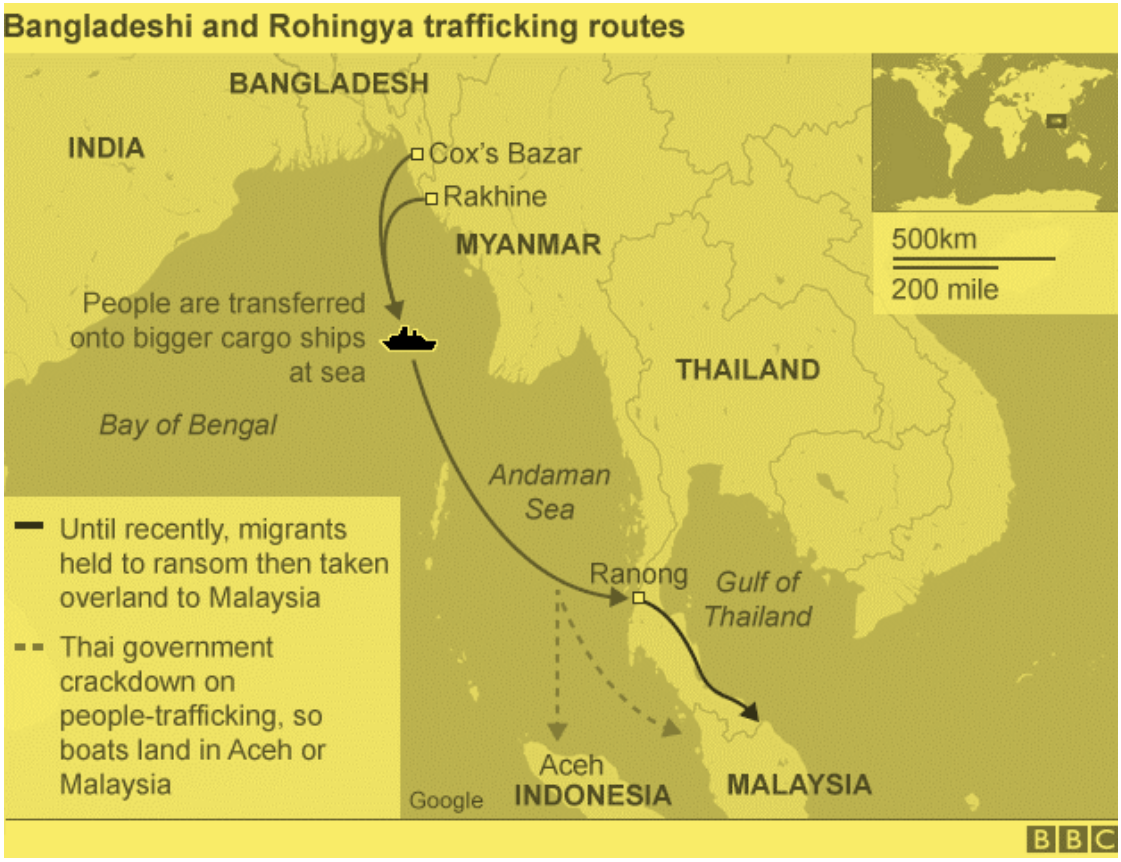
Journey into Hell

Folks, after viewing the 45-minute documentary (link follows) go through this *two-part* document. In the second part, toward the end of the documentary transcript below, you will find a short Question & Answer piece from the Reuters news agency on the **Rohingya**. (Note: Burma is also known as Myanmar.)

Guys, a reminder: racism/ethnicism does not exist only in United States; it exists all over the world wherever there are *historically-determined* unequal power relations in multi-ethnic capitalist societies. They are historically-determined in the sense that following the Columbian Project and the inadvertent rise of the Europeans as imperial powers holding sway across much of the world (from the fifteenth century on through the nineteenth century), brought in its wake the development of multi-ethnic societies on an unprecedented scale as they carved up the world on the basis of artificially created political borders, but which, however, were marred, more often than not, by deep antagonistic divisions rooted in unequal power relations and its corollary, exploitation/oppression, against the backdrop of the capitalist relations of production—*profiting* from human misery, whatever its source, has always been an important dimension of the rise of capitalism—*and* the absence of democracy, that continue to most tragically haunt many of these societies up to the present. Symptomatic of this fact today, on one hand, are huge populations of refugees in various parts of the world attempting to find safe havens in what is turning out to be a heartless "dog-eat-dog" world—itself a symptom of the current form of globalization, one sponsored by corporate capitalism—and on the other, the rise of extremism and terrorism.



Focusing specifically on religion, its use today by ethnicists and racists of all stripes as a weapon to dehumanize entire groups of people, often as a prelude to massive and unconscionable violations of their human rights (an echo of the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the Nazi Holocaust, the Armenian genocide, and so on, of yesteryear), is, of course, not unique just to Burma. It is prevalent, *at varying levels of intensity*, in such diverse places as China, many parts of Europe, India, many countries of the Middle East, Nigeria, Russia, Thailand, and here in United States. (Guys, note that the "ethnic-cleansing" in slow motion of the Rohingya by the Buddhists in Burma—involving murders, rape, imprisonment, dispossession, starvation, restriction to artificially created ghettoes, human trafficking, and so on—is continuing even now as you are reading this document.)

Documentary is available here:
http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/stories/2015/06/22/4257490.htm

Journey into Hell:

On the trail of the traffickers exploiting the most unwanted people on the planet.

