

ROHINGYAS IN BANGLADESH:  
OWNING ROHINGYA IDENTITY IN DISOWNING SPACES

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on Rohingya people, with a special emphasis on Rohingya youth and young adults, and how they construct their identities. While Rohingya ethnic identity is deeply rooted in Burma, it is influenced by how they grow up and reach adulthood within a protracted situation in Bangladesh. Many Rohingya youth and young adults find it complicated to define who they are because they belong to a place, Burma, that does not consider them “citizens,” and they reside in a place, Bangladesh, that never recognizes them as “residents.” The uncertainty around Rohingya identity raises several questions: How does the experience of displacement and refugeeness in Bangladesh shape identity among Rohingya people, particularly among the youth and young adults? What is Rohingya identity? In what ways do they retain their Rohingya identity in the context of their non-citizen status in Bangladesh? While they are stateless, how are the social rights of citizenship experienced by Rohingya people?

Using ethnographic methods, I spent nine months in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, between 2014 and 2016 to collect data for this research. I interviewed 44 Rohingya people. Rohingyas first arrived in Bangladesh in 1978. After that, many Rohingya people were born and/or raised in Bangladeshi refugee camps, and have never left, while others were forcefully repatriated by Bangladeshi government and then forced to return to Bangladesh again by the Burmese government during 1992-1993 (Abrar, 1995; Pittaway, 2008; Loescher & Milner, 2008; Ullah, 2011; Murshid, 2014).

The findings of my research show that due to living in oppressive conditions, uncertainty, and the lack of an appropriate social environment, Rohingya people struggle with forming their identity. Their liminality, statelessness, and lack of rights have created an unsettled and hybrid form of identity for many youth and youth adults living within and outside the refugee camps. In this dissertation, I first describe the lives of Rohingya refugees, then I examine individual constructions of identity and how their sense of belonging is influenced by their refugeeness and lack of legal citizenship. Rohingya people’s struggle with identity formation can only be resolved when the Rohingya crisis comes to an end.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAA	American Anthropological Association
ACF	Action Contre La Faim
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BDRCS	Bangladesh Red Crescent Society
CIC	Camp-In-Charge
CNN	Cable News Network
CODEC	Community Development Center
CSA	Canadian Sociological Association
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HSC	Higher Secondary Certificate
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSF	Medecins Sans Frontieres
NEB	National Education Board
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NRS	Northern Rakhaine State in Burma
RRRC	Rohingya Refugee Repatriation Commissioner
RTM	Research Training & Management international
SSC	Secondary School Certificate
TAI	Technical Assistance Inc
TCPS	Tri-Council Policy Statement
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Populations Fund for Population Activities
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organization

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The Rohingya people have a long history of a tumultuous relationship with the nations of Burma (now Myanmar) and Bangladesh. There are an estimated 3.5 million Rohingya dispersed worldwide and more than 1.1 million Rohingya reside in Bangladesh (Council on Foreign Relations, December 5, 2018). Many Rohingyas in Bangladesh live in refugee camps, and raise families there, but we know very little about the younger generation and their experiences. While Rohingya people's ethnic identity is deeply rooted in Burma, it is often influenced by how they grow up and reach adulthood within a protracted situation in Bangladesh.

This dissertation focuses on Rohingya people, particularly the youth and young adults, and their identity and citizenship in the face of their physical and social alienation in Burma and Bangladesh, respectively. I explore how Rohingya's hopes, fears, experiences, and daily activities within and outside refugee camps have generated a partial or hybrid form of identity for many youth and young adults because of their liminal condition and separation from their country of origin. While some of them strictly hold their Rohingya identity amid their statelessness, Rohingya identity conflicts with their self-claimed Bangladeshi identity for others. Many Rohingya are confused about their identity because they belong to a place, Burma, that does not consider them "citizens," and they exist in a place, Bangladesh, that neither recognizes them as "residents." This uncertainty raises several questions: How does the experience of displacement and refugeeness in Bangladesh shape Rohingya identity among the youth and young adults? What is Rohingya identity? In what ways do they retain their Rohingya identity in the context of their non-citizen status in Bangladesh? While they are stateless, how are the social

rights of citizenship experienced by Rohingya people? Using ethnographic methods, I first describe the lives of Rohingya refugees, then I examine their individual notions of their identity construction, and how their sense of belonging is influenced by their refugeeeness and lack of legal citizenship. In total, I spent nine months in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, between 2014 and 2016 to collect data. I interviewed 44 Rohingya men and women.

The government of Bangladesh recognized 33,542 Rohingyas as “registered refugees,” and gave them temporary shelter in two locations in Cox's Bazar as of 2016 (Bangladesh Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, 2017). The first wave of the Rohingya arrived in Bangladesh in 1978. There have been four additional major influxes of Rohingya community to Bangladesh taking place in 1991, 2012, 2016, and 2017 (Ejaj, 2017, November 10). However, not all Rohingya refugees were registered. After the influx of October 2016 and August 2017, the total number of Rohingyas in Bangladesh stands somewhere between 900,000 to over one million (UNHCR, 2019; Council on Foreign Relations, 2018), most of whom remain unacknowledged by the Bangladeshi government. Many Rohingya were born and/or raised in Bangladeshi refugee camps, and have never left, while others were forcefully repatriated by Bangladeshi government and then forced to return to Bangladesh again by the Burmese government during 1992-1993 (Abrar, 1995; Pittaway, 2008; Loescher & Milner, 2008; Ullah, 2011; Murshid, 2014).

Segregated in registered camps, the Rohingyas receive support from the government, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and other national and international agencies, while those in the unregistered camps receive nothing, and yet manage to survive. However, both registered and unregistered Rohingyas in Bangladesh face two challenges to their Rohingya identity. One is their statelessness, as Rohingya identity is informed by an uneven

relationship with citizenship, and the other is their integration to the host country, as Rohingya-ness differentiates them from Bangladeshi people.

Although a few studies have been conducted on the marginalization of the Rohingya community, such as their historical exclusion (Ullah, 2011), security issues (Rahman, 2010; Ahmed, 1996), and living conditions (Pittaway, 2008), no study has particularly examined the impacts of vulnerabilities and persecution on Rohingya identity of the youth and young adults among the Rohingya community, and their sense of belonging. Moreover, there is no known study that carefully compared registered and unregistered refugees (this distinction is described in Chapter 5). Most of the above studies focused on the undocumented Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh who are known as unregistered Rohingyas. My research aims to fill the gaps in the areas of Rohingya people, their belonging, and identity and citizenship.

Youth and young adulthood are not just phases between childhood and adulthood, but are states of becoming, transition, socially constructed phases that can create different meanings depending upon social values and norms, cultural practices and political agenda. The issue of identity is a salient topic in studies on youth and young adults (Hatoss & Sheely, 2009; Senay, 2009; Sundar, 2008), and we learn that the lack of rights can have a negative impact on the identity of youth and young adults, and their sense of belonging (Pinson, 2012; Bonet, 2018).

Pinson's (2012) research on Palestinian/Arab high-school students revealed that a disruptive social world affected the formation of a "civic (Israeli) versus national (Palestinian/Arab) identity" for some youth leading them to feel confused about who they were (Pinson, 2012, p. 201). Their lack of rights in Israel led to frustration and a negative self-perception.

Another study, conducted by Bonet (2018) with Iraqi refugee youth in the US, shows that due to the lack of incorporation and the ability to become full members of their local communities, youth remain at the margins of the society. Demonstrating how refugee youth and young adults' aspirations for education are unachievable due to their lack of US citizenship, this study indicates that expectations about life in the US differed from their everyday experiences. Rather, they “continue[d] to find themselves rightless and outside the bounds of the nation state” (Bonet, 2018, p. 65), which threatened their sense of self.

Research on young people and their identity in relation to statelessness often demonstrates the importance of rights. This study on Rohingya people contributes to this small body of work on stateless refugees by addressing the experiences of displacement and refugeeness for a population living highly restricted lives. Moreover, no in-depth study is available on Rohingya youth and young adults in temporary refugee camps or otherwise. They are disenfranchised without rights and power. As they reach their adulthood, their disenfranchisement creates a challenging environment for them in terms of their living condition and their self-perception. In fact, the lack of available information on Rohingya refugees has kept this marginalized group invisible for a long time.

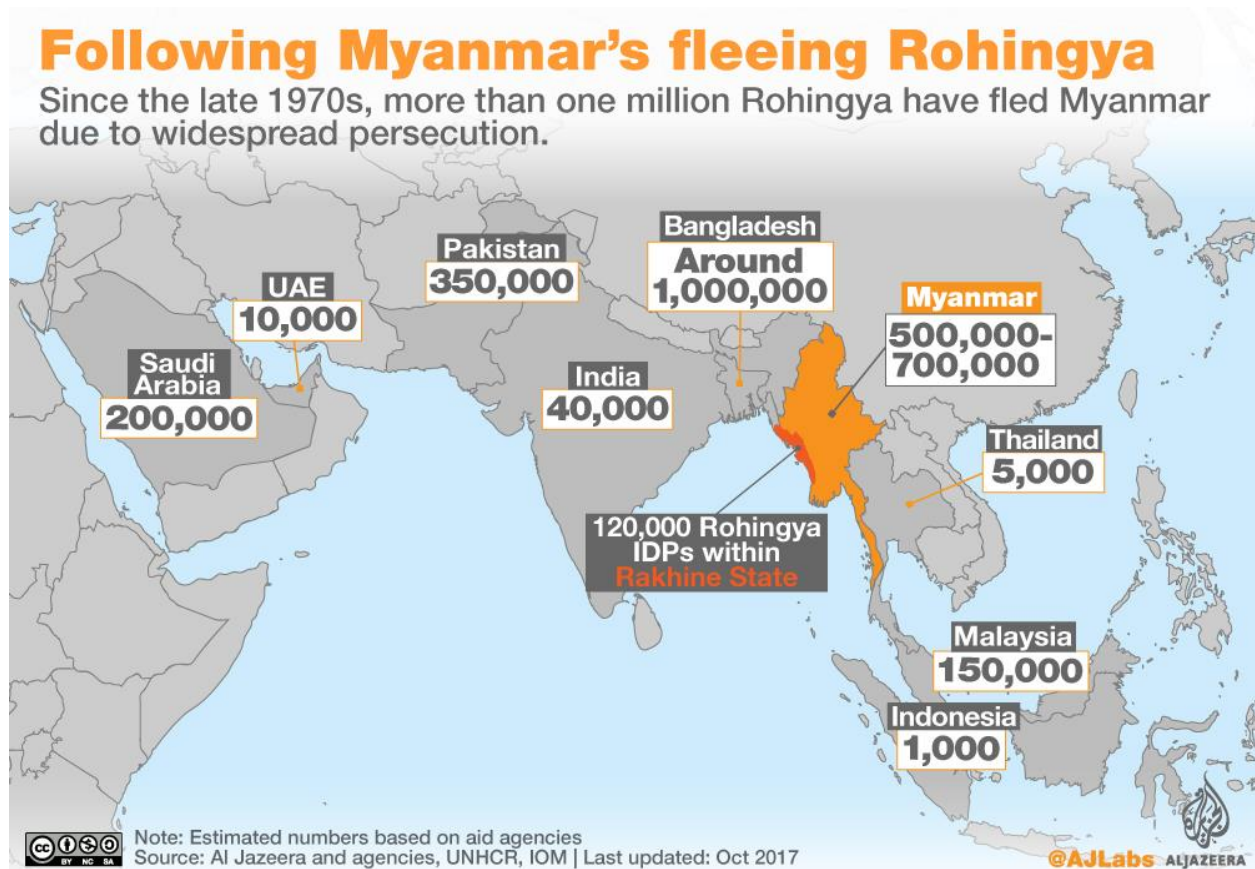
But, why is there unavailability of information and lack of attention? The answer, perhaps, lies in how the world perceives Rohingya refugees compared to other refugee communities. The issue of Burmese Rohingya affects only a few Asian countries (see Map 1.1). As shown in the map, Bangladesh has received the highest number of Rohingya and, ultimately, according to the World Food Program USA, this recipient country is the haven of the largest refugee camp on the planet (Altman, 2018). Clearly, the Rohingya crisis does not currently trouble Western countries. At the same time, countries like Australia (\$22.2 million USD),

Canada (\$9.4 million USD), the United States (\$87.5 million USD), and the United Kingdom (\$52.4 million USD) have provided a combined total of \$171.5 million USD for humanitarian support (“Australia’s response to the Rohingya human rights”, 2018). However, because of the Bangladesh government’s reluctance and discouragement, accessing Rohingya refugee camps has been a challenge for outside government officials, NGOs, academic researchers, and journalists. Media and human rights activists have been silent on the plight of the Rohingya until 2016 as stated in Uddin (2015) that “national media, rights activists, and civil society actors in Bangladesh have been reluctant to raise the Rohingya issue” (p. 65). Only after the recent exodus in 2017, international delegates, journalists, politicians, noble laureates and celebrities started visiting Rohingya community in Bangladesh. As a result, very little information regarding Rohingya population in general and Rohingya youth and young adults in particular has been made available.

In contrast, although the crisis of Syrian refugees began in 2011, the issue drew worldwide attention in 2015, and continues to this day. The Syrian refugee crisis began to receive widespread media coverage due to their number and the reaction in Europe. According to the World Vision Canada, “5.1 million Syrians have fled the country as refugees and another 6.3 million Syrians are displaced within the country” (“Syrian Refugee Crisis,” 2018). Countries like Australia (\$56 million USD), Canada (\$206 million USD), the United States (\$1 billion USD), and the United Kingdom (\$403 million USD) have provided a combined total of \$1665 million USD for Syrian refugees as of 2018 (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2018). Moreover, media’s access to Syrian refugee camps has made Syrian refugees’ information available to the world widely (“How to build a perfect refugee camp,” February 15, 2014). Although at the beginning of the crisis, European countries accepted

some Syrian refugees, these countries' attitude soon began to change as they adopted harder policies to tighten up their borders and showed unwelcoming approach to the Syrian refugees.

Map 1.1: Rohingya concentration in Asia



Despite having the highest concentration of Rohingya refugees, the lack of official recognition of Rohingya's existence in Bangladesh, and categorizing them into registered and unregistered problematize Rohingya identity and divide the community into two stratified groups (see Chapter 5).

