered with a slight incrementation for the conflicts of same religions (+27% from 1990 to 2015) and slight decrease of almost 22% for the religious conflict in the same religious tradition<sup>129</sup>.

Returning to the main question concerning to the role of religion in the settlement of religious conflicts, it is now possible to analyse more in depth the influence of religion to discover if this nexus exists or is an incorrect assumption. According to a study conducted by Svensson (Svensson, *Fighting with Faith- Religion and Conflict Resolution*

<sup>129</sup> The author considered the period from 1990 to 2015 because starting from the end of the Cold War several scholars expected to register an incrementation of religious conflict in the same religious group.

in Civil Wars, 2007) this link exists and it is more evident in the internal conflicts rather than in external ones<sup>130</sup>.

Hence, as stated before according to this study the connection between the two factors in inversely proportional. In other words, in accordance to religious features abovementioned which include more subjectivity and indivisibility, the peace settlement is less immediate when in presence of religious claims<sup>131</sup>.

Without reporting all the passages of this study that would loss the focus on the main question, it will briefly trace the process that demonstrate this nexus mentioned. Hence, the study firstly combines religious conflict fought by rebels coming both from the same religious tradition and different ones with the presence of religious element in the “incompatibility”<sup>132</sup>. The result has collected 217 dyads divided into 4 kinds of conflicts obtained from the combination of (1) religious conflict with same tradition and no religious dimension in incompatibility; (2) religious conflicts with different traditions and with absent of religious dimension in their demands, (3) religious conflicts with same traditions, claiming for religious requests in the conflicts; and (4) religious conflicts with different traditions and characterized by the presence of religious claims in incompatibility<sup>133</sup>.

A further step of the study showed how the presence of religious claims in the incompatibility has a negative influence on the settlement of the dispute<sup>134</sup>. On the contrary it is showed how an intervention by a third party could improve the process of resolution. Overall, the table here below will concretize the description here explained

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<sup>130</sup> Svensson, I. (2007). Fighting with Faith- Religion and Conflict Resolution in Civil Wars. *Journal of conflict resolution*, 930-949.

Pag 941.

<sup>131</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>132</sup> The definition of incompatibility is contained at page 34

<sup>133</sup> Svensson, I. (2007). Fighting with Faith- Religion and Conflict Resolution in Civil Wars. *Journal of conflict resolution*, 930-949.

Pag 939

<sup>134</sup> Ibidem.

**Table 6: Probit Estimates on Negotiated Settlement**

<b>Probit Estimates on Negotiated Settlement</b>				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Religious incompatibility	-0.778** (0.219)	0.621* (0.259)	-0.681* (0.302)	-0.820** (0.221)
Religious dissimilarity	0.093 (0.220)	0.131 (0.270)		-0.267 (0.437)
Territory		-0.116 (0.266)	-0.053 (0.231)	-0.378 (0.252)
Ethnic		0.285 (0.305)		
Religious Incompatibility × Territory			-0.155 (0.471)	
Religious Dissimilarity × Territory				0.735 (0.524)
Duration		-0.017 (0.012)		
Army		-1.87e-07 (3.79e-07)		
Government-sided intervention		0.192 (0.393)		
Rebel-sided intervention		-0.201 (0.373)		
War		-0.076 (0.289)		
Mediation		1.014** (0.189)		
Income		7.03e-06 (0.0000291)		
Democracy		0.005 (0.022)		
Third-party guarantees		1.122** (0.283)		
Constant	-0.539** (0.148)	-1.337** (0.305)	-0.494** (0.164)	-0.447** (0.161)
Observations	217	209	217	217

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Errors are clustered on country-level.

\* Significant at 5 percent. \*\* Significant at 1 percent.

This study, thus, outline the importance to analyse the religious component in the armed conflict according to several variables rather than a phenomenon regulated by fixed laws. As the religious features are composed by a consistent number of aspects concerning the identity and the religious incompatibilities, the study and the finding are not stable and fixed during the times yet need to be constantly reviewed and new variables needs to be tested. This process is inherent the role of the social scientist, whereas in this specific domain become more crucial. With this study several evidence is pointed out, for example the missed nexus between the conflict settlement and the existence of more religious traditions like S. Huntington contrarily argued. Thus, according to data collected and showed here above, we are not approaching to the expected “Clash of Civilisations”<sup>135</sup>.

<sup>135</sup> Ibidem. Pag 943

Suggestions on the strategic plan to challenges religious armed conflicted are also proposed in this research and entails suggestions to prevent military escalation, often used a solution to the RELAC that become not containable and will produce irreversible damages to the civil society.<sup>136</sup>

## **Conclusions**

This chapter focuses on the connection between religion, politics, and religious armed conflicts, in order to provide a descriptive analytical analysis of the role of religion as a key element within the resolution process. This has been achieved through an initial theoretical overview of the concept of religion, the various opposing perspectives and by attempting to highlight the importance of religion in today's international politics. The various contrasting theories were examined, including those that define religion as an intrinsically violent element and therefore the root of religious armed conflicts.

While affirming a clear division between the role of civilisation and religion, it was also necessary to analyse the theories of civilisation in conjunction with international relations, seeking to emphasise the importance of these theories on the actual implications for international politics. This theoretical parenthesis was necessary to understand and try to predict the future dynamics of inter-state relations.

In the second part of the chapter, particular attention was paid to the search for empirical data confirming or disproving the link identified between religion and politics, and more clearly, the role that religion can play in conflict resolution if used as a tool for spreading peace and stability among states. Due to obvious structural and time constraints, reports previously carried out by the Department of Peace and Conflict Research of the Swedish University of Uppsala were used. These studies are based on data included in the database of the same University. Through the collection of data, reworked through the use of parameters and variables widely discussed in the chapter, it was possible to give substance to the theoretical compartment previously analysed. In this way it was possible, not only to infer a role for religion as a hostile element in conflict resolution, but also to understand how the only antidote to conflict resolution was religion itself and not a violent armed response.

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<sup>136</sup> Ibidem

What will follow within this thesis work is an analysis of the importance of diplomacy for the resolution of both religious and other conflicts. Given the essence of stability, peace and harmony expressed in the tradition of religions, it is clear how religion can become an instrument within diplomatic work for the achievement of the above-mentioned goals. The mixture of religion and diplomacy is the result of theories concerning the so-called 'diploreligio' which will be analysed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter three: Diploreligio, the role of religion in contemporary diplomacy**

### **Introduction**

With this last chapter of the first part of this dissertation, we will get to the heart of the matter examined, going deeper into the role of diplomacy interconnected with the religious sphere. As will be seen in the following pages, the role of religion in diplomacy is not merely causal but also, and foremost, has a structural function within global dynamics. Brief outlines of the changes that have taken place in international relations have already been provided in the previous chapter in order to make the analytical description of the dynamics more fluid.

The aim of this chapter will be therefore to give a brief outline of the concept of diplomacy, and to focus more on the role of religious diplomacy or *diploreligio*. With this last component, the first part of the thesis will be completed with all the necessary tools to analyse the dynamics within the state of Myanmar. Only through an in-depth description of the variables that determine religious conflicts and the role of diplomacy in resolving them can a complete picture of the dynamics be drawn. Moreover, for the purposes of research, after having analysed the various conflicting theories, it is possible to anticipate and predict the critical issues encountered. Finally, we will try to conclude the research work by providing tools and solutions that are concretely applicable, albeit partially, for the resolution of the problems presented.

Another important element to be stressed concerns the changes in the diplomatic context. With the advent of globalization and other worldwide phenomena, most recently the Covid 19 health crisis, the role of the diplomat and diplomacy within global contexts has undergone significant modifications and changes that open up new perspectives and new scenarios, including new actors and new challenges to be overcome.

These changes also involved the religious aspect demonstrated by the increase of religious conflicts that returned to the global scene, creating numerous problems for the international actors who were called upon to resolve them. It has been noted, therefore, that what was previously called “track I” diplomacy (concerning the involvement of Governments) was not sufficient to challenge the new scenario in the globalised and interconnecting world. The involvement of new actors, thus, has changed the dynamics



creating new “tracks” including non-state actors and therefore the need to occurs to other methods of diplomacy emerged<sup>137</sup>.

As mentioned by Thomas S. several causes determined the new features of current diplomacy, including changes in the global disputes leading to more intrastate conflicts rather than infra-State conflicts<sup>138</sup>; the more interdependent world and lastly the United Nations’ structure that is experiencing considerable complexities in handling and mitigating conflicts.

### **3.1 Analytical approach**

Starting from the assumption that religions cannot and should not be considered cultural factors, as we previously examined from empirical and theoretical perspectives, the role of religion in the contemporary diplomacy retains a specific and complex position that could be analysed under several level of analysis, examined here below. What is crucial in this part of the thesis is to focus on the importance of religion as structural factors inherent the international community, rather than considering religion as the root of faith-based conflicts.

In the previous part of this dissertation several features of religion have been examined under sociological, statistics and historical lens. The influence of religion has been examined in both the opposite perspective, when it constitutes a source for episodes of discrimination and armed conflicts and when it had an influence in the domestic matters inherent the State. Data have been used in order to confirm that religion and faith issues still retain a pivotal position in the conflicts settlement and in the peace-building processes in that religion is perceived as an indivisible aspect of people’s lives that cannot be negotiated with something with comparable value.

Since evidence have underlined the importance for religious armed conflicts to be solved through other instruments, avoiding the military escalation, become linear to examine the role that religion could retain in the religious settlement or, moreover, as instrument to use in the diplomatic relation. Consequently, religion should be considered a structural factor, comparable to pivotal aspect as non-proliferation, for instance.

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<sup>137</sup> Thomas , S. M. (2005). *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the transformation of International Religion*. New-York: Palgrave Macmillan US.

<sup>138</sup> Ibidem Pag.177

According to theories and studies conducted by diplomat<sup>139</sup> religion could be useful in achieving several aims including the fight against terrorism. Thus, it is important to specify that religion dimension concerned an aspect related to the very fabric of the international community. Furthermore, the power of influence exercised by it should gain more attention from the diplomatic actors in that could retain an active role in influencing the global order or disorder, as it is stated in the previous chapters, albeit it is not the only component with this leverage, religion has unquestionably a fundamental section in the international context.

In order to define the importance of religion influence in the diplomatic context, three level of analysis can be identified:

- Analysis of the evolution of international relations in light of the resurgence of religions;
- The examination of the role of religion as an instrument of preventive diplomacy;
- The examination of the international effects of high-level meetings of religious leaders or promoted by religious leaders<sup>140</sup>.

The first level of analysis is focused on the international relations' theory combined with the study of diplomacy, considered in this case as a practise of international relations which entailed the resurgence of religion in the international context. This aspect has been mentioned in the previous chapter, concerning the nexus between religion and politics specifically the new approaches toward global politics and the need to actuate a renewal within the diplomatic context.

The second level of analysis aims to the examination of the role of religion as an instrument of preventive diplomacy, thus it entails a more pragmatic level, or furthermore the role of diplomacy in post-conflicts situations and in terms of conflicts resolutions. As formerly underlined, the power of inclusion and influence exerted by religions should be used in a more pragmatic manner in order to achieve substantial changes.

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<sup>139</sup> See Ferrara P.

<sup>140</sup> Ferrara, P. (2014). *Global Religions and international relations, A Diplomatic Perspective*. Palgrave MacMillan.

Lastly, the final level consists of the study of the international effects of high-level meetings of (or promoted by) religious leaders. Thus, in this perspective the role of religion achieves a more symbolic role compared to the other level of analysis<sup>141</sup>.

The meeting of religious Leaders of the world, who occasionally meet and proclaim their contribution to peace in the world and other issues linked to other spheres. Certainly, these meetings do not have only aims linked to the faith and to the spread of messages of their own creed to the religious community, otherwise they can also exert a consistent influence in the international community. For instance, the meeting organised in several occasions like before and after the G20 or the G7, religious leaders meet all over the world in order to discuss the agenda of the meeting of G20 and to understand what could be the outcomes and the repercussion from the religious perspective. These meeting can be scheduled following a consistent number of issues: form the reduction of famine and the problems linked to desertification to the nuclear weapons and lastly to contribute to the fight of last pandemic.

Furthermore, it is remarkable to mention the areas of interests concerning the religion in international level in order to understand how to approach to the several religious issues that emerge in the current global dynamics. The definition of these multi-level aspect of religious issue is crucial for the diplomatic actors in that it simplifies the manner in which international actors can observe religions at international level and, consequently, define a path to follow in order to achieve the objectives planned.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibidem.

**Table 7: Religions beyond border: type of relations and area of influence**

Type of relations	Area of influence
Religions and inter-state relations	Foreign policy
Religions and internationalism	International democracy
Religions and transnationalism	World collective identity
Religions and globalism	Global policies

**Source:** Ferrara P. 2014

In the graph above several areas of influence are represented, as shows they are linked to different level of relations among states, government, international community. The connection between religions and inter-state relations concerns all the aspects dealing with foreign policies. For instance, the case of Iran and the Shi'a version of Islam and the Sunni<sup>142</sup> or like in the case of Saudi Arabia. In this case the themes concern religion (albeit it is arduous to define the effective influence of religion rather than the degree of instrumentalization of it) but they are also matters of international politics interest and more specifically matter of foreign policies<sup>143</sup>. In this perspective governments and religious issues are combined within the borders of the States into object of analysis.