By Mark Davis and Peter Cronau Updated June 23, 2015 11:25:00

Monday 22nd June 2015 SOURCE: http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/stories/2015/06/22/4257490.htm

They promise a safe passage away from persecution and a new life in a safe haven. Instead they beat, rape, starve and often kill those who put their trust in them. They're the people smugglers trading in human misery.

Four Corners investigates the network that has trafficked tens of thousands of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar into Thailand, through eye-witness accounts as well as video and audio recordings.

"This is a network that's been in place for years." Human rights investigator

We take the smugglers' route, discovering their methods and their alliances.

"None of these camps could have operated without the full awareness of the Thai authorities and also the Malaysian authorities." Human rights investigator

The traffickers show no mercy and make no distinction between men, women and children.

"If the children cry, they beat us. If we talk to each other, they beat us. If we complain about the food not being enough, they also beat us. They beat us not with their hands but wire." Refugee

The scale is extraordinary, the cruelty extreme.

So what is driving these refugees to put their lives in the hands of the smugglers?

Reporter **Mark Davis** travelled undercover into Myanmar to find out. It's a story the government there does not want told. More than 100,000 Rohingya are held in camps in Myanmar, some in a ghetto where no-one is allowed in or out unless under armed guard. In some camps, starvation is taking hold. It's a human rights disaster that has been hidden from view.

Documentary Transcript

KERRY O'BRIEN, PRESENTER: On Four Corners tonight, a journey into the heart of darkness: shedding light on the brutal world of the people smugglers.

MARK DAVIS, REPORTER (hunched down in car): We've had to go a bit off-road to get around the checkpoints that are encircling these camps. We're now inside.

CHUTIMA SIDASATHIAN, JOURNALIST: This is, seriously, an area, this one: very, very dangerous. Yeah.

ABDUL KALAM, JOURNALIST: This is very dangerous for me.

TRANSLATOR (off-screen): So we have nothing to eat.

OLD ROHINGYA WOMAN (translation): It has been almost five days and I have not eaten anything.

KERRY O'BRIEN: The people smuggling trade is based in greed and cruelty: human exploitation at its absolute worst. Desperate people driven into the arms of ruthless criminals and passed along a trail of misery and torture; many hundreds lost along the way.

It's a trade that can only flourish with the active assistance and corruption of government officials.

Reporter Mark Davis went undercover, deep into Myanmar, laying bare the hidden truths of the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya people. He then followed the trail of the traffickers through the jungles of Thailand and Malaysia: a wild and heart-wrenching journey with a shocking outcome.

MARK DAVIS, REPORTER: Phuket, Thailand: a familiar place to many Australians. For tourists it is known as a piece of paradise.

But for others passing through here, it is nothing more than a pit-stop on the road to hell: a halfway point from their torment in Myanmar to their hoped-for refuge in Malaysia.

North of the Phuket resorts, extensive mangrove swamps hide hundreds of small islands. We are making our way through these twisting bends in search of a secret that has been covered up here for years.

ALAN MORISON, JOURNALIST: We are heading to one of the camps that has been recently discovered. It's a camp were several people died and where the body of a pregnant woman was exhumed, not long back.

For six years Australian journalist Alan Morison and colleague Chutima Sidasathian, through their website Phuketwan, have been reporting that a very dark trade was being conducted in these swamps.

Today Anwar, a refugee who has recently been rescued from this swamp, is guiding us into the maze where he was imprisoned.

ALAN MORISON: We've got one of the survivors with us and he'll, he'll show us the spot where, where she and perhaps other, other people were buried.

(Footage of party disembarking from boat, walking uphill through jungle)

CHUTIMA SIDASATHIAN, JOURNALIST: Here is the place that they're staying, waiting for transfer to the south and the border side. You can see shoes, water, have some clothes there.

MARK DAVIS: How many people here, do you think?

CHUTIMA SIDASATHIAN: About 300 people here before.

MARK DAVIS: Three hundred? In this, in this...?

CHUTIMA SIDASATHIAN: In this area, yeah.

MARK DAVIS: This traffickers' camp was a temporary land drop after an exhausting ocean voyage. It was here that refugees would be hidden until further transport could be arranged.

It is a chilling memory for Anwar: a place of constant beatings and silence for weeks on end.

ANWAR, ASYLUM SEEKER (translation): After we arrived they put us in groups, with two agents guarding. If someone move or stands, they are beaten. Some were so hungry they asked for food and water. But for talking they got a beating.

(Chutima finds an empty packet of food mix in the jungle mast)

CHUTIMA SIDASATHIAN: You see this? Myanmar Mix. See?

MARK DAVIS: Coloured bands would be attached to the wrists of victims here to indicate which trafficker owned them and to which horror jungle camp they would be driven to on the Malaysian border.

(Party shows open grave)

CHUTIMA SIDASATHIAN: That's the grave of the women. We don't know how she died but we believe that she has a long journey, a long, big journey in the boat. The boat is quite, very crowded, you know, on one boat.

The body of a heavily pregnant women was discovered buried here, as Chutima filmed a few weeks back.

(Footage of party digging large mound. A woman's skeleton is revealed, as are the bones of a man)

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): Exhausted from a sea journey, perhaps sick, perhaps such a burden that she was murdered - as her caved-in skull suggests.

(Footage ends)

MARK DAVIS: Do we know her name?

CHUTIMA SIDASATHIAN: No, we don't know, we don't know.

POLICE OFFICER: Rohingya.

MARK DAVIS: Rohingya? Rohingya lady.

(Officer nods)

MARK DAVIS: The remains of a man were also found here, tightly tied to a tree below the tidal waterline.

The graves found here were the first thread of a scandal that has revealed itself this month and shocked the world.

ALAN MORISON: This is a hell of a place to spend three or four days. To spend a fortnight here: God, pretty awful.