On the basis of my research, I argue that the lack of citizenship in Burma, and inability to naturalize in Bangladesh, have unsettled Rohingya ethnic identity, infringed on their human rights, and questioned their sense of belonging. I also argue that their refugee status and non-citizen status, their disenfranchisement, have further created hybridity in their identity,

particularly among Rohingya youth and young adults in Bangladesh. The identity of young people among Rohingya refugees is linked to confusion in self-concept and questioning of self because of their liminality and status. Seemingly, displacement does not directly affect young Rohingyas in Bangladesh because a large number of them were born and raised there. However, they grow up hearing the stories of their displaced parents, and these stories connect the youth to their unseen land of origin, Burma, their ancestors, and their ethnicity. Displaced Rohingya parents' pass their feelings of belonging to Burma to the next generation, yet the young generation grows up with a sense of belonging also to Bangladesh. Clearly, formation of their identity is influenced by these processes. My participants' narratives show that although citizenship is viewed as a legal status, their cry for citizenship lies not only in a piece of paper but in their sense of belonging to both places.

This thesis shows how Rohingya identity, which is rooted in their ethnic bonding, is also influenced by various sociocultural aspects such as language, family lessons, gender roles, and community building efforts. It also shows how they develop a sense of self amid their statelessness and lack of citizenship. This research demonstrates that although Rohingyas' decades-long statelessness could not wipe out their ethnic identity rooted in Burma, Rohingyas cannot escape forming partial and hybrid identity due to their liminality and social circumstances in Bangladesh. Although this dissertation gives a special emphasis on the identity of Rohingya youth and young adults, in order to show how adults' thinking affects the identity construction of the younger generation within their community, the dissertation involves adults' perspectives. This dissertation is organized as follows.

Chapter 2 describes the history of Rohingya ethnic community—their origin and geopolitical background, and the process of exclusion and persecution on their own land.



Rohingya identity cannot be disassociated from the historical and contemporary context of Rohingya in Burma.

One does not simply belong; one feels belonging. In the context of Rohingya refugees, the achievement of their belonging is shaped by their ethnic bonding and current situation. Both the concepts of “identity,” a social product, and “citizenship,” a legal status, are necessary for an individual to construct a sense of belonging. Based on these ideas, Chapter 3 discusses the conceptual framework of identity construction. It shows how the absence of the necessary social conditions recommended by the theorists along with the lack of recognition of their belonging to larger social forces, and the lack of a stable social world create confusion and restlessness around the process of developing a sense of self within a Rohingya. The relationship between identity and the self is often considered reciprocal and complementary as they always correspond to each other. This Chapter draws on the theoretical framework of Mead, Moore and Goffman’s concept of identity while it highlights Mead’s (1934) theoretical approach of identity and self. It also employs Staples’ (2012) political theorization to show how social condition, acceptance, recognition, and membership are necessary for an individual to develop a sense of self.

Chapter 4 focuses on research methodology. It shows how researchers in the past dealt with challenges and debates came out of using particular research methods when researching vulnerable population. It describes my entry to the research field, and the steps followed for site selection, recruitment, and data collection. It also discusses ethical considerations and challenges with social research, and why my chosen method is appropriate to my research questions.

Chapter 5 describes the stateless lives of the Rohingya people. Rohingya ethnic community has been in Bangladesh as refugees for over four decades. Along with their refugeehood, they live a stratified and unequal life. The registered ones, although in a better

situation compared to the unregistered ones, are deprived of social rights, while the unregistered ones are the victims of discriminations and inequality. This chapter first presents the history and factual information of the camps. It then highlights the lives of Rohingyas inside and outside the refugee camps by describing the stratification and inequality of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

Chapter 6 demonstrates that becoming Rohingya is connected to their land and ancestors in Burma. The chapter describes the commonalities and distinctions between Rohingya and Burmese, and Rohingya and Bangladeshi people. It shows what makes them Rohingya, how the survival strategies and resistance of Rohingya create a sense of self among them, and their community building efforts through which their agency is expressed.

Chapter 7, based on the previous chapters, highlights how a sense of belonging, identity and citizenship are interlinked for Rohingya refugees to develop a sense of self. It presents my participants' views on citizenship, and shows the apparatus of the states, particularly of Burma and Bangladesh, to keep Rohingya community outside of citizenship, and thus problematize their identity. It highlights three key areas around Rohingya identity and citizenship such as their hybrid identity, legal citizenship, and social citizenship.

Chapter 8—the concluding chapter—reflects on the research questions. It critically evaluates Mead and others' theories of identity and citizenship by pointing out the gaps as to what extent Mead's concept of identity and self applies to Rohingya refugees, and offers recommendations on viable solutions to Rohingya crisis.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE ROHINGYA: ORIGIN AND GEOPOLITICAL OVERVIEW

From the past, the Rohingya people have been claiming that they are the inhabitants of former Arakan, now known as the Rakhine kingdom of Burma. Although there is a lack of consensus regarding the origins of the Rohingya people, many scholars agree that they are descendants of Arab and Persian traders that included Indian and Bengali migrants who settled in the Arakan region between the ninth and fifteenth centuries (Ahmed, 2009; Ullah, 2011; Kipgen, 2013).

Below is a chronological overview of the geopolitical history related to the origin of Rohingya, and their displacement from their land:

Table: 2.1: A chronological overview of the geopolitical history of Rohingya origin

<b>Year</b>	<b>Events</b>
9 <sup>th</sup> century	Arab Muslim merchants docked at an Arakan port and thus Arakanese had first contact with Muslims
between 9 <sup>th</sup> and 15 <sup>th</sup> century	Arrival of the descendants of Moorish, Arab, Persian, Bengali traders, soldiers and migrants
1430-1710	Arakan was ruled by Arakanese Muslim kings
1784	Chittagong remained part of Arakan until 1784
1784-1785	Arakan was occupied by the Burmese
1785	Burmese king conquered Arakan and killed more than 200,000 Arakanese
1796	Arakanese's attempt to overthrow Burmese rule failed, and first exodus of two-thirds of Muslim Arakanese into neighboring Chittagong area happened
1805-1820	Famine and cholera severely affected Burma
1872	The British administration conducted a biased census by excluding Arakan
1885	The British incorporated Arakan into its empire; many Arakanese returned from Chittagong
1886	Arakan became part of the province of Burma of British India
1891	Another census conducted by the British being affected by displacement of people
1939	Buddhist Rakhine and Arakanese Muslims lived together until World War II

<b>Year</b>	<b>Events</b>
1941	Japan declared war against British government
1942	Japanese brutality, in collaboration with Rakhine Mogs <sup>1</sup> , Muslim massacre happened
1948	Burma becomes independent
1962	Military junta seizes power
1977	Burmese military registered all of its citizens prior to a national census in 1977
1978	200,000 Rohingyas were pushed to Bangladesh by the military authority of Burma
1982	Burmese Citizenship Law excludes Rohingya from 135 legal ethnic communities
1989	“Burma” was changed into “Myanmar” by the Burmese military
1990	“Arakan” was changed into “Rakhine” by the Burmese military
1991 to 1992	Between 210,000 and 250,000 Burmese Rohingyas enter Bangladesh due to violence in Burma
1993- 2005	Repatriation continued from Bangladesh to Burma
2006-Sept 2016	Rohingyas continued living in Bangladesh
2014	The UN-backed census in Burma did not count Rohingya as the Burmese government banned the official use of the term “Rohingya”
Oct 2016-2018	Ethnic cleansing in Burma continued which pushed 738,196 Rohingya to Bangladesh after August 25, 2017, making the total number of Rohingya in Bangladesh 906,572 as of December 31, 2018

Sources: (Ahmed, 2009; Ullah, 2011; Kipgen, 2013; Richell, 2006; Loescher & Milner, 2008; Pittaway, 2008; Uddin, 2015; UNHCR: Refugee response in Bangladesh, 2018; “A Short Historical Background” n.d.; MacLean, 2018):

Map 1.2 shows the geographical location of the Rakhine state, formerly the Arakan kingdom, where Rohingyas have been persecuted over the last few decades, and ethnic cleansing began after the October 2016 military crackdown.

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<sup>1</sup> The Mog are the descendants of the Arakanese, now known as the part of Burmese military who exploit the Rohingyas

Map 1.2: Location of the Rakhine state



Based on the chronological overview of Rohingya’s geopolitical history, it can be said that the Burmese government’s exclusionary Citizenship Act, religious prejudice and bigotry, constant denial of Rohingya’s existence, and persecution have made Rohingya community stateless, which has been discussed below.

### **Exclusionary Citizenship Act**

According to Uddin (2015), “Arakan was an independent kingdom until 1784, when it encompassed the Chittagong region in the southern part of today’s Bangladesh” (p. 66). Later, as Yusuf (2014) notes, “British Empire in Burma created identities based on people’s religions and ethnicities, as evident through the creation of the census in 1872” (p. 2)—which did not record its inhabitants’ identity according to their birthplace—creating a greater division between local Burmese and other ethnicities. In the past, the British excluded Rohingya community from the

census and the Burmese, more recently by virtue of the 1982 Citizenship Act, excluded them from 135 legally recognized ethnic groups, calling them illegal migrants. According to U Nyi Nyi, the former director of the Attorney General's Office of the Burmese government, Rohingyas "are not in conformity with either the 1948 or 1982 Act. That is the main reason that they are not entitled to become Myanmar citizens" (Myanmar Times, February 9, 2014, n.p.). Similarly, the Burmese military regime claims that the reason for the non-inclusion of Rohingya in 1982 Act is, the "Rohingya were 'Bengalis' who migrated from Chittagong in southeastern Bangladesh after 1823, and thus were ineligible for citizenship" (MacLean, 2018, p. 88). Ullah (2016), MacLean (2018), and others reject these claims as historical records, such as Buchanan's travel records of 1798, prove that Rohingya's presence in Burma "predates the 1823 cutoff by centuries" (MacLean, 2018, p. 88). Yet, it is important to know the strategies 1982 Act followed to exclude Rohingyas from being Burmese citizens.

The Act confers Burmese citizenship under three categories: citizenship, associate citizenship, and naturalized citizenship. For the first category, the Act suggests that if someone fails to produce proof of his/her linkage to ancestry and/or their settlement in Burma before 1823, they will not be citizen under this category. The second, Associate citizenship, applies to "those who did not obtain citizenship but applied for it under the 1948 Union Citizenship Act as per Chapter III of the 1982 Citizenship Law" (Chakma & Ahmed, 2017, n.p.). The final category, Naturalized Citizenship, applies to an individual "who has entered and resided in the State anterior to the 4th January 1948 and off springs" were born within the State, and the individual has not yet applied under the Union Citizenship Act 1948" (Chakma & Ahmed, 2017, n.p.). Furthermore, if at least one parent of an individual holds any of the above three categories of citizenship, that individual is also eligible for Burmese citizenship.

The divisive 1982 Citizenship Act still has scope to grant citizenship to the Rohingya, particularly under category 1 and 3. The Rohingya have been living in Burma from long before 1823, fulfilling the condition of the first category, and have resided in Burma long before the 4th January 1948 and Rohingya mothers gave birth to children within Burma, fulfilling the condition of the third category. However, the purpose of the 1982 Act is to exclude Rohingya community by denying the truth which has been discussed in the following passages. The racist and fascist nature of the Act of 1982 snatched away Rohingyas' right to citizenship in a cleverly manner—by splintering a legal bond between a state and an individual. Such a de-nationalization process was implemented by the issuance of three different colored cards to its citizens: pink cards for the full citizens, blue cards for associate citizens and green for naturalized citizens. Based on a Joint Statement between Bangladesh and Burma signed on April 28, 1992, Rohingya repatriation began. While all parties agreed that the returnees would be given “appropriate identification” in Burma, in practice they received “returnee identification cards,” “yellow color cards which only identified them as persons having returned from Bangladesh by giving them no legal status” (Ullah, 2015, n.p.). Clearly, the yellow card did not earn any benefits for the repatriated Rohingyas. Rather the purpose of this card was to identify them as returnees from Bangladesh.

In fact, the 1982 Act successfully represents the Burmese government's unfair attitude towards its ethnic communities through its inclusionary and exclusionary strategies. This Act includes Karen, another ethnic community of Burma, as citizens. The Karen demand an independent state. In order to fulfill their demands, Karen community has been operating the longest self-determination movement in Burma since 1949 (Mcconnachie, 2012). On the contrary, this Act excludes Rohingya community that wants legal status and a separate identity

but not a separate state. Being victims of the 1982 Act, Rohingya and Karen both ethnic communities have been living as refugees in Bangladesh and Thailand, respectively.

### **Religious Prejudice and Bigotry**

Another key source of the conflict surrounding Rohingya identity is religious difference. Rohingyas follow Islam. The majority of Burmese follow Buddhism. While Table 2.1 shows that Rakhine Buddhist and Arakanese Muslims lived together in Burma until the World War II (Uddin, 2015), a Muslim massacre by Rakhine Buddhists was instigated by Japanese invasion in Burma. Later, in 1962, the Burmese military introduced propaganda and threats that Burma is not a country for the Muslims. The Burmese government's racial discrimination against Rohingyas has been fueled by religious differences. Rohingyas are disqualified to be Burmese citizens because of their religion. Like other minority ethnic Muslim communities, Rohingyas in Burma have become the "others," which means they are not Burmese citizens per se. Burma's nationalist, anti-Islam, Buddhist perspective considers the Burmese as "civilized", and the Rohingyas as "unruly" (Wade, 2017). Ironically, a contrast between beliefs and actions is manifested in the way Buddhism is practiced in Burma. For instance, the members of the movement led by Buddhist monks known as the Organization for the Protection of Race and Religion, which is locally known as Ma Ba Tha, clearly point to such manifestation when they, on the one hand, claim that "Buddhism stands for truth and peace" (Wade, 2017, p. 5) and, on the other, the Buddhist community continues killing and persecuting Muslims in Burma. They justify these acts in the name of preserving their religion, along with their race and nation.

