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The Lived Dystopia of the Rohingya: Liminalisation, Demonisation, and Expulsion

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The prospect and willingness of the Rohingyas to repatriate are, by and large, conditioned by their past experience of living in Myanmar. Discussions on repatriating the Rohingyas are likely to fail not because they are unwilling to return but mainly because of the lack of reasonable initiatives to address the deep-rooted animosity against the minority group prevalent in the country they had to flee. This paper analyses the findings of the 50 in-depth interviews of the refugees encamped in Cox's Bazar. It presents ten instances of injustice, nine examples of forced payments, and systemic discrimination against the Rohingyas in Myanmar. Twenty-eight per cent of the respondents reported that at least one family member or relative was killed during the atrocities in 2017. The study finds that not all Buddhists participated in the attack against the Rohingyas; some reportedly helped the victims find safe shelter. The Rohingyas in Bangladesh suffer from an insufficient supply of relief during the last days of a relief distribution cycle. To survive, they take loans and seek illegal ways for finding employment outside the camp. While awaiting the perpetrators to be brought to justice, some Rohingyas remain optimistic about a peaceful return to their home country. And others are scared of even thinking of going back to the places where they witnessed both their homes and hopes burnt into ashes. Besides proposing two short-term measures— "burden-sharing" and "internal flight alternative"—this paper underscores the need for a novel approach in finding a durable solution to the problem.

Keywords: The Rohingya, Repatriation, Refugee, Myanmar, Bangladesh
JEL Classification: H84, J61

I. INTRODUCTION

The Rohingya is considered "the most persecuted minority in the world"[1] by the UNHCR. According to Amnesty International, six of the eleven types of crimes against humanity were committed against the Rohingyas in August 2017.[2]

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[1]https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22491&LangID=E (accessed on May 2nd, 2019).

[2]https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/10/myanmar-new-evidence-of-systematic-campaign-to-terrorize-and-drive-rohingya-out/ (accessed on May 14, 2019).

Rohingyas are not considered members of any of the 135 recognised *taingyintha* or "national races" in Myanmar (Cheesman, 2017, p. 6). They have been denied recognition as citizens of Myanmar, despite having sufficient evidence of their citizenship (Kyaw, 2017, p. 276). The officials of Myanmar even opposed identifying Rohingyas by their preferred name because they are closely connected to Rakhine: "*Labels reveal the political in the apolitical*" (Zetter, 2007, p. 188, emphasis added). The original name of the state of Rakhine was Arakan; in the regional dialect, it is called Rohong or Rohang and the people of Rohong are called Rohingya (Ahmed, 2010, p. 57).

The people of Burma, the last name of Myanmar, fought against the British colonial rule from 1942 to 1948 to become an independent nation. In this struggle, the Rohingyas played a complex role. Burma's then Prime Minister Nu once pledged an autonomous area in Rakhine for Muslims (Fair, 2018, p. 66). Rohingyas once had their own political party and even won seats in the election held in 1990 (Ibrahim, 2018, p. 41); they hoped for a dignified identity and a nation of their own; they, at times, were also assured of such privileges. The Rohingyas remained loyal to the colonial British as the colonial rulers, as a strategy, courted the minority groups to discriminate against the majority Rakhines. Due to this, the Rohingyas had to suffer a lot during the anti-colonial riots of 1938 and the Second World War. Japan carried out "multiple massacres of the Rohingyas for their pro-British stance" (Mohsin, 2019, p. 5). Arakanese Buddhists who wanted independence from the British also assisted the Japanese forces in attacking the Muslims (Fair, 2018, p. 66). The Rohingyas came under renewed attack in independent Burma. Their organisations were banned. The military carried out a national census and deliberately excluded the Rohingyas (Ullah, 2011, p. 143). The exclusion of Rohingyas played a crucial role in denying them the right to recognise themselves as citizens of Myanmar.

The minority group faced at least nine major phases of evictions from 1942 to 2007 (Ahmed, 2010, p. 40): about 1,00,000 Rohingyas were killed and many were evicted during World War II; Rohingyas were forced out of Arakan in 1948; Rohingya Muslims were identified as foreigners in 1974; Operation Dragon King created about 2,00,000 Rohingya refugees; 1982 citizenship law effectively made Rohingyas stateless; about 2,50,000 Rohingya refugees encamped in Bangladesh in 1992; 50,000 refugees were forced to return to Myanmar in 1993; voluntary repatriation stopped in 1994 and subsequently forced repatriation increased; and some refugees resettled in Canada in 2007 (Wipperman & Haque, 2007). In May 2012, extremist Buddhists killed several hundred Muslims, destroyed more than 5,000 Rohingya homes, and evicted about 75,000 Rohingyas (Fair, 2018, p. 67).

The recent mass expulsion of Rohingyas took place in 2017, resulting in an exodus of 8,88,000 to one million nationals of Myanmar.[3]

Along with the rise of Buddhist nationalism, the historical conflict between the two dominant ethnic groups (Bamars and Arakanese) has been overshadowed by the vilification of Rohingyas as a national enemy (Alam, 2018; Mahmood, Wroe, Fuller, & Leaning, 2017). Although the government of Myanmar initially patronised the Muslims as a force to counter the dominant Arakanese Buddhists, the scenario drastically changed after the independence. The military rulers, specifically General Ne Win, embraced Buddhism and started promoting it as a unifying national force and consequently, the followers of other religions experienced diverse forms of discrimination. In fact, the Myanmar military historically tried to gain popular support by promoting Buddhism as the "ruling ideology" (Ibrahim, 2018, p. 39). The Muslim Rohingyas were vilified and made the prime target in the process of generating a pro-Buddhist national sentiment. The expulsion of the Rohingyas serves two important purposes: promoting Theravada Buddhism as a unifying force in Myanmar and countering the perceived prioritisation of the rights of the Rohingya minorities by the international agencies (MacLean, 2019, p. 11).

This paper attempts to examine the following: why the Rohingyas had to leave their homeland, i.e., Myanmar; what kind of suffering and discrimination they had to endure; what expectations they had in deciding to take the risk of crossing the Border of Myanmar; what they think of the prospect of repatriation; and how they managed to reimagine life in the refugee camps in Bangladesh. The paper also examines the refugee narratives and the experiences of both the old wave Rohingyas and recent ones (who fled Myanmar in August 2017).

II. CONTEXT

Narratives are meant not to convey an already known message but to continue a conversation by taking the interlocutors into confidence. The more people believe and respond to the emerging constructs, the more successful a narrative has come to be. It is one reason social scientists seriously examine not the validity but the concrete impacts of any such public discourse, be it emerging, tantalising, or passing. Analogous to the ever-evolving trajectories of refugee lives, narratives (re)take shape alongside. In the lives of encamped refugees, the struggle to come up with reasonable/trustworthy narratives is of paramount importance. It is not only because their lives depend on it. Whether refugee lives (or their loss) matter,

[3] UNHCR, Bangladesh Refugee Emergency Population Factsheet (30 June 2018).

whether their life is "grievable" (Butler, 2016), is often determined by the perceived authenticity of the narratives emerging from the stories of refugees. More importantly, how refugees themselves make sense of their experience—shocking, exciting, eye-opening, or disturbing—often remains less focused in the public discourse. Social scientists, instead, value the refugee stories to document the voices of the unheard. They vow to empathetically examine the agonies, aspirations, and anxieties embedded in the quotidian voices.

Refugees do not have to be portrayed as helpless subjects; instead, they are "people with agency and voice" (Estmond, 2007, p. 253). The willingness and credible attempts to listen to the stories which contribute to making a favourable world are desperately sought after by the refugees. Being able to narrate their experiences in their own words without fear or intimidation constitutes the elementary steps of (re)building the prospect of a decent future. The sincere will and urge to listen to the stories of the camp residents—without being prejudiced or biased—constitutes the essential condition of transitioning from "bare life" (Agamben, 1998) to a person with the full strength of an agency. The very process of listening to the stories—in addition to recording, coding, tabulating, analysing the testimonies—might help the refugees regain a sense of dignity and worth as human beings. While listening to the stories, the refugees feel reassured that their stories are worth narrating; their testimonies deserve careful attention, and their voices are worth carefully documented for academic and policymaking purposes.