Secondly, the focused is addressed on religions and internationalism. It concerns the process of decision making and the involvement of religions in this international process, in this manner there is expressed the need to inclusion in the international community. Moreover, following this perspective the role and the potential of religions is considered to be fundamental for the development of international diplomacy. Considering the weaknesses that the international scenario is facing in the modern world<sup>144</sup>, the inclusion of religion could be useful to widening the horizons. At this purpose, the requests coming from the religious community addressed to the international community are directed. These concern the widening of the international democracy at

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<sup>142</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>143</sup> Ibidem pag. 28.

<sup>144</sup> Thomas , S. M. (2005). *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the transformation of International Religion*. New-York: Palgrave Macmillan US.

all levels, including the decision-making progress within the United Nations in the General Assembly but also in other contexts including G20 as mentioned before.

As far as Transnationalism is concerned, it entails the inherent feature of religion to be transnational *per se*, regardless borders and historical conflicts or barriers of every shape and nature. Hence, this pillar characterizing the majority of religions creed, has a double intrinsic function related to the power of cohesion that religions have, aiming to aspire to a sense of world connective identity. We can refer to religious leaders talking about the global human family or concept like common destiny and common home referred to the earth like in the case of recent speech of Pope Francis on the environment and its consequently Encyclical “*Laudato Si*” (2015) centered on the nexus between social crisis and environmental crisis. Moreover, this connection among several part of the globe and this sense of common identity is viewed as inspiring for the future of the global politics. This sense of belonging to mankind beyond the borders lead to a sense of collective identity that should be transmitted into global politics<sup>145</sup>.

Lastly, globalism is linked to the influence of religion on the global agenda. In this manner changes are expected to be introduced from the bottom of the society, including religious groups or communities. Ferrara<sup>146</sup> mentioned the WCC World Council of Churches or Religious for Peace, a coalition of religious leaders as examples of their commitment to the global issues. With their work and spreading the messages of solidarity and union among several and different context, they give concreteness to the hypothetical ideal of global community. To mentioned Ferrara’s words “*I think that the universal approach of religions, as an alternative to ideological globalism, could give some more concrete and democratic meaning to the vague and somewhat oligarchic idea of global governance*” (Ferrara, Global Religions and international relations, A Diplomatic Perspective, 2014).

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<sup>145</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>146</sup> Ibidem. Pag.38

### 3.2 The religious engagement of Diplomats

After having mentioned the principle analytical approach concerning the several perspectives linking the role of diplomacy and religion, it now fundamental to concentrate remarks on the actors of diplomatic function.

The role of diplomats has changed during the time, influenced by the structure of society. Hence, the role of ambassadors has passed from an aristocratic function in the middle age to a professional feature, thus becoming professional agents of their government. The evolution inherent the diplomatic context undergone changes concerning the issues related to their role and the number of actors involved the accomplishment of their functions.

Thus, an increase of number of issues dealt by diplomats was registered in the last part of century, including more issues beyond the traditional dichotomy war-peace. These transformations involved a change into the thematic tackled by diplomats, including several issues that were not involved in the diplomatic environment. Among those transformation it can be mentioned the religious engagement of diplomats. The word "*religious engagement*" could be misleading in that it can be connected to the diplomat's attitude to be religious and to be involved in the religious process. Otherwise, the religious engagement is related to the role of diplomat that should have a religious literacy and be aware on the differences among several creeds, or the disputes over religions within States. The knowledge about religions, therefore, should be considered on the same level of others issues that diplomat dealt on, for instance the international security or cyber security. In that manner it is possible to dispose qualified expert who can have a wide range of tools to use in performing their tasks.

Furthermore, it entails a minimum level of connotation about religions. The notion of religious engagement recognizes the need of a deeper "religious literacy" for diplomats. Training in religious literacy should become an integral part of foreign ministries programs for young diplomats and, at a higher level, for more experienced diplomats.

Moreover, the expressions "religious engagement" or "religious diplomacy" do not mean that diplomats have to fulfil their job on the basis of some personal religious conviction or because they are connected to a particular creed. The crucial distinction is to effectuate between what is called "faith-based diplomacy" and religious engagement of diplomats.

The former, includes a more proactive role of religious personalities and leaders in the diplomatic scenario, while the latter consists in involving religious issues in the international politics dialogue, to engage religious matters in order to inspire foreign policies.

In order to explain the differences between these two different approaches of diplomacy, it is useful to mention the case of International Centre for Religious and Diplomacy (ICRD)<sup>147</sup> as an example of faith-based diplomacy. Thus, this non-profit organization based in Washington DC aims to integrate the religious representatives in the diplomatic context. Their mission is focused on:

By building relationships of trust, ICRD steers religious convictions away from fomenting conflict and toward strengthening communities in their ability to resolve current and future challenges to peace. ICRD capitalizes on the following unique attributes of religious actors and institutions, which allow them to build trust and overcome differences.<sup>148</sup>

The mission above mentioned is fulfilled following four main core objectives which include:

- Decreasing religion's role as a driver of conflict;
- Increasing the capacity and number of religious peacemakers;
- Increasing the role of religious clergy and laity in peacemaking;
- Increasing policy-makers' awareness of and receptivity to the potential contributions of religious actors.<sup>149</sup>

As the list specifies the role of ICRD and, consequently, of faith-based diplomacy aims to create a bridge among diplomatic actors and religious ones.

Besides comments on this kind of diplomacy, this is not related to the conception of religious diplomacy that is explained in this chapter and within the whole dissertation.

Hence, diplomat's religious engagement consists in including religious issues in the diplomatic process and to use them to achieve other goals different from religion.

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<sup>147</sup> <https://icrd.org/our-approach/>

<sup>148</sup> See ICRD website

<sup>149</sup> Ibidem see section "our approach"

This does not mean that diplomats should perform their role according to their religious convictions because they are believers. Whereas, what religious diplomacy or religious engagement means, concern the engagement of religions and, in order to achieve that, conversation with religious actors, should represent the pillar for the contemporary diplomacy.

### 3.3 Diploreligio

The distinction between diploreligio and faith-based diplomacy represents a fundamental pillar for the purpose of the explanation of the research question. Thus, in this perspective the taxonomy elaborated by P. Ferrara about diploreligio is remarkable and provides a wider and more detailed perspective on the different kind of diploreligio.

More specifically, four level of diploreligio can be identified according to this theory. A table here below will briefly give an overview of them.

**Table 8: Classification of religious diplomacy**

Category	Main feature	Theoretical definition	Case studies
Diploreligio1	Advancing Religious freedom	Liberal international religious diplomacy	Washington, Islamabad
Diploreligio 2	Religious engagement	Domestic eclectic religious diplomacy	New Delhi, Jakarta, Algiers
Diploreligio3	Religions and foreign policy	Realist religious diplomacy	Teheran, Riyadh, Tel Aviv, Ankara
Diploreligio4	Global influence of religions	Constructivist/ideational religious diplomacy	Holy See, UN

**Source:** Ferrara P. 2019



The first type of *Diploreligio* concerns the advancing of religious freedom and aims to include the respect and the protection of freedom to religion and belief in the international politics. Example of this kind of *Diploreligio* are the visit of the former Chief State Department of the USA, Mike Pompeo in Rome in October 2020<sup>150</sup>. He participated to a Conference of religious freedom in the world organized by the US Embassy to the Holy See.

The interest on religious freedom and its respect within the domestic context is an aspect considered important by several countries for their role in the international scenario either because they are observer of the international religious freedom or because the observation of religious freedom is adopted by other states. Moreover, in the theoretical definition related to *Diploreligio 1* is mentioned “Liberal international religious diplomacy”. It is considered “liberal” in that religion is considered as a human right and it is linked to the public manifestation of the respect of this human right through public reports in which the degree of respect of the right to freedom of religion and belief in the country is declared. Practical examples are related to United States of America<sup>151</sup> because the Congress of the USA demand the State Department to produce every year the report of the state of religious freedom in the world in compliance with section 102 (b) of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998<sup>152</sup>.

Furthermore, *Diploreligio 2* concerns the religious engagement and the consequent engagement of internal religious actors. With this perspective the role of diplomat became more eclectic and there is express the necessity to interact with religious leaders in order to understand the religious struggle within the referring country, the

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<sup>150</sup> See the article at: [https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/mondo/2020/09/30/mike-pompeo-arrivato-a-roma-vedra-conte-parolin\\_10b9996c-c050-48d1-855c-f4104ef88388.html](https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/mondo/2020/09/30/mike-pompeo-arrivato-a-roma-vedra-conte-parolin_10b9996c-c050-48d1-855c-f4104ef88388.html)

<sup>151</sup> <https://www.state.gov/international-religious-freedom-reports/>

<sup>152</sup> Sec. 102 Reports: (b) ANNUAL REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM.— (1) DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION.—On September 1 of each year or the first day thereafter on which the appropriate House of Congress is in session, the Secretary of State, with the assistance of the Ambassador at Large, and taking into consideration the recommendations of the Commission, shall prepare and transmit to Congress an Annual Report on International Religious Freedom supplementing the most recent Human Rights Reports by providing additional detailed information with respect to matters involving international religious freedom. Each Annual Report shall contain the following: (A) STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM[...]; (B) VIOLATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM[...]; (C) UNITED STATES POLICIES[...]; (D) INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS IN EFFECT[...]; (E) TRAINING AND GUIDELINES OF GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL[...]; (F) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY [...]

interaction and dialogue with religious leaders and exponents could provide a comprehensive overview on the issues inherent the State and moreover the legal structure founding the country. In this way, a greater awareness of the state's weaknesses and strengths becomes consequential, in order to understand which international policy policies can be enforced. Only through an in-depth knowledge of the internal dynamics of the state, including religious dynamics, is it possible to establish effective diplomatic relations and thus make a greater and more concrete contribution to resolving problems. Historically, the application of the same international policies in radically different contexts has proved to be unsuccessful and, to a greater extent, detrimental to the populations concerned. One of the problems at the root of this type of diplomacy is certainly the lack of attention paid to the internal structure of states and their sociological and religious divisions. Therefore, it is necessary to have diplomats who are literate in religious culture and know how to dialogue and take into account what the religious representatives declare. Only by establishing interconnected networks is it possible to accomplish the complex and prestigious role that this figure incorporates.

The third type of *Diploreligio* concerns the correlation between religion and foreign policies. As the table above indicates, this kind of religious diplomacy is linked to the IR theory of realism. Without going into excessive description of the realist theory of international relations, brief remarks will be provided in order to better understand what this approach implies in international relations. This particular position envisages actors as the core of the international system and driven by the pursuit of national interest expressed in terms of power. International relations also have as its dynamic the evolution of the balance of power between States. Consequently, foreign policy has as its primary objective the security of its own State. The space for international organizations and cooperation is limited, whereas in some cases they can be interpreted and compared to national actors, as international organizations can be seen as a means of consolidating one's own position to the detriment of other states. This view of international organizations has consequences for the means used within the global context. In fact, the political instruments available to states are essentially those of bilateral diplomacy.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Mazzei, Marchetti, & Petito. (2010). *Manuale di politica internazionale*. Milano: EGEA S.p.A.

An important expression of what is defined as "realist pessimism" is certainly the previously mentioned theory of Samuel Huntington<sup>154</sup> in which he expresses the need to revise the causes of modern conflicts, which are to be found in the religious component of belonging to a given civilization and no longer in the political components. In this post-bipolar vision of the world, the concept of "civilization", which he introduced, represents the intervening variable for the anarchy of states. The expected result would be, according to Huntington, the clash between these civilizations, cultural fights replacing geopolitical ones.<sup>155</sup>

The last kind of religious diplomacy is connected to the idea of transnational role of religion and thus is linked to the consider mankind as a unity. The theory at the base of it is the constructivism. Analysing the theory itself, it represents itself a bridge between the two main theories of international relations.<sup>156</sup> The main objective of this theory is to underline the importance of the interrelations between actors and the manner in which they reflect on the identities and on the interests. The essence of this pillar can be found in the writings of its pioneer, A. Wendt who underlines the importance of the ideas. Untimely, States structures are shaped by the relationship they have with the other States and they can lead to security dilemma or to a community, according to the type of relationship.

A practical example can be found in the creation of the UN agencies, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) established in 2005 by the initiative of the former UN Secretary-General (Kofi Annan) and by the Spanish and Turkish Governments.<sup>157</sup> The pillar of this initiative embodies the constructivism's ideals, in fact in the part explaining the activities and the approach of the UNAOC we read:

*While active on a number of cross-cutting issues, UNAOC works mainly in four priority areas to which it brings a multidisciplinary and multi-perspective approach: Youth, Education, Media, and Migration. The four pillars of UNAOC provide an essential organizing structure for the development and implementation of its various programmes and*

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<sup>154</sup> Warner, C. M., & Walker, S. G. (2011). Thinking about the Role of Religion in Foreign Policy: A Framework for Analysis. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 7, 113-135.