According to Table 2.1, the first exodus of Rohingyas to Bangladesh happened in 1796, and their descendants returned to Burma in 1885, after almost one hundred years. So Rohingyas' connection to Bangladesh is longstanding, although Rohingyas hold a sense of belonging to



Burma, not Bangladesh. This is illustrated by the narratives of my research participants, presented in the later part of this dissertation. However, the Anti-Muslim Burmese government uses Rohingya's connection to Bangladesh in a distorted manner, labeling them Bangladeshi Muslims, while it takes a biased position regarding the Rakhine community living in Burma. Anwar (2013) notes that more than half of the Buddhist Rakhine community living in today's Rakhine state of Burma migrated from Bangladesh and settled during Ne Win's era from 1958 onward. Indeed, Rakhine's multiple back and forth movements between Burma and Bangladesh took place until Burma's independence, and many of the Rakhine's ancestors and descendants still live in the southern region of Bangladesh. Yet the Burmese government does not have any problem with the Rakhine community's connection to Bangladesh. Moreover, the 1982 Act demands valid evidence of residence only from Muslim Rohingyas, not from Buddhist Rakhines; Muslim Rohingyas must prove existence of their fore-parents in Burma before 1823. Interestingly, the Rakhine, if asked, would not be able to show any evidences to support their connection with their ancestors in Burma (Anwar, 2013). But religious prejudice and bigotry of the Burmese government have resulted in persecution at first, then ethnic cleansing, and finally genocide against the Rohingya Muslims in Burma.

To sum up, the anti-Islamic attitude of the Burmese government is one of the main reasons of Rohingya persecution. It is evident in the "establishment of new Buddhist settlements on vacated Muslim lands; and demolition and burning of mosques, Muslim houses and villages, and Islamic religious schools" (Parini, Othman, & Ghazali, 2013, p. 137) in Burma. Very few scholars, except Ullah (2016), Wade (2017), and MacLean (2018), clearly indicate that it is the state-sponsored communal violence that has fueled the flame of exclusion of Rohingya in Burma

since the purpose of the Burmese government is “to build a mono-religious nation” (Ullah, 2016, p. 289) where Muslims have no place.

### **Denial of Existence**

The use of the term ‘Rohingya’ is offensive to the Burmese government. Both Burmese historians and politicians are committed in their refusal to use the term “Rohingya.” They ignored multiple references of the wide spread use of the term Rohingya even long before Burmese conquered Arakan. Although tracing the exact period of the origin of Rohingyas in Arakan may seem difficult, available references suggest that the origin of the term Rohingya is rooted in Arakan, so is the Rohingya ethnic community.

In fact, “Rohingya” is a phonological derivation of words like Rakhanga (Leider, 2012); “Reng,” “Roung,” Rossawn,” “Russawn,” “Rung” (Buchanan, 1992). Arakan history expert Leider (2012) confirms that the term “Rossawn” is Roshang, the Bengali word for Arakan. Asiatic Researches (1799) state that “The Mohammedans settled in Arakan, call the country Rohingaw, the Persians call it Rekan” (p. 223). While traveling British India in 1798, famous European traveler Francis Buchanan, whose book was published in 1992—almost two hundred years after recording an account of his journey—mentioned the name Roang as an alternative to that of Arakan (p. 104). Buchanan (1992) also informed that “Roang language was spoken by people who used to live in Arakan” (p. 108).

The research evidence reaches one single conclusion, and that is the Rohingya community did exist in Burma in the past. The evidence terminates the validity of the Burmese government’s deliberate denial of Rohingyas’ existence in Arakan, or Burma. The stateless Rohingya community did not manufacture their identity recently, rather it has been nurtured among themselves over time. They identify themselves Rohingya because they have been living

in Burma as a native of Rohang, or Arakan, or Burma. There may be lack of available research or historical evidences on the ways in which Rohingya people formed their identity as a particular group of people, yet sufficient historical research confirms their existence in Burma as an ethnic group for many hundreds of years.

### **Consistent Persecution in Burma**

The coercive power of the British colonial regime dismissed the indigenous territorial boundaries in Burma (Lang, 2002). As Pittaway (2008) observes, the Rohingya Muslims “were promised that if they supported the British they would be given their own national area, but the British later reneged that promise” (p. 86). Amid violence, some Rohingyas stayed in Burma while, according to the UNHCR (2007a) report, many fled to East Bengal (now Bangladesh) during the invasion of Japan. Later, Rohingya people merged into the local community, which was facilitated by their cultural, religious, and linguistic similarities.

The following years after Burma became independent in 1948 brought further suffering into the lives of Rohingyas as the Burmese government continued treating Rohingyas as illegal migrants, and denied their citizenship (Pittaway, 2008). Although, the Rohingya people claim themselves residents of NRS (the Northern Rakhaine State in Burma), the discrimination and violence against the Rohingyas began in Burma’s western Rakhine state following the 1962 coup, when the military junta first seized power (New Statesman, 2009, p. 30). In order to exclude the Rohingyas, the Burmese military registered all of its citizens prior to a national census in 1977 (Pittaway, 2008). This event caused extreme violence, widespread killings, and rape; 200,000 stateless Rohingyas were pushed to Bangladesh by the military authority of Burma in 1978 (Loescher & Milner, 2008, Ullah, 2011). Because of consistent persecution in Burma, another major wave of 210,000 and 250,000 Burmese Rohingyas fled from Burma to

neighboring Bangladesh between December 1991 and March 1992 (Refworld, 2001).

Geographical proximity between Burma and Bangladesh—one of the main factors of the exodus—enabled Rohingyas’ easy access to Bangladesh. In addition, as Farzana (2011) states, “when they were forced to come to Bangladesh, leaving behind everything, the Rohingyas thought they would have a peaceful life in this new country; after all, they thought, they belong to the ‘same religion’” (p. 225). However, from the beginning, they were unwanted in Bangladesh, an already overpopulated country with limited resources.

Although the Bangladeshi government has banned Rohingyas’ stay, it has granted them temporary residence—in cramped and unhealthy conditions—in two government-run makeshift camps at Nayapara and Kutupalong in the Cox’s Bazar district. Cox’s Bazar is located in the border area of Bangladesh (Murshid, 2014) where forced labor, violence, persecution and lack of security are everyday phenomena (Pittaway, 2008). After a series of unsuccessful negotiations between the government of Bangladesh and the UNHCR, as well as some forms of repatriation and refoulement (forcible return of refugees), 32,000 registered Rohingya have been housed in the two camps for years (“Bangladesh Plans to move Rohingya,” 2015, n.p.), while a large number of unregistered Rohingya have been able to manage temporary shelters in the nearby villages.

### **The Role of UNHCR**

At this point, a few words on the role of the UNHCR is necessary. One might ask about the role of UNHCR in protecting persecuted Rohingyas. While the United Nations has described them as “the most persecuted people in the world” (Al Jazeera, April 18, 2018), UNHCR’s passivity in response to Rohingya crisis since 1978—the first exodus of persecuted Rohingyas in the independent Bangladesh—until today is reminded in two quotes. One says, “There comes a

time when silence is betrayal” by Martin Luther King; and the other, “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor,” by Desmond Tutu. UNHCR has a mandate to protect refugees and stateless people, and it has failed to do so for the Rohingya over the last four decades. UNHCR does publish dozens of thick reports with colorful illustrations and heartbreaking photos of Rohingya refugees, and assist goodwill ambassadors of other UN agencies and internationally renowned persons in visiting refugee camps etc. And yet, even when other UN agencies facilitate discriminatory census conducted by Burmese government, UNHCR remains silent. For example, with the help of United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Burmese government conducted a census in early 2014, which did not count Rohingyas. According to Human Rights Watch report, in 2014 election “1.09 million people were not counted” (“Burma: Amend Biased Citizenship”, 2015, n.p.). UNHCR’s neutral and/or silent position in Rohingya crisis puts UNHCR on the side of persecutors.

To conclude, despite the purposeful and agenda-based behavior of Burmese government in denying Rohingya’s existence in Burma, and despite Burmese government’s evasiveness in not using the name “Rohingya” as a strategy of labeling them “others” (Wade, 2017, p. 129), the historical evidence clearly confirms Rohingya’s origin and existence in Burma. Rohingya’s “cry for identity and homeland remains unheeded,” however, for over the last 30 years (Yusuf, 2014, p. 4). They are neither Burmese, in the eyes of the Burmese government, nor Bangladeshi, in the eyes of the Bangladeshi government. Since they “do not fit in our particular image of the world” (Johnson, 2014, p. 134), they are forced to embrace delegitimization, discrimination, and an exile status, and finally turn into human waste, because they have “no useful function to play in the land of their arrival and temporary stay, and no intention or realistic prospect of being assimilated and incorporated into the new social body” (Bauman, 2005, p. 97).

This situation is even more problematic for Rohingya youth and young adults. Pittaway (2008), Loescher and Milner (2008), Ullah (2011), Murshid (2014), Uddin (2015), Ullah (2016), MacLean (2018) present the Rohingya crisis from the geopolitical context, and living situation of Rohingya community outside the refugee camps. My study focuses on Rohingya refugees inside and outside the refugee camps, and in what ways it is difficult for them to define who they are. Before moving onto this, the following chapter offers the theoretical framework on citizenship, identity, and refugee youth and young adults.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWROK

The chosen theoretical frameworks for this study include: Mead's (1934) concept of self, and Staples' (2012) political theorization of statelessness. Using these theories, this chapter demonstrates the necessary conditions required for identity construction, and the application of these theories to Rohingya people's identity. Both theoretical frameworks situate the key research question of this dissertation: How does the experience of displacement and refugeeness in Bangladesh shape Rohingya identity among youth and young adults? Based on the theoretical discussion, the chapter also shows the link between citizenship and identity, and their importance for refugee youth and young adults.

#### **The Concepts of Identity and Self**

The relationship between identity and the self is often considered reciprocal and complementary as they always correspond to each other. Through their acts and interaction, while individuals influence the social world they live in, the self is influenced by the collective meanings the society produces, shaping a particular role for the self in that society, and giving the individual an identity. Scholars have attempted to construct and deconstruct the notion of identity. However, "the concept of 'identity' is hotly contested, not only within contemporary politics, but within scholarly discourse as well" (Thornton, 2007, p. 2), and the expression of identity depends on the social context in which one's sense of self is developed.

When we ask someone "Who are you?" "Where are you from?" or "What is your background?" we expect that in order to identify the self, the respondent will point to a connection between his/her place of origin, and his/her sense of self and belonging.

From a sociological perspective, the process of developing a sense of self, and maintaining one's belongingness occurs in two ways. These are, as suggested by Mead (1938), other people's conceptions of the self and the reactions of the self to those conceptions. Rohingya people, for example, would feel uncomfortable in responding to the above three questions—Who are you? Where are you from? and What is your background? Finding a connection between their sense of self and their belonging is, given their statelessness, likely difficult for them. Other people's conceptions of Rohingya youth and young adults have negative connotations as Rohingya, in general, are considered "illegal people" in Bangladesh. But Rohingya youth may have a different perspective as they were born and raised in Bangladesh. They may want to be Bangladeshi as well. Moreover, their sense of self may not have a connection to their place of origin (Burma). Their experiences of displacement and refugeeness in Bangladesh would most likely make many Rohingya youth and young adults convinced that their identity is questionable, and that they are not entitled to have social citizenship rights in the host country (Bangladesh).

According to Mead (1938), the self is a constant "conversation between two phases: the "Me", the conception of myself that I receive from the outside world and from others, and the "I", which is my response to others, the source of originality and creativity" (Craib, 1998, p. 75). In other words, a "me" comprises the attitudes and meanings we perceive others to have of us, and the role of an impulsive "I" is to make sense of the "me." Mead shows that the idea of self is developed mutually between the self and others, individuals, groups, and the larger society—the social surroundings in general, and cannot be constructed without responses from others to the self. Thus, we would expect Rohingya people to construct their sense of self based on the attitudes and meanings they perceive from their peers and respond accordingly.



This scenario relates to Cooley's (1902) metaphoric concept of the looking-glass self which indicates that "the self is constructed out of what is reflected back to the individual via other people's gestures" (Anderson, 2016, p. 175). In other words, within the context of the society, one's self and identity are developed through one's interpersonal interactions. The impression Rohingya people get from others about themselves (the Rohingya) help them create an image of who they are. This is consistent with Mead's (1932) generalized other, the third stage of self-development, which is the set of attitudes of the members of the society towards an individual.

Because of their displacement and refugee status, I speculate that Rohingya people are aware that "the set of attitudes of the members" of the host country (Bangladesh) would find their Rohingya identity problematic. This is why many of them may adopt Bangladeshi identity as an integration strategy. From a social constructionist perspective, an individual's identity is shaped by his/her position in the society, experience gained through social interactions, and indeed others' perceptions towards an individual. An individual can be named, or identified, as a son/daughter of his/her parents, a responsible/vulnerable member of a community depending upon the individual's position in the society, and also an illegal/stateless human being—labeled by the state authority—whose position is often associated with threats and danger, particularly in the eyes of the state. Mead clearly notes that one's response or reaction is often determined by other's perceptions of the individual. For Rohingya people, others' perceptions of them would simply remind them of their distinct behavioural pattern, and make them aware of not exposing Rohingya identity. This situation may prevent Rohingya people of acquiring a sense of self with confidence.

According to Mead, identities, self-consciousness and a sense of self—all are produced through the interpretation of experiences that take place under different aspects of common social undertakings in which individuals are all engaged (Mead, 2003; Lawler, 2014). This idea makes it clear that identity cannot be ascribed or foundational, rather it can be understood in relation to the involvement, interaction, commonality and experience of individuals with others. Hence, we can attempt to discover our identity but it cannot be fully discovered as it is under a process of continuous construction, invention, imagination, imposition, projection and celebration in an unstable and never-ending way (Mendieta, 2003), which denotes that the pattern of individuals' interactions and involvement does not always follow a particular and fixed formula to confirm one's identity.

Mead's sociological perspective is linked to Moore's (2006) analysis of identity. From a socio-psychological perspective, as Moore (2006) suggests, identity performs three major functions associated with belonging: creating membership, differentiation, and inner identification. In the first one, "identity is seen by others and can be demonstrated to others" while in the second one, identity is constructed "in contrast to others (other people/ groups/ ideas/ practices)," where particular types of markers exist around which an identity is shaped, and in the third one, which is the foundation of making choices and forming preferences, "identity exists as a subjective or internalized perspective of what makes one's life intelligible and meaningful" (Moore, 2006, p. 28-29).