Are the Rohingyas destined to be eternally trapped in the camps? What is the future of the Rohingyas who are "forcibly displaced"? Are they going to be *eternally homeless*? They do not have formal recognition as citizens of Myanmar, nor do they have an identity they hold dear to their heart: Rohingya. Not surprisingly, their current host—Bangladesh—is unwilling to recognise them as refugees. They are an ideal type or category of humans; for whom "the state of exception" is the norm, not an aberration (Agamben, 1998). What happened before 2017—the systemic and sustained persecution of the Rohingyas—in Myanmar is pivotal in understanding the prospects and perils of attempted repatriation of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh. *The past is not what has already happened; it's the opposite*, i.e., what the developments in recent times make it seem to be. Borrowing from Michel Foucault, I draw attention to a "history of the present"—how the happenings in the present make meanings of what we claim to know about the events that happened in the past.

The paper does not just argue that the events that took place before 2017 are also important. Instead, careful analyses of the pre-2017 experiences of the Rohingyas in Myanmar are crucial to finding any durable and amicable solution to

the existential crisis of more than a million Rohingyas residing in Bangladesh. The spectre of the past is haunting the Rohingyas. The history of the sufferings is embodied, inscribed on the bodies of the Rohingyas. The experiences are ever-present, incessant in the sense that the history of the trauma, anxiety, discrimination, humiliation is always already in action—embodied.

What the Rohingyas think of the past creates the conditions of the possibility of any (in)voluntary repatriation. Any discussion about repatriation tends to remind them of the traumatic memories; such discussions force them to worry seriously about an imminent danger. Their apparent determination to not return stems from the invocation of those traumatic memories—the past vividly animated in the present. Repatriation of the refugees requires *prior* arrangements of redressing the embodied trauma of the Rohingyas. Any potentially successful redressal of the problem warrants the due recognition of the camp residents as dignified nationals of Myanmar

III. METHODOLOGY

As part of a mixed-method study (BIDS-IFPRI Report 2019), 50 in-depth interviews were conducted. Based on the quantitative survey findings, issues for qualitative investigation and potential respondents for in-depth interviews were identified. Respondents for the initial quantitative survey were selected randomly. From those respondents, a set of sub-samples was identified for qualitative interviews. While conducting the quantitative survey, families were identified whose members experienced unusual sufferings such as the killing of family members, severe injury, and burning of homes. From those identified families, interviewees were purposefully selected. Respondents with diverse forms of experience were interviewed to record a comprehensive picture. Instead of aiming for generalizability, the goal was to search for the diversity of their experience. The objective was to go into the details of the story. Different criteria were considered in selecting the interviewees: refugees whose family members were tortured/injured/killed, members of large families that have more than eight members, those who suffered from diseases, families that occasionally suffered from insufficient food, refugees who found employment outside the camps, Rohingyas who survived various shocks, those who started small businesses inside the camps, those who borrowed money and/or food to survive, and finally those who were vocal in articulating the experiences and expectations of the camp dwellers. Interviews of the members of large families were done to explore why families have more children and what they think about family planning practices. Families that reportedly suffer from a lack of food are selected to examine whether relief materials are sufficient, what they do when supplies are insufficient, and how

they cope with the shortage. The paper also investigates how the Rohingyas managed to go outside the camp and find employment. To clarify, instead of policing, the goal is to understand how the uprooted Rohingyas manage to survive the everyday odds.

The interviews were recorded. Respondents were first informed about the study objective, and then they were kindly asked if they would allow us to record the interviews. The interviews were recorded when they consented to us to do so. We explained that the recordings would only be used for the purposes of the study; we would strictly maintain the confidentiality of their private information. The recorded interviews were translated first from the local Rohingya dialect to Bengali and then to English. This study presents the recorded testimonies of the victims. Although numerous reports there are on the allegations of atrocities against the Rohingya, these carefully documented testimonies might serve as crucial evidence of the alleged crimes against humanity. As the famous German poet, Goethe insisted, "Truth has to be repeated constantly, because Error also is being preached all the time, and not just by a few, but by the multitude."[4]

IV. FINDINGS

This section presents the Rohingya's painful experiences of living in Myanmar, the systematic harassment by the police, religious discrimination, the atrocities carried out in August 2017, and the crimes against humanity. The section also examines the strategies of escaping violence and finding safe shelter in Bangladesh, anxieties of the camp life, occasional insufficiency of food, finding employment inside and outside of the camps, risks of prolonged camp life, prejudices against Rohingyas, and finally, the less-known story of Buddhists helping Rohingyas escape violence.

4.1 Living in an Open Prison in Myanmar

While the majority of the Rohingyas became refugees in Bangladesh, a small proportion of them (about 1,30,000 according to Human Rights Watch) were forced to live in the camps within Myanmar.[5] They were segregated from the majority Rakhine population and put under surveillance. They were made unworthy of the fundamental rights of human beings by the people and institutions that are supposed to secure the life and dignity of all residents of Myanmar. Hosna Akter, a 22-year-old refugee woman, elaborated how their family members were

[4] http://www.whale.to/a/goethe_q.html (accessed on 16 October 2019).

[5] ttps://www.hrw.org/report/2020/10/08/open-prison-without-end/myanmars-mass-detention-rohingya-rakhine-state (accessed on May 25, 2021).

forced to live in camps where their movements were restricted and monitored: "We were obliged to return home by 6 p.m. Even if the people in the neighbourhoods were about to die, we were not allowed to see him/her after that time period. They would shoot if they found us on the street after 6 pm." The respondent also testified about the lack of confidence in the medical system run by the majority of Buddhists. Due to the distrust, Rohingyas were too afraid to seek medical assistance. They feared that the medical system run by the local Mogs would hurt them instead of saving their lives. The important question is not whether the apprehensions lack sufficient ground; *what is crucial is to seriously consider what actual consequences these apprehensions have in the daily lives of the refugees*. Hosna remarked: "We could not go to the Mog doctors after they had confrontations with us." As Rohingyas were confined in "an open prison without end" (Human Rights Watch, ibid), they were desperate to be out in the world interacting and living as free human beings.

4.2 Extortion, Abduction, and Everyday Harassment

Knowing that the minority Rohingyas in Myanmar were vulnerable and often unable to defend themselves, they were subjected to extortion, abduction, and harassment (Fair, 2018, pp. 65-67; MacLean, 2019, pp. 9-11; Ahmed, 2010, pp. 20-26). The security forces of Myanmar allegedly abducted the vulnerable members and claimed large amounts of ransom. Saleha Khatun, a female Rohingya whose husband was killed by the Myanmar Police, testified: "When the Myanmar police took me with them, they claimed 10 lakh taka [Kyat[6]] ransom." Families of the victims sold almost everything they had to pay the claimed ransom in order to rescue their loved ones. Kidnapping the locals to claim ransom was not an exception, all but almost a regular event.

TABLE I

INSTANCES OF INJUSTICE AGAINST THE ROHINGYAS IN MYANMAR

1.	Unpaid forced labour	2-4 days a week
2.	Forced by the Army to share crops	Seasonal
3.	Beaten by Army for cultivating own land	Occasional
4.	Forced payment for early marriage	Occasional
5.	Fine for failing to do unpaid work	Regularly
6.	Mandatory payment for birth registration	Occasional
7.	Barred from ritually sacrificing animals	Annual
8.	Had to be vigilant during prayer	Daily
9.	Bared from collectively praying on Fridays	Weekly
10.	Sunrise to sunset law: 6 am to 6 pm	Daily

Source: Stories of Rohingya Lives, BIDS-IFPRI, 2019.