MARK DAVIS: Two years ago Alan Morison and Chutima dared to suggest that Thai authorities were involved in the trafficking business. Next month they face trial on criminal defamation charges for that suggestion, with a possible jail term.

But now, the sheer scale of the trafficking network is now coming to light, courtesy of the detailed investigative reports by human rights researcher Matt Smith of Fortify Rights.

(To Matt Smith) How can you run something of this scale without the knowledge of, certainly, all the villages and, presumably, some of the authorities?

MATT SMITH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FORTIFY RIGHTS: None of these camps could have operated without the full awareness of the Thai authorities, ah, and also the Malaysian authorities. Villagers know, know what's happening.

The Thai authorities have, ah, handed over thousands of people who were in their custody to the human trafficking networks. Ah, we know this has happened. We've documented it.

MARK DAVIS: What level of authority are we talking?

MATT SMITH: Well, uh, a, a senior army commander was just, ah, arrested in Thailand. Ah, most of our documentation points to a number of different state security agencies in Thailand that were profiting from this. Um, we know there are upwards of 50, ah, police who

are being investigated by the, the current Thai junta. Um, is that enough? Definitely not. Ah, I mean, this is, this is a network that's been in place for years.

Here's a boat that's under construction

MARK DAVIS: A network purpose-built to traffic Rohingya refugees. But what are the Rohingya running from?

That story is still largely untold. It's a story that takes us north to Burma - or, as it is now known, Myanmar: a nation just now staggering out of decades of brutal military dictatorship.

(Footage of Mark in car, Yangon)

MARK DAVIS: We are heading out of the capital, ah, Yangon, trying to make our way up to the north-west. It's a no-go zone. It's where the Rohingya live and, er, of course, where the Rohingya are now trying to escape. There's a lot of security there: they don't want, ah, outsiders in those camps at all - and especially, of course, er, journalists. So we'll see how far we get.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): In the capital Yangon, at least, there is a new mood of political freedom as the nation moves towards elections this year. But this will be the last place I can film openly as I move towards the Rohingya areas in the north-west. There, the old rules apply.

The Rakhine state has been the traditional stronghold of the Muslim Rohingya in a solidly Buddhist nation.

After three years of ethnic turmoil, the Rohingya are now confined to these coastal swamplands. And from these shorelines leaky boats, pirates and possible death seem like better options than the land they are living in.

(Footage of athletes playing chin lone (sepak takraw))

Sittwe is the capital of the Rahkine state. Five hundred thousand people live in and around here.

I get a rare opportunity to be seen using a camera, by arriving during the celebrations leading to Rakhine National Day.

But there's a sinister side to this beautiful display. Rakhine National Day has only been going for a few years. It's solidly Buddhist and ethnically based. And this display of ethnic pride only started after the Rohingya were violently expelled from the city: a clear sign of the Buddhist contempt for the Muslim Rohingya.

(To Buddhist monk) They should stay away?

BUDDHIST MONK (translation): Stay far away.

MARK DAVIS: Where should they, where should they go?

BUDDHIST MONK (translation): Far away. It's better if they stay far away from Rakhine.

(Footage of rioting. Houses and buildings are on fire)

MARK DAVIS: In 2012 a joint force of Buddhist monks and Rakhine nationalists attacked the Rohingya in Sittwe. Hundreds of Rohingya were killed, their homes and businesses destroyed and virtually all of them - a third of the population - were expelled from Sittwe.

(Photographs of Narzi houses and buildings on fire)

MARK DAVIS: This was the suburb of Narzi, the biggest Rohingya sector in the city. A housing district and a major commercial hub.

(Footage of long stretch of empty fields, overgrown with vegetation)

MARK DAVIS: And this is all that remains of it today.

It's hard to image now, but this was a suburb like any other in this city: two-storey buildings, houses, businesses. All burnt down by the locals and then, ah, ultimately bulldozed by the local government. The place has been totally obliterated and the people that lived here are now down on the mudflats by the coast, behind wire.

As the city celebrates three years of ethnic purity, it's still a touchy topic to discuss its former inhabitants who now live behind wire outside the city boundaries.

MAN IN PARK (translation): Only people born in Rakhine belong here. We don't want Rohingya to rule over us.

SECOND MAN (off-screen, translation): Don't talk about these things to a foreigner.

(Footage of Rohingya encampment)

DRIVER: Yes, over there is a (inaudible)

MARK DAVIS: Checkpoint?

DRIVER: Yes. Down on, on...

(Camera is quickly dropped behind car seat)

MARK DAVIS: The roads to the Rohingya camps all have police checkpoints on them now. Special permits are required, which are rarely granted to journalists.

(Mark is hunched down in back seat of car)

MARK DAVIS: We've had to go a bit off-road to get around the checkpoints that are encircling these camps. We're now inside.

There's about 10 kilometres of Rohingya settlements spread along this coast. There's still police, er, in here, um, so I need to keep my hat on - as some form attempt at a, a disguise - and my head down until we can get inside some of these villages.

More than 100,000 Rohingya have been locked in camps like this for three years. The bulk of the people in this camp were city people. They had businesses and jobs in town, where they had lived for generations. Now they are permanently locked in and survive almost entirely on UN rations.

(To driver) If there's police, tell me.

Lookouts keep me advised of police patrols as I meet with Aung Win, previously a wealthy Rohingyan businessman..

(To Aung Win) So most people come from Sittwe?

AUNG WIN, ROHINGYAN MAN: Sittwe, downtown Sittwe.

MARK DAVIS: Right. So they had businesses and they had..."