What comes out from both Mead and Moore's analysis is "identity is a label attributed to the attempt to differentiate and integrate a sense of self along different social and personal dimensions" (Bamberg, 2010, p. 4). Both theorists indicate that the construction of identity heavily relies on individuals' social circumstances—a set of diverse and heterogeneous elements

spreading over the memories of the past, the experiences of the present, and aspirations for the future, which produce a certain type of image of the *self*.

### **Symbolic Interactionist Perspectives in Application**

Although Mead argues that there is no distinction between different aspects of identity, Goffman, in his work on stigma, differentiates between three forms of identity. From his social constructionist perspective of the self and identity, Goffman (1968) describes that the first form is personal identity, which refers to the particular type of characteristics, or biography of an individual, the second is social identity, which is obtained through membership of social categories, and the third is ego identity that points to a subjective sense of who we are, and how we exist in our social world (Lawler, 2014). All three forms are related to the ideas of Mead (2003) and Moore (2006) as discussed above. According to Goffman, all three forms of identity are formulated on the basis of societal norms, assumptions, knowledge, and understanding of individuals, which reflect core ideas of social constructionism.

For Goffman, identity formulation process relies on six principles, these are: performance, the team, the region, discrepant roles, communication out of character, and impression management—all of which indicate that identity is “projected at the target audience in a theatrical performance that conveys self to others” (Clarke, 2008, p. 511). The theatrical performance of Rohingya youth and young adults includes constant efforts in presenting themselves as decent human beings, and for that they would require guarding their impression by forming a hybrid identity as Rohingya and Bangladeshi.

Based on the theoretical perspectives of Mead, Moore and Goffman, Table 3.1 shows the similarities, overlap, and distinctions generated around identity:

Table: 3.1 Summary of theoretical perspectives of Mead, Goffman and Moore

	<b>Mead</b>	<b>Goffman</b>	<b>Moore</b>
1.	<p>The ‘self’ is divided into two:</p> <p>1) the ‘Me’, the conception of myself that I receive from the outside world</p> <p>2) the ‘I’, my response to others, the source of originality and creativity</p>	<p>Three forms of identity:</p> <p>1) personal identity: certain type of individual characteristics/biography</p> <p>2) social identity: obtained through membership of social categories</p> <p>3) ego identity: a subjective sense of who we are, and how we exist in our social world</p>	<p>Three functions of identity:</p> <p>1) creating membership: identity is seen by others, and can be demonstrated to others</p> <p>2) inner identification: identity is formed in contrast to others (people/groups/ideas/practices)</p> <p>3) making choices: as an internalized viewpoint of what makes one’s life coherent and meaningful</p>
2.		Membership is essential	Membership is essential
3.	Development of the “self” occurs in a mutual way that requires both “the self” and “the others” (individuals, groups and the larger society)	Identity is obtained through membership for which acceptance to others (individuals, groups and the larger society) is required	Creating membership and developing a sense of inner identification require “the others” (individuals, groups and the larger society)
4.	“self” is a constant dialog between what others conceive of the “self” and how it reacts on those conceptions. Societal norms affect conception and reactions	Foundation of all three forms rely on societal norms, assumptions, knowledge and understanding of individuals – core ideas of social constructionism	
5.	“Self” cannot be constructed without social conditions and responses from others. Social conditions encompass others’	Identity formulation process relies on six principles: performance, the team, the region, discrepant roles, communication out of	Identity is granted through membership which has to be seen by others and can be demonstrated to others in the society. When demonstrating, one guards the impression

	<b>Mead</b>	<b>Goffman</b>	<b>Moore</b>
	performance, concurrence etc.	character, and impression management	
6.	The “self” emerges as an object under existing social conditions (societal norms)	Individuals need to conform the societal and cultural norms in their presentation of the “true” self	Ratification of one’s identity by others is necessary which happens through individual’s relation with others and compliance with social norms
7.	Despite having commonalities among the members of a group, they may have different social projects		Identity serves to maintain distinctions that differentiate an individual or a group from another
8.	Self-consciousness is produced through the interpretation of experience with others		Inner identification occurs contrary to others (people/group/norms)

In table 3.1, Mead’s theoretical standpoint suggests that “self” cannot be constructed without social conditions and responses from others, and the “self” in fact emerges as an object under existing social conditions (societal norms). Goffman’s view supports Mead’s suggestion as Goffman says that individuals need to conform the societal and cultural norms in their presentation of the “true” self (Clarke, 2008), which again points to the conflict between their loyalty to a particular ethno-cultural group and their existing vulnerable situation caused by their statelessness. Rohingyas expressing their loyalty only to their own ethnic community, not to the Burmese, is an example of being victims of significant stigma triggered by identity conflict. Burmese Rohingyas’ nonconformity labeled them poor performers in the theater of politics. Their unwillingness to embrace Burmese societal and cultural norms has left them unratified on their own land.

Moore, following Mead and Goffman, highlights the importance of ratification of one's identity by others which happens through individual's relation with others and compliance with social norms. Strangers or refugees, therefore, find it difficult, and ambiguous to relate the question of their identity to their theatrical performance in a different societal context. In Clarke's (2008) words, "the problem with this is that the qualities projected onto the group by the stranger do not stem from the group itself, which fuels the anxiety of ambiguity" (p. 526). Yet, we cannot dismiss the importance of identity for individuals, it is even a significant question for those who are labeled as "stateless."

In fact, "what identity *means* depends on how it is *thought* about" (Lawler, 2014, p. 7), and the thought process depends on the pattern of one's identity, a circular reasoning. The functioning of this thought process, unarguably, is subject to social circumstances.

A brief summary of the major theoretical discussions in this chapter offers a clear picture of why this dissertation project works from the assumption that the identity of Rohingya youth and young adults is unsettled. Identity—a self in the fullest sense—is something that can be achieved (Lawler, 2014) through a) establishing relationships, b) having interactions within social circumstances (Giddens, 1991), and c) understanding the interpretation of experience as members of a social group (Mead, 2003; Lawler, 2014). Achieving all these are some of the great challenges Rohingya youth and young adults may face because of their statelessness. Moreover, an absence of ratification and membership in a larger social body even makes it further problematic for developing their fullest sense of the self. Citizenship may resolve it.

Regarding the role of citizenship, and a sense of belonging to a nation-state in shaping people's sense of self, it is important to bear in mind that "for refugees, statelessness imbues everyday life and identity with a sense of absence and vulnerability, an acute lack of protection"

(Peteet, 2005, p. 101). They are like strangers who, in Bauman's words, "bring the "outside" "inside" and poison the comfort of order with the suspicion of chaos" (Clarke, 2008, p. 526) – unwanted, dangerous and uninvited. Rohingya people's situation in Bangladesh is not an exception. Their statelessness not only results in their unsettled identity but also disqualifies them to enjoy their social citizenship. This may turn them into a stigmatized group of people, yet they may tend to develop a set of habits to represent themselves positively to the social world they are in.

This discussion takes us to the relationship of the mind to the environment that is inevitable, and that works like a set of adjusted "body of habits" (Mead, 1934, p. 126). According to Mead (1934), we act or talk a certain way, and a series of habits then starts working together. Mead's (1934) metaphor of the link between our well-adjusted habits and our travel preparation explains it well as he writes that when we decide to travel, "we have a body of related habits that begin to operate—packing our bags, getting our railroad tickets, drawing out money for use, selecting books to read on the journey, and so on (p. 126)", and all of them are guided by the type of relationship between mind and environment. This mind-environment metaphor may help to understand the construction of subjective notion of Rohingya people's identity. Their body of habits includes their way of talking, perceiving things, dressing up or even having food etc. in a certain way in the process of becoming and representing themselves to others.

Mead (1934) maintains that "The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity" (p. 135), and it emerges as an outcome of the individual's interaction within his/her own social environment. Though Rohingya youth and young adults are stateless, their identities are tied to their social

conditions in Bangladesh. The very nature of their being excluded and “othered” produces a unique set of social conditions which produces the self. Since, “we normally organize our memories upon the string of our self” (Mead, 1934, p. 135), the self, despite its bodily presence in one place, is able to associate itself with another place that has already become a part of its memory. It is true that human beings cannot disassociate itself from its bodily presence in the surrounding environment and the events taking place in that environment.

Hence, it can be said that the individual’s self is formed of a collection “of the particular attitudes of other individuals toward himself and toward one another” (Mead, 1934, p. 158), and the individual along with others participate in those particular social activities from which specific attitudes are organized. In addition to being constituted by a set of specific individual attitudes, the self is constructed “by an organization of the social attitudes of the generalized other or the social group as a whole to which he belongs” (Mead, 1934, p. 158). To sum up, the self reaches its full development by the organization of both by individual and social attitudes.

### **Political Theorization of Statelessness**

Staples’s (2012) political theorization of statelessness explains how states conceptualize statelessness. Although she does not specifically write about the ways this concept impacts on Rohingya identity, Staples (2012) shows the connection among the protections of state membership, the burdens of statelessness, and the situation of stateless persons. She argues that three principle reasons have made the states “extremely reluctant to receive stateless persons,” and these are: “the stateless person’s unclear identity, uncertain legal status, and the resulting difficulties of ensuring his or her departure” (Staples, 2012, p. 18). Staples’s (2012) three reasons do not directly point out how these three affect a refugee’s identity construction but I



investigate how these reasons, particularly the first two, have empirical values to refugee identity.

The first reason, unclear identity of stateless person, may involve misplacing necessary documents. Because of statelessness and displacement, many Rohingya refugees misplace their proofs of residence, schooling, birth registration certificates and other documents that could have been used to establish their connection to their land of origin to claim their rights. For instance, when persecuted Rohingya refugees fled Burma for Bangladesh, they lost all necessary documents. The consequence of such misplacement of documents is expected to invite multiple problems for younger people. Those who were born in Burma and came to Bangladesh with their parents have no official records to confirm their age. As I show in Chapter 6, the lack of documents prevents their admission to institutions in the host country such as education and hospitals. Similarly, those who were born in Bangladesh are ineligible to receive their birth registration certificate due to their parents' statelessness that also disqualifies them from receiving certain services. Rohingya people's statelessness accompanied by their inability to officially prove their status increases their possibility of dis-identification.

The second reason refers to an outcome of the exclusionary attitude of the state. Denial of membership, Staples (2012) maintains, not only excludes a community from its own social network but also pulls apart the possibility of getting global recognition because it "is always the first of a long train of abuses..." (Staples, 2012, p. 36). Being denied of membership eventually makes an individual deprived of citizenship rights, which is nothing but "a major threat to a person's sense of self" (Staples, 2012, p. 28). The dynamics of inclusion and exclusion of people differentiate between membership and citizenship. Denial of membership gives birth to an uncertain legal status. Rohingya people, because of their denied membership into Burma, do not

exist in the Burmese constitution. In Burma, they are viewed as temporary residents. After arriving in Bangladesh, they again fail to produce proof of their legal status, which again labels them outsiders.

In her third point of the state's attitude towards stateless people, Staples (2012) emphasizes how the above two factors result in difficulties of ensuring a refugee's departure. Staples (2012) argues that states do not acknowledge their failure to recognize statelessness as a problem of the state. Statelessness is rather considered as the lack of a nationality, or a situation that is caused by individuals who fail to prove their nationality. Even article 1(1) of the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons states that "the term 'stateless person' means a person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law". This statement recognizes the power of the state to formulate laws and regulations that define statelessness but do not hold the state accountable to protect those labeled as "stateless". Therefore, from the state's point of view, it is not the state but the individual actors who must prove their nationality. Failure to show one's national membership invites a set of tragic consequences: the normalcy of his/her life gets threatened, s/he is forced to leave his/her home, his/her identity is invalidated, and in the host country his/her identity is questioned or stigmatized.

Going back to my research question, Rohingya youth and young adults' experiences of displacement and refugeeness in Bangladesh are understood to complicate their identity. Theorists adequately explain the importance of individuals' sense of self in the process of having membership and maintaining differentiation to create self-image. But I assume that these are a luxury for Rohingya youth and young adults because of their social conditions. Their social

conditions are created by their statelessness and lack of social citizenship which influence their decision of retaining and/or abandoning their Rohingya identity in Bangladesh.

Based on the above theoretical discussion, I now show the relationship between citizenship and identity, and their importance for refugee youth and young adults. I use the cases of the Burmese Rohingya ethnic community, Mexican immigrant workers in Canada, and Palestinians in Israel to demonstrate that the access to rights is important for developing a strong connection to an ethnic identity.

### **Citizenship and Identity**

Identity is an ongoing social process of accomplishment that creates a sense of self and a way of being, while citizenship is a process of achieving both membership and belonging through some acts and recognition. Although Splitter (2011) and Yuval-Davis (1999) consider identity as an individual experience, and citizenship as a collectivist concept; both identity and citizenship are linked to membership. For identity, membership establishes bonding between an individual and his/her community members, which assures an individual about his/her membership in that community. On the other hand, for citizenship, as used in this study, membership has to be legally recognized by the state. The complex nature of the concept of citizenship, and an ongoing process of developing one's sense of self indicates that there is a close relationship between one's citizenship and identity.

According to Selle, Semb and Stromsnes (2013), "identity is essentially a matter of how individuals conceive of themselves, including their relations to other people and places" (p. 717). Thus identity, although a personal experience, becomes "the most public aspect of self" (Gecas & Burke, 1995, p. 42). It locates an individual in a social space in relation to membership and

entitlements of rights within a specific political community. Identity, therefore, is associated to the institutional production of social conditions which affects and is affected by citizenship.

Citizenship ensures recognition and protection of citizens. States admit persons with clear and formally recognized national “identity” based on “the passport and visa system and the regulations governing all aspects of social life” (Staples, 2012, p. 18). It indicates that citizenship is a legal status. Various authors, such as Marshall (1964), Isin and Wood (1999), Miller (2000), Tan (2005), and Pinson (2008), maintain that citizenship is a process and a status that involves access to different forms of duties, rights, and power. With an emphasis on rights, Marshall identifies three forms of citizenship. These are social—the right to economic welfare, health services, housing, education etc.; civil—individual freedom, the right to own property etc.; and political—free and fair exercise of the right to vote, demonstrate, etc. Revi’s (2014) analysis of Marshall’s typology of citizenship shows that Marshall considered all three intertwined:

Once all citizens possess civil rights and are equal under the law, a claim can be naturally made for political rights, to give all a voice in shaping laws. Upon being granted suffrage, citizens have the political power to successfully push for legislated social rights (p. 454).