[6]10 lakh Kyat is equivalent to almost US$ 650; 1 US$ is worth about 1,500 Kyat.

Besides abducting and torturing, the authorities in Arakan (Rakhine State) forced Rohingyas to pay for the routine activities in their daily lives. As summarised in Table II, they had to pay for everyday activities, such as organising a wedding, making phone calls, staying outside the home for a day or more, travelling outside the neighbourhood, and performing religious rituals. These restrictions had made the Rohingyas feel imprisoned in their homeland.

TABLE II
EXAMPLES OF MANDATORY PAYMENTS[7] IMPOSED ON ROHINGYAS IN MYANMAR

Est. Amount of Payment (Kyat)	Reason
5,000-15,000 (US$ 4-10)	Staying at a relative's house
200-500	Visiting neighbours
300,000	Making phone calls to Bangladesh
300,000	8-month permit for attending school
1,600,000 (US$ 1000)	Est. the annual cost of attending school
100,000 – 200,000 (US$ 65-130)	Having more than 3 kids
200,000 (US$ 130)	Marriage registration
5,000- 10,000	Ritually sacrificing animal
5,000-10,000	Permit for visiting cities

Source: Stories of Rohingya Lives, BIDS-IFPRI, 2019.

The fees were reportedly imposed on Rohingyas, not Mogs [Rakhines].[8] Those minorities were targeted and forced to endure the discrimination probably because of their assumed status as a foreigner or "Kalar"—a racial slur.[9] Performing the rituals of the culture in which they were born and raised is supposed to be part of one's inalienable rights. Denial of those basic needs of human beings, especially of the helpless minorities, made them desperately seek an exit, however dangerous that could be.

[7]Two disclaimers: First, the amounts of payments or fines should be read as indicative of systematic harassment, not as accurate figures; second, systematic surveys, using structured questionnaires, need to be conducted for finding out the accurate amount of payment.

[8] Due to the limitations of time and resources, we could not independently verify the claims.

[9]"In 2009, Myanmar's consul general in Hong Kong wrote a letter to foreign diplomats calling the Rohingya 'ugly as ogres' with 'dark brown skin," reported by *Los Angeles Times*. The report was accessed on 25 September 2019, from here: https://www.latimes.com/world/asia/la-fg-myanmar-rohingya-hate-20171225-story.html

4.3 Religious and Cultural Discrimination

The Rohingyas, the vast majority of whom are Muslim,[10] complained that they were not allowed to freely practice their religion. A few of the Rohingyas were allegedly forced to convert to Buddhism. Lucky Begum, a 30-year-old Rohingya woman, observed: "They want us to convert to their religion. They used to say that there cannot be two religions in this country. Everything will be alright if we convert to their religion." Lucky also complained that during *Ramadan*, they could not perform *Azan* (call for prayer) and could not turn on the lights to take *sehri* [meal eaten before sunrise during *Ramadan* by Muslims].

TABLE III

SYSTEMIC HARASSMENT OF THE ROHINGYAS IN MYANMAR

Reported Reasons	Nature of Harassment
Turning on lights at night	Arrest
Seeing doctors	Had to buy a permit
Visiting neighbours	Needed permission; must return before the evening
Allegedly because of being Muslim	Harvests looted, properties confiscated
Restrictions on social gatherings	Permission required from police for picnic/games
Fishing, collecting firewood, and cattle farming	Permit needed from the police
"Rohingyas" allegedly not hired	Job discrimination

Source: Stories of Rohingya Lives, BIDS-IFPRI, 2019.

The allegations need to be carefully investigated by experts. But the fact that the Rohingyas were scared and felt threatened merely because of following their faith was sufficient to make them feel insecure and at times "precarious" (Ibrahim, 2018, p. 149; Martin, Yerni, & Yue, 2019). Instead of formally prohibiting them from practices of Islam, the authorities put in practice coercive measures, specially targeting the Muslim minority in the Rakhine State of Myanmar.

[10]There are 105 Hindu families (approximately 400 individuals) hosted in a separate refugee camp in Bangladesh. Soon after the killing of 22 Myanmar security officials, on 25 August 2017, the Arakan Salvation Army (ARSA) killed 99 Hindus in Myanmar (https://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-bangladesh-rohingya-hindus-20190105-story.html, accessed on 23 April 2019). Due to the resource and time constraints, the study focused only on the Muslim refugees in Bangladesh.

4.4 The Fateful Incident that Triggered the Atrocities in 2017

Raz Bahdur, a Hafez [one who memorised the Quran], is a 38-year-old Rohingya. In 2007, his four-year-old daughter was killed by the Mogs; he described the incident in August 2017, which reportedly triggered the atrocities against Rohingyas in Myanmar: "In Maungdaw, 10 Amirs [Islamic clerics] were slaughtered." Those Amirs came to "chilla" [ritual gathering] from Akyab in jamaats from different places, and were doing the "dawati" work [invitation to Islam]. Raz reflected, "If the Moulvis were tortured, we could not tolerate it." Because of the attack against the Amirs, a *hartal* [strike] was called. The moulvis were reportedly killed in the corner of a hill while returning to Maungdaw at night. Hearing the news, Rohingyas became angry and spread it and demanded justice. On that Friday, the news spread through announcements at all the mosques.

He went on to say:

> *Consequently, the government announced in all the areas, including Akyab and Maungdaw, that Rohingyas carried arms, and they would attack. After that announcement, many Unions/Paras were destroyed. Many children and adult people were killed. Men were buried alive. Women were imprisoned and forced to eat food from the floor and tortured brutally. Hundreds of dead bodies were found under the bridge, and most of them were burnt. They killed innocent, general people by calling them "Alekin" [ARSA]. People could not tolerate this violence and started leaving.*

We note two important things here. First, the gruesome attacks were carried out in a mosque, a holy site. Second, the target was the Amirs, usually revered by devoted Muslims. Killing and humiliating the religious leaders in a mosque were enough to enrage the targeted Muslim community in Myanmar. The labelling of the Amirs and the victims of the attacks as members of a militant group, Alekin [Harakah al-Yakin, or ARSA], added further fuel to the fire. Although the interviewees did not always highlight it, some Rohingyas carried out a retaliatory attack. The attack killed 12 security personnel of Myanmar.[11] Regardless of the intention of the perpetrators, what followed the retaliation is considered one heinous crime against humanity.

[11] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41082689 (accessed on 22 November 2019).

4.5 Indiscriminate Killing and Rape

The consequences of the communal tension defy imagination: burning homes of the Rohingya community to ashes, indiscriminate killing, and uprooting and evicting the residents en masse. Killing innocent people and raping women are two reported heinous crimes committed against Rohingyas. "In one of our neighbourhoods, 380 people were killed," Jomila, a 25-year-old female Rohingya, reported. Hajera, a 50-year-old Rohingya refugee, testified: "They burned 350 people at once. One woman came to us drenched in blood after they killed her whole family." Twenty-eight per cent of the respondents reported that at least one of their family members or relatives was killed. While calculating the total number of murders, two reported large numbers (380 and 350) were not calculated twice. Respondents were possibly talking about the same incident. Instead of using the two separate numbers, we used the average of the two numbers: 365. Reports of abduction and disappearance are also common. Three respondents reported enduring severe injuries. The numbers may be underreported. While emphasizing the incidents of killing and disappearance, they talked less about injuries.

TABLE IV
CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY

	Person Involved/Incidents	Number of Respondents Reported
Killing	365	14 (28%)
Rape	2	2
Abduction	3	3
Missing/Disappeared	3	4 (8%)
Severely Injured	3	3

Source: Stories of Rohingya Lives, BIDS-IFPRI, 2019.