<sup>155</sup> Ibidem. Pag. 276.

<sup>156</sup> Ibidem. Pag 172.

<sup>157</sup> See the website <https://www.unaoc.org/who-we-are/>

*initiatives, which all play a critical role in reducing cross-cultural tensions and building bridges between communities globally*<sup>158</sup>.

Thus, the UNAOC example together with the Holy See case constitute an example of this last typology of *diploreligio* which underline the need to create an interconnection with the religious actors in order to go beyond divisions and create a unified community.

## **Conclusion**

With this last chapter the focus on the connection between diplomacy and religion has been provided by using both theoretical and practical approach. What emerge from these last paragraphs is the resurgence of religions and cultural factors (to be conceived separately) in the global dynamics and, consequently, in the contemporary international politics. With the end of the bi-polar era, thus, new trends were registered, and the traditional dichotomy of conflicts was surpassed. Hence, new exigences emerged and those changes had also consequences on the diplomatic scenario. The necessity to extend the scope of action of diplomacy, jointly with the resurgence of religious conflicts and religious issues, lead to the new the typologies of diplomacy with new actors and new dynamics and finally, several tools different from the traditional ones.

With the focus on the most important theories of international relations, the different combination, and perspectives of *diploreligio* are depicted, in parallel with practical example and case studies, useful to define a more concrete overview and connection with the reality.

What emerges from this last part is the necessity to conceive the role of diplomat as an eclectic figure capable of understanding and predict the global dynamics, to define a strategy, to select the correct instruments and to interact with the actors in the international scenario. In this manner, the position occupied by religion has become more crucial with the time. There is a need to have a literacy of the interreligious dynamics of the countries with which dialogue is being conducted, to foresee possible crises and fractures inherent in the religious scenario and to prevent these from spreading to encompass other aspects. Moreover, as religious conflicts increase, it is essential to understand the rationale

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<sup>158</sup> Ibidem

underpinning them, to be prepared to disentangle the effective religious causes from mere instrumental demands and to adapt the typology of intervention accordingly.

At the end of this first part of the dissertation devoted to the theoretical aspect, we can comprehend the importance reserved by international law to freedom of worship and religion, which also enables us to define the range of action in which the actors on the international scene can operate. In addition, the data and variables involved in religious armed conflicts are available, useful for a proper and pondered analysis. And finally, with this last chapter, a global perspective on the key actors in the system has been provided. In this manner, it will be possible to interpret the selected case study on Myanmar, and the religious conflicts that plague the dynamics of this country, from a different standpoint.

## **Part two**

### **Chapter four: historical and sociological context**

#### **Introduction**

This second part of the dissertation is entirely focused on the case study concerning the State of Myanmar which has gained in the last year a strategical role in the Asian context for several reasons that will be depicted in the further chapters. The definition and the methodology used in the first part will be useful to analyse the dynamics inherent the international relations among countries. The *file rouge* that connects the two parts of this thesis will be the focused on the relation between religion and diplomacy and how religion has influenced the spread of religious conflict in this specific Country selected. The empirical data will be applied to the description of most principal religious armed conflicts in order to confer a concrete approach to the dissertation. For this purpose, the UCPD database, whose characteristics are contained in the second chapter, will be used.

Furthermore, in order to achieve a comprehensive standpoint on the matter analysed, a first chapter will be dedicated to the history and sociological divisions in the context of Myanmar. As will be showed in the following chapter, the ethnic and religious division in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar retained a pivotal role in the conflicts and divisions among different groups and, thus, become fundamental to analyse and describe the historical origins of these divisions.

In the following chapter, moreover, the role of the international actors will represent the core of the analysis. The focus on the past interventions and provisions actuate by the international organizations results useful to understand the approach adopted by the external actors, to define drawbacks and finally to suggest interventions in the context of Myanmar. A particular attention will be dedicated to the Rohingya crisis which reached a peak in 2017 with 740,000 members of this minority who were forced to leave the country and seek refuge in Bangladesh. The level of segregation and separation of Rohingya minorities and Muslim minorities has worsened in the last years and conducted to an increase of conflicts especially during the period of transition. What is registered is an isolation of the Rakhine State compared to the center of the State which

has matured a deeper sense of segregation and create, consequently, a fertile breeding ground for a national-ethnic conflict.

#### 4.1 Historical background

Myanmar also known as Burma is a territory situated in the western part of Asian continent, specifically in the Southeast Asia. Since 1885 it has changed name into Union of Myanmar, replacing the former name as well as the name of the former capital<sup>159</sup> changed from Rangoon to Yangon<sup>160</sup>.

The morphological aspects of this country have always influenced its historical and cultural features. Therefore, the presence of numerous mountains surrounding the country and in addition the sea facing south have contributed to its isolation from the rest of South-East Asia. The result was the almost complete cultural independence from the Indian traditions and the prevalence of a Burmese cultural tradition. These geographical features have consequences in the development and rise of national religions. Consequently, during the Medieval age (XI Century) Myanmar became the heart of the most important form of Buddhism, the *Theravada*<sup>161</sup>.

Thanks to its strategical position and its proximity to China, this State has always represented a key objective to reach and to conquer other States and to enter in the core of Asian continent by non-traditional and expectable routes. The English Empire was an example of this strategy. With the second Anglo-Burmese war<sup>162</sup>, in fact the British army seek to build a new commercial partnership with China and to this purpose they annexed the north part of Myanmar which results a fundamental conquer considering the multitude of natural resources present in that territory.

The British presence in this territory lasts almost 60 years, from 1885 (in the occasion of the third Anglo-Burmese war) to 1948, that correspond to the date of Independence. During these years of colonization, Myanmar become part of Indian territory, becoming a province of neighbouring State.

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<sup>159</sup> The capital of Myanmar from 1948 to 2006 was Rangoon and changed in 2006 to Naypyidaw

<sup>160</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/place/Myanmar>

<sup>161</sup> Theravada is a Buddhist School that preaches complete adherence to Buddhist doctrine and practice. It is considered the most ancient school of Buddhism.

<sup>162</sup> There were three Anglo-Burmese wars. The first from 1824-1826; the second 1852-1853; the last 1885-1886 which ended with the annexation of Burma to the English Empire.

**Figure 3: British territorial acquisitions in Burma**



Certainly, these years of British domination had an impact on the traditions and the cultural habits that were installed among the population and overall influences were registered in the relationship between religion and domestic politics that represented a pillar in the previous decades. Under the monarchy the dyads monarchy-monkhood ruled the mutual control of the two forces, enabling, on the one hand, religion to have greater freedoms and advantages and, on the other, the monarchy to control religion through the



direct appointment of patriarchs and to ascertain the existence of the eligibility for the allocation of financial privileges<sup>163</sup>.

With the British secularist approach, fractures among religions emerged and exacerbated a situation already dominated by several ethnic and religious divisions. The division between religion and domestic politics represented a pillar of British policy in Myanmar, influenced by the drawback of the events previously occurred in India<sup>164</sup>. The colonial approach thus established a strict division between the monarchy and the monkhood by promoting secular education and spreading the pillar of Christianity through financial supports to schools which role was to criticize the Buddhist precepts.

With the British influence on Burmese traditions and culture, several people decided to leave their native country and on their return were determined to regain their independence by negotiating with the colonial Empire. These new nationalist stirrings combined with the general discontent caused by British isolationism towards Myanmar led to the first youth and student riots. This was the 1930s, about 10 years before independence was granted by the British Empire, and the figure of Aung San began to emerge in Burmese history.

The figure of Aung San, father of Nobel Peace Prize Aung San Suu Kyi, was crucial in the process of independence after the end of World War II. In fact, towards the end of the war, various clashes and military strategies were implemented in order to make the country autonomous. After several clashes between the Japanese army, which had settled in to fight the enemy troops, and the British army, independence was granted in January 1948. Aung San was assassinated by conservatives troops for be allied with the British side during the Japanese occupation. Since then, from the interval from 1948 to 1962 the military has always detained a pivotal role in the government of Myanmar. In 1962 a coup d'état from General Ne Win guaranteed the Socialist Burmese era. He was a leading member of "Thirty Comrades" and invested the army with a strong nationalism showed in the 26 years of power. During that period, he used anti-colonialism values against Japanese and British forces, ushering the history of Burmese dictatorship by Generals. The idea of army as core of the country was born in these years, the Bamar ethnic group, the predominant in Myanmar, consider themselves as protectors of their

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<sup>163</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/place/Myanmar>

<sup>164</sup> Ibidem.

homeland<sup>165</sup>. The long and devastating military occupation lasts for over 70 years and imposes as unifying force of the country. Consequently the *Tamadaw* has imposed its force as necessary to guarantee stability in their territory.

Since the 2015 the Republic of the Union of Myanmar is under the control and the leadership of National League for Democracy. The transition started with the ratification of the new Constitutional Chart which abolished the military junta despite the military role occupies a considerable space in the country. The transition toward a democratic regime did not reflect an increasing focus on the level of human rights in the country and the guarantee of democratic rights. On the contrary the pressures have increased: in 2017 about 740,000 members of the Rohingya minority were forced to leave the country and seek refugees in Bangladesh. The threat of genocide for the Muslim minority is a real menace. Despite the condition and the repression toward political parties, media and civil society is less restrictive; the overall trend is showing a country where basilar democratic rights are not guaranteed sufficiently to define Myanmar a full democratic regime.

The optimistic perspectives defined by the Aung San Suu Kyi election as State Counsellor have been, thus, redefined if we consider the parliamentary composition which seats are reserved for a quarter to the military forces.

Since 1948, the date of independence, this multi-ethnic society has experienced a relevant number of internal conflicts which involved the central government and the ethnic armed minorities. Consequently, the role of the *Tatmadaw*, the official name of the Burmese military, has been pervasive for several decades. The 2008 can be defined as starting point for the democratic opening. Thus, the military defined the path toward democracy with the new Constitution and other institutional reforms for the new parliamentary asset.

In 2011 Thein Sein became the first elected president and simultaneously the rise of the NLD (National League for Democracy) with its leader Aung San Suu Kyi is registered and led, in 2016, to the presidency of Htin Kyaw a NDL exponent. With the NDL exponents in charge, the level of democratic rights has been eroded, ethnic groups differing from Bamar are forced to leave their States. In November 2019 the International Criminal Court started an investigation in order to control and assess crimes against humanity toward Rohingya with particular attention to those living in the Rakhine State.

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<sup>165</sup> <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/lesercito-del-myanmar-vuole-prendersi-il-paese-costi-quel-che-costi-31137>

In February 2021, the military coup has further destabilised the fragile balance created, devastating the country, and reducing it to continuous violence and food and humanitarian crises that are no longer sustainable. As of 9 September 2021 1058 people are killed by the military junta and 6343 are under detention. The data are taken by Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) an NGO based in Thailand which offer assistance political prisoners.<sup>166</sup>

## **4.2 Ethnic and religious divisions**

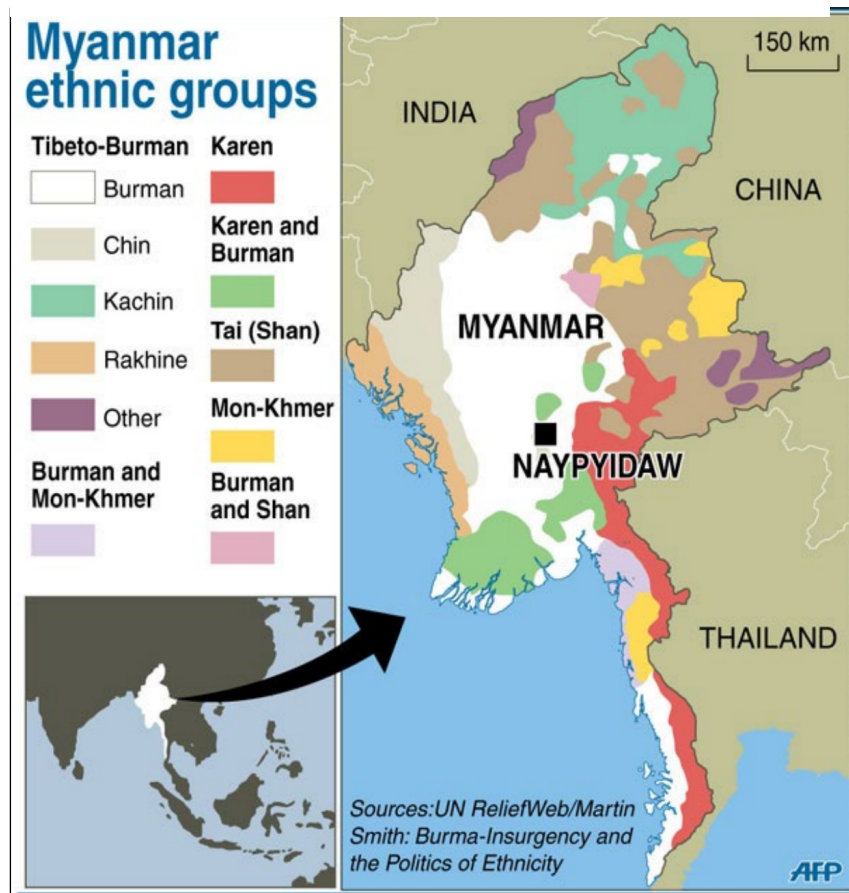
The State of Myanmar has always represented a complex mix of religions and ethnic divisions that have exerted a consistent influence on the domestic and international dynamics. What is peculiar from this coexistence of religions is their intricate relationship with the concept of ethnicity, race, or citizenship<sup>167</sup>. The result is a broader and confusing definition of religion in the country where the “[...] *beginning and end of religion is impossible to discern*” (Simpson, Farrelly, & Holliday, 2018).