AUNG WIN: Businesses, yeah, jobs and so many things. Now they are, everything is empty.

They killed old man and killed old women. So on that day the Rahkine people killed one of my brother-in-law, (inaudible). And another one was - cut his throat in front of my father-in-law.

They burned down and they looted our property. No we cannot go back to Sittwe, downtown, any more. There is many security and many checkpoints around the camp.

MARK DAVIS: So you can't go out?

AUNG WIN: Yeah. If we secretly caught, they will pick up us and they will send us to the jail for one month.

MARK DAVIS: To escape these camps, members of Aung Win's family have boarded the traffickers' boats that hover offshore, as have tens of thousands of others, he claims. The Myanmar government disputes that people are fleeing for their lives - and the reported scale of the exodus.

AUNG WIN: So I can give a long list of the people: so who die on the boat, who reach to Thailand border, who die in the trafficker hands. I can give the list of the people.

MARK DAVIS: Yes.

AUNG WIN: So (inaudible) government is shitting and lying.

MARK DAVIS: Shitting: bullshitting, you say?

AUNG WIN: Bullshitting!

MARK DAVIS: Bullshitting. (Laughs)

AUNG WIN: Yeah. Bullshitting (laughs).

MARK DAVIS: Most of the Rohingya here can trace three or four generations in Sittwe; others, many, many more.

(Footage of Mark talking with ROHINGYA man in group)

MARK DAVIS: Were you, were you born here? In Sittwe?

(Rohingya man speaks)

TRANSLATOR (off-screen): Yes.

MARK DAVIS: And your father?

TRANSLATOR (off-screen): Yes.

MARK DAVIS: In Sittwe, or from Myanmar? And your grandfather?

ROHINGYA MAN (translation): Also my grandfather.

TRANSLATOR: Also my grandfather.

ROHINGYA MAN (translation): All the generations are from here.

MARK DAVIS: The Rohingya have been in Sittwe for centuries, but it's not enough to have earned them citizenship.

(To Zakari) None of these people are citizens?

ZAKARI, YOUNG ROHINGYA MAN: Yeah, they're not citizen. But government mention them: you are Rohingyan, migrated from Bangladesh.

MARK DAVIS: Right.

ZAKARI: But that is not true. These people are not Bengali. They are Rohingya.

(Zakari walks with Mark through camp)

ZAKARI: Our government don't want to provide them because they have fought back with the Rakhine community during the conflict of 2012.

MARK DAVIS: They fought back?

ZAKARI: Yeah, they fought back.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): The status of the Rohingya has always been marginal - but never quite as hopeless as this.

The people in this camp are on the verge of starvation. When the mob came to destroy their village in 2012, they armed themselves with sticks and machetes and fought back.

(They visit a shack. Zakari points to wooden bench, the size of a single bed)

ZAKARI: Six family member living in there.

MARK DAVIS: On this?

ZAKARI: On this.

MOTHER (translation): My little children and I pass the days in hunger.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): For fighting back, the Myanmar government declared the whole village combatants, not displaced people - not entitled, therefore, to receive UN aid or rations.

(To Zakari) A hundred and fifty houses?

ZAKARI: Yeah.

MARK DAVIS: Seven hundred people. And no food?

ZAKARI (to villager, translation): No ration, no rice?

VILLAGER (translation): We get nothing.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): They've lost their homes. Their farmland has gone. And they can't leave here to get work.

ZAKARI (pointing to mattresses): Five family members are living on this.

Now forced to beg off other refugees: the poorest of the poor.

OLD ROHINGYA WOMAN (translation): It has been almost five days and I have not eaten anything. My head spins from starvation and weakness. I didn't get any food. I'm so weak. (Cries)

ZAKARI (translating): We have no energy here.

YOUNG ROHINGYA MAN (translation): Brother, we are happy this man is from Australia. We can survive for some more days if we get just $500.

OLD ROHINGYA WOMAN (translation): There is no food to eat.

(Zakari and Mark are back in the car)

ZAKARI: We have to stay here like a prisoner. No movements and no freedom here.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): My guide in the camps, Zakari, was just finishing school when the mob burnt down his home in Sittwe. He quite suddenly loses his composure when he tells me he would have graduated from university this year.

ZAKARI (cries): So how long shall we need to stay in the camp, in this situation there? How long?

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): For those younger than Zakari, there is not even a high school to attend anymore. No state funds for schools - but plenty for police.

(Camera suddenly ducks as car approaches police vehicle)

MARK DAVIS (to driver): Stay, stay, stay, stay. Stop, stop.

(To Siraj) What happens if the, if the cops, er, see us?

SIRAJ, YOUNG ROHINGYA MAN: If we see the cops, we are afraid of them.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): It's not hard to see why people might risk their lives getting out of here. And there's no shortage of traffickers to meet that demand.

I meet Siraj, whose cousin recently escaped from here on one of the smugglers' boats. And he explains to me how the trade works - almost all of it essentially on credit.

(To Siraj) Now, the people around here: they don't have this money. How do they, how do they get the money?

SIRAJ: First, for the Malays: first, the Rohingya people want to go leave for Malaysia, they have to pay the smugglers $200

MARK DAVIS: Yep.

SIRAJ: And then the smugglers take them to the ship.

MARK DAVIS: So to begin with, though, you only need $200?

SIRAJ: Yeah.

MARK DAVIS: Two hundred. It's like a deposit, is it?

SIRAJ: Yes.

MARK DAVIS: You give $200?

SIRAJ: Two hundred dollars.

MARK DAVIS: And you pay the rest when you get to Malaysia?