Surovi (20) reported how her father and husband were murdered, her brother abducted, and male relatives kidnapped by Nasaka [a border security force]. Sahela told her husband was killed by the military. She could not even find his dead body. A 28-year-old Rohingya male named Meherban, who used to lead prayers at a mosque in Myanmar, testified: "*Seven 'Alems'* [Muslim scholars] *among the 16 were killed."* The slain Alems were assumed to be members of ARSA. "We saw all the dead bodies floating in the sea," testified Monju Begum, a 22-year-old female Rohingya refugee. The testimonies of the Rohingyas are indicative of an intention to commit genocide against the Rohingya in Myanmar. The Myanmar Army reportedly led the attack. Monju Begum recalled: "*The militaries were*

killing people like animals." It was a well-orchestrated attack against unarmed civilians. To escape, they did what anyone would do in that circumstance: Flee from the site and find a safe shelter nearby.

While in Myanmar, women and girls were reportedly raped by members of the Myanmar military. Incidents of rape took place often when girls and women were living alone at home. They were alone home because families' male members had been either killed or abducted. Home is where we find safer shelter. But the Rohingya mothers experienced the worst form of torture at homes, often in front of their children. To avoid hurting the victims by recalling the horrific acts, the interviewers did not try to probe the reported incidents.

> *"What should I tell you about their torture? They raped the daughter in front of the father"* (Gafur 30-year-old man and used to be a well-known businessman in Myanmar).

> *"Her parents had been killed; since then she was living alone in a room. Then three military officers came and raped her. Her face [were] scratched."* (Hosna Akter, a young Rohingya woman)

> *"Many women were raped. A mother got raped in front of her daughter"* (Saleha, a 33-year-old woman whose husband was killed by the Myanmar Army).

The reported crimes mentioned should be investigated. The perpetrators must be brought to justice, preferably at the International Criminal Court.

4.6 The Dreadful Journey: Perils of Crossing the Border

As the Rohingyas were desperate to save their lives, they ended up fleeing en masse from Myanmar. Hoping to find a safe shelter, they walked for about seven days, crossed the hills, starved, and spent nights under the open sky. Upon reaching the bank of the Naf river, they found a Bangladeshi boatman who helped them reach the shore.[12] Raz Bahadur recalled: "We moved from one hill to another for about one month. While starving, we even ate the leaves of the trees [crying]." Raz Bahadur and his fellows remained hungry for days: "*I went from one hill to another without taking food for 10-11 days*." Some had to endure the pain of watching their infants die without food. Shockingly enough, some had to leave the babies assuming to be dead on the way (Jamila, whose husband was killed by the

[12]Not all boatmen were equally helpful, though. Some reportedly forcefully seized valuable things from the Rohingyas. For example, Hosna Akter's earrings were seized forcefully by a boatman.

Myanmar military). Upon arriving in Bangladesh, the refugees finally found a place to rest easy: the camps. Babies or mothers did not have to suffer from a lack of food; they got access to medical facilities. However, despite being homeless and unrecognised refugees, they became optimistic about their new life in a foreign country. As the ordeal was almost over for the refugees, they became happy finding themselves in a new community. They finally found a relatively safe place to sleep at night in the camp. One of them expressed satisfaction about the role of the host community in Bangladesh, recalling an interesting experience: people who gave shelter to the refugees slaughtered a cow for treating the Rohingyas (Masuda Khatun, a female Rohingya refugee).

4.7 What It Means to Be an Encamped Refugee

The Rohingyas exhaled a sigh of relief once they managed to leave Myanmar. They are sad that they (in some cases) lost family members or got injured, but they are happy to have an opportunity to tell the world what they have gone through. The refugees are grateful to the host community in Bangladesh for allowing about a million uprooted Myanmar nationals to find temporary shelter. "*What Bangladesh did for us can be compared with the value of mother's milk …* the tiny rooms in which we live here in Bangladesh seem to us no less than concrete-made buildings. Here we can sleep in peace, which we could not do in Myanmar," remarked Sahela. Though the refugees now live in slum-like conditions in Bangladesh, they prefer to stay in the camps in Bangladesh, not in homes in Myanmar that are like torched. As their stay in the camps is getting longer, the camp dwellers find themselves mired in other problems, such as lack of income-earning opportunities and difficulty in managing the food of their choice.

4.7.1 Occasional Insufficiency of Relief

The encamped Rohingyas get, on average, three meals per day (BIDS-IFPRI Report, 2019). However, the amount of food is, at times, insufficient, and there is not enough dietary diversity. Kids especially suffer from the lack of a preferred menu on their plate. The encamped refugees often sell some of the rice, lentils, onion, and oil to buy other necessary items, such as fish, meat, and vegetables. And when they sell some of those items, they reportedly start to suffer from the scarcity of food in the last few days of the relief distribution cycle. In those days, they try to survive by borrowing food from their fellows, who also suffer from the insufficiency of essential food items during the end of the food distribution cycle. Different groups of camp residents receive the reliefs on different dates in a month. As a result, when one group runs out of their food stock at the end of a cycle,

another group begins the cycle and receives their relief materials. So, it is not the case that one group of refugees gets an abundant supply of the essential items and others do not. They try to help out each other despite knowing that helping their fellows almost certainly makes them more vulnerable to such crises in the future.

Some refugees tend to suffer more than others. Families that have five or more members suffer more. Smaller families are also reported to sometimes suffer from a lack of sufficient food.

> *We get 27/28 kg of rice once a month for the three of us. But these are not enough; every month, we need to take loans from our neighbours. And when we get our ration, we give back the amount of rice we borrowed. When someone comes to our house, we can't even offer something as we don't get enough food* (Amzad, a 22-year-old Rohingya male).

The amount of money they get for a month is also meagre.

> *It is not possible for a person to pay the expenses of a month with 850 taka. We can pass 15-20 days with the relief we get. In the rest of the days, we have to go through much hardship* (Al Amin, a refugee man living in Nayapara camp).

During the days of the food crisis, they reportedly stay hungry or half-fed. Many of the respondents suffered from a lack of sufficient food, at least a few days every month. "If we can manage anything, we eat that; if not, then we do not eat" (Kabir, a resident of Balukhali camp). Respondents also suffered from the lack of other necessary food items needed to prepare a regular meal, such as oil and spice.

> *We get three types of food—lentils, rice, and oil. These three items are not enough for a family. We also need firewood, chilli, turmeric, onion, and garlic. I cannot buy everything due to the crisis of money. We cannot eat good food even if we want to.* (Nazrul, an old-wave Rohingya refugee)

The Rohingyas are barely surviving with relief. They can hardly think of regularly managing nutritious food, especially for children.

> *I get relief by showing a food card. We get 720-750 taka a month per person. With that money, we can buy anything from the market as per our needs. Can a man survive even a month with 750 taka only? Is this humanity? Or this is just for enduring anyhow?* (Shafiulla, a 42-year-old man with two children).

They almost always fail to eat meat, fish, egg, or milk. As they almost always eat the same type of food distributed by the agencies, Rohingyas no longer crave that. That is why Rohingyas, at times, sell some of the relief. With that money, they buy other necessary groceries. They occasionally buy meat, mentioned by Hasina, a Rohingya woman and mother of ten children. Sometimes they sell lentil packets to buy dry fish (Hosna Akter, a 22-year-old Rohingya). Jamila reported selling two of the three bottles of oils to purchase fish and eggs (Jamila, a 25-year-old woman). Her children do not want to take lentils all the time. Parents in the Rohingya community sometimes eat less food and remain half-fed so that their children get a little bit more. One respondent (Gafur, a 30-year-old camp resident) explained why children sometimes refuse to eat the distributed food. The parents then sell those items on the market and buy the food items preferred by their children.