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<sup>166</sup> For Further information see their website at: <https://aappb.org/>

<sup>167</sup> Simpson, A., Farrelly, N., & Holliday, I. (2018). *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Myanmar*. New-York: Taylor & Francis Group.

**Figure 4: Ethnic groups in Myanmar**



According to the CIA World Factbook, the distribution of religious creed registered a majority of Buddhist (87.9%), Christian (6.2%), Muslim (4.3%)<sup>168</sup>, Animist (0.8%), Hindu (0.5%); other (0.2%), none (0.1%)<sup>169</sup>. These different religions are divided and constitutes the correspondent faith for the several ethnic groups. Officially, the State of Myanmar recognized 135 ethnic groups or races including the *Bamar*, *Chin*, *Kachin* and several further groups.

Furthermore, there is the necessity to specify that the kind of Buddhism professed in Myanmar is not the most common form of Buddhism correlated with a pacifist world view, otherwise it is a conservative and traditional current of Buddhism, the Theravada<sup>170</sup>

<sup>168</sup> The Muslims percentage need to be reviewed considering the emigration of Rohingya minority starting from 2017.

<sup>169</sup> For further information see the CIA Factbook website at: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/burma/#people-and-society>

<sup>170</sup> Theravada Buddhism is contraposed to Mahayana Buddhism. For further information on the main divisions see: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zf8g4qt/revision/2>

which wrongfully is considered at the basis of most conflicts in Myanmar or Sri Lanka. As many scholars have underlined, there are no valid and concrete basis linking the pillar of Theravada to violent episodes registered in Myanmar during the Rohingya crisis or in Sri Lanka and generally in the Southeast Asian context. Therefore, any form of violence, motivated by any aim, also including the protection of the so-called “Three Jewels”, the pillars of Buddhist doctrine i.e., Buddha Sangha and Dharma<sup>171</sup> are forbidden.

Thus, there is no need to find a justification for interweaving religious precepts with acts of discrimination and violence perpetrated by actors who use religion as a central motivation, undermining the noble role that faith plays within the context in which it is established. What is crucial to remind is the division among faith people and religious creed, that is useful to distinguish from what is inherent the faith and, whereas what is instrumentalized by political actors in order to increase their popular support.

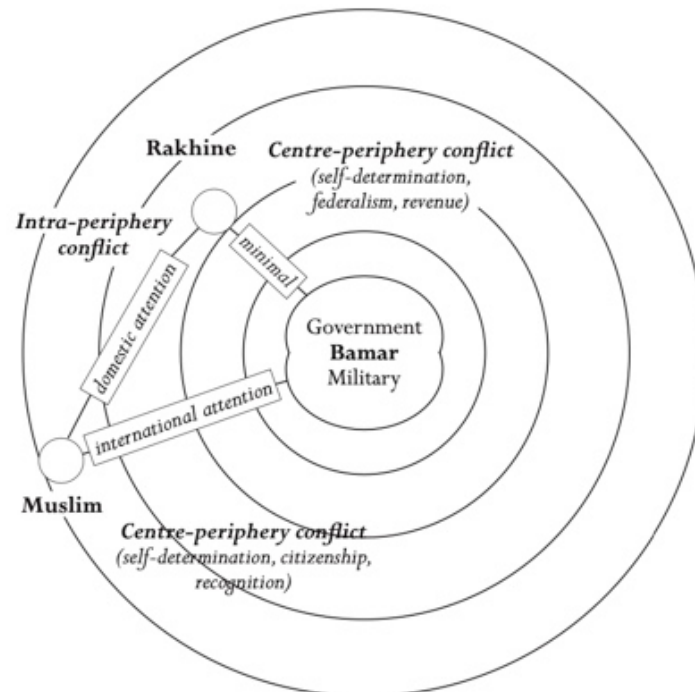
After the Second World War the threat of war does not disappear entirely, conversely, new menaces appeared with new declinations. Among these, identity conflicts emerged, and these are often combined with clash of cultures, communal conflict and – like in Myanmar- cases of ethnic cleansing. Consequently, the war among States become private and opposing troops are replaced by ethnic groups. Among the scholars, Posen has analyzed the ethnic conflicts defining segregation and isolation as one of the key elements of security escalation. Thus, as the author underlines, the conditions in which the ethnic minorities live and their role in the society reflects on the level of self-security. The more there are isolated, the more their fear will arise, and extremism escalation will be registered.

In the Myanmar case, the level of segregation and separation of Rohingya minorities and Muslim minorities has worsened in the last years and conducted to an increase of conflicts especially during the period of transition. What is registered is an isolation of the Rakhine State compared to the center of the State which has matured a deeper sense of segregation and create, consequently, a fertile breeding ground for a national-ethnic conflict. The Myanmar ethnic conflict has been deeply analyzed by Ware and Laoutides which define these domestic struggles in three layers showed in the picture above.

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<sup>171</sup> Chavez-Segura, A. (2014). Hijacking the "Buddhadharma": Violence and War in Buddhist Societies. *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 105-111.

**Figure 5: Asymmetries of power and tripartite nature of the Rakhine State conflict**



Source: Anthony Ware and Costas Laoutides

What emerged from this kind of social and political structure, is a fragmentation inherent the society which is forced -by the date of its independence- to make a consistent number of ethnic groups coexist in the same territory. The geographical factor, moreover, has worsening the dilemma because what is showed by the current events is an escalation of violent repercussions by the Muslim minority in the Rakhine State nonetheless the political leadership in the central government was led by the *Bamar*.

Thus, despite they were represented at political level the reprisal against the Rohingya minorities continued, demonstrating their level of distrust and discontent with the central *Bamar* military government. This is a concrete sign of how their collective identity of human group attached to their land led to an asymmetric balance of power in which the request of independence over the Rakhine State were ignored and, on the other hand, the military interference has eroded the cultural identity over the time. The pressing role of the military junta has indeed increased the level of fear and fostered the generalized lack of trust which finally contribute to the dilemma of ethnic security.

### 4.3 Religious Armed Conflicts in Myanmar

After a rapid glance to the history of Myanmar and ethnic and religious division in the Country, it is useful to briefly define the features of principal religious armed conflicts. As underlined in the second chapter, the UCDP database has collected and classified the armed conflicts worldwide, consequently starting from those data I will focused on the Burmese religious conflicts in order to have a comprehensive overview on the current and past situation in the country.

According to the reformulation based on RELAC done by Svensson<sup>172</sup> in Myanmar 24 groups can be find in the history of conflicts within the country listed in the table below.

**Table 9: Actors in International Religious Conflict in Myanmar**

ACTOR	NAME	DATE OF FOUNDATION	RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION	IDEOLOGY
ABSDF	All Burma students' Democratic front	1988		Federalism
ALP	Arakan Liberation Party	1960s		Federalism
BMA				
CPB	Communist Party of Burma	1939		
DKBA 5	Democratic Karen Buddhist Association	2010	Buddhism	
GOD'S ARMY		1997	Christianism	
KIO	Kachin Indipendent Association	1961		

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<sup>172</sup> Svensson, I., & Nilsson, D. (2018). Disputes over the Divine: Introducing the Religion and Armed Conflict (RELAC) Data, 1975 to 2015. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 62(5), 1127-114

KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party			Separatist
KNU	Karen National Union	1947	Christianism Buddhism	
KNUP	Karen National United Party	1953		
LNUP	Lahu National United Party	1990		
MNDAA	Myanmar Nationalities Democratic Alliance Army	1989		Separatist
MTA	Mong Tai Army	1985		Separatist
NMSP	New Mon State Party	1958		Separatist
NSCN-K	National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang faction	1980	Christianism Maoism	
PSLF	Palaung State Liberation Front	1992		Federalism
RCSS	Restoration Council of the Shan State	1996		Federalism
RPF	Rohingya Patriotic Front	1970	Islam	
RSO	Rohingya Solidarity Organization	1982	Islam	
SSPP	Shan State Progress Party	1971		Separatist
SSRA	Shan State Revolutionary Army			



SURA	Shan United Revolutionary Army	1960		Separatist
TRC	Tai Revolutionary Council			Separatist
UWSA	United Wa State Party	1989		Nationalism

Source: <https://www.ucdp.uu.se/actor/225>

Overall, it can be argued that a consistent part of those armed or political group are composed by separatists armed groups or army wings of political parties aspiring for independence of their ethnic minority correspondent to their State. Divisions, thus, are increased by the features inherent the country composed by a consistent number of ethnicities, religions claiming for their autonomy.

Due to the geopolitical characteristics outlined above, a variety of armed groups have flourished, including those listed in the table previously mentioned, which control or contend for central power, creating situations of continuous political instability. In fact, the existing division, which reflects divisions already present in colonial times, provides for the presence of various ethnic strains settled on a highly heterogeneous territory in which the main *Bamar* ethnic group is settled on the plains, while the other groups are rooted on the more difficult to control highlands historically used as buffer zones.

Among those conflicts the remarkable ones concerns the divisions among the two main religious group which correspond to Buddhist and Muslim population which adhere to the Sunni Islam. The first struggles against Myanmar Muslim minority dates back to 1962 when they achieved a peak with General Ne Win<sup>173</sup>. Starting from that period discriminations increased despite the Constitution declared that there is not a State religion and furthermore, that rights to express freedom of religion are guaranteed by the Constitution. Consequently, art 34 of the Myanmar Constitution of 2008 states that *“Every citizen is equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess and practise religion subject to public order, morality or health and to the other*

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<sup>173</sup> <https://www.ucdp.uu.se/actor/2698>

*provisions of this Constitution.*”<sup>174</sup> Conversely, section 361 of the Constitution reserves a special treatment for Buddhist religion considered that the large majority of the population profess Buddhism<sup>175</sup>.

These conditions were heightened in the Rakhine State with Rohingya minority who suffered from isolation and discrimination, excluded from official positions within the Government<sup>176</sup> and in Rohingya case, they were forced to leave the country and to seek refuge in the neighbouring countries. Thus, a discrepancy is registered between what is stated in the Constitution and what is the real situation, underlining the instrumentalization of religion by the central Government. Hence, the omnipresence of religion depicted in the last paragraph seems paradoxical if we considered the recent events occurred in the country which have mobilized the intervention of International community.

In the following chapter, thus, a focus on the Rohingya crisis will depict the most important features, in particular referring to the international involvement in this international humanitarian crisis.

It is evident that interest in the issue of the Rohingya minority within Rakhine State is not of greater importance compared to other religious conflicts in the State. The international resonance and inclusion of third states as well as the entire international community makes the issue of the Rohingya Muslims a tragic example of how religion is not only a personal matter whereas must be reconsidered at the centre of the sphere of inter-state relations.

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<sup>174</sup> Constitution of Myanmar art.34 available at [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Myanmar\\_2008.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Myanmar_2008.pdf?lang=en)

<sup>175</sup> Constitution of Myanmar. Section 361: *“The Union recognizes special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens of the Union.”*

<sup>176</sup> <https://www.ucdp.uu.se/actor/2698>

## Chapter five: The role of international community in the Rohingya conflict

### Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapter, defining the current situation in Myanmar in a linear manner is arduous and requires to take into account several independent variables connected to both domestic and international level.

Furthermore, the strategic position of this State has always represented a crucial role for the most powerful actors in the IR chessboard notably the Myanmar-China relations, the so-called *pauk-phaw*<sup>177</sup>.

The influence of the colonial period on the part of the British Empire, combined with the geographical characteristics of the country, has resulted in a succession of military juntas over the years. The main task of the military intervention within the governmental dynamics concerned above all the need to prevent the disintegration of the country, a need that clashes with the current administrative division into states, regions and self-administered zones on an ethnic basis<sup>178</sup>. The Tatmadaw has always been reluctant to implement federalism, which would not allow the control of peripheral areas where, among others, the Rohingya minority resides.

This chapter thus, will be dedicated to the analysis of the role of international community in the resolution of the Rohingyas' crisis. Furthermore, the role of single States within the United Nations will be depicted as well as their interests in the Myanmar's affairs, notably the neighbouring States like China and India and the geopolitical powers like Russia.

Furthermore, a focus on the Responsibility to Protect will be addressed to the Myanmar question. Thus, since 2005 at the UN World Summit meeting it becomes a political commitment in order to avoid episodes of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. In the case under scrutiny, the R2P principle is stalled due to internal divisions in the Security Council among those who condemn the atrocities within the State and those claiming the supremacy of State sovereignty over R2P.