From this analysis, it is found that identity is a precondition for citizenship. Because it is the state that holds power and authority to grant membership to individuals based on evidence and the conditions set by the state. In the eyes of the state, individuals who do not possess the right identity are labelled as “others”. It is because they—the “others”—are not acceptable to the given state that they are stateless within a state. Burmese Rohingyas’ non-citizenship status is an example of how they were turned into “others” in their own homeland. The 1982 Citizenship Act—the apparatus of the state—played a key role in turning Rohingya community into “others” in their own country and excluded them from being citizens (see Chapter 2).

On the other hand, citizenship becomes a precondition of identity when they are outside of their country and in need of proving their membership in their country of origin. Burmese Rohingyas' dangerous movement by boat in 2015 is an example of this. A group of Burmese Rohingyas fled Burma because of persecution and sought refuge in three neighboring countries, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. However, according to these states, since they failed to produce the necessary documents to prove their Burmese origins, they were treated as unidentified human beings, which made them inadmissible to these three countries. As a result, they ended up floating around the sea "stranded in rickety boats off the coasts of Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia with dwindling supplies of food and water" (BBC news, May 18, 2015) or drowning in the river.

The examples of the 1982 Citizenship Act and Rohingya refugees in boats point to the importance of recognized membership. Achieving recognition by obtaining Burmese citizenship has become an impossible procedure particularly for the Rohingya people, which in turn translates to challenges to obtaining legal status elsewhere, like in Bangladesh. Moreover, legal membership in Burma may make Rohingya feel more a part of their ethnic community which, in Anderson's (2006) word, is an "imagined political community." Anderson (2006) explains that this is an imaginary perception because regardless of the size of a community, most of its members remain unknown to each other as they never meet their fellow-members, "yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p. 6). Individuals' notions of their membership, as well as their rights and claims, are constructed by their imagined perception of the acceptance of their group. On the basis of their imagined resemblance and togetherness, they receive recognition from others, which generates a feeling of nation-ness within themselves as they live in the same social world. Individuals of "imagined political community" share similar

interests because they nurture a similar sense of belonging to their community. This is necessary for developing a sense of self. This nation-ness is sovereign in nature but in the contemporary period individuals require citizenship tied to a site in order to realistically exercise their rights of membership and belonging.

According to McNevin (2012), citizenship develops through practicing the entitlements (political, legal, social rights), claims (demands according to subject positions), and counter-claims of belonging that facilitate for individuals to be “marked as one of us” or “one of them”, and to exist lawfully in a public space with recognition and acceptance “in the civic sphere” (p. 167). This is better explained by Basok (2004) in her work on Mexican migrants working in Canada. She observes that, despite having access to some legal rights, the migrants were unable to claim full rights because of the restrictive level of membership in Canada. Baines and Sharma (2002) maintain that differential citizenship is a strategy to “marginalize, exploit, and ensure the continuity of differently entitled and empowered groups” who are “legally and ideologically classified as non-citizens” (Baines & Sharma, 2002, p. 76). What is the exact purpose of citizenship then? Leaving some individuals at the bottom of the stratification with limited or no rights, and elevating others with the capacity of exercising power?

While membership offers a sense of belonging to a nation-state, and plays a key role in shaping people’s sense of self, social stratification in terms of rights and entitlements identifies people as excluded or outsiders. Isin and Wood (1999), therefore, argue that despite having a modern and universalist rhetoric, citizenship has “never been expanded to all members of any polity” (p. 20). Because of the “elusive, contested and multifaceted” nature of citizenship (Pinson, 2008, p. 202), some people are categorized as stateless and/or refugees in a place they call home, and continue struggling with their unsettled identity. Pinson (2008) also shows the

problem of the disconnect that comes with living and feeling connected to a place yet not be given official membership in that place. This is the case of Palestinian citizens—a “trapped minority” in Israel—who “are expected to accept their inferior status and to adopt a civic identity that politically rejects them and their collective memory” (p. 204).

Identity is significantly influenced by the connection to land. The intimate linkages between people and place often form territorialized concepts of identity (Malkki, 1992), which involves dignity and honor (Ullah, 2014). When it comes to the connection between people and place, kinship also plays a significant role in some cultures. For example, the Palestinian identity has emerged both from their connection to the land and their notions of shared kinship within the Palestine territory (Fincham, 2012). Disconnections from these two put them in a difficult situation when they are uprooted from their land, and embrace refugee-lives in a new place. This situation creates a tension within them as they constantly struggle with restrictions, boundaries, rules and regulations concerning their mobility in the new place. Such struggles often result in compromising their freedom of living a life, restricting their access to rights, and thus developing an unsettled identity. Despite Palestinian youth’s struggles, it is often found that they put efforts to fit themselves to the host country. But insufficient service provisions, especially in terms of health care and education, and lack of adequate support to meet their social and developmental needs in overcrowded deteriorating living conditions, negatively impacting on their development, as highlighted in Ullah’s (2014) study in relation to young Palestinian refugees in Lebanese refugee camps. Yet, their desire to return to their homeland in Palestine remains alive, “Every Palestinian should have an identity. We have the right to have an identity card to preserve our honor and dignity in front of other people. We will hopefully return to our homeland Palestine” (Ullah, 2014, p. 75). In such a situation, one may develop a hybrid form of identity for

two reasons: because of a sense of belonging to the place of origin where the individual is not recognized, and because of the effects of the social world the individual has been in for a long time.

These individuals continue their struggle to form a particular identity, and the struggle is even harder for young people who are in a transitional life stage fraught with uncertainty because of their social conditions. Obtaining legal citizenship may release them from the burden of their unclear identity as the recognition of a national “identity” and obtaining a legal citizenship are based on legal documents, i.e. passports, (Staples, 2012). But it is important to remember that the invention of passport is one of the intelligent tactics that is applied to both enable and limit an individual’s movement, and bestow citizenship “status” on an individual. People hold the belief that a passport is an important document for international travel that facilitates people’s movement, but “it is born out of an attempt to restrict movement along national lines that are explicitly raced” (Mongia, 1999, p. 554)—another technique of exclusion. The mobility of populations is regulated by government tactics and rules. The implication of this technique is even more serious for refugees who possess certain racial and ethnic marker, and do not possess a document, a passport, validating their legal status. These people who have been excluded from citizenship are now treated as “illegal” and “risky” simply because they are people without passport, an important legal document of citizenship. Since young people are in a transitional phase of life, deprivation of social rights affects refugee youth and young adults heavily (see Chapter 5 and 6). I now discuss the concept of refugee youth with an emphasis on youth and young adults.



## **Refugee Youth and Young Adults**

A brief discussion on youth and young adults is useful to understand the concept of refugee youth. From a social-psychological perspective, youth are “betwixt and between, no longer children and not yet adults” (Hall, 2003, p. 117) who are passing through a “psychologically complex” (Kehily, 2007, p. 12) phase of life that challenges them “to visualize a viable future for themselves” (Cote & Allahar, 1994, p. 82). To describe the concept of youth and young adults, I use Arnett’s (2000) idea of “emerging adulthood”, which “is a distinct period demographically, subjectively, and in terms of identity explorations” (p. 469), as this encompasses all the facets of youth and young adults above.

Arnett (2007) uses the term “emerging adulthood” for young people from the late teens until the mid-20s. According to The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group. While the UN Secretariat terms youth as people between the ages of 15-24 years, the African Youth Charter categorizes youth as people between the ages of 15 and 35 years. According to Statistics Canada, the portrayal of Canadian youth includes people aged between 15 to 34 years old. In fact, the biological age-based definition of youth simply overlaps “youth” either with “children” or with “adults”. The youth who are in emerging adulthood negotiate their belonging in a distinct way through their participation in and organization of activities within their social world (Arnett, 2004). In many societies, youth is believed to be a transitional phase between childhood and adulthood that is “understood as a time of stress, disruption and social change” (Montgomery, 2007, p. 47) and perceived as “dependent, ignorant, rebellious, powerless and vulnerable” (Tyyska, 2009, p. 5), generating a strong impression that they are yet to be biologically and emotionally mature (Cote & Allahar, 1994). Youth and young adults tend to get involved with a

wider range of “activities than persons in other age periods because they are less likely to be constrained by role requirements, and this makes their demographic status unpredictable” (Arnett, 2007, p. 471). We must note that, profound physical changes along with changes in the brain structure caused by the functioning of serotonin and dopamine—two of the many significant components of biological chemistry—foster heightened behavioral responses and influence learning efficiency of youth (Gaspar, Cases, & Maroteaux, 2003). They do not have any control over these changes, yet they are often blamed for their high-risk behaviors such as reckless driving, risky sexual involvement, self-injury, drug addiction etc., particularly in the West. However, as Arnett (2007) suggests, “the transition from emerging adulthood to young adulthood in the late twenties” reduces their instability (p. 471).

Youth and young adults are also distinct subjectively. They are emerging adults. Their subjective sense informs them that they are no longer children/adolescents. This notion shapes their behavior in a distinctive manner compared to the adolescents. On the other hand, they are also aware that they are yet to be adults. During this stage, their “individualistic qualities of character” (Arnett, 2007, p. 472) are formed by their subjective sense of in-betweenness, and their desire of becoming full adults. Some of these qualities are, as Arnett (2007) notes, “accepting responsibility for one’s self, making independent decision, becoming financially independent” (p. 473). An example of their tendency of making independent decisions is reflected in their independent living at an early age. In an industrialized country like the US, 40 percent of those aged 18 or 19 years “move out of their parental home not for college but for independent living and full-time work” (Arnett, 2000, p. 471). This is not a sign of their competence and maturity, but an indication of how their subjective sense shapes their tendency of making independent decisions.

Turning to the third, the tendency of identity explorations makes youth and young adults distinctive. Arnett's (2000) findings show that the explorations occur mainly "in the areas of love, work and worldviews" (p. 473). In terms of love, "American adolescents typically begin dating around ages 12 to 14" (Arnett, 2000, p. 473) which provides them experiences of having recreation and sexual experimentation. For most of them, the dating relationship lasts for a short period, and the emerging adults, compared to the adolescents, consider their relationship more seriously (Arnett, 2000). The second area of explorations, getting involved in work at an early age gives them experiences in "managing their time and money" (Arnett, 2000, p. 473), and they pay attention to work more seriously as they grow up and start thinking about their careers. The third, their worldviews also change as they gradually prepare themselves to adopt adult roles. Arnett (2000) also notes that their identity explorations continue through reviewing and reexamining their values and beliefs which do not always earn them positive experiences, turning some into pessimist adults while others into optimists. However, this perspective of youth and young adults clearly reflects western cultural patterns as, "youth must be understood as the products of culture, and must be seen as cultural constructions" (Montgomery, 2007, p. 53).

Indicating the dramatic changes that occur in human life, especially in industrialized societies over the last few centuries, Cote and Allahaar (2006) claim that the developments in the maturation process have been termed and explained in diverse ways resulting in "a variety of conflicting interpretations regarding youth" (p. 14). This is mirrored in Montgomery (2007) as she notes that "youth is a loaded term and carries with it many connotations and assumptions" (p. 46). For youth and young adults, the construction of identity in a positive manner becomes challenging when the social conditions are disrupted. I now turn to refugee youth and young adults to show how disrupted social conditions problematize their identity and citizenship.

A refugee youth and/or a refugee young adult is an individual who grows up “in contexts of violence and uncertainty, experiencing the trauma of loss, and attempting to create a future in an uncertain world” (Correa-Velez, Gifford, & Barnett, 2010, p. 1399). Refugee youth and young adults are often termed as an “invisible population” (Evans, Forte & Fraser, 2013, p. 15), who are forced to flee their homeland because of conflict or persecution. Approximately 35% of the total refugee population in the world is comprised of refugee youth aged 15 to 24 years (UNHCR, 2016) who lose “confidence, social circles, aspirations and dreams” (UNHCR). In terms of status, age and social conditions, refugee youth and young adults are distinct from other groups of the population. Non-refugee individuals, by virtue of citizenship, i.e. holding legal status of a particular political community, are entitled to claim rights. Their membership and legal status make them entitled to exercise rights. But refugee youth and young adults’ perception towards life is different due to their displacement and persecution, and they often form a hybrid and distressed identity in relation to their day-to-day living in the context of their restricted freedom in precarious living conditions.

Refugee youth and young adults endure a challenging time because a) youth itself is a transitional phase; b) their liminal and malleable situation needs care; c) they need support to meet developmental needs; d) they need to learn about their tradition, culture and form a social network to build a viable future; and e) they need to trust the social world within which they live. Unfortunately, because of their disrupted social world, the above criteria remain unaddressed. Hampering their process of *becoming* and *being* is the only consequence in this situation, and both the “right to have rights” (Arendt, 1951) and “the right to claim rights” (Isin, 2012, p. 109) remain far-reaching dreams for a refugee youth and young adult.

Clark-Kazak's (2012) study on the young refugees in DRC (The Democratic Republic of the Congo) demonstrates that, because of the heterogeneous characteristics of the unaccompanied young people, it is important "to take into account intra-generational power relations—including gender, social age, education and class—that affect young people's differential experiences of migration, including within peer groups" (p. 14). Membership and belonging of young people, however, are often challenged by the legal instruments of states, which pay less attention to diversity of race, ethnicity, and gender and more attention to securitization of states. The existing practices of how refugees are treated in most of the countries clearly show that they are recognized as an entity, but in reality, the recognition does not translate into practice. The lives of disenfranchised and delegitimized refugee youth and young adults, thus, turn towards a disadvantageous, futile and risky path that often obstructs the development of a sense of 'the self'. It is social conditions that categorize youth and young adults as "refugee" and/or "citizen"; however, we must not forget that they are human beings who are entitled to human rights. Arendt (1951), through her famous assertion, reminds us that "human rights are not possible outside of the structures of citizenship in that any rights require a state to protect and enact them" (Nyers, 2006, p. 120). Indeed, it is "the structures of citizenship" that needs to be reconsidered to acknowledge the importance of identity for refugee youth and young adults.