> *The WFP provides suji and special nutritious food packages for children. But that packaged food is almost inedible. The children throw up once eaten. That is why you will see we rather sell this in the market. It is way better to feed the child one litre of milk than this packaged food.*

Children reportedly vehemently refuse to eat the same type of food repeatedly. They also complained about the poor quality of the food. Khaled (a 23-year-old Rohingya) sold some of the chilis and lentils to buy meat. Manik, a Rohingya, currently living in Kutupalong camp, at times, sold a packet of lentils for 100 taka and spent that money to buy fish. Masuda, a Rohingya mother and camp resident sells some of the rice, lentils, and oil to buy firewood and fish. Similarly, Momena, a 52-year-old Rohingya woman, sells lentils and oil to buy meat. The respondents sometimes remain half-fed because they sell the relief materials to buy other food items preferred by their children.

> *I buy fruits by selling lentil packets. Whatever I earn, I spend most of that on buying healthy food for them. They cannot live only on rice and lentils. Even if my wife and I don't eat properly, we try to give them fish, meat, and eggs. They were accustomed to eating well in Burma.* (Gafur, the 30-year-old Rohingya male)

The Rohingyas sell food items not because they always have more than needed. They reportedly sell some of the food to collect what they, especially their children crave. They at times sell the relief to buy things they wish to have but could not usually afford, such as buying a new dress or mobile phone. A recent study, published by the X-Border local research network, reports that the Rohingyas sell the relief materials to buy necessary non-food items, get cash, pay

for emergency medical needs, and pay off the debt.[13] The residents of the camps sell some of the relief materials in the market to ensure the essential diversity in their food and consumables. Important to note that the Rohingyas sell the items at a cheaper rate; the buyers are, in most cases, the local Bangladeshis. In no way the Rohingyas are leading a decent life in the camps. If the financial and institutional support for regularly providing the essential food items for almost a million people gets interrupted, the conditions will almost overnight become alarming. Measures are needed to be adopted to avoid any such possibilities. The policymakers should ensure an uninterrupted and sufficient supply of essential food items.

4.7.2 Finding Employment Inside and Outside Camps

To address the unmet needs, the camp dwellers try to find opportunities for earning money both inside and outside the camps. Although the Rohingyas are not allowed to go outside the camps, they often find ways to leave the camps and seek employment opportunities in Cox's Bazar and other nearby cities, e.g., Teknaf. They are, at times, hired by NGOs operating in the camps both as day-labourers and salaried employees. The Majhis (leaders of the camps) coordinate with the potential employers to find prospective employees. Old wave Rohingyas help the newly arrived ones to find employers. Al Amin, a Rohingya refugee, came to Bangladesh 28 years ago; at that time, he could reportedly go to Teknaf without any permission or restrictions. The situation is the opposite now. NGOs working inside the camp often hire the Rohingyas for making new houses and constructing, repairing roads and drainage systems inside the camps. Although it is difficult, male Rohingyas secretly go outside the home and work. Sometimes, they stay outside for up to two weeks to work.

> *If someone searches seriously, s/he can find work. If you go to Satkania in Chittagong, you find 4,000-5,000 Rohingya labourers. There, labourers are sold and bought on a per-day basis. People come from distant places and hire labourers according to their needs. There is a fixed [rate of] Tk 500-450 or 400 [per day]. People go for even 15 days, and they arrange for accommodation there.* (Delwar, a 53-year-old Rohingya refugee)

A son of Josna Begum, who is a 22-year-old Rohingya refugee, worked at a grocery shop in Teknaf for 6-7 months. He was paid about Tk. 2,500 –3,000 per

[13] "Emerging marketplace dynamics in the Rohingya refugee camps of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh," X-Border Briefing Paper, January 2021: https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/X-Border_Emerging-Marketplace-Dynamics-in-the-Rohingya-Refugee-Camps-of-Coxs-Bazar-Bangladesh.pdf (accessed on 26th May 2021).

month, but he quit the job due to the alleged misbehaviour of the employer. He then started working as a construction worker with a daily wage of Tk. 350-400. He sometimes gets sick and cannot work regularly.

In addition to working as volunteers, female Rohingyas are sometimes hired by NGOs to do nutrition-related work and cleaning jobs. Those who passed 8-10 grades are preferred for the jobs, reported Amzad Hossain, a 22-year-old Rohingya refugee. Fahima, a 60-year-old Rohingya woman, who works as a midwife at a hospital inside the camp, reported: "I have got the salary of 15 days, worth 5-6 thousand taka." She spent the money to repay the loan and buy vegetables and meat for her family members. Fahima added: five women work as volunteers at the hospital. Young girls sometimes volunteer as teachers at schools in the camps; they get a token payment of Tk.3,000-4,000 per month, reported Abul Hashem, a Rohingya refugee. The respondent also specified: "Those who work as teachers get Tk.5,000-6,000" per month.

The Rohingyas get paid less than the local workers for doing the same job. Momena Khatun, a 52-year-old Rohingya refugee, complained: "Yes, local people are [paid] much more. If they are given Tk.1,000, we get Tk.400-500. For this reason, the Rohingyas do not work; and [they] flee. They become very angry." The wage discrimination has twofold implications: First, local people in Cox's Bazar blame the Rohingyas for taking their jobs and causing a fall in the wage rate; and second, the relationship between Rohingyas and local people has deteriorated. The sympathy or empathy of the locals towards the encamped people has waned. More importantly, it creates the condition for transforming the hospitality of the host community into a sense of animosity towards the uprooted people in the camps.

4.8 Prejudices

Local Bangladeshis sometimes blame the Rohingya for their alleged reluctance to use birth control measures. Perceptions do not always represent reality. According to a recent study, 51 per cent of the female residents of the Kutupalong Rohingya camp used contraceptives (Khan, Islam, Rahman, & Rahman, 2021); Forty-nine per cent of the Rohingya women refrained from using birth control measures because of their husbands' disapproval. Although some of the old-wave Rohingya refugee women in Bangladesh considered female leadership important, the Rohingya women who came in recent times generally considered it a sin (Mohsin, 2019, p. 11). Jarina, a woman Rohingya residing in the refugee camp in Bangladesh, reported that family planning practices in Myanmar were costly and scary. Abul Hashem, a male Rohingya refugee, believed

that birth-control practices are *haram* (forbidden). However, Rohinga woman Lucky confessed that some Rohingyas *secretly took birth control measures*. Although the relatives discouraged her from using birth-control measures in Myanmar, with access to the facilities here in Bangladesh, her daughters, granddaughters and she decided to use contraceptives. Sajeda, a 55-year-old Rohingya woman and mother of eight daughters and four sons, started taking birth control pills after giving birth to the youngest child. Rohingyas stopped having more children often to avoid embarrassment in the family. Those who used birth-control practices sometimes had to hide the fact that they were taking the measures. However, there were exceptions in Myanmar. Hosna, a 22-year-old refugee woman, testified that "the bride and groom had to agree upon the condition of *not taking more than three children*, by signing a document."

Although some Rohingyas are apparently prejudiced against women's employment and education, many consciously try to find a job and become self-reliant. Jahanar Begum, a 32-year-old Rohingya woman, testified: "In Burma, people don't like women working outside. Elders complain about these in mosques." Although it is uncommon, Rohingya women worked outside in Myanmar, mentioned Dilu Begum, a resident of camp number seven. While living in the camps in Bangladesh, a number of Rohingya women work as day labourers, volunteers, teachers, and NGO workers. However, Rohingya women sometimes fail to find jobs due to the lack of basic education, reported Ramjan Ali, a 53-year-old Rohingya refugee.