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<sup>177</sup> Di Muro, L. (2020, 6). Cina e Myanmar fratelli coltelli. *Limes, Rivista italiana di geopolitica*, 283-296.

<sup>178</sup> Myanmar is divided into 7 regions, 7 States, the territory where the capital is situated, 5 self-administrative zones and a self-administrative division.

## 5.1 Historical roots of the conflict and current evolution

Rohingya Muslims minority in Myanmar has now been persecuted for decades, their hounding probably dating back to 1948, when Myanmar achieved independence from Britain. In more specific manner, the reasons for their current prosecution are deemed to be rooted in the colonial period<sup>179</sup>. As many claims<sup>180</sup>, Rohingya entered the country to benefit from the labour policies implemented by the British colonizer, leading the Muslim population to triple between 1871 and 1911<sup>181</sup>. Eventually, in exchange for their support during the Second World War, the British promised the Rohingya their own national territory<sup>182</sup>, while Burmese natives supported the Japanese<sup>183</sup>. Consequently, right after Myanmar's independence was reached and military rule was imposed in the country<sup>184</sup>, the animosities by Myanmar's nationalists and Buddhists against the ethnic minority quickly escalated, also due to their Islamic religion. In a few years, the Rohingya became the target of hatred and discrimination, and in 1982<sup>185</sup> they were formally deprived of the rights of citizenship and, as a consequence, of any legal protection from the government, as well as access to health services, education and employment.

Moreover, they have been denied several other fundamental rights, namely the right to worship freely, to move freely and to own property, alongside with marital restrictions. Nothing has changed since those days, on the contrary, the situation has gradually deteriorated over the years as in 2012 more than 120,000 Rohingya were obliged to live in displacement camps in Rakhine state<sup>186</sup>, in 2014 they could not take part in the national census, and in 2015 they were hit by the Protection of Race and Religion laws, which aimed to restrict women and non-Buddhists' rights<sup>187</sup>.

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<sup>179</sup> Abdelkader, E. (2017). The history of the persecution of Myanmar's Rohingya . *The Conversation* .

<sup>180</sup> Adams, S. (2019, January). If not now, when?: The Responsibility to Protect, the Fate of the Rohingya and the Future of Human Rights. *Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect*(8).

<sup>181</sup> *ibidem*.

<sup>182</sup> The promise was not kept, but right after WWII the Rohingya were awarded with prestigious government positions.

<sup>183</sup> *ibidem*.

<sup>184</sup> Adams, S. (2019, January). If not now, when?: The Responsibility to Protect, the Fate of the Rohingya and the Future of Human Rights. *Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect*(8).

<sup>185</sup> When the Citizenship Act of Myanmar was enacted. Cfr. *ibidem*.

<sup>186</sup> The Myanmar's area where the Rohingya have always lived.

<sup>187</sup> Adams, S. (2019, January). If not now, when?: The Responsibility to Protect, the Fate of the Rohingya and the Future of Human Rights. *Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect*(8).

In 2016, following a Rohingya rebels attack, Myanmar's security forces responded with a four-month repression, during which several gross human rights violations had been carried out<sup>188</sup>, and which resulted in the migration of about 73,000 Rohingya in the neighbouring country<sup>189</sup>. Shortly afterwards, in August 2017, new attacks were perpetrated by the official security forces, leading to the death of about 6,700 Rohingya<sup>190</sup>. Such actions "clearly constituted crimes against humanity under international law and also appeared to be genocidal in intent"<sup>191</sup>.

## 5.2 Myanmar's role in Rohingyas' persecution

As it has just been said, the Rohingya is facing a serious threat of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity, while the government of Myanmar has failed in its primary duty to protect them. Most of the 1-2 million Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar have been rendered stateless and therefore extremely vulnerable to flagrant violations of their human rights. The Myanmar armed forces began its first physical violence against this specific ethnic group in the late 1970s, and in 1978 the Myanmar military carried out operations with the aim to expel "foreigners" from the region. As a consequence of this action, more than 200,000 Rohingyas took refuge in Bangladesh and created the first major wave of refugees. At this point Bangladesh stipulated a bilateral agreement with Myanmar and at the end of 1979 a significant amount of Rohingyas returned to Myanmar.

This ethnic group went through many causes of violence, the most important is represented by the fact that Myanmar government does not accept these people as their citizens or nationals because it considers them as illegal immigrants and, for this very reason has often adopted violent approaches in dealing with them. Myanmar's security forces began a series of crimes against humanity such as the killing of hundreds of Rohingya women, men and children in their villages, the abduction of women and girls, the relocation of men and boys to places of detention where they were tortured, and their houses were also burned by the soldiers.

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<sup>188</sup> Namely mass arrests, torture, sexual violence, extrajudicial killings and the widespread destruction of Rohingya homes and mosques. *ibidem*.

<sup>189</sup> Bangladesh.

<sup>190</sup> Adams, S. (2019, January). If not now, when?: The Responsibility to Protect, the Fate of the Rohingya and the Future of Human Rights. *Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect*(8).

<sup>191</sup> *ibidem*.

At this point the International Court of Justice in The Hague has declared itself competent to rule on the charge of "genocide" against the Rohingya Muslim minority, against the army of Myanmar. Furthermore, the Court ordered Myanmar to take "all measures in its power" to prevent the alleged genocide against the Rohingya Muslims. Moreover, the judges granted a number of emergency measures required under the 1948 Genocide Convention.

The Muslim minority Rohingya in Myanmar is actually subject to violations of human rights and needs help, international statutory and voluntary organizations are in fact working for the finding of solutions on the conflict in Myanmar. The urge to reserve humans from the violations of their rights have resulted in many reports from the UN in which it has been coined the expression of "responsibility to protect" (R2P). The Responsibility to Protect consists in a global political commitment which was endorsed by all member states of the UN during the 2005 World Summit with the aim to address its four key concerns to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. It consists in an international norm that seeks to ensure that the international community will not fails again.

The objective of the government of Myanmar and the international community under the principle of R2P is to protect Rohingya that is on the brink of genocide and of crimes against humanity. There are some attempts made by the government of Myanmar to run the crisis, the government did not provide a significant support to but end to the violations of human rights of the Rohingya and also failed in its duty to protect them.

Myanmar represents one of the countries that is at severely high risk of genocide as violence and other crimes acted against the Rohingya are common and systematic. The intention to commit genocide is mandatory in the case of criminal proceedings for genocide, but not in the case of R2P. The need for the proof of discriminatory intent will make it impossible to prove genocide, especially genocide affecting the state, as in the case of Rohingya. In addition, R2P also incorporates the responsibility to prevent, which suggests that it covers situations where crimes of mass barbarity are likely to arise.

In Myanmar situation, the responsibility to protect the Rohingya Muslims belongs to the state of Myanmar, which as the facts indicate, is an accomplice to the crime. In these cases, the responsibility falls on the widest communities to supply such protection.

The international community, through the United Nations, also has the primary responsibility to use adequate diplomatic, humanitarian, and other peaceful means, to help secure populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic crimes. It has also emerged that if peaceful means cannot achieve peace, the means cannot be used to affect the state concerned in order to protect its own population, therefore the international community could undertake military intervention, through the Security Council.

The R2P commands a wide range of actions, including military intervention, diplomacy, financial penalties, legal proceedings in international courts, intelligence, and the following collection and other actions to deter would-be offenders.

The Rohingya do not benefit from the solidarity of other peoples, such as Palestinian refugees or those who fled Venezuela, and do not have a homeland to return to, like Syrian refugees. They do not stir international opinion. They are not, if only marginally, part of the geopolitical game of the great powers. They have limited migratory outlets (Thailand, Malaysia). The country that could and should take the first decisive step, Myanmar, does not seem willing to do so. Despite having a Nobel Peace Prize-winning woman at the helm.

### **5.3 The role of United Nations in Myanmar**

One of the founding objectives of the United Nations (UN) is preventing mass atrocities. Hence, the UN has enacted several international humanitarian laws in order to protect civilians from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity<sup>192</sup>, such as the ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’, by deploying peacekeeping missions, imposing sanctions, establishing international criminal tribunals, and even authorizing military intervention if deemed necessary.

While, the UN has always been internally divided between those in favour of the traditional notion of state sovereignty and those who insisted on the right of humanitarian intervention, after NATO failed mission in Kosovo in 1999 there had been a change in the debate, which led to the establishment of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) in 2001 and then to the World Summit in 2005, where for the first time it was denounced the notion of ‘Responsibility to Protect’

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<sup>192</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect*, Report of the Secretary-General, A/63/677, 2009.

(R2P), defining the responsibilities both of the national states and the international community<sup>193</sup>. Notwithstanding, it was proven extremely arduous for foreign states to actively intervene in internal matters of other countries without proper strategic interests and gains, for providing humanitarian aid and just formally condemning the crimes is less expensive of a military intervention. Additionally, there is the need to consider that despite international laws and norms are crucial for the protection of human beings, States are rarely obliged to follow them. Furthermore, the principle of R2P has not actually been utterly used since R2P cannot be identified neither as a law nor as a legally binding framework. Consequently, the UN member states remain discordant about in which specific cases this principle should be put into effect.

In this regard, Myanmar crisis exposed two enduring flaws of the international efforts to prevent such violations of human rights:

The first is that despite an abundance of rhetoric around the importance of prevention, very few states or regional bodies are prepared to act on early warning of human rights violations or identity-based conflicts that could result in atrocity crimes. The second major failing is that the UN Security Council's effectiveness remains constrained by the veto power of its five permanent members<sup>194</sup>.

Consequently, it can be affirmed that on one side, what contributes to stall the R2P activation is an existing underlying division between the great powers inside the Security Council. While the U.S., U.K., and France condemn these atrocities as a threat to international stability, Russia and China claim the absolute state sovereignty above R2P, even though they theoretically agree with its principles and, even more remarkably, they continue to give political and military support to the Myanmar government that has repeatedly ignored the calls of the international community. Hence, in 2007, both China and Russia opposed the first Myanmar's government resolution aimed at stopping persecution of ethnic minorities, releasing political prisoners - such as Aung San Suu Kyi - and allowing humanitarian organizations into the country.

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<sup>193</sup>Ibrahim, H., & Nordin, R. (2015). The Principle of Responsibility to Protect: The Case of Rohingya in Myanmar. *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, 1-18.

<sup>194</sup> Adams, S. (2020). Rohingya Symposium: The UN Security Council, the Rohingya Genocide and the Future of International Justice. *Opinio Juris*.



The two powers argued that Myanmar's situation was not a real threat to international peace and security, further stating that the UN Security Council was not the appropriate place to discuss other state's internal affairs<sup>195</sup>.

Accordingly, China and Russia have frequently make use of their veto power against the UN General Assembly resolutions and Security Council initiatives to prevent any intervention in Myanmar, joined by Cambodia, Laos, the Philippines, Vietnam, Belarus, Syria, and Zimbabwe in successfully opposing the 2017 resolution on Myanmar aimed at safeguarding the return of refugees, enabling humanitarian aid workers, and grant full citizenship to the Rohingya<sup>196</sup>. China and Russia are currently providing economic-political support to Myanmar constraining Western influence in the country. For China, this can be explained by its strategic interests in the Indian Ocean that can be reached through Myanmar, with which China shares a common border.

The Myanmar strategic position paves the way to important maritime trade as to be defined as the "*China's satellite in the Indian Ocean*" (Marchi, 2016)<sup>197</sup>. Moreover, the Beijing-Naypyidaw axis has been consolidated thanks to the military and weapon low-cost furniture granted by China which amount has increased starting from the 2011 the date of Myanmar democratic opening. The Chinese multiple interests in Myanmar are linked to the protection of border, considering not only the military ones but they are also linked to the economic interests, considering for example the diversification of energy supply guarantee by the access to the Bay of Bengal, or the role of Myanmar as one of the States (including Pakistan, Bhutan and Nepal) thanks to which China could manage the ascending role of India.

Moreover, to confirm the ambivalent Chinese role, which ignores the issues affecting the Myanmar country, Chinese administration in 2015 refused to sign the agreement for ceasefire. In 2015, indeed, the Rohingya crises reached a critical point, causing 250 thousand of refugees without considering a large amount of Rohingya forced to leave the countries and seek refuge in the neighboring countries including Bangladesh.

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<sup>195</sup> Ibrahim, H., & Nordin, R. (2015). The Principle of Responsibility to Protect: The Case of Rohingya in Myanmar. *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, 1-18.

<sup>196</sup> The Guardian, China and Russia oppose UN resolution on Rohingya, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/24/china-russia-oppose-un-resolution-myanmar-rohingya-muslims> (last access 18/09/21).

<sup>197</sup> Di Muro, L. (2020, 6). Cina e Myanmar fratelli coltelli. *Limes, Rivista italiana di geopolitica*, 283-296.

For this reason, China is the biggest investor in Myanmar, and is making plans to set up a seaport in the Rakhine State as a part of the One Belt One Road initiative<sup>198</sup>. For Russia, its main interests in Myanmar are related to weaponry sales, being its bigger source of advanced arms, and the potential in sources of gas reserves<sup>199</sup>. Additionally, Myanmar might be Russia's way to expand its presence in Southeast Asia. From a more global perspective, Russia and China support each other in an attempt to create a bloc against the U.S.-led Western initiatives<sup>200</sup>.