In conclusion, Nyers reminds us that "refugees are courageous citizens who, because of their words, actions, or thoughts, are forced out of their political identities (citizens) and communities (state)" (cited in Moulin, 2012, p. 60). Yet, the social reality portrays refugees as a homogenous group and views them as "ungrateful subjects," instead of "courageous citizens" (Moulin (2012). Labeling them as refugees, unidentified, non-citizens and stateless, and letting

them live with these labels for an uncertain time can simply exacerbate the situation. Therefore, bearing the research questions in mind, the above theoretical discussion brings up a set of unavoidable questions: since youth and young adults understand opportunities and constraints in a different way than adults, in what ways the programs and policies of the government concerning young people can incorporate the diverse and complex experiences of migration and refugeeness of the youth and young adults? What are the ways to create a platform for refugee youth and young adults to facilitate their development of the sense of self with confidence and self-esteem? Despite statelessness and refugeeness, how refugees can obtain membership of a political community in order to access social rights until their legal citizenship is conferred in their place of origin and/or their place of belonging? Following Mead, Goffman and Moore's arguments, it can be speculated that stable social conditions, which include citizenship as a means of identity, acceptance to the members of the society, and a supportive environment for growth and development of potentials—are necessary elements for refugee youth and young adults. Based on my research findings, the social conditions of the refugee youth and young adults are presented later in this dissertation, which will be helpful to address the above questions. Before that, it is important to discuss my research methodologies.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

While the theoretical framework points to the conditions necessary for identity construction, the research method outlines how I explored Rohingya's experiences of statelessness in the host country, and how their experiences shape Rohingya identity among youth and young adults, in what ways they retain their Rohingya identity in the context of their statelessness, and how they experience social citizenship in the host country. Because of our limited knowledge of the social world, knowing the unknown is always a challenging task unless there is systematic planning and design. The planning and work procedures are indispensable part of social research, to help a researcher find the answer to the research questions.

#### **Methodology**

I was inspired by the ideas of The Chicago School of Sociology that set the trend of active participation and interaction between the researcher and the researched, establishing participant observation as an important sociological method, and opening a window for me to apply Mead's ideas of symbolic interactionism. Following these traditions, I accomplished my study through ethnographic fieldwork using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions.

In an ethnography, a researcher observes the behaviors and interactions of individuals. According to Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004), individuals "attempt to evoke, assert, define, modify, challenge, and/or support their own and others' desired self-images" (p. 4) through their interaction. An ethnographic approach was helpful to build a set of knowledge through observation and interviews with Rohingya youth and young adults. Wolcott's (2008) suggestion of considering a trilogy—the three "E"s—of interdependent guidelines complemented my

ethnographic project. These are: “experiencing” (e.g., participant observation), “enquiring” (e.g., interviewing), and “examining” (e.g., an activity in which the researcher turns attention to what already has been produced by others) (Wolcott, 2008, p. 50). My use of participant observation, conducting interviews, and examining what has been produced by other researchers have been guided by these three Es.

I am convinced by Marcus’s (1999) ideas that an ethnographic work requires the involvement of social actors within the reach of ethnographic project. A researcher accesses the field but also contributes in creating an atmosphere in which both the researcher and the actors equally take part in a natural setting. It is difficult to know the answer of my primary research question, how the experience of displacement and refugeeness shape identity among Rohingya youth and young adults, unless I interact with them in a natural setting and observe their everyday life. The theoretical framework of my study shows the importance of social conditions within which individuals interact and develop a sense of self, which is an ongoing process. Since their experience, memories, and feelings of refugeeness have been produced through series of events; an appropriate research method gives opportunity to a researcher to spend adequate time for building rapport, gaining trust, observing their daily life, talking to them, getting to know them. These small activities combinedly play a significant role in collecting data accurately as much as possible. My chosen research method allowed me to accomplish all these tasks during my fieldwork.

I took the following steps according to Marcus’s (1999) suggestions. First, I put efforts in collecting enough information about the field from relevant government offices, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), my personal networks and online. Second, I did not confine myself to specific plans and strategies. For example, my initial plan was to observe and



know my participants and not to conduct any interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) in the first few days until I was able to know most of them. But, after the first few hours of my introductory meeting with a group of Rohingya women in the unregistered camp, I felt that it was a suitable time to conduct a FGD with some of the women I met. This way, I came out of my initial plan, and conducted my first FGD on the very first day in my field successfully. The third suggestion I followed was to allocate time for initial rapport building with the participants. My consistent observation of, and participation in, their everyday activities—particularly in domestic activities—facilitated the rapport building process effectively.

My ethnography training made me aware that everything in the field does not follow the plan of an ethnographer. Ethnographers have to be ready to change the strategies developed earlier, develop new strategies according to the demands of the situation, and sometimes to imagine the situation beforehand to deal with any unexpected scenario or question. My experiential knowledge about the Rohingya community's conventional and simplistic attitude informed me of their possible curiosity towards my personal life. Unlike Western people, they would most likely ask about my earnings, family status, and some personal questions, too. Before entering the field, I prepared myself for this kind of question based on anticipated conversations between my participants and I. In this regard, Wolcott (2008) rightly points out that "the purposes that guide ethnographic inquiry do not spring forth from the settings in which ethnography is conducted; they are something that ethnographers bring with them to the scene" (p. 74), which echoes Marcus's (1999) idea of being an imaginative ethnographer. Being an imaginative ethnographer not only helped me respond to their questions about myself but also made it easier for me to build rapport with them soon.

Before presenting on the details of my data collection methods, a brief discussion on some key concepts of ethnography and ethnographies with young refugees is presented below.

### **Researching Refugee Youth and Young Adults Using Ethnographic Approach**

The term ethnography is used to refer to interpretive accounts of individual peoples and cultures, an idea derived from the literal translation of the Greek words '*ethnos*' and '*graphia*' which denote "writing about a people" (Jones, 2010, p. 13). Hammersley (2001) states that ethnographic research aims "to discover and represent faithfully the true nature of social phenomena" (p. 103). Such discovery, as Malinowski notes, requires an understanding of "the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world" (Jones, 2010, p. 17). Through engagement, lived experiences, and interpreting other's stories, ethnographers seek to develop an ethical and functional relationship with people, and aim to bring a positive transformation in the society towards a "more equitable and just world" (Rinehart, Barbour & Pope, 2014, p. 6). One of the predominant ethnographic paradigms is it "is an empirical tradition that seeks to manufacture situated knowledge" (Athique, 2008, p. 32) based on subjective investigation of social relations. In this process, participant observation plays a key role.

Participant observation was introduced into anthropology by Malinowski at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with a view to understanding the community being studied empathically and intimately. According to Jorgensen (1989), it is a methodology that "seeks to uncover, make accessible, and reveal the meanings (realities) people use to make sense out of their daily lives" (p. 15). In other words, it is a method of recording participants' perceptions of their lives and describing them. For Goffman, it is a technique that helps ethnographers to collect data by subjecting the self, the personality and the social situation of the ethnographers to the various social or ethnic situations of the research participants that place the researcher "in a position to

note their gestural, visual, bodily response to what's going on around them" (Emerson, 2001, p. 155). This analysis indicates that participant observation is, as Emerson (2001) notes, "predominantly naturalistic in tone" (p. 14) in which an ethnographer can be the observer as participant and the participant as observer, or both, considering the social context.

Doing ethnography with vulnerable populations always requires special attention. Some ethnographic studies have focused on younger generations among the refugee population, not with those who have been in refugee camps for a long time but with those who either have been resettled or are in a relatively privileged position to receive community support. Most of these studies claim that due to their research context, which includes vulnerability of their research participants, ethnography was a helpful method of data collection. The key methods lessons from this body of work, mentioned below as examples, emphasize making access to the field, unearthing realities grounded in participants' everyday life, and describing what occurs in their social reality. This is echoed in Hammersley (2001) as stated above that ethnographers aim to represent the valid pattern of social phenomena.

Some of these studies include 1) employing two years' participant observation of Vietnamese and Cambodian immigrant and refugee students' understanding of their participation in a creative community service-learning experience (Shaddock-Hernández, 2006); 2) examining young refugees' capabilities to manage the "precarious and uncertain living conditions" as well as their way of navigating "the present towards an unknown future through hope and faith" in Nairobi (Turner, 2015, p. 173); 3) three years ethnographic fieldwork on navigation of resettled Somali young refugees in a new country in relation to their social identities within the realm of sport in Australia (Spaaij, 2015); 4) FGD and open-ended semi-structured interviews in order to examine the results of literacy and social development approach

undertaken for the African refugee high school students based on small group tutoring by the secondary teacher education students in after-school homework centers in Australia (Naidoo, 2008); and 5) a series of semi-structured and unstructured interviews, conversations, observations as part of multi-sited approach for holistic account in Davila's (2014) research on how the high school refugee students in Vietnamese central highlands "orchestrate their identities in response to specific contexts, experiences, and goals" (p. 24) and "how positionality and reflexivity can influence the portraits researchers render of their study participants" (p. 21).

Among them, participants in Turner's (2015) study resemble my research participants. Although Turner's (2015) article does not talk about his methodical approaches, the pattern of his fieldwork confirms his use of ethnography for the refugee youth. Turner's (2015) study focuses on Burundian young refugees' capabilities to manage their uncertain living conditions in Nairobi. Similar to Rohingya refugees who belong to neither Burma nor Bangladesh, Burundian young refugees belong to neither Burundi nor Nairobi. Rohingyas flee their country due to persecution and live in Bangladeshi refugee camps, and their younger generation—born and raised in Bangladeshi camps—looks forward to a different future with mixed feelings of hope and frustration amid uncertainty with everything. On the other hand, Turner's (2015) participants flee their country due to war and insecurity who find hope in the middle of their vulnerabilities and precariousness either in camps or in the city in Nairobi as the best strategy. Considering liminality and vulnerability of young refugees, ethnography can be treated one of the most appropriate research methods which warns researchers to be aware of the situation of the participants but allows them (researchers) to unearth participants' social world without hurting, coercing or deceiving them.

Now I present the details of my data collection methods.

## **Gaining Entry**

Access to Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh requires government permission. I was aware of the concern of the government of Bangladesh with Rohingya refugees. First of all, the camps are located near Bangladesh-Burma border, which is considered a sensitive area due to the popularity of this area as a smuggling zone, and also for some political issues between two countries. Secondly, for years Rohingya issue has been considered a delicate matter to the government. Researchers and journalists have not been granted access to the camps, and allowed to talk to the refugees. As a Bangladeshi citizen, I was informed of these realities, and I planned accordingly to pursue my research. In order to gain my access, I sought an appointment for a meeting with the Rohingya Refugee Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh in summer 2014. I was happy to have the confirmation of my meeting with the RRRC, and flew from Canada to Bangladesh. However, instead of the RRRC I met one of his representatives in Cox's Bazar in August 2014 as the RRRC was called for other tasks by his authority at that time. I discussed my research proposal with the representative.

The purpose of my initial visit was to introduce myself to the government authority, and give them clear ideas about the objective of my research. During the meeting I assured that my research has no political motive, and is not involved with any agenda that may be applied against the sovereignty of Bangladesh. During my meeting, I received verbal permission from the RRRC office for a preliminary visit to the camps. I started for Kutupalong camp at Ukhia from Cox's Bazar the same day. Two local NGO personnel accompanied me during the visit as decided by the RRRC office. This was how I entered Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh for the first time. The NGO personnel not only briefed me about the situation of the Rohingya refugees but also introduced me with other NGO personnel providing services to Rohingya refugees in the

camp. The visit included a registered camp only. At the end of the visit, a local NGO staff took me to the place where the registered camp ended, and the unregistered camp began. From there, a vast hilly area—full of shacks made of bamboo sticks and plastic sheets—occupied by the unregistered Rohingyas was clearly visible. Although it was a short visit, it helped me develop my fieldwork plan.

After the meeting at the RRRC office and visiting the camp briefly, I contacted the RRRC to thank him for the support his office provided me, and reminded him of the official written permission for my fieldwork. I never met this RRRC in person as he was later transferred when I went to Cox's Bazar in 2016 to conduct my fieldwork. But, despite bureaucratic complexities in the government system, I received the required permission letter from the RRRC office by early September 2014, within two weeks of my initial visit, just before I left for Canada to continue my Fall courses.

### **Site Selection and Maps**

I conducted my research in both registered and unregistered refugee camps at two *upazilas*—Bengali terms for subdistricts—in the Cox's Bazar district in Bangladesh. They were Kutupalong registered and unregistered camps at Ukhia *upazila*; and Nayapara registered camp and Leda unregistered camp at Teknaf *upazila*. All four camps were selected based on the availability of Rohingya refugees in these locations. These are the only places in Bangladesh where Rohingya refugees are officially allowed to live temporarily. From the political and administrative point of view, due to the porous border in this region, the names of both *upazilas* are associated with human trafficking, smuggling, drugs and crimes. Border forces often stop vehicles and check passengers as part of their routine duty to control suspicious movement.

Two maps on the camp location and number of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh provide ideas about the sites. Before presenting the maps, clarification on a few terminologies is necessary.

**Taal.** The Kutupalong unregistered camp is called *Taal*. Local Bangladeshi people as well as the registered Rohingya refugees use this derogatory term. It means a pile of valueless items/wastes; in other words, a garbage dump.