In Myanmar, Rohingyas generally could not attend school because of insufficient educational institutions accessible to them. The available institutions mostly taught religious subjects: "Only the Quran and the Hadiths were taught at the Maktab [the village primary school]," observed Sahela Khatun, a female Rohingya. Arif Hossain, a Rohingya male refugee, reported that schools were mainly for Buddhists in Myanmar. Due to the restricted mobility, unavailability of schools and high cost of education, Rohingyas remained uneducated or poorly educated. Despite all the obstacles, few managed to succeed. They are getting the benefit of it. Five Rohingya women work as midwives in the camp, reported Fahima, a 60-year-old Rohingya. Monju Begum, a 22-year-old refugee, said that some of the Rohingya men are also "working at the hospital as interpreters, teaching at the schools, [and] doing surveys." The observations of the Rohingyas show that prejudices against women's education, job and birth control practices are both cultural and structural. Rohingya men and women need opportunities and access; that is what they have long been deprived of.

4.9 The Rohingya Lost Everything but Identity

Many of the Rohingya refugees we interviewed reportedly lost almost everything they had: "We have nothing that we can call our own," observed Ashnuara, who is a Rohingya mother; a pregnant refugee woman, Hosna Akter's last resources, the gold earrings, were forcefully seized while travelling on a boat, Kabir a resident of Balukhali camp, could not bring anything with him while arriving in Bangladesh; Monju Begum, like many others, had to leave almost everything in Myanmar while coming to Bangladesh; she was able to come to Bangladesh only with her child; Rakib and his fellows had nothing with them while entering Bangladesh; Shurovi, a 20-year-old female Rohingya refugee, reportedly had everything in Myanmar but owns almost nothing now in Bangladesh.

The Rohingyas sometimes feel they also lost that which makes humans persevere: Hope. However, what they seem never imagined losing is their preferred identity of Rohingya. The more the Rohingyas feel their preferred identity is at stake, the more they embrace it. The very identity that makes them subject to harassment and humiliation also makes them solidify as a group. A Rohingya refugee, Masuda Khatun, whose husband and a son were killed by the Myanmar Army, observed:

> *I feel very good if someone calls me Rohingya. We are suffering so much for our demand for recognition as the Rohingya. When they addressed us Bengalis in Myanmar, we were ashamed. If someone calls me Rohingya in Bangladesh, I feel honoured.*

Rohingyas are aware that the authorities in Myanmar detest the identity that the refugees prefer. They also know that insisting on that identity might invite hostilities against them. Nevertheless, they stick to it. One explanation could be this: "The word that wounds becomes an instrument of resistance in the redeployment that destroys the prior territory of its operation" (Butler, 1997, p. 163). In the case of the Rohingya, it is not using a particular name that hurts. Instead, it is the refusal to recognise a preferred identity that offends. In response, those who are offended insist on the debated terminology to reclaim their right to be recognised as preferred. Insisting on calling the refugees as the Rohingya thus becomes an "insurrectionary speech" (ibid); repeating that unwanted terminology is expected to bring about changes in the desired direction. Sahela Khatun, a refugee woman, put it candidly: "If anyone addresses us as Rohingya in Bangladesh, it feels as if we will be able to go back one day to our own country with this recognition."

The preference to be called by a chosen name could be considered one of the non-negotiable or "inalienable" rights of any human being, including the Rohingya. The Rohingyas know well that losing the right to be identified by their preferred name risks losing the hope of re-imagining life as dignified citizens of Myanmar. Apparently, for the same reason, the officials of Myanmar vehemently refuse to recognise their Rohingya identity.

4.10 Risks associated with a Prolonged Camp Life

The problems of having more children cannot be more evident anywhere other than in the refugee camps. The Rohingyas can barely hide their heads and bodies in tiny shanties; they can hardly move with their heads up and bodies stretched. The condition becomes miserable if a family has children (especially a newborn) or an ailing member. The question of privacy would appear utopian in that condition. The possibility of spreading communicable diseases is strong. More troubling would be to consider the future, especially of the children who committed no wrongdoings to be punished harshly. Vulnerability is evident in almost every moment in the camp life of the Rohingyas.

The longer-term camp life of the Rohingyas might be a fertile ground for producing potential new recruits for the existing militant groups. Militants often do not infiltrate from outside; instead, long-term stay in refugee camps is the reason why militarisation within camps takes place (Murshid, 2013, p.10; Ahmed, 2009). The Rohingyas residing in the camps in Bangladesh are generally uncomfortable and hesitant to talk about the ARSA. Many of them did not know about the ARSA, did not have any interaction with any of its members, or did not have experience dealing with the ARSA. A few of them, however, expressed positive opinions about them. Najma Begum, a 32-year-old female Rohingya refugee, remarked: "They were the well-wishers of the Rohingyas. They supported and helped the Rohingyas. They asked us not to create any chaos; Allah would do justice. They consoled the victims and sufferers." However, almost all of the Rohingyas expressed their concern about the ARSA. Members of the Myanmar military regularly blamed and tortured innocent Rohingyas as members of ARSA. Abul Hashem, a resident of Balukhali camp in Cox's Bazar, shared such a story: "When we came to Bangladesh leaving everything [in Myanmar], the Alekin looted Tk. 6 lacs from my father. They asked us why we were going to Bangladesh leaving Burma without fighting against the Mogs. This incident had taken place a few days before coming to Bangladesh, which will remain as a scar on my mind." The uprooted and encamped Rohingyas are largely unaware of any activities of the

ARSA militants in Bangladesh; moreover, the camp residents tend to remain vigilant and apathetic about any militant activities in the camps or nearby.

Policymakers need to be mindful that militant groups are reportedly active in the border areas of Myanmar and Bangladesh (Milton et al., 2017, p. 7). Rohingyas know that the systematic effort to uproot them from Myanmar started long ago. For example, soon after World War II, as many as 100,000 Rohingyas were reportedly killed and forced 50,000 others to seek shelter in East Bengal (Ahmed, 2009, p. 15). They also know that there is no guarantee that they will soon be able to return to their homeland, i.e., Myanmar. Some Rohingyas joined Pakistani militant groups such as Laskar-e-Taiba (Ibrahim, 2018, p. 149). Rohingyas remain trapped "in Arakan [where] there is state-sponsored persecution to cleanse ethnic minorities, and in Bangladesh state, there is the inability to provide necessary protection" (Ullah, 2011, p. 156). While the hope of returning home to Myanmar starts to dim, the everyday anxieties are no less debilitating than the prior experiences of violent attacks on them. "Daily stressors, … have had a strong and direct effect on depressive symptomatology" on the Rohingya (Riley, Varner, Ventevogel, Hasan, & Welton-Mitchell, 2017, p. 320). If this situation continues and Rohingyas stay trapped in the camps with no hope of living a safe and dignified life, the possibility of the rise of militant groups will be strong.

Despite all the worries and uncertainties, Rohingyas expressed gratitude for the hospitality of the host community, i.e., the people of Bangladesh. The Rohingyas remain thankful to the Bangladeshi people that they never hesitate to call the Rohingyas by their preferred name: "Rohingya." However, the local Bangladeshi community is increasingly impatient with the Rohingyas, mainly because of the inconveniences of hosting them for years. A local newspaper, *Dhaka Tribune*,[14] identified the crucial problems: "significant price hike of essentials, scarcity of transports, traffic congestion, degradation of the environment, including hill cutting, deforestation and manifold increase in house rent." Violent conflicts between the Rohingyas and locals are common. Recently, a local Bangladeshi leader was killed by some Rohingyas; security officials of Bangladesh reported the shooting of the targeted Rohingyas in "crossfire."[15]

[14] https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/rohingya-crisis/2019/03/31/rohingya-crisis-host-community-furious-over-badly-affected-livelihood

[15] https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/18/spate-bangladesh-crossfire-killings-rohingya

4.11 Not a Typical Communal Conflict

The conflict between Buddhists and Muslims in Rakhine is a relatively recent phenomenon; despite occasional conflicts, members of the two communities got along well in the past (van Klinken & Aung, 2017, p. 12, 14). The tension between the two communities escalated in the recent past. A study of the Center for Diversity and National Harmony (CDNH, 2015) found that 80 per cent of Rakhine Buddhists did not trust Muslims[16], 84 per cent were not comfortable living with Muslims, and 61 per cent of the women, in particular, refused to be involved in any reconciliation effort with Muslims. However, not all the Buddhists in Rakhine supported or participated in the atrocities against the Rohingya in 2017. Rohingyas also testified that some Buddhists helped the targeted Muslim minority find safety. Meherban, a 49-year-old Rohingya male and an Imam who used to lead prayers at mosques in Myanmar, testified: "The Mogs were all around; there were multiple types of opinion. Many showed respect to me."