On the other side, there is another important factor that contributes to disagreement between states on the intervention in Myanmar and is causing stall in the use of R2P. This is the fact that Myanmar, thanks to a 2008 constitutional reform, reshaped its state into an “eye wash democracy”, i.e. a governmental system appearing democratic on the surface but that is undemocratic<sup>201</sup>. As evident, even though the military should have maintained complete autonomy in matters of security, defence and foreign relations, Myanmar is still subject to a military rule that actually receives civilian population's approval in its persecution of minorities, such as Rohingyas.

## 5.4 Conclusion

Regardless of these flaws, it is crucial to regard the Rohingya oppression in terms of R2P attributable both to Myanmar's national government and to the international community, especially to the UN Security Council. What can be observed from the Myanmar crisis is that the international systems and specific bodies for early warning and structural prevention of these atrocities are not effectively deployed each time they are needed. Rather, after prevention fails the only option left to UN is often belatedly dispatch of UN peacekeepers in an attempt to manage an already disrupted situation, therefore failing to apply the R2P principle<sup>202</sup>. If the R2P was applicable in the past cases of Kosovo

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<sup>198</sup> T. Chau, China-led port project inches ahead in Myanmar, 2019, <https://www.asiatimes.com/2019/07/article/china-led-port-project-inches-ahead-in-myanmar/> (last access 18/09/2021).

<sup>199</sup> Cfr. Myanmar Times, Myanmar-Russia ties reviewed, 2017, <https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/25467-myanmar-russia-ties-reviewed.html> (last access 04/12/20).

<sup>200</sup> Ibrahim, H., & Nordin, R. (2015). The Principle of Responsibility to Protect: The Case of Rohingya in Myanmar. *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, 1-18.

<sup>201</sup> *ibidem*.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibidem*.

and Darfur, when action was taken without a mandate from the Security Council, then it should and must be resorted to in the case of Myanmar<sup>203</sup>. In fact, even at times when Institutions such as the UN Security Council appear to be paralyzed, due to the disputes on internal affairs and state sovereignty<sup>204</sup>, there should be a much more proactive international community to prevent human rights violations, protect all vulnerable populations, and hold the perpetrators responsible for their crimes.

In an increasingly interconnected world, therefore, the single action of a State is not an isolated case and cannot be analyzed independently by the global context. The Myanmar situation, hence, constitutes a real risk for the entire globe for its crucial and pivotal position in the Indian Ocean in addition its ethnic richness should be considered as an asset for the democracy developing. Therefore, as mentioned before in the dissertation, the analysis should consider the population, their cultural inheritance as an asset and moreover as a concrete variable to be taken into account. The respect of human rights, the respect of ethnic minorities and the recognition of their will and rights should represent a challenge tackled jointly and cohesively by the States. Only in this manner it is possible to implement the international system in which we claim to be involved.

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<sup>203</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>204</sup> Adams, S. (2019, January). If not now, when?: The Responsibility to Protect, the Fate of the Rohingya and the Future of Human Rights. *Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect*(8).

## Chapter six: Diploreligio in Myanmar

### Introduction

In this last chapter all the elements analysed in the previous part will result useful to achieve a concrete and comprehensive understanding of the role of diplomacy and religion in the State of Myanmar. Thus, the definition of diploreligio contained in the third chapter will find a concrete application to the case abovementioned, in order to try to use religion as a tool to overcome the drawbacks inherent the international systems, the same drawbacks depicted in the Rohingyas' crisis.

As emerged in the previous paragraphs, the international engagement toward gross violations of human rights has failed in guarantee the respect of them due to the prevalence of Permanent members' interests over the real and concrete threat to the stability of a State.

Moreover, with resurgence of religions in the international affairs, it emerged the necessity to innovate the tools used in the diplomatic relations among States, to integrate religious precepts in order to achieve the goals at the basis of the international system. Considering that the study of the influence of religions within international relations between states is now considered a valid field of research, the role of religions in the international context can be defined as transcending traditional political categories<sup>205</sup> and, consequently, religions should not be considered as mere faith-based NGOs<sup>206</sup>.

As emerged in the course of the dissertation, there are many aspects that can be assigned to the role of religion within the international scenario, both in an active way, as useful tools in the process of peacebuilding and reconciliation, and as triggers of violence and religious conflicts. Throughout the thesis, an attempt has been made to demonstrate how this approach to religion is a partial explication of global phenomena and does not guarantee an external vision that is detached from current events.

In this chapter the consequences of Buddhism over the Myanmar politics will be described. As it will emerge, the connection between Buddhism and politics is not a modern phenomenon yet is inherent the pillars of religious creed.

Furthermore, attempts will be made in order to define the international implication in the diplomatic relation between Myanmar and several actors. The importance of the Sino

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<sup>205</sup> Ferrara, P. (2016). *Il mondo di Francesco*. Milano: Edizioni San Paolo.

<sup>206</sup> Ibidem.

Burmese relations thus will be depicted, and the result will define a polarized powers in which the interests of Myanmar are instrumentalize in order to fight the western powers. With this last chapter the research will reach the final step, reaching a complete overview of the macro theme of religion and politics.

### **6.1 The moral path of Myanmar politics**

Myanmar represents a very complex and intricate case in which the link between religion and politics has interfaced with the geographical, ethnic, and historical heritage in which Buddhism, notably the Theravada Buddhism, has always retained a pivotal role in the definition of domestic and international spheres.

Starting from mentioning the so-called Saffron Revolution in August 2007, the religious exponents has constantly intervened to fight against the national military government, underlining in what degree Buddhism has always played an active role in preventing the excesses of power by central government. Clearly, as the recent events has shown, the religious involvement in the domestic and consequently, international matters, has led to negative episodes of discrimination toward other religious and ethnic minorities, therefore obscuring the romantic vision of Myanmar linked to the imagination of “*spiritually wealthy*” country (Schober, 2011)<sup>207</sup>.

The colonial legacy has moreover influenced the relationship among religion and politics in the country in that the British Empire after the Anglo-Burmese wars destroyed the intricate relationship between Buddhism and central government introducing a new wave of secularism<sup>208</sup>. Furthermore, an additional feature linked to the colonial period is to be found in the role of Buddhism as resistance power. In fact, during that period the Buddhist resistance played a crucial role in contrasting the colonial dominance, role that it has continued to retain in the modern phase, against the military junta and nationalist powers.

This intricate relationship between Buddhism and political division of the power in the Burmese society<sup>209</sup> relies on the Theravada Buddhist cosmology, based on a predilection for the monarchical from of State due to the human tendency toward immorality that

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<sup>207</sup> Schober, J. (2011). *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

<sup>208</sup> Ibidem

<sup>209</sup> After Myanmar

needs to be controlled by a strong political personality embodied in the King<sup>210</sup>. This natural hierarchy based on the consequences of past actions on the present, has represented a pillar for the explanation of political structure and generally on the manner in which they perceived the nature of political order, anchored according to Walton to the view of “moral universe”<sup>211</sup>.

Moreover, the peculiarity inherent the Theravada Buddhist implications in Myanmar concerns its differentiation from other Buddhist traditions i.e. Sri Lanka or Cambodia<sup>212</sup>. Thus, a more lay Buddhist tradition is registered in the country due to the colonialist experiences and these features changed by the time and according to the different religious belief in the several ethnic groups present in the country<sup>213</sup>. The result is a dynamic version of Buddhist tradition whose capacity of renewal has been influenced by exogenous factors in a consistent manner that lead several scholars to talk about new wave of modern Buddhism, located in Myanmar which result different from the other neighbouring States.

Moreover, the Institution of *sangha* has undergone substantial changes from the pre-colonization period to the Independence phase of Myanmar’s history<sup>214</sup>. This reflects on the way of conceiving the traditional Theravada practices, and in certain cases there was registered a synthesis with political ideologies<sup>215</sup>. What emerges, thus, is a redefinition of religious precepts and pillars by the external dynamics ruling the country. Unlike the other cases in which Buddhism has remained fixed on the traditional concept and practises, the case of Myanmar results much more dependent and vulnerable. As many scholars claims, this process is certainly to be explained by combining the use of religion, in this case Theravada Buddhism, to legitimate their politics<sup>216</sup> and, furthermore, the reaction to the British colonial prohibition to political reunions that lead to an increase of religious participation to the political debate.

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<sup>210</sup> Walton, M. J. (2017). *Buddhism, politics and political thought in Myanmar*. New York: Cambridge Univeristy Press.

<sup>211</sup> Ibidem

<sup>212</sup> Ibidem

<sup>213</sup> Ibidem

<sup>214</sup> Schober, J. (2011). *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

<sup>215</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>216</sup> Walton, M. J. (2017). *Buddhism, politics and political thought in Myanmar*. New York: Cambridge Univeristy Press.

Thus, the modern Buddhism has become pervasive in several aspects of society, changing the traditional practises and furthermore redefining the former Weberian conception of “otherworldly” religion, incapable of exerts the same social influence as other religions, notably Protestantism<sup>217</sup>.

## **6.2 The international implications**

The Buddhist vision with its repercussions within the dynamics of the state needs to be taken into account as a binding force for the various component parts of this ethnic-religious mosaic with a background strongly influenced by western politics.

Despite the conditions of the state of Myanmar having been ignored for years by the international community, due to its scarce weight in the geopolitical chessboard, in the last few years the geopolitical scenario of the former Burma has come back into focus.

China's interference in the dynamics of the country under analysis, for example, has ancient roots, from the seizure of power by General Ne Win who established a socialist regime by blocking cross-border trade with the People's Republic of China. After the anti-government protests of 1988, China used the isolationism in which Myanmar was forced to establish favourable trade relations, which continued until the 2000s with investments and trade in various sectors such as hydroelectricity and manufacturing<sup>218</sup>.

The intricate relationship between China and Myanmar is also part of the broader divergence between the two superpowers, the United States on the one hand and china on the other. relations between Myanmar and the two superpowers have varied over the years, using various strategies, a small part of which may be religious. However, it must be specified that China's use of Buddhism<sup>219</sup> does not correspond to the vision of religious diplomacy as interpreted within this thesis, yet it is necessary to mention it in order to understand how religion has been counted among the instruments of influence in the relations between the two countries. therefore, it is testified how Buddhism is one of the essential components of the political sphere of Myanmar and how, if correctly declined,

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<sup>217</sup> Schober, J. (2011). *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

<sup>218</sup> Di Muro, L. (2020, 6). Cina e Myanmar fratelli coltelli. *Limes, Rivista italiana di geopolitica*, 283-296.

<sup>219</sup> Raymond, G. V. (2020 ). Religion as a Tool of Influence: Buddishm and China's Belt and Road Initiative in Mainland Southeast Asia . *ISEAS- Yusof Ishak Institute* , 346-371.

it can define a more complete and exhaustive overview of the country and finally define more effective interventions of diplomacy.

Moreover, since the democratic transition process began in 2011, there has been a steady detachment from Beijing in favour of an increasing counterbalancing process by the United States, India and Japan.

The military wanted to demonstrate internally that there had been a real change from the past, and externally that Myanmar was ready to reshape its relations with the world, seeing the West as a new frontier to halt Chinese influence<sup>220</sup>. The case that gave the greatest external confirmation of this process was the blocking of the Myitsone dam, which would have been a turning point for the people of Kachin<sup>221</sup>. The suspension of the work took place without informing China and represented the turning point for a change of strategy by China, which from that moment began to consider Buddhism as an instrument of diplomacy to restore relations with the neighbouring State<sup>222</sup>.

The introduction of Buddhist diplomacy as a means of rapprochement between states is done through both soft power instruments, such as the construction of the Myanmar-China Buddhist centre in Naypyidaw in order to improve and inaugurate a new wave of Buddhism's teachings<sup>223</sup>. Moreover, institutional visits were introduced in order to rebuild new approaches between the countries and as the President of the Buddhist Association China stated,

“Buddhist circles between China and Myanmar will work together in the future to contribute to our equally neighbourly friendship in the spirit of social harmony, national prosperity and the dedication to world peace”<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Di Muro, L. (2020, 6). Cina e Myanmar fratelli coltelli. *Limes, Rivista italiana di geopolitica*, 283-296.

<sup>221</sup> Ibidem

<sup>222</sup> Raymond, G. V. (2020 ). Religion as a Tool of Influence: Buddhism and China's Belt and Road Initiative in Mainland Southeast Asia . *ISEAS- Yusof Ishak Institute* , 346-371.

<sup>223</sup> Ibidem

<sup>224</sup> Buddhist Association of China, [Vice President the Chinese Buddhist Association Vice President and Party Secretary Liu Wei met with Myanmar's Most Honourable Supreme Council and Buddhist Leader], 23 June 2019, <http://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/e/action/ShowInfo.php?classid=506&id=40421>. From Raymond, G. V. (2020 ). Religion as a Tool of Influence: Buddhism and China's Belt and Road Initiative in Mainland Southeast Asia . *ISEAS- Yusof Ishak Institute* , 346-371.