**Nayapara.** In the past, government documents used to spell it Noapara.

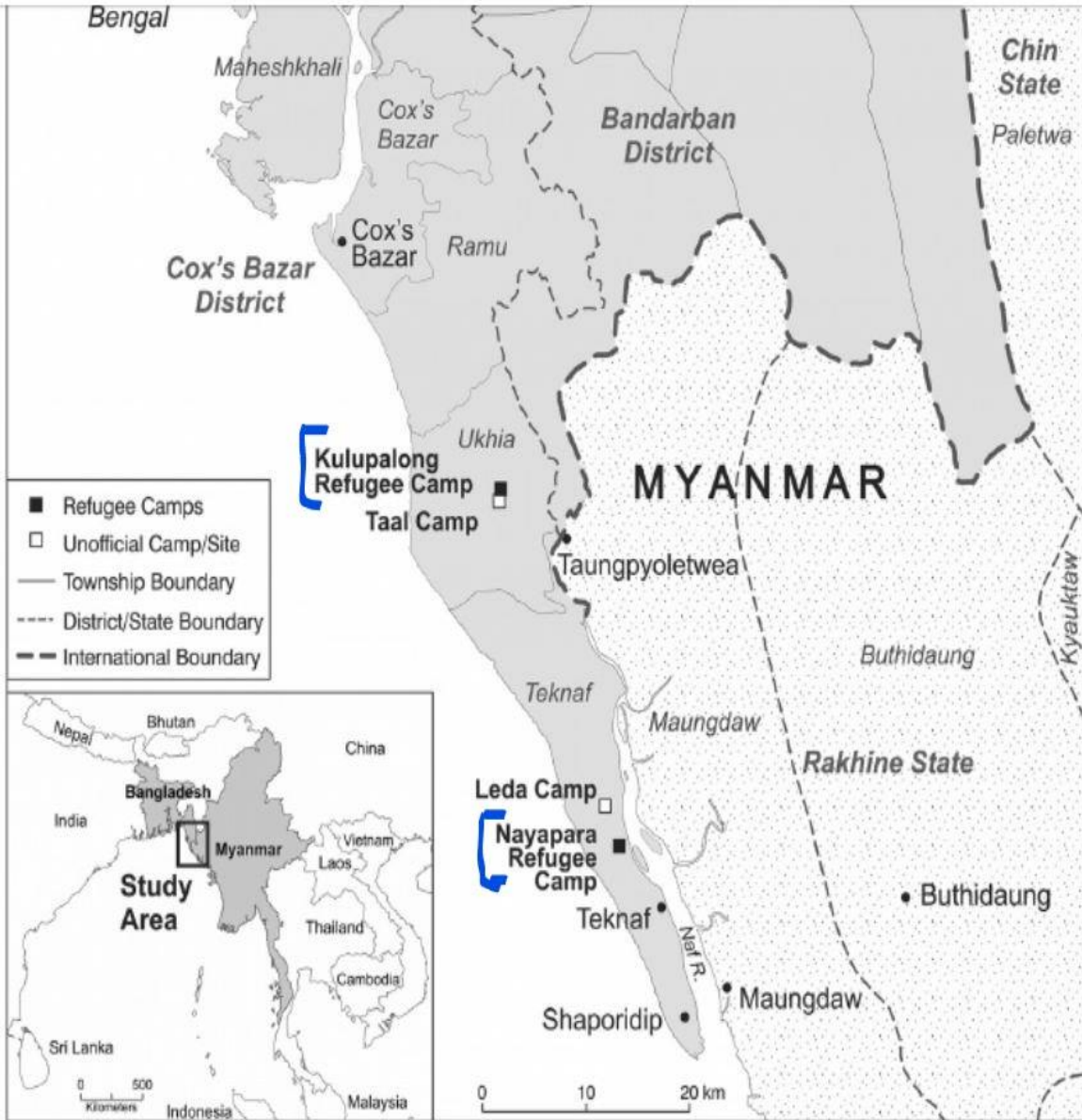
**Bazar.** In English it translates to market. The Bangladesh Government tends not to indicate refugee camps, even the registered ones, in its official administrative maps. Rather the government maps point out the camp locations by naming them local bazar, such as – Kutupalong bazar, Noapara bazar (which now is called Nayapara bazar).

**RC.** Registered Camps.

**MS.** Makeshift Camps/unregistered camps (located outside of formal /registered camps)

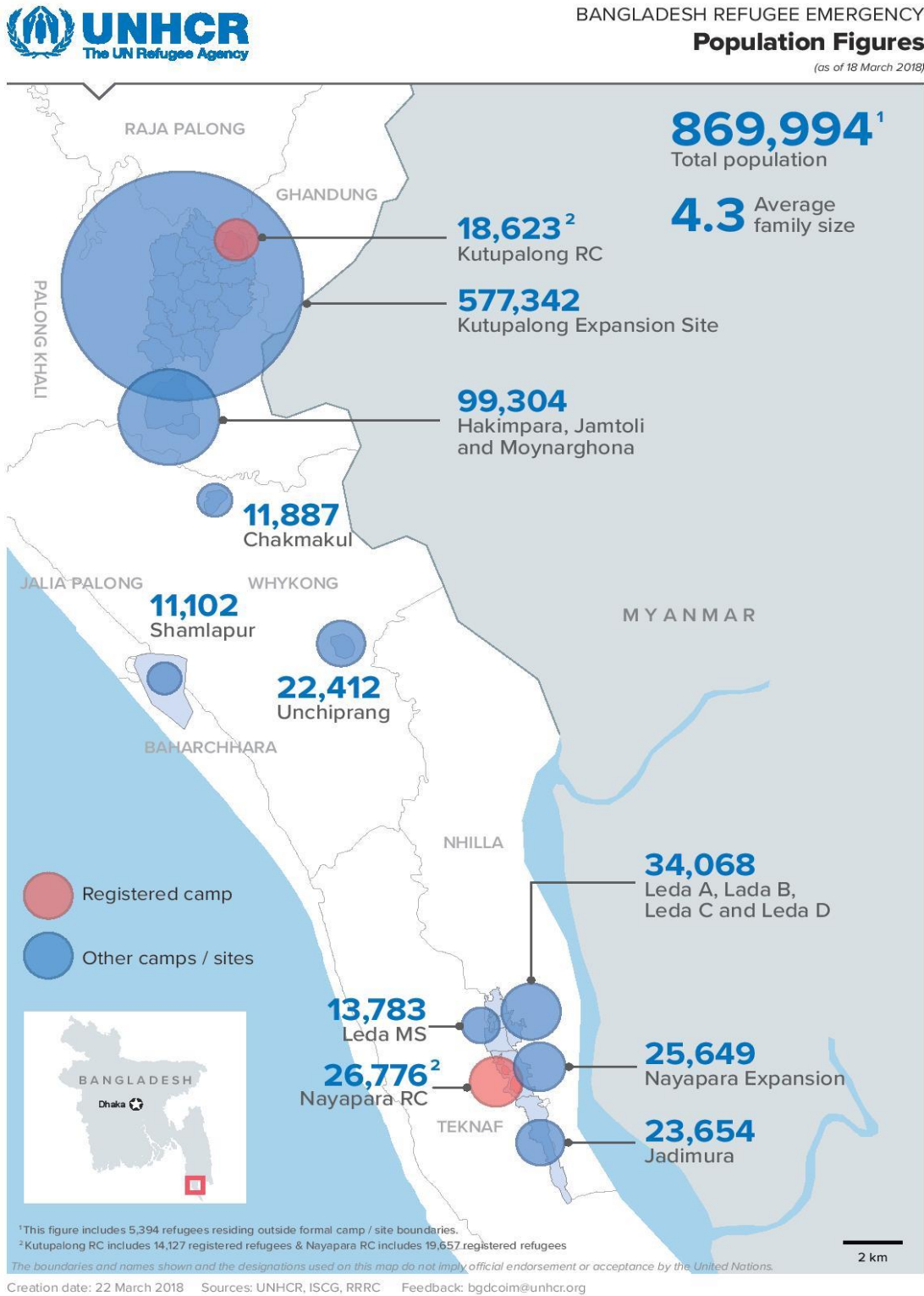
**UNHCR map.** This is the latest map of refugee population which shows an increase in the number of unregistered Rohingyas compared to 2016 when I conducted my study. The expansion sites mentioned in this camp were unoccupied land area in 2016.

Map: 4.1 Map of both camps at Ukhia and Nayapara. Source: Uddin (2015): State of stateless people:





Map: 4.2 Map: Location and number of Rohingya community in registered and unregistered camps.



## **Recruitment and Sampling**

I employed a reflexive approach of participant observation along with FGDs and semi-structured individual interviews. Initially I thought that my personal network with few local non-government employees involved in providing services to the refugees would be helpful to recruit participants in this research. I ended up with a different reality. Because of living outside Bangladesh for quite a few years, I lost many of the contacts I had in the past when working in the development sector of Bangladesh. As a result, during my 2014 visit, I found only one NGO staff working in that area who was known to me, a potential individual who wanted to introduce me to my participants. Interestingly, that individual was transferred to a different location when I reached at Ukhia to begin my fieldwork in 2016.

Entering the camp for the first time in early January 2016 created a mixed feeling within me—fairly ambivalent—an excitement of beginning my research for which I had been waiting since the onset of my journey with Sociology, nervousness and concerns over maintaining research ethics and following research methods, and indeed curiosity of meeting a new people who have come from a state, yet “stateless” and live in this place in Bangladesh, yet “placeless”. In my professional life, I worked with vulnerable people such as coastal fishing communities, socially disadvantaged women, street children and children without parental care. All of these gave me ideas of what “vulnerability” and “helplessness” denote. But this was the first time I was here to talk and spend several months with the Rohingya people; I was unsure how to start up. I was advancing with a feeling of strangeness, thinking of how to begin a conversation and how to recruit my participants. As I am transforming my feelings into writing, it reminds me of Taussig’s (2011) term used for anthropologists. Taussig calls an anthropologist, “quintessentially a stranger in a foreign land asking for directions” (p. 144). Although I knew about this place, the

place was new to me—a foreign land, and although I did not ask anyone for directions, I was questioning and constructing thoughts—seeking a direction within myself. Finding no prescribed formula, I began recruiting my research participants using “an informal strategy”; in particular, “judgmental sampling” – relying on my own judgment to find “the most appropriate members” in a simplistic and natural way by initiating an informal conversation with them (Fetterman, 2010, p. 35). My initial conversations with them helped me to find my research participants considering their gender, age, diverse experience etc. This non-probability technique was helpful for me to find the potential participants for individual interviews My primary discussion with potential participants included all ethical and procedural matters such as, the type of the research, participants’ right to participation, withdraw and intervention (in relation to informed consent procedure), possible risk and benefits, confidentiality and any other relevant concerns, such as being emotional or psychologically upset, raised by the participants. Most of my participants considered that this process was more important for me (the researcher) than themselves as some of them even commented about the ICF: “what would I do with these papers?”

During my second visit, I accomplished my eight months of ethnographic fieldwork in two refugee camps in Bangladesh from January to August in 2016. The camps were Kutupalong at Ukhia and in Nayapara at Teknaf. I conducted twenty-eight individual interviews and three focus group discussions (FGD) with Rohingya refugees until July. Fifteen males and thirteen females participated in the individual interviews. I conducted one FGD with men and two with women with a total of fourteen participants, five men and nine women. Four participants overlapped in individual interviews and FGDs. I conducted two more individual interviews and one FGD with four men in August. This time, all of them were from Kutupalong registered camp. Altogether, I had direct in-depth discussions with forty-eight participants while many

others were involved with my study indirectly. I did not need an interpreter as I was able to communicate with my participants directly. I transcribed my data by myself. My research participants were selected based on their willingness and consent.

I committed to the Office of Research Ethics at York University that I would not recruit any minor for the purpose of my study. Accordingly, I recruited all participants ensuring that they were eighteen years old and older. The key focus of this thesis is Rohingya people, but this research involves both youth and adults among Rohingya community. It is difficult to capture youth’s perspective if adults’ views are excluded since the narratives and perspectives of adult Rohingya strongly influence on how youth perceive their (youth’s) world. Therefore, along with the youth majority, this thesis incorporates the views of few adult Rohingya participants, too.

As I wanted to categorize my participants as youth and adult, I researched the definition of youth (Chapter 3). In order to avoid debate and dilemma with the age of youth, for my research participants, I categorized youth and young adults who were between the ages of 18 to 35 years. This category respects the UNCRC definition of children who are under 18 years old.

Table 4.1 below outlines the basic demographic characteristics of my participants in Bangladesh and includes their gender, age, location and status of participation in individual interviews and FGDs:

Location		Male		Female	
		Age	Status	Age	Status
<b>Participants in individual interview</b>					
SI				SI	
1	KUTUPALONG	52-year-old man	Unregistered	1	19-year-old woman Unregistered
2		35-year-old man	Unregistered	2	30-year-old woman Unregistered
3		20-year-old man	Unregistered	3	19-year-old woman Unregistered
4		24-year-old man	Unregistered	4	25-year-old woman Unregistered
5		40-year-old man	Unregistered	5	18-year-old woman Unregistered
6		50-year-old man	Registered	6	19-year-old woman Unregistered
7		20-year-old man	Registered	7	A woman (age unknown) Registered

Location		Male		Female		
		Age	Status	Age		Status
8		65-year-old man	Registered	8	18-year-old woman	Registered
9		40-year-old man	Registered	9	40-year-old woman	Registered
10		23-year-old man	Registered	10	42-year-old woman	Unregistered
11		35-year-old man	Registered			
12		34-year-old man	Registered			
<b>Participants in Focused Group Discussions</b>						
13		40-year-old man	Registered	11	19-year-old woman	Unregistered
14		48-year-old man	Registered	12	30-year-old woman	Unregistered
15		45-year-old man	Registered	13	25-year-old woman	Unregistered
16		42-year-old man	Registered	14	28-year-old woman	Unregistered
17		35-year-old man	Registered	15	35-year-old woman	Unregistered
18		50-year-old man	Registered	16	25-year-old woman	Unregistered
19		20-year-old man	Registered	17	30-year-old woman	Unregistered
20		23-year-old man	Registered	18	30-year-old woman	Unregistered
21		22-year-old man	Registered	19	35-year-old woman	Unregistered
<b>Participants in individual interview</b>						
1	NAYAPARA	18-year-old man	Registered	1	20-year-old woman	Registered
2		18-year-old man	Registered	2	25-year-old woman	Registered
3		42-year-old man	Registered	3	18-year-old woman	Unregistered
4		46-year-old man	Unregistered	4	20-year-old woman	Unregistered
<b>25 male participants</b>				<b>23 female participants</b>		

Legends: 18-35: 33 participants; 36-45: 8 participants; 46 and above: 6 participants; 1 unknown

Although the above table shows a list of 48 participants, the actual number of my research participants was 44. Four participants in individual interviews—a 50-year-old man, a 23-year-old man, a 19-year-old woman, and a 25-year-old woman—were FGD members. Among 48 participants, I interviewed 33 youth and young adults and 14 adults, while the age of 1 participant remained unknown. In the individual interviews conducted after the FGD, I noticed that interviewees felt easier as I already met them in the FGD. In order to find answers to my research questions, participant observation helped me “to know in depth their hopes and fears, their acts and avoidances, their picture of the world,” which have a substantive influence on the

identity construction of a Rohingya youth and young adult (Wax, 1972, p. 8). I found that focus groups were essential in exploring the complex nature of social interactions between participants (Hughes & DuMont, 1993) while semi-structured interviews allowed them to share intimate experiences without feeling constrained by a rigid and closed interview structure (Roulston, 2010).