SIRAJ: Malaysia. And the other relatives who are in foreign country: they will pay.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): A down-payment gets a Rohingya onto a boat like this, which heads offshore to meet the smugglers' mothership.

(Footage from mobile phone of boat journey)

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): One of the families here gave me this cell phone footage of the journey out from the camps to meet the main vessel.

The mothership will cruise up and down the coast for weeks, until its holds are full with 400 or 500 refugees and ready to depart.

Then the journey is on to the jungle camps of Thailand, where the true nature of the deal becomes apparent: they are hostages to be ransomed.

MARK DAVIS (To Siraj): And they're getting on the phone and they're calling their families?

SIRAJ: Yes.

MARK DAVIS: Saying, "Please pay, please pay"?

SIRAJ: "Please pay for me."

MARK DAVIS: OK.

SIRAJ: "If not, the smugglers will kill me." And their relatives pity him and they pay for him.

MARK DAVIS: OK. And they do kill people, obviously?

SIRAJ: Yeah, yes.

MARK DAVIS: They kill them?

ARAFA, ROHINGYA WIDOW (translation): I have suffered hardships. I've suffered so much. Oh brother, I nearly died.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): Arafa, a widow, has just escaped from one of the offshore vessels with her four young children. She was at sea for seven weeks and is still deeply traumatised by her ordeal at the hands of the traffickers.

ARAFA (translation): If the children cry, they beat us. If we talk to each other, they beat us. If we complain about the food not being enough, they beat us.

MARK DAVIS (to Ummu): So were you scared of the smugglers?

UMMU, ARAFA'S DAUGHTER (translation): I was really afraid of the smugglers. They are Thai. If we do anything wrong, they beat us.

MARK DAVIS: So they were beating people. Were they beating the women? Beating the men?

UMMU (translation): They made the men take off their shirts, then beat them with a belt. The women got beaten with electrical wiring. If the smugglers are woken by crying children, they beat them. By a thick wire. If the parents objected, they beat them too.

MARK DAVIS: After 50 days, the smugglers couldn't find a path around the Thai navy blockade. Her children were starving and two of them were very sick. She begged to be put on a passing Rohingya fishing boat.

But there was a price for that too: severe beatings and demands for more money.

ARAFA (translation): How could I pay?

UMMU (translation): They asked for more money or they will throw us into the sea.

ARAFA (translation): They stole the clothes I took with me. They took them from me and beat me. I didn't have clothes when I arrived, so I asked from people here. Now we are able to wear clothes.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): Janu Bibi's husband escaped from the Sittwe camp, hoping to provide for her and their son. He hadn't had a day's work since the 2012 pogrom.

Her husband was two months at sea. He made it to a forest camp in Thailand from where Janu received a phone call, demanding payment from the traffickers.

JANU BIBI (translation): I got money by borrowing from people. I cried and I begged. I got some from my in-laws. I borrowed some of the money from them and the rest from here. What else can you do?

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): Thirteen hundred dollars was paid to the smugglers' agent, who lives in Janu's village. It was $700 dollars short - and her husband died before she could raise any more.

JANU BIBI (translation): I heard he was brought to the house where the people are freed. But after two days, I was told he had passed away.

MARK DAVIS: Do you know where your husband's body is?

JANU BIBI (translation): He died at that holding house.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): I've seen where the refugees are held in Thailand: they're in jungle camps with bamboo cages. But I don't have the heart to tell her.

In the heart of Sittwe town sits the grand mosque: ransacked, abandoned and its ancient library destroyed.

This majestic ruin, the site of a mosque for three centuries, almost mocks the passing citizens on the main road. A silent testament to the ancient Rohingyan presence in this city.

And I'm shocked to discover that some of the people who once worshipped here still live about 500 metres away, trapped inside a city enclave.

MARK DAVIS: This is one of the more sinister parts of Sittwe and, frankly, it's a bit dangerous to be around here. Immediately around the corner, behind me, is a checkpoint: a barbed wire fence, general fencing.

It's the last Rohingya enclave in Sittwe. We're just off the business district here and there's about 4,000 Rohingya living in a suburb just behind me.

They can't get out. Twice a week a police truck comes and escorts some of them down to the market to buy their food, under guard. But otherwise they are completely trapped inside this, er, this ghetto. It is Sittwe's darkest secret.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): Walls, barbed wire and multiple layers of road blocks surround the small enclave known as Aung Mingalar, which somehow survived the onslaught 2012 . No-one is allowed out. The military now occupy what was the school and peer in on the ghetto.

MATT SMITH: The big secret is that there's a Rohingya population still living in Sittwe, uh, and, and I think there's a lot that the authorities don't want the international community to know about in Rakhine state.

Um, I think certainly, in the event that there is a significant act of violence against the population of Aung Mingalar: less details about this place, the better from the perspective of the authorities, unfortunately.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): And unfortunately it appears that the bloodlust in this town still hasn't abated towards the Muslim Rohingya.

(Footage of barber cutting hair)

BARBER (translation): Kill them all, especially the Rohingya.

TRANSLATOR (off-screen): He wants to kill the Rohingya, or "so-called" Rohingya.

BARBER (translation): There will be no Rohingya in Rakhine.

MARK DAVIS: But why? Why?

BARBER (translation): What would I do with the Rohingya? Give me power for six months and I will deal with them. (Laughs) I will use the army, navy, and air. I will kill them all.

MAN AT HARBOURSIDE 1 (translation): Keep them separate in the camp and from there they will just leave by themselves.

MAN AT HARBOURSIDE 2 (translation): They are not from here. They are from Bangladesh.

MAN AT HARBOURSIDE 3 (translation): They are Bengali. Even if living here a long time, still Bengali.