Thus, religion has been instrumentalized in order to achieve goals that could not be fulfilled with the traditional means of diplomacy, demonstrating that a renewal in the strategy used in the international relations, needs to be considered.

However, Myanmar re-enters the Chinese sphere of influence through the issue of Rohingya management by leveraging economic issues, among others. The PRC's decisive role in mediating the 2016 peace conference rekindled suspicions of Chinese influence on Burmese soil<sup>225</sup>. These suspicions have since been confirmed in practice, considering the flow of Chinese-sourced arms supplied to armed opposition groups to the government. As previously mentioned, it is through the cases of government repression of the Rohingya minority that Sino-Burmese relations resume. Hence, in 2018, China has reasserted itself as Myanmar's sole protecting power, becoming in practice, its only economic partner, following sanctions and the gradual decline of Western economic relations<sup>226</sup>.

We could continue to list the geo-political issues underlying the relations between Myanmar and several political actors, yet the mere description of past and recent events would lead away from the central focus of this thesis. As it emerged above, the relations between Myanmar and other actors in the international scenario are the result and the example of geopolitical strategy which uses all the means and tools at their disposal to exerts influence over a strategic country as Myanmar.

The former Burma is aware of the power inherent the Chinese government which extends its influence through the use of traditional and non-traditional means, using religion as a common element in order to improve the bonding between the countries in the worst phases of their relationship. What otherwise do not result utterly clear is the nature of this relationship in which Myanmar is using to some extent the Chinese interests and investments in their territory in order to attract western interest in their country<sup>227</sup>. The result is a geopolitical strategy of threat in which none of the actors is deceived on stable a continuative relationship and uses as a leverage the correspondent actor. What emerge is an inefficient and unstable alliance in which the real problematic affecting the countries are considered as a mere tool to exerts the power.

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<sup>225</sup> Di Muro, L. (2020, 6). Cina e Myanmar fratelli coltelli. *Limes, Rivista italiana di geopolitica*, 283-296.

<sup>226</sup> Ibidem

<sup>227</sup> Ibidem

The western powers, moreover, have underestimated the gravity of the situation undergoing in Myanmar, and they used economic and commercial threat, expecting to solve and stop outbreaks that are undermining the stability of the country.

## **Conclusion**

There is, thus, the necessity to take into account alternatives and more efficient tools of diplomacy in order to have a comprehensive strategy that could include the fulfil and the guarantee of the respect of fundamental human rights that are constantly violated in this country.

What I propose in this thesis is linked to the inclusion of a religious literacy for diplomats and generally, to include the study of religion in the analysis of international relations. The lack of interest devoted in the past to the religious phenomena has led to an incomplete overview of the international scenario and consequently to inefficient intervention that lacked an essential component of the mosaic.

According to several scholars, this process was linked to the perception of religion as irrational and disruptive elements that could jeopardize the stability and the peaceful coexistence in the international context<sup>228</sup>. Conversely, as it has explained in the dissertation, the conception of religion as inherently violent lead to a misconception of the role of religion and does not take into account the pillar of religious precepts that aspire to a peaceful coexistence of multiple religions. This misleading vision has remerged in the last period especially with the resurgence of terrorist attacks and it has led to talk about the association of religion to religious fundamentalism<sup>229</sup>.

The Theravada Buddhism's case represents a further example of this phenomenon albeit in a less emphasised manner by the media and by popular opinion. In fact, it was frequently described as the root of Myanmar disorders and as a cause of the violent episodes, especially those against other religions i.e. Muslim minorities in the country.

A further motivation for the lack of interest in the religious issues in the predominance of realist approach to the explication of international dynamics. Hence, in analysis of international relations scholars have constantly focused on the strategy among

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<sup>228</sup> Ferrara, P. (2016). *Il mondo di Francesco*. Milano: Edizioni San Paolo.

<sup>229</sup> Ibidem

the countries, on their military power and their leverages that can be used to exert their power toward the other States.

In the analysis of the Myanmar position, hence, the focus of western states was focused on the geopolitical position that it retained rather than on the religious heritage that could represent an asset for the international relation of the country.

With a focus on Buddhism and its political implications, a more comprehensive analysis could have been achieved. Hence the essence of Buddhism, and in particular the Theravada Buddhism have demonstrated how, during the history of Myanmar the religion has been influenced by the external dynamics and, consequently has changed in several aspects in order to legitimize the modern political system.

This inherent characteristic of Buddhism can be explained with the definition of transitional religions that could easily adapt to other context even distant from the land of origin<sup>230</sup>. As for many other religious creeds, like Hinduism and Christianity, the transnational religions lead to a sense of protection and community that is independent from the historical and territorial bonds<sup>231</sup>.

In the Buddhist case, this reflects on the cosmology and on the pillar of Theravada based on the casual connection between past actions and present and the constant need to adhere and adapt to the changing political order. As previously underlined, the so called “modern Buddhism” reflects this change toward a more laid religious practices which can influence people and political order, independently on their creed.

This universality and flexibility of Buddhism and in general of religion, should retain a pivotal role in the analysis of international politics. The foundation of international system on the mere analysis of realistic element, does not depict the importance of religious precepts on the root of a society and on the political implications that the same religious precepts could achieve.

Thus, in order to achieve a post-secular approach, the religious implications on the international system should be integrated in the political debate and be conceived as a fundamental part of it. In this manner, religions should be interpreted according to the transformation of global political order and in particular as a manifestation of the decline

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<sup>230</sup> Ferrara, P. (2014). *Global Religions and international relations, A Diplomatic Perspective*. Palgrave MacMillan.

<sup>231</sup> Ibidem.

of global hegemony by Nation-States, International Organizations and religious Institutions<sup>232</sup>.

Finally, in this manner, religions can be conceived as key actors capable to reverse the *status quo* albeit be defined as mere Institutions to be included or excluded in the political community. The Buddhist example in Myanmar is a clear example of what a religion is capable of. The continuous fights against the colonial power firstly and the fights against the military junta secondly, has shown how religious power cannot be conceived anymore as matter of inclusion or exclusion nor they cannot be linked to the matter of cosmopolitan dimension. Conversely, there is the need to reconfigure the spaces of political relations with the lens of pluralism.

Furthermore, this new manner of conceiving the international relations enables to rethink the international relations by eliminating the traditional concept of international key actors. With the resurgence of religion in the XX century, this process become ineluctable and necessary to redefine a new wave of international relations in order to make the role of the International Community worthy of the principles that inspired its birth.

With this thesis the role of religion has been analysed under several aspects, from the international law point of view to the role of religion in the process of peacebuilding and finally with a focus on the role of religion in Myanmar.

Thanks to the description of the several issues linked to the freedom of religion and belief, it is now possible to understand how the thesis of *diploreligio* several obstacles and threats has to overcome like the protection of freedom of religion, or the theme concerning the security and religion complex relationship. Hence, the research and the studies on this theme are not ultimate and they need constantly to be reviewed in order to adhere to the reality and to fulfil the real necessity in the international community.

Whereas, what represent a pillar for this research is the need to avoid euro-centric perspectives and to reconsider the key actors of international systems according to the need of the Community with the consciousness that people are the basic element of the international Community and no policy can be afforded to threaten the integrity of it, regardless of underlying interests.

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<sup>232</sup> Ibidem.

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## **List of Abbreviation**

CEDAW- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination

CRC- Convention on the Rights of the Child

DEAFIDBRB- Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and  
Discrimination based on religion or Belief

FORBs- Freedom of Religion or Belief

ICCPR- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

ICERD-International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial  
Discrimination

ICPRW-Convention on the Political Rights of Women

OHCHR-Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

RELAC -Religion and armed conflict

R2P-Responsibility to Protect

UNAOC- United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

UNCAT- United Nations Convention against Torture

UCDP- Uppsala Conflict Data Program

UPR -Universal Periodical Review

WCC -World Council of Churches

NLD-National League for Democracy

## **List of Figures and Tables:**

<b>Table 1 Attribute/Target of the Right to FoRB .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Table 2: Perspectives on religion, Conflict and Interfaith Dialogue.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Table 3: Alternative model of global politics .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Table 4: Religious Issue Conflicts by Region, 1975-2015.....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Table 5: Different Types of Religious Claims .....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Table 6: Probit Estimates on Negotiated Settlement.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Table 7: Religions beyond border: type of relations and area of influence .....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Table 8: Classification of religious diplomacy .....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Table 9: Actors in International Religious Conflict in Myanmar.....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Figure 1: Countries that experienced Religious Armed Conflict in 2016 .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Figure 2: Number of Conflict dyads per years .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Figure 3: British territorial acquisitions in Burma .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Figure 4: Ethnic groups in Myanmar .....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Figure 5: Asymmetries of power and tripartite nature of the Rakine State conflict.....</b>	<b>81</b>

## **List of Treaties; Declarations and other International Instruments**

- Commission on Human Rights Resolution on Elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief, Resolution 2005/40 of 19 April 2005.
- Commission on Human Rights Resolution on Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Resolution 2005/39 of 19 April 2005.
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- Commission on Human Rights, *Implementation of the Declaration on the elimination of all forms of intolerance of discrimination based on religion or belief*, 6 January 1993, E/CN.4/1993/62.
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- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 39/46 of 10 December 1984 and entered into force on 26 June 1987.
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 39/46 of 10 December 1984 and entered into force on 26 June 1987.
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 34/180 of 18 December 1979 and entered into force on 3 September 1981.



- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989 and entered into force on 2 September 1990.
- Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Adopted on 28 July 1951 by the United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons convened under General Assembly resolution 429 (V) of 14 December 1950 and entered into force on 22 April 1954.
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- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (MWC), Adopted by General Assembly resolution 45/158 of 18 December 1990 and entered into force on 1 July 2003.
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- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966 and entered into force on 3 January 1976.
- *International Religious Freedom Act 1998* (Irfa) s. 102.b (USA).
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## Summary

This thesis is focused on the relationship between religion and diplomacy in the Myanmar context, to understand how and in what percentage the religion has an active role in the struggle of ethnic conflicts and how the diplomatic scenario has reacted to the past conflicts and to the most recent ones.

In order to have a comprehensive standpoint the thesis will be divided in two parts, the first part is introductory to the second, focused on the Myanmar case study. In the first three chapters the role of religion is examined in several ways and from several perspectives. It is, thus, underlined the role of the international human right law in guarantee the right to freedom of religion. Only with a deep knowledge of the international human right law regarding the freedom of religion it is possible to be conscious of the achievements and the challenges of the contemporary diplomacy.

Another aspect to consider for the research plan is the political reconciliation and the role of religion in the scenario of political injustices. Differences between religious approach to reconciliation are underlined with the aim of understanding the religious and ethnic divisions in the second part of the dissertation. These two first chapters will lead to the last point of the first part where the core of the thesis will be tackled. Indeed, the third chapter is entirely dedicated to the *diploreligio*, to its tools and its pivotal role in the contemporary diplomacy.

The second part of the dissertation is composed by three chapters that will follow a critical approach to the past and contemporary events occurred in Myanmar and the role of the international arena to these events. Their attempts and their modalities used to deal with the several crises in the State above-mentioned, will be analysed with a particular attention to religion and its use in the relations between countries. Consequently, the Rohingya crisis will be covered using the lens of *diploreligio*, whose pillars were previously clarified. A final part will be, thus, dedicated to final remarks regarding the path followed by the international community to solve disputes in Myanmar and the crucial role that religion has both in the inherent causes of these crises and, externally, as a tool to solve the same crises.

As result, after having acquired all the instruments and the knowledge required, the future, the analysis, and the critics of the issue in the Myanmar State become more accessible and more predictable. There is, thus, the need to track a path in order to prevent

the events like those occurred in the last February and the role of this thesis will be, thus, to demonstrate how religion could represent the cause and also the solution of several political events. The religion and consequently the religious leaders should increase their active role in the diplomatic process and should take advantage of the pillars of faith at their disposal, which contains messages of peace, reconciliation, and cooperation. The same goals shared with the diplomacy.

In the first chapter the attention will be focused on the role of religion in the international human rights law. It is, thus, necessary to understand the role of freedom of religion in the international context to analyse how and in what percentage religion represents a crucial element in the international domain. Moreover, a focus on the path of recognition of freedom of religion is strongly required in order to have a deepened understanding of the achievements and the lacks in terms of equality and protection of freedom of religion.

An analysis of all the international instruments listed before will be provided in this first chapter with the purpose of depicting the whole international instruments used to promote the respect of freedom to religion and belief and to define their characteristics, possible constraints inherent the system.

After having analysed the legislative procedures and technicalities linked to the role of international law and more precisely human right law, it is fundamental to analyse the theoretical part dedicated to the role of religion in the political of reconciliation. It is, thus, crucial to define and underline how religion does not strictly concern about the question of faith and personal belief, on the contrary could represent an instrument to be used for political reconciliation and that, is often uses at the core of political debate to justify several political actions.

The definition and the analysis conducted in the first chapter on the Treaties and other legislative instruments aimed to the protection of the freedom of religion and belief has underlined how arduous the distinction between religious freedom and other human rights is, moreover with the global interconnection and the technological development, the boundaries among those rights become more blurred and a compartmentalise analysis could no longer be proper.