The hostilities between the Buddhists and Rohingyas were reportedly rare in the past. Nasir Uddin, a 57-year-old Rohingya, owned a grocery shop in Myanmar. He recalled the friendly interactions he had with both the Buddhist and Muslim customers: "Earlier, the Mogs did their work, and we would do ours. There was no problem. They started torturing us just before we came to Bangladesh. …We talked to the Mogs and sat with them. I had a grocery shop. From there, all the Mogs and Muslims did buy stuff." Contrary to popular belief, Buddhists or Mogs, at times, helped the Rohingyas escape possible atrocities against the minority Muslims. The existing trust and credibility of the members of Muslim and Buddhist communities played a crucial role in preventing possible violent actions in many parts of Rakhine. Buddhists and Muslims managed to meet up and discuss among themselves possible ways of preventing atrocities in their areas, especially at times of heightened tension (Walton, Schissler, & Thi, 2017, p. 16).

4.12 "I want to die where my children died": Plan for the Future

The Rohingyas living in the camps in Bangladesh are uprooted but not entirely unmoored. Camps are not just sites of social dissolution; they are also the altars of new beginnings (Turner, 2016). Having been deprived of the citizenship of their country of origin and forced to reside in the refugee camps for years, they earned the identity of "campezenship" (Sigona, 2015). The Rohingyas may have become

[16]Referring to non-Kaman Muslims, Kaman is an officially recognised ethnic group in Myanmar.

"the undeserving stateless persons" (Sigona, 2016, p. 275); they were never entirely excluded from their reimagined camp community. They embody the state of "precarious inclusion" (Ibid). The encamped Rohingyas as a precarious community still cherish the memories of living in Myanmar; they still have the courage and confidence to reimagine living a dignified life, preferably in Myanmar. About a million forcefully evicted residents of Myanmar became a perfect example of the "precariat" in our time. The displaced people imagine a future that is rooted in the past; they dream of a homeland that will grant them dignity and citizenship. "I want to die where my children died. At least my soul will rest in peace if I die in that place," Masuda, a refugee woman, pleaded.

No one else other than the victims themselves does worry more about their future, especially their children. The Rohingyas like to have a safe shelter that they can call home. The refugees themselves thought about their future and agreed upon a set of demands.[17] Raz Bahadur, a male refugee, pointed out:

> *We have agreed upon 12-point demands. First, we have to be recognised as citizens of the country [Myanmar]. Second, we have to be given the opportunity of education. Third, we have to be given the same opportunities as the Mogs [Buddhists in Rakhine]. Fourth, our household goods and properties have to be returned to us. Besides these, other demands were also put.*

The question for the refugees is not whether they like to go back home. Instead, their concern is whether there is actually any place they can call home. They want credible assurance that they would not be tortured or prosecuted if returned. They would like to breathe easy on their land. Raz remarked, in Bangladesh, at least, the Rohingyas "can die peacefully reciting Kalima [verses from the Quran declaring faith in Allah]." The refugees want to live in Myanmar without any restrictions on their movement. Sahela Khatun, a 33-year-old Rohingya refugee woman who worked as a midwife in the camp, reacted:

> *If the government of Bangladesh [wanted to] forcibly send us back, we would not go back even if we die. We would hide from hill to hill, without taking food, if need be…If the Myanmar government recognises us, we will go back; otherwise, we will not go back to Myanmar even if they kill us.*

[17]On 20 August 2019, BBC Bengali reported the five demands: https://www.bbc.com/bengali/news-49403487.

The displaced Burmese demand justice; they want their rights to be restored. They want to get back their properties. They want the perpetrators to be tried. Delwar, the Rohingya refugee male who ran a clothing business in Myanmar, insisted: "If the Rohingyas are recognised with their rights like the Mogs, we won't need to be forced; we will go back willingly."

The encamped Rohingyas evidently endured horrendous oppression in Myanmar; notwithstanding the horrible experiences, the Rohingyas think of Myanmar as their home. Home is where they want to return. The host community, the international community and the diaspora Rohingyas seem to agree on one thing: the Rohingyas have an inalienable right to a safe and dignified return to their homeland, i.e., Myanmar.

V. LIVED DYSTOPIA

Rohingyas are the manifest embodiment of an ideal example of liminal life (Grajewski, 2020). This liminal status allows them to belong neither here nor there; they are trapped in the interstices of the borders and camps; they are stuck in the spaces called "betwixt and between" (Turner & Abrahams, 2017). Like stray objects floating in the air to be blown away anytime without much resistance or respite, Rohingyas are a textbook example of a group of expendable life. Edward Said once talked about immigrants who are forced to live a life of perpetual running between their homes (Said, 1997). Rohingyas, in this case, are forced to perpetually run between the camps and borders; their lives are the visible realities that mystify the otherwise clearly demarcated lines between humans and not-quite-humans. The Rohingyas are not considered dignified human beings with due rights and recognition as citizens of a country. Not only have they become stateless, but they also end up living the life of a "subhuman" (Uddin, 2020). Having no recognised citizenship of a country and having no identity, the Rohingyas have become an example of "*homo sacer*" (Agamben, 1998), sacrificing whom is essential to solidifying the nationhood of an ostensibly Buddhist Myanmar. The expulsion of "the Kalar"—the dark-skinned, foreigner—Rohingyas was expected to foreground the foundations of the nationhood of fair-skinned Buddhist Myanmar. The Rohingyas embody the "existential hyper-precarity of the acutest kind only to end in years of punitive immobilization" (Martin et al., 2019, p. 903). The life and aspirations of the encamped Rohingyas have come to be immobilised; their capacity to aspire stumbled, if not stifled. The worst form of nightmare has already come true in the lives of the Rohingyas. In the squalid camps, they are left with little prospect of realising the life of a mere human being.

The lived reality of the camp residents in Cox's Bazar could be considered a good example of a dystopia (Gordin, Tilley, & Prakash, 2010). The Rohingyas have experienced both the systemic and sudden refusal to enjoy the rights and privileges that they have taken for granted as human beings. They lost their home, homeland, family members, and properties. The uprooted Rohingyas were heartbroken to wake up to the reality that they might not be able ever again to visit their ancestral land and meet friends and relatives in Myanmar. Not only have they been forced to forget their identity as the Rohingya, but they also face the possibility of never being able to visit the burial sites of their family members and relatives in Myanmar. In many cases, they do not even know where the perpetrators buried/left the dead/mutilated bodies of their loved ones. Furthermore, the Rohingyas, especially the younger ones, have been facing the distant possibility of forgetting the memories of having a home in Myanmar. Not only do the Rohingyas bear the unbearable pain of forcefully erasing the memories of living/growing up in Myanmar, but also they are left with the frightening prospect of never being able to claim their ancestral land as their own. The Rohingya refugees lost control of many of the things that made them who they are. The loss of control is likely to be permanent and irreversible. This is dystopian: "Dystopia represents a loss of control, often finally and absolutely" (Claeys, 2013, pp. 170-171). Dystopias do not have to happen accidentally; they can, at times, be planned and implemented. It is the living reality for the Rohingyas—lived dystopia. The Rohingya lives are inundated with the sense of fear, experiences of destruction, and preponderance of enmity, which are the three constitutive features of a dystopia (Claeys, 2013, p. 145). For the Rohingyas, the dream of having a decent life has culminated into nightmarish camp life with no end in sight, no hope to hold on. Neither repatriation nor resettlement seems to be a possibility in the near future. Nightmares, not dreams, keep them awake at night. Scholars might have lengthy debates about whether the reality of the Rohingyas could be considered a perfect example of a dystopia. The limited focus of this paper does not allow the author to elaborate on that debate. The important task here is to highlight that dystopias are not just a matter of the distant past or literary imaginations; dystopias can be a living reality in our contemporary times.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The Rohingyas were subjected to systematic discrimination, torture, and humiliation in Myanmar. Many of them were forced to live in internal camps, carefully segregated from the majority Buddhists or Mogs, to use the commonly used nomenclature. The exodus in August 2017 was the culmination of a long-