MARK DAVIS: Would you let them come out of the camps to work?

MEN AT HARBOURSIDE (translation): No!

MARK DAVIS: No?

MAN AT HARBOURSIDE 4 (translation): No.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): All levels of government in Myanmar, state and national, are blatantly hostile to the Rohingya. And there's little sign that Aung San Suu Kyi, the great democratic hope for Myanmar in this year's elections, will be much different.

MICHAEL SAINSBURY, JOURNALIST: The side of politics that the rest of the world has supported - Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy - have been, ah, very silent on the matter.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): Veteran Asia correspondent Michael Sainsbury is in Yangon, following the two main stories here: the rise of Suu Kyi and the demise of the Rohingyans.

MICHAEL SAINSBURY: It's been an issue that she's, she's, ah, had a lot of criticism for in the past few weeks. Um, and they, they, they find it very difficult even to say the word "Rohingya." They don't describe them as Rohingyas, they describe them as, ah, "Bengali Muslims", ah, because they don't, they don't, they don't see them as legitimate. No-one in, no-one in this country sees these people as being a legitimate part of Myanmar.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): With such little hope of change inside Myanmar, the sea seems like the only door open to the Rohingya.

After leaving from the west coast of Myanmar, they're generally dumped somewhere in the mangroves of southern Thailand. There they are sorted into groups and sent overland towards what they hope will be an Islamic refuge in Malaysia.

We pick up their trail on the main highway south. Roadblocks, searching for human cargo, are a recent feature on the roads of southern Thailand. The depth of police and army involvement in the trade is becoming clearer and several senior commanders have already been arrested.

Until a few weeks ago road blocks were rare and even now their locations are well known and avoidable, as the Rohingya are shuttled ever southwards.

MARK DAVIS: The mangrove swamp camps are generally fairly temporary. The Rohingya are then brought out of there and packed in vehicles just like this: a very common utility in Thailand. They get seven people on the bottom here, a think cover; another seven people. Covered on top.

And then they're taken down to the true horror camps, which are down on the Malaysian border. A very thick forest area. And that's where we're heading now.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): I'm travelling up into the mountain range that straddles Thailand and Malaysia with Rohingyan Abdul Kalam.

(To Abdul Kalam) How many camps?

ABDUL KALAM, JOURNALIST: So more than 50 camps. More, more, more than 50 camps.

MARK DAVIS: Fifty camps on this mountain?

ABDUL KALAM: Yes. Just this mountain. So all around have all together, on the Malaysia side, also Thai sides together. Not one side.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): Kalam has spent eight years secretly filming and documenting the camps that have been running in these mountains.

We meet with a Thai army patrol in the forest and they guide us up to the border. It's familiar terrain to Kalam.

From this stick marking the border with Malaysia, Kalam knows of four abandoned camps, only two of which have been discovered.

(Abdul Kalam shows Mark footage from his small camera)

MARK DAVIS: And when was this? When did you film this?

ABDUL KALAM: This is only three week.

MARK DAVIS: You went in with the army, did you? Or...

ABDUL KALAM: No, no, no, because I go alone.

MARK DAVIS: You went alone?

ABDUL KALAM: Yes.

MARK DAVIS: And so you found this camp?

ABDUL KALAM: Yes. This is the second camp...

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): The camps revealed so far by the Thai and Malaysian authorities are just a scratch on the surface of these killing fields.

(To Abdul Kalam) They're buried, all the bodies?

ABDUL KALAM: Yeah...

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): And the number of shallow graves below that surface will be many hundreds, according to Kalam: refuges starved or executed by traffickers.

(To Abdul Kalam) Like, we've seen on the news: we've seen two...

ABDUL KALAM: No, more, more, more, more, more, more. More graves.

MARK DAVIS: We've seen two big graves. There's going to be more? There's this one and more?

ABDUL KALAM: More. More!

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): This has been nothing short of a wholesale operation that must have been known to all in this region.

(To Abdul Kalam) Hundreds and hundreds of people?

ABDUL KALAM: Thousand, thousand people, not hundred, hundred people. One camp was 1,000 people. All the people know. I think so. All people know this is a long time already, this problem.

MARK DAVIS: And there's trucks coming in and pick-ups and things? Bringing...

ABDUL KALAM: Pick up: about, he come to have 100 people, or come with 500 or 600 people at one time, one day.

MARK DAVIS: Up the road?

ABDUL KALAM: Yes.

MARK DAVIS: In one day?

ABDUL KALAM: And the road, by road.

MARK DAVIS: Five hundred people in one day?

ABDUL KALAM: More than.

MARK DAVIS: And then walking: 500 people walking up?

ABDUL KALAM: Walking up, up here. Jungle.

MARK DAVIS: This is huge. It's huge.

(Footage of Abdul Kalam and Mark Davis walking through forest)

ABDUL KALAM: Maybe more than 200 people here living...

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): Further into the forest we come across an abandoned camp which has recently been discovered.

(To Abdul Kalam) So this is in the middle of the jungle?

ABDUL KALAM: In the middle of jungle. Big jungle. Big trees.

MARK DAVIS: And you can't see from the air?

ABDUL KALAM: Yeah, so cannot, helicopter up there cannot see inside down there.

MARK DAVIS: How many people would be here?

ABDUL KALAM: Oh, much, much. About more than 200, 300 like this, people.

MARK DAVIS: OK.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): With us is a former camp worker, who can't be identified, returning for the first time since he fled here last year.

BURAQ, CAMP GUARD (translation): I feel like I have been taken out of a dark grave. That's how I feel.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): Buraq, 17, himself a former Rohingyan refugee, recounts the horrors of this camp and another nearby where he worked, earning his freedom by digging graves.