Thanks to the examination of the previous Resolutions, Articles and Reports, the need to reach a comprehensive approach has become a priority, hence, only with a

strategy that include politics, education, and relation with all the aspect of the society, changes could be achieved. As the number and the nature of the episodes of discrimination on religious ground become progressively serious, a reconsideration of the role of religion should be effectuated not only as a cause of episodes of violence and discrimination but also on the active side as tool to conduce to the political reconciliation.

The second chapter, consequently, was dedicated to the study of the sociological perspective entailing the role of the religion in the global context. From this point of view of religions, there has been talk in recent years of a focus on religions in the political and cultural spheres. It can be mentioned the events of the Arab Spring in North Africa, and then move on to the unresolved Arab-Palestinian question, the Kurdish question in Turkey or the religious minorities in Myanmar. Even the West, which has always blamed populations that do not belong to its geographical and cultural context, has in recent years approached (in a totally instrumental way) religion. We are talking about extreme right-wing movements that are now widespread throughout Europe and a large part of the West, which use religious symbols to justify the repression of freedom and to implement greater control over populations. I would argue, in a non-overall way, that the use of religion to reaffirm certain values has been decisive in most of the cases mentioned. Rather than an increase in the spread of religion, one should rather speak of an increase in the instrumentalization of religion as an excuse for the implementation of extremist policies. Consequently, the first part of this second paragraph was dedicated to the role of religion in the modern political context, analysing the new perspectives about the politicisation of religion with a focus on the interfaith dialogue and its role in the creation of a peaceful context. The second paragraph thus was dedicated to the role of religion in the political reconciliation and more specifically to the empirical analysis done by experts on religious armed conflict. Thanks to the support primary sources composed by charts and data, the theoretical background will take a clear shape and concreteness.

With the last chapter of the first part of this dissertation, the heart of the matter examined will be analysed, and furthermore the analysis has gone deeper into the role of diplomacy interconnected with the religious sphere. The role of religion in diplomacy is not merely causal but also, and foremost, has a structural function within global dynamics. Brief outlines of the changes that have taken place in international relations have already been

provided in the previous chapter in order to make the analytical description of the dynamics more fluid.

The aim of this chapter will be therefore to give a brief outline of the concept of diplomacy, and to focus more on the role of religious diplomacy or *diploreligio*. With this last component, the first part of the thesis will be completed with all the necessary tools to analyse the dynamics within the state of Myanmar. Only through an in-depth description of the variables that determine religious conflicts and the role of diplomacy in resolving them can a complete picture of the dynamics be drawn. Moreover, for the purposes of research, after having analysed the various conflicting theories, it is possible to anticipate and predict the critical issues encountered. Finally, we will try to conclude the research work by providing tools and solutions that are concretely applicable, albeit partially, for the resolution of the problems presented.

Another important element to be stressed concerns the changes in the diplomatic context. With the advent of globalization and other worldwide phenomena, most recently the Covid 19 health crisis, the role of the diplomat and diplomacy within global contexts has undergone significant modifications and changes that open up new perspectives and new scenarios, including new actors and new challenges to be overcome.

These changes also involved the religious aspect demonstrated by the increase of religious conflicts that returned to the global scene, creating numerous problems for the international actors who were called upon to resolve them. It has been noted, therefore, that what was previously called “track I” diplomacy (concerning the involvement of Governments) was not sufficient to challenge the new scenario in the globalised and interconnecting world. The involvement of new actors, thus, has changed the dynamics creating new “tracks” including non-state actors and therefore the need to occur to other methods of diplomacy emerged.

As mentioned by Thomas S. several causes determined the new features of current diplomacy, including changes in the global disputes leading to more intrastate conflicts rather than infra-State conflicts; the more interdependent world and lastly the United Nations’ structure that is experiencing considerable complexities in handling and mitigating conflicts.

With this last chapter the focus on the connection between diplomacy and religion has been provided by using both theoretical and practical approach. What emerge from these last paragraphs is the resurgence of religions and cultural factors (to be conceived separately) in the global dynamics and, consequently, in the contemporary international politics. With the end of the bi-polar era, thus, new trends were registered, and the traditional dichotomy of conflicts was surpassed. Hence, new exigences emerged and those changes had also consequences on the diplomatic scenario. The necessity to extend the scope of action of diplomacy, jointly with the resurgence of religious conflicts and religious issues, lead to the new the typologies of diplomacy with new actors and new dynamics and finally, several tools different from the traditional ones.

With the focus on the most important theories of international relations, the different combination, and perspectives of diplomoreligio are depicted, in parallel with practical example and case studies, useful to define a more concrete overview and connection with the reality.

What emerges from this last part is the necessity to conceive the role of diplomat as an eclectic figure capable of understanding and predict the global dynamics, to define a strategy, to select the correct instruments and to interact with the actors in the international scenario. In this manner, the position occupied by religion has become more crucial with the time. There is a need to have a literacy of the interreligious dynamics of the countries with which dialogue is being conducted, to foresee possible crises and fractures inherent in the religious scenario and to prevent these from spreading to encompass other aspects. Moreover, as religious conflicts increase, it is essential to understand the rationale underpinning them, to be prepared to disentangle the effective religious causes from mere instrumental demands and to adapt the typology of intervention accordingly.

At the end of this first part of the dissertation devoted to the theoretical aspect, we can comprehend the importance reserved by international law to freedom of worship and religion, which also enables us to define the range of action in which the actors on the international scene can operate. In addition, the data and variables involved in religious armed conflicts are available, useful for a proper and pondered analysis. And finally, with this last chapter, a global perspective on the key actors in the system has been provided. In this manner, it will be possible to interpret the selected case study on Myanmar, and

the religious conflicts that plague the dynamics of this country, from a different standpoint.

The second part of the dissertation is entirely focused on the case study concerning the State of Myanmar which has gained in the last year a strategical role in the Asian context for several reasons that will be depicted in the further chapters. The definition and the methodology used in the first part will be useful to analyse the dynamics inherent the international relations among countries. The *file rouge* that connects the two parts of this thesis will be the focused on the relation between religion and diplomacy and how religion has influenced the spread of religious conflict in this specific Country selected. The empirical data will be applied to the description of most principal religious armed conflicts in order to confer a concrete approach to the dissertation. For this purpose, the UCPD database, whose characteristics are contained in the second chapter, were used.

Furthermore, in order to achieve a comprehensive standpoint on the matter analysed, a first chapter will be dedicated to the history and sociological divisions in the context of Myanmar. As will be showed in the following chapter, the ethnic and religious division in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar retained a pivotal role in the conflicts and divisions among different groups and, thus, become fundamental to analyse and describe the historical origins of these divisions.

In the following chapter, moreover, the role of the international actors will represent the core of the analysis. The focus on the past interventions and provisions actuate by the international organizations results useful to understand the approach adopted by the external actors, to define drawbacks and finally to suggest interventions in the context of Myanmar. A particular attention will be dedicated to the Rohingya crisis which reached a peak in 2017 with 740,000 members of this minority who were forced to leave the country and seek refuge in Bangladesh. The level of segregation and separation of Rohingya minorities and Muslim minorities has worsened in the last years and conducted to an increase of conflicts especially during the period of transition. What is registered is an isolation of the Rakhine State compared to the center of the State which has matured a deeper sense of segregation and create, consequently, a fertile breeding ground for a national-ethnic conflict.



As mentioned before, defining the current situation in Myanmar in a linear manner is arduous and requires to take into account several independent variables connected to both domestic and international level.

Furthermore, the strategic position of this State has always represented a crucial role for the most powerful actors in the IR chessboard notably the Myanmar-China relations, the so-called *pauk-phaw*.

The influence of the colonial period on the part of the British Empire, combined with the geographical characteristics of the country, has resulted in a succession of military juntas over the years. The main task of the military intervention within the governmental dynamics concerned above all the need to prevent the disintegration of the country, a need that clashes with the current administrative division into states, regions and self-administered zones on an ethnic basis. The Tatmadaw has always been reluctant to implement federalism, which would not allow the control of peripheral areas where, among others, the Rohingya minority resides.

This chapter thus, will be dedicated to the analysis of the role of international community in the resolution of the Rohingyas' crisis. Furthermore, the role of single States within the United Nations will be depicted as well as their interests in the Myanmar's affairs, notably the neighbouring States like China and India and the geopolitical powers like Russia.

Furthermore, a focus on the Responsibility to Protect will be addressed to the Myanmar question. Thus, since 2005 at the UN World Summit meeting it becomes a political commitment in order to avoid episodes of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. In the case under scrutiny, the R2P principle is stalled due to internal divisions in the Security Council among those who condemn the atrocities within the State and those claiming the supremacy of State sovereignty over R2P.

Regardless of these flaws, it is crucial to regard the Rohingya oppression in terms of R2P attributable both to Myanmar's national government and to the international community, especially to the UN Security Council. What can be observed from the Myanmar crisis is that the international systems and specific bodies for early warning and structural prevention of these atrocities are not effectively deployed each time they are needed. Rather, after prevention fails the only option left to UN is often belatedly dispatch of UN peacekeepers in an attempt to manage an already disrupted situation, therefore

failing to apply the R2P principle. If the R2P was applicable in the past cases of Kosovo and Darfur, when action was taken without a mandate from the Security Council, then it should and must be resorted to in the case of Myanmar. In fact, even at times when Institutions such as the UN Security Council appear to be paralyzed, due to the disputes on internal affairs and state sovereignty, there should be a much more proactive international community to prevent human rights violations, protect all vulnerable populations, and hold the perpetrators responsible for their crimes.

In an increasingly interconnected world, therefore, the single action of a State is not an isolated case and cannot be analyzed independently by the global context. The Myanmar situation, hence, constitutes a real risk for the entire globe for its crucial and pivotal position in the Indian Ocean in addition its ethnic richness should be considered as an asset for the democracy developing. Therefore, as mentioned before in the dissertation, the analysis should consider the population, their cultural inheritance as an asset and moreover as a concrete variable to be taken into account. The respect of human rights, the respect of ethnic minorities and the recognition of their will and rights should represent a challenge tackled jointly and cohesively by the States. Only in this manner it is possible to implement the international system in which we claim to be involved.

In the last chapter all the elements analysed in the previous part will result useful to achieve a concrete and comprehensive understanding of the role of diplomacy and religion in the State of Myanmar. Thus, the definition of diplomareligio contained in the third chapter will find a concrete application to the case abovementioned, in order to try to use religion as a tool to overcome the drawbacks inherent the international systems, the same drawbacks depicted in the Rohingyas' crisis.

Moreover, with resurgence of religions in the international affairs, it emerged the necessity to innovate the tools used in the diplomatic relations among States, to integrate religious precepts in order to achieve the goals at the basis of the international system.

Considering that the study of the influence of religions within international relations between states is now considered a valid field of research, the role of religions in the international context can be defined as transcending traditional political categories and, consequently, religions should not be considered as mere faith-based NGO.

In this chapter the consequences of Buddhism over the Myanmar politics described. As it will emerge, the connection between Buddhism and politics is not a modern phenomenon yet is inherent the pillars of religious creed.

Furthermore, attempts will be made in order to define the international implication in the diplomatic relation between Myanmar and several actors. The importance of the Sino-Burmese relations thus will be depicted, and the result will define a polarized powers in which the interests of Myanmar are instrumentalize in order to fight the western powers. With this last chapter the research will reach the final step, reaching a complete overview of the macro theme of religion and politics.

Finally, What I propose in this thesis is linked to the inclusion of a religious literacy for diplomats and generally, to include the study of religion in the analysis of international relations. The lack of interest devoted in the past to the religious phenomena has led to an incomplete overview of the international scenario and consequently to inefficient intervention that lacked an essential component of the mosaic.

In the analysis of the Myanmar position, hence, the focus of western states was focused on the geopolitical position that it retained rather than on the religious heritage that could represent an asset for the international relation of the country.

With a focus on Buddhism and its political implications, a more comprehensive analysis could have been achieved. Hence the essence of Buddhism, and in particular the Theravada Buddhism have demonstrated how, during the history of Myanmar the religion has been influenced by the external dynamics and, consequently has changed in several aspects in order to legitimize the modern political system.

This inherent characteristic of Buddhism can be explained with the definition of transitional religions that could easily adapt to other context even distant from the land of origin. As for many other religious creeds, like Hinduism and Christianity, the transnational religions lead to a sense of protection and community that is independent from the historical and territorial bonds.

In the Buddhist case, this reflects on the cosmology and on the pillar of Theravada based on the casual connection between past actions and present and the constant need to adhere and adapt to the changing political order. As previously underlined, the so called “modern Buddhism” reflects this change toward a more laid religious practices which can influence people and political order, independently on their creed.

To conclude, this new manner of conceiving the international relations enables to rethink the international relations by eliminating the traditional concept of international key actors. With the resurgence of religion in the XX century, this process become ineluctable and necessary to redefine a new wave of international relations in order to make the role of the International Community worthy of the principles that inspired its birth.