awaited and carefully planned expulsion of the minority Rohingya Muslim community in Arakan. The expulsion followed the incidents of murder, rape, arson attack, abduction, and extortion. The Myanmar police allegedly led the crimes against humanity. As a desperate attempt to save lives, the Rohingyas took the perilous journey to Bangladesh. They reportedly had to walk for about ten days and suffered from the lack of food. Infants died on the way due to the lack of emergency medical support; parents, in some cases, could not even bury the dead bodies of their beloved children; instead, they had to leave the bodies, assumed to be dead, under the open sky! Those who managed to stay alive were rescued, regardless of the injuries and ailments, by the security forces of Bangladesh and subsequently moved to the camps Where the Rohingyas found themselves as "refugees" encamped in a foreign country. The Rohingyas have been given food, medical support, temporary housing, and assurances of a safe return to their homeland. While remaining apprehensive of the return to Myanmar, they urge the international community to bring the perpetrators of crimes against humanity to justice. Consequently, the International Criminal Court has formally opened an investigation of the reported crimes against the Rohingya in Myanmar.[18]

"What the refugees need is fame," Agier (2008, p. 103) paraphrased Hanna Arendt's famous proposition (1985, p. 287). However, for the Rohingyas, the need is something different. They are not unknown to the world; the injustices and crimes committed against them are visible. What do the refugees need now? The unusual nature of the problem warrants uncanny alliances. Resettlement of the Rohingyas in a third country is also not a viable alternative. It can encourage more inflows of refugees from the poverty-stricken areas of Myanmar to Bangladesh, as 78 per cent of the people are poor in Rakhine.[19] The only remaining option—repatriating more than a million Rohingyas—warrants non-conventional thinking. Typically, initiating the process of repatriation involves a visit to "go-see" the condition of the country of origin or a "come-tell" visit to the host country (Crisp & Long, 2016). The two options are not likely to be feasible in the case of the Rohingyas. On thinking beyond the binary of the host and home country dynamics, there could be *a novel approach*: engaging a third actor who might be able to empathetically deal with both the countries and find an amicable solution to the problem. The third party, in this case, could be Turkey or Pakistan, for example. Turkey showed great interest in seeking a durable solution to the Rohingya

[18]https://www.icc-cpi.int/Pages/item.aspx?name=20200204-otp-statement (retrieved on November 9, 2020).

[19] "UN Reports on Rakhine Living Conditions" published in August 2017, http://www.hlrn.org/news.php?id=p2ppaA==#.X7pCClBxXb0 (accessed on Nov 16, 2020)

problem; Pakistan already hosted hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas[20] and expressed sincere interest in helping the refugees find a permanent home of their own. The official representatives from Turkey or Pakistan (or both) could meet the Rohingyas and the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh to start an effective way of repatriating the Rohingyas. In this case, the international community could insist that Myanmar meet the minimum preconditions of any attempt to repatriate the Rohingyas, including a free, fair, and participatory election (Chimni, 2004).

Understanding the distant possibility of repatriating the Rohingyas and the growing discontent of the local Bangladeshis in Cox's Bazar, the government of Bangladesh recently transferred hundreds of Rohingyas to Bhasan Char.[21] The island is 34 kilometres away from the mainland. Pushing them "out of sight in remote areas" might facilitate the radicalisation of the refugees (Sude, Stebbins, & Weilant, 2015, p. 20). "[S]ocial disconnection, a sense of estrangement from, resentment of society" is key to producing extremist ideology and activism among young refugees (Antunez, 2019, p.5). The transfer of the Rohingyas to the remote island has been criticized by the international actors, but the criticism of the hasty actions must not jeopardize the prospect of finding durable solutions for the Rohingyas. The international actors could act to address the problems of the Rohingyas in two ways.

First, the United Nations could play an effective role in ensuring that Myanmar commits to an emergency interim *burden-sharing* mechanism (Inder, 2017). The repatriation process will surely take time to begin, but the needs of the camp residents must be met on an emergency basis. An official meeting of the representatives of Myanmar and the United Nations might decide how Myanmar can start contributing to the funds necessary for feeding and treating the Rohingya. Two things are likely to follow: the beginning of Myanmar's formal and effective processes of sharing responsibility and the opening up of an opportunity to initiate the long-waited repatriation process.

Second, the way the Government of Bangladesh commits to finding spaces for a long-term solution for some of the Rohingyas, the same way the government of Myanmar also has the opportunity to find rooms for *internal flight alternatives* (Betts, 2010, p. 23). One option is to work with the UN to create safe zones within

[20]Report of the UN Advisory Commission on Rakhine (https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-royingya-pakistan-idUSKCN1BL0B4, accessed on November 22, 2020)

[21]https://www.dw.com/en/bangladesh-rohingya-relocation-to-isolated-island-criticizedby-rights-groups/a-55822366 (accessed on December 20, 2020).

Myanmar for internal resettlement of the precarious Rohingyas. The Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar regularly learn from their relatives still in Myanmar about the miserable lives of the IDPs. The public representatives of Myanmar could provide credible evidence of ensuring safe and dignified life and living conditions of the prospective returnees in Myanmar, which would make the encamped Myanmar nationals confident about the prospect of having a secure life in their homeland.

The longer the Rohingyas happened to stay in the camps in Bangladesh, the stronger relationships they would form with the local community in Bangladesh. The closer the relationship between the Rohingyas and the local community, the lower the possibility of the repatriation of the camp residents will be. The sooner the international actors are convinced of the urgency of comprehensive and concerted initiatives to address the sufferings of the more than a million Rohingyas, the shorter the wait would be for the world to see the beginning of the end of one of the gravest humanitarian crises of the twenty-first century.

"Despite its status as an academic field of study, the development of refugee studies has always been intimately connected with policy developments" (Black, 2001, p. 58). Following the convention of refugee studies (Appleby, 2017), this paper provides the above-mentioned policy recommendations. In addition, we have identified three areas for future research. First, extensive studies need to be conducted to specifically search for any successful examples of repatriation of the Rohingya refugees to Myanmar. Studies need to answer this question: what are the conditions of the successful repatriation of the Rohingyas to Myanmar? The successful cases may not be many, but the point is to deliberately investigate what is needed to make successful attempts to repatriate the Rohingyas. Second, some of the Rohingya refugees mentioned that there are instances of cooperation and friendly interactions between the Rohingyas and Buddhists in Rakhine. Researchers need to investigate how some of the Rohingyas and the Buddhists managed to overcome the apparently hostile attitudes towards each other and how the two groups cultivate and maintain a cooperative relationship. The study could raise this question: what do they do to preempt any prospective hostilities between the two groups? Third, future studies could investigate how the ordinary Rohingyas, not just the leaders or Majhis, respond to the reality that returning to Myanmar seems to be an increasingly remote possibility. Scholars need to devote careful attention to understanding this question: what are the quotidian responses to the prospect of being confined to the camps for an indefinite period?

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