BURAQ (translation): When I see the camp it feels like the whole world is breaking up and falling in on me.

With my own hands I buried 20 bodies. Firstly, I had to cook and serve them food. Then when someone died, I had to carry them to the grave and bury them. Then we had to carry firewood. That's all.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): Buraq tells of Rohingya being held in pits, starved and tortured as relatives made bank deposits to stave off their execution.

BURAQ (translation): Even an animal would not do the things that they did. They were ruthless.

MARK DAVIS: They were beating the men and the women? Who were they beating?

BURAQ (translation): They would beat the men, they would rape the women, if they failed to get the money.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): Some were kept here and tortured for two years, while families sent small amounts to keep them alive. If the payments stopped, they were killed.

BURAQ (translation): Hanging. They kill them by hanging. We had to carry those bodies to the grave and bury them. We could not talk about that to anyone. If we did we were beaten.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): Women faced extra horrors here.

BURAQ (translation): My sisters: though they were not my real sisters, we were from the same area.

The smugglers would humiliate and rape them in the camp. The Thais and Rohingyans, both bosses and workers, would rape our women.

I saw six women die. Three of them were raped. They survived two days following the rape, then they died. Three others couldn't pay the money: that's why they were killed.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): Even children were not spared the depravities of the traffickers.

BURAQ (translation): There were two little children who came here with their mother. They would always scream and cry for food. Scream and cry for their mother.

You know what they did to those boys? They chopped their hands off and sent them off to beg. I never saw them again.

MARK DAVIS: Why did they cut the hand off a child?

BURAQ (translation): To have them beg in the street, so they could pay back what their parents owed. While begging these children would have to pretend, to get sympathy, as if their parents had died and they needed money for the funeral and to bury their bodies.

MARK DAVIS: How old was the child?

BURAQ (translation): One of the children was eight and the other one was almost 10.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): It is doubly sickening to know that Thai government officials were happy to profit on this trade.

Fortify Rights recorded one of the phone calls from this forest from a Rohingya boy from Sittwe to his uncle.

ROHINGYA BOY (phone call, translation): My skin is peeled off from beatings. They are beating me. My legs and hands are twisted.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): The family knew that the boy had been arrested by Thai police when he first landed in Thailand. When the uncle asks why the boy was calling from a traffickers' camp, he receives news of a chilling transaction.

TRAFFICKER (phone call, translation): The boss is Thai. We are just working for the Thais.

UNCLE (translation): Our people did not go with these Thais. They were captured by Thai immigration. How did he reach a Thai boss from the hands of Thai immigration?

TRAFFICKER (phone call, translation): The Thai boss purchased them from Thai immigration.

(Footage of Buraq, Kalam and Mark walking through jungle)

BURAQ (translation): I can show you the graveyard. I can precisely point to the graves that I dug. I can point to the exact grave of the girl who was raped. I can give evidence how people were hung.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): Buraq leads us away from the camp: far away. He leads us off the mountain and down towards the main town.

Pedang Besar is the official crossing point between Thailand and Malaysia. It was the heart of the traffickers' operations. The town mayor and his deputy have recently been arrested for their involvement in the trade.

Whenever there was a load of two or three corpses, Buraq would be driven through these streets at midnight towards a little-used cemetery.

(Footage of Kalam and Buraq in car)

ABDUL KALAM (pointing): Here police station. Near.

MARK DAVIS (off-screen): Right next to it? The grave, the grave is right next to the police station?

ABDUL KALAM: Yes. You see the police station is there.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): Buraq is nervous driving down this road. The smuggler he worked for still lives here, still free and perversely overlooking the graves of the Rohingya who died or were murdered in his camp.

ABDUL KALAM (to Buraq; translation): As soon as we get to the grave, just show him and leave quickly.

BURAQ (translation): It is heartbreaking to come here. People died of starvation and we buried them here. If my boss sees me here, he will kill me.

These are the graves here. Dead.

MARK DAVIS (off-screen): Here?

BURAQ: Here.

MARK DAVIS (off-screen): Show me. How many: one, two, three?

BURAQ: One, two, three, four, five, six, nine, 10.

MARK DAVIS (off-screen): Here?

BURAQ: Here.

(Buraq takes Mark to another part of the cemetery)

BURAQ (translation) (crying): Rohingya. All Rohingya.

MARK DAVIS (off-screen): Rohingya? All Rohingya?

BURAQ: Yes. Yes. All.

(Buraq points to a grave)

BURAQ (translation): This is my friend.

MARK DAVIS (off-screen): Who was your friend? What was his name?

BURAQ: Mohamed Rafik. My friend. (translations) These are my classmates. My heart is wrenching. I can't bear it. I can't bear it. The broker killed him. Beating, beating. Calling for money. But if none, beating. Now dead here.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): Buraq knew half the people he buried and could identify the rest. With his own hands he buried at least 20 here. But he believes there are dozens more Rohingya buried by others: perhaps 100.

BURAQ (translation): Rohingya here.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): Buraq's former boss still lives in one of the houses overlooking the graves, buried here to avoid evidence of the dead being found at his jungle camps.

No matter what the threat is now to his life, Buraq is determined to directly accuse those he blames for the deaths of his friends and fellow Rohingyans - if there is a legal system that will listen.

BURAQ (translation): Alom had his throat cut. Rohingya. Slaughtered by that smuggler there.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): For Thai authorities, the biggest mass grave to be found in this whole sordid story may not be on a remote mountain top but in the middle of town and still under guard of the perpetrators.

(Mark and Buraq return to the car)

ABDUL KALAM: Somebody come. Let's go. Let's go. Let's must go. Let's go.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): As we leave, Buraq's fears are confirmed as two traffickers' cars emerge from the house towards us.

MARK DAVIS (off-screen): Is that the broker?

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): A sign of their brazen impunity in this town.

ABDUL KALAM: Not one car: two, three car already. Now, count two, three cars.

MARK DAVIS (off-screen): Three cars already? Coming?

ABDUL KALAM: Yes, coming. He want to shoot. So you do know this...

CHUTIMA SIDASATHIAN: This is, seriously, an area, this one: very, very dangerous. Yeah.

ABDUL KALAM: This is very dangerous for me.

MARK DAVIS (voiceover): The Rohingya graves lie just 800 metres from the official border crossing into their hoped-for refuge in Malaysia: just behind the police station.

If police there want to investigate, they just need step outside and take the first road on the left.

Just as in Myanmar, there are crimes, bodies and now witnesses - but not a lot of will, it seems, to investigate the deaths of the most unwanted people on the planet.

KERRY O'BRIEN: You'll at least be reassured to know that key witnesses in tonight's story are now in a safe location. We've also told Thai authorities where they can find the mass grave.

Next week: the first instalment of an important two-part exposon the operations of the Mafia in Australia.

Until then, good night.

Why is no one helping Myanmar's Rohingya?

By Amy Tennery June 17, 2015

Source: http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2015/06/17/why-is-no-one-helping-myanmars-rohingya/

Myanmar is currently in the throes of a massive humanitarian crisis. Thousands of ethnic Rohingya are fleeing persecution. Boarding overcrowded boats (and often enduring horrific conditions), they're going to countries scarcely able to help them — or in some cases, frankly, not interested in helping them.

How did this happen?

Who are the Rohingya?

The Rohingya are an ethnic Muslim minority in the majority Buddhist Myanmar. Many of their enemies refuse to acknowledge that the Rohingya are an ethnically distinct group. They claim instead that the Rohingya are Bengali and that their presence in Myanmar is the result of illegal immigration (more on that later). The Rohingya, for their part, claim to be pre-colonial residents of Myanmar's Rakhine state, the Middle East Institute explains, with the earliest known appearance of the term Rohingya in 1799.

Why are the Rohingya fleeing Myanmar?

The Rohingya face violence and lack basic rights such as access to healthcare, education and employment. They live in "apartheid-like conditions" due to, among other things, Myanmar's refusal to recognize them as citizens. But this is nothing new. Between May 1991 and March 1992, more than 260,000 Rohingya fled the country over "human rights abuses committed by the Burmese military, including the confiscation of land, forced labor, rape, torture, and summary executions," the nonprofit group Physicians for Human Rights wrote in a 2013 report.

OK, but if it's been going on almost 25 years, why is everyone talking about it now?

While this problem isn't new, it's gotten demonstrably worse in recent years.

Myanmar's 2010 transition from a military-led government to a somewhat more democratic system led to some of the worst violence against Muslims. The national government has tacitly permitted the rise of the 969 movement, a group of Buddhist monks who employ "moral justification for a wave of anti-Muslim bloodshed," Reuters reports. Since 2012, roughly 140,000 Rohingya have fled northwestern Myanmar amid deadly fighting with the majority Buddhists.

Why is there so much animosity toward the Rohingya?

As is the case in many modern conflicts, the current unrest in Myanmar can trace its roots to the country's colonial past.

In 1826, Britain annexed what's now the northwest part of the country, as well as the region that's currently home to most of Myanmar's remaining Rohingya Muslims. Due to the British colonial government's lax immigration laws at the time, Bengali Muslims flooded into the region. And the British installation of South Indian chettyars (money lenders) as administrators of the new colonial territory displaced Burmese Buddhist peasants. It's had an enduring legacy, as the Economist explains:

> "Over the decades [the Rohingya], without legal or any other sort of protection, have been the victims of wanton discrimination and violence by both the virulently anti-Muslim Rakhines, a Buddhist ethnic group, and agents of the central government. One of the few things Rakhines and members of the ethnic Burmese majority have in common is a shared hatred of the 'Bengalis,' a label they both apply to Rohingya with contempt."

Add to that a failed Rohingya secessionist uprising between 1948 and 1961, persistent fears of Islamic encroachment on Buddhists and a 1982 citizenship law "essentially legitimizing discrimination against the Rohingya," according to the Middle East Institute.

Why don't nearby countries take them in?

The obvious candidates to house displaced Rohingya have appeared unwilling or unable to provide permanent homes for them.

Malaysia and Indonesia have turned away Rohingya by the hundreds because the countries claim they are financially unable to accept them. "We have to send the right message that they are not welcome here," Malaysia's deputy home minister remarked recently. The Thai navy has similarly rebuffed the refugees.

Bangladesh, a majority Muslim nation, had informally harbored the Rohingya for years — only to order them out of border camps in recent days. That's not surprising; it's one of the most densely populated countries in the world, with a fragile government and economy.

Why doesn't the Myanmar government do something about this?

Good question. It's one that the Dalai Lama, President Barack Obama, the U.S. State Department and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton have all asked. Archbishop Desmond Tutu has called the violence against Rohingya a "slow genocide." Billionaire George Soros has compared it to Nazism.

Put simply, positioning oneself against the Buddhist majority is considered a risky political move. Myanmar President Thein Sein's office previously issued a statement referring to the rabidly anti-Rohingya 969 movement as "just a symbol of peace." Even Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel Laureate who fought for decades for democracy and reform in Myanmar, has been conspicuously quiet on the issue.