### **Data Collection**

In total, I spent nine months in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, between 2014 and 2016, for the purposes of this study. I decided to use FGDs and semi-structured interviews with my participants for two reasons. The first, to encourage them express their feelings on the topics they wanted to share and thus limit my control over their expressions. They would feel less comfortable in using survey forms or responding to structured questions due to their level of education. Moreover, my orientation about their vulnerability and cultural practices informed me that they would feel more comfortable in talking in groups—in the form of FGDs—and share their detailed personal stories during individual interviews if interview questions did not confine them. Also, when they used cultural or historical references as part of their conversation—either individually or in a group, I was an active listener—limiting my power and authority as a researcher—to follow what they said and to understand how they connect these references to their social realities. During both FGDs and semi-structured interviews, I was able to ask questions for further elaboration. The second, a researcher is always in a convenient position to keep the participants focused on the topic they address to respond to a question and drive the participants towards a meaningful conversation. It is neither controlling nor manipulating the conversation per se, but facilitating the discussion to satisfy the purpose of the research.

In addition to the interviews and the FGDs, I planned to take photos of non-human elements, such as their homes, schools, and roads, etc., if and when relevant, and review policy materials with the help of the RRRC office, if available. My purpose was to use them as supplementary to my observation and field notes, and to reaffirm capturing every day phenomenon of different events, which often influence the development of a sense of belonging for the Rohingya people. Regarding the use of picture in sociological work, as Zuev and Krase (2017) suggest, photos not only aid sociology in “studying the seen as well as the unseen aspects of social reality” (p. 1), but also allow researchers collect and represent accounts in a neutral way as “they do not reflect the position of the researcher or the respondent” (p. 6). But Taussig (2011), comparing photos with fieldnotes, points out the limitation of using photos as “a photograph captures only the surface, but the notebook gets at the deep truth of things” (p. 109). I would disagree on this because, in my own case, if not in others, one reason for my plan to use photos was to represent the observed in its own way which written texts often fail to tell.

However, because of the strict restriction of the camp management regarding outside people’s movement inside the camp in recent days, I was able to take only a few pictures in the registered camps. I took quite a few pictures in the unregistered camps. My study ended up with almost no policy materials reviewed as the RRRC office and the CIC (Camp-In-Charge) in one camp declined to share any government documents with me. Another CIC, who was fairly enthusiastic and supportive towards my work, gave me a factsheet on the services government provides in the camp. I received this document on the very first day of my meeting with him in early January 2016; it was my last meeting with him too. Next month I learned that he had been transferred to a different place.

No government record was available (as of 2016) regarding the exact size of the unregistered camp and the number of unregistered Rohingyas. It was only in 2017, after the recent exodus, several international agencies tried to find out the size of the camps and the number of the unregistered Rohingya people. Until 2016, it was assumed that the total land area was 3000 acres where more than 300,000 Rohingyas have been living as unregistered in both locations. However, as announced on BBC news on the evening of February 13, 2016, the first census began for the unregistered Rohingyas in Bangladesh on that day. In the field that day, I saw some local people as part of the census team collecting numbers and names of family members of the unregistered Rohingyas at Kutupalong. Hence the sources of statistical data used in this thesis, particularly of registered Rohingyas' number and other services, are the government factsheet and website. Sometimes due to lack of unavailability of data in the government database, I had to count on my participants for some of the information.

### **Analysis Strategy**

I recorded my observations as a journal of fieldnotes on a regular basis during my fieldwork. I consider them evidence of my work. In Taussig's (2011) word, "a fieldwork diary is like a scrapbook that you read and reread in different ways, finding unexpected meanings and pairings as well as blind alleys and dead ends" (p. 47). What he meant was fieldnote is a collection of meanings of accounts in diverse forms—old, new, hidden, clear—that becomes clearer when one reads and rereads them. However, Taussig (2011) also thinks that overfeeding the notebooks with too much data may cause a "sinking feeling that the reality depicted recedes, that the writing is actually pushing reality off the page" (p. 16). I was aware of this, although it was a difficult task to maintain a line of what to include and what to leave.



The first few days were partly confusing, as I was unsure about what to include and what not to. For instance, when I entered the shack of a Rohingya woman at Kutupalong unregistered camp on the very first day, due to the structural weakness of the place, I could not first figure out how to describe it. At night, after returning from the field, what I wrote in my journal regarding this was, “I wondered if it could really be called a house.” Indeed I described it later in my notes but I also recorded this little piece of feeling I had at that time. However, as I got accustomed to the setting and continued my writing as a routine work, it became clear to me that as an ethnographer I would report what I observed and what I felt. My fieldnotes not only documented activities, behaviors—verbal and non-verbal, events, social structures and overall physical setting but also recorded my realizations, impressions, ideas, concerns, and questions around how I observe my participants as well as my participation in their everyday activities.

My fieldnotes supplement the interview and FGD data. A digital recorder cannot record the facial expression or gesture of a participant. It is the fieldnote that includes all these elements. It also included the rich and subtle meanings of their narratives. It helped me identify the patterns I saw in my participants’ expressions and experiences, links between these experiences, and similarities and dissimilarities of experiences between individual participants during the interviews and among group members during FGDs. I took short notes immediately after participating in events such as cooking, cleaning or cutting vegetables in my participant’s shack. Afterward, before those small details and my observation get lost, I elaborated them as soon as I returned from my field in the evening. My detail notes thus became analytic memos as they included both descriptive and reflective notes of my observation.

Methods of writing fieldnotes vary. For my fieldnotes, I actively followed Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein’s (1997) suggestions on what to include in a fieldnote. Accordingly, I included

observation date, time, and location, factual information such as numbers of schools and students in the camp etc., details of the events taking place in the field, observations related to verbal and non-verbal feelings such as whether participants emphasize particular words or phrases, and their body language, the use and effect of sounds, smells, taste etc. queries about participants, and their performances and the site. Examining how Rohingya people's experience of statelessness shape their identity involves both factual information as well as verbal and non-verbal elements related to their language, expression, body language etc. The aim of my fieldnotes was to record as much information as possible to understand their subjective notions of their identity.

I translated the interviews from Rohingyas' Chittagonian language into English, and transcribed all of the interviews and FGDs. I used *express scribe*, a transcription software, to transcribe my data from audio to textual form. While some researchers, instead of transcribing the full audio file, prefer to transcribe partial audio; I decided to transcribe the full interview which was indeed time consuming, yet quite helpful for me to relate to the events that have been stored in my memory. I discovered that while fieldnotes are able to record a wide range of data of the happenings, they cannot capture all the small details accompanied by the narratives which remain stored in the memory. I was able to recall those—such as the nuances of facial expression and body language which my fieldnotes might have missed—through the process of listening to the audio interviews, even after a long time, and transforming them into text.

Since “observations and analysis are interwoven processes in qualitative research” (Babbie & Benaquisto, 2014, p. 373), I analyzed the data thematically to find out the salient themes and patterns from the narratives of interviews and observations. Through a thematic analysis, I was able to reveal the patterns of similarities and differences of data. I used NVivo 10, a software program for assisting researchers in organizing and coding qualitative data, as well as

my own judgement to accomplish my data analysis. Based on the coherence and incoherence as well as potential relationships between and/or among the data, this software program thematically breaks down the transcripts, identifies and labels various concepts through which I was able to interpret the context and preserve the richness of the concepts. However, I did not fully rely on the software. Because of the volume, diversity and richness of my data, I often used my judgement to pick up themes from the narratives related to the concepts such as their living conditions, education, language, family ties etc. The objective of my data analysis was to let the data “speak for itself” to facilitate the process of capturing “all elements of events and experiences, the who, what, and where...or basic nature and shape” (Netland, 2013, p. 85) of the social world of my research participants.

### **Ethical Considerations and Challenges**

Ethnography is a widely used qualitative approach in Sociology and Anthropology, yet the tensions within the tradition of ethnography often raise controversies over trustworthiness and credibility of research, and questions of ethics. First, I briefly discuss ethical challenges, and move onto the ethical procedures I followed in my study.

The studies with refugee youth and young adults as discussed in the section titled “Researching Refugee Youth and Young Adults Using Ethnographic Approach” do not offer clear ideas of how methodological implications of deception, ethical dilemma, over subjectivity or objectivity affect the credibility of the research. One must acknowledge that for an ethnographer avoiding some degree of deception, finding balance between subjectivity and objectivity as well as between being an insider or outsider, and achieving an acceptable level of credibility always remain a challenge. Many of the ethnographic studies confirm that debates concerning methodological issues in fieldwork are part of ethnography. From my research

experience with Rohingya refugees, it can be said that vulnerable population often has heightened expectations of a researcher. As happened with me, after passing almost three months in the field and gaining much of their trust as a researcher, not as a donor or an NGO worker, some of my participants expected me to provide financial support and advocate with the policy makers at the government level and with political leaders to find a solution to their crises. They expressed such heightened expectations despite explaining my position at the beginning of my rapport building with them. Although I understand the reasons of such expectations, remaining completely objective and silent in this kind of situation is too difficult, especially when I have already witnessed their inhuman living conditions and indescribable sufferings. However, considering time and my limited capacity, I had to forcefully convince myself that it would not only be a wrong decision for me to be driven by emotions and try to satisfy their expectations but also would be an ethical violation.

But there are instances when ethnographers connect with their subjects so much that at one point they are driven by their participants' expectations, and decide to study their participants too intimately. Goffman (2014) was accused by Lubet for this kind of study in which she was desperate to examine how hope became a means for her participants to navigate, and assist them to come out of their liminal space. Studies driven by emotions, however, most likely end with creating problems for the refugee population as well as for the research.

In a politically complicated situation, as the situation of Rohingya refugees is, it is perhaps not a feasible act for an ethnographer to try to bring dramatic changes by helping a group of people whose vulnerability is connected to multifarious elements in their social world. Such acts may further heighten their expectation regarding the capabilities of the researcher to eliminate their marginalization that ends with frustration—creating misunderstanding between

the researcher and the participants, making them distrustful of future studies, damaging the objective of the research, and questioning the credibility of the entire project. The aim of an ethnographic research is to expose the situation of vulnerable people to the world to raise awareness of the international community to come forward to eliminate the marginalization of the researched. This way an exchange of knowledge among various stakeholders is possible which can be termed as public sociology that “brings sociology into a conversation with publics, understood as people who are themselves involved in conversation” (Burawoy, 2005, p. 263).

While social researchers raise awareness to help the marginalized people, social research often involve ethical challenges emerges from the “standard approach.” Hugman et al., (2011) argue that research with vulnerable populations, in particular, refugees reveals that seeking to do no harm fails when refugees are often left with further risk by the process of the research. Refugee participants often provide personal information as they trust the researcher and also with a hope that this information sharing may improve their situation, however, at one point they “find that their information is treated like a commodity” (Hugman et al., 2011, p. 1277), and they are simply exploited. In their own words, “We are really fed up with people just coming and stealing our stories, taking our photos and we never get anything back, not even a copy of the report. Nothing ever changes” (Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2003, p. 36). If the objective of ethical research is to safeguard “the rights and feelings of those who are being researched” (Laverick, 2010, p. 75-76), in what ways the standard approach of the existing ethical code of conducts safeguard the vulnerable population? Since power relation and marginalization play vital role in every research, deceiving those who are less powerful is relatively easier.

Although Hugman et al., (2011) explains the reason of such contamination is caused mainly by misunderstanding between the researcher and the researched, it can be treated either as

intentional or unintentional deception. From an ethical perspective, when the participants accuse the researcher for violating privacy and confidentiality, it is a serious concern and suggests that the researcher's lack of attention of their own role in the ethical matters. However, the participant's assumption regarding the informed consent process—whether it is taken seriously or casually by the participant—often blurs the border between deception and non-deception (Hertwig & Ortmann, 2008). Despite all these concerns, Hugman et al., (2011) suggest that because of the social setting embedded in risk, fear, confinement in camp, experience of persecution, and their liminal states, especially for the refugee youth and young adults, that result in multifarious vulnerabilities, “the standard approach to research ethics is insufficient in work with refugees” (p. 1280). While many tend to strictly follow ethical procedures and advocate the process of informed consent, Hugman et al., (2011) point to the limitations of participatory approach that was “developed out of a response to white, Western researchers recognizing their identity and the impact that this has on the research” (p. 1283).

Examples of ethical risks involved in conducting fieldwork in settings with vulnerable populations are common in ethnography (e.g. Humphreys, 1970; Milgram, 1963). Clark-Kazak (2017), in order to deal with the challenges around trustworthiness, ethical conduct with the participants, especially those who are in situations of forced migration, strictly recommends maintaining a set of ethical principles. Voluntary and informed consent, one of the key ethical principles, emphasizes that: “All research respondents must voluntarily and formally consent to participate in research after having been informed of the potential risks and benefits of their participation” (Clark-Kazak, 2017, p. 12). In my own research, I was able to maintain confidentiality and privacy of the participants. I also paid attention to minimize harm and maximize benefits of research.

As a researcher with a background in sociology and anthropology, I oriented myself with the code of ethics of the Canadian Sociological Association (CSA) and the Tri-Council Policy, and the American Anthropological Association (AAA). For this research, I was accountable to York University Ethics Review Board. Following statements affirmed by the Senate of York University, this research maintained the ethical codes of respecting the safety, welfare, and dignity of human participants and treating them equally and fairly (York University Website).

It involved humans who were 18 years old and above, and was guided by the Ethical Principles outlined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (1998). These are: “respect for human dignity, respect for free and informed consent, respect for vulnerable persons, respect for privacy and confidentiality, balancing harms and benefits, minimizing harm and maximizing benefit” (p. i.5-i.6). As this research was aware of fulfilling the requirements for free and informed consent suggested in the Tri-Council Policy (1998), it followed the process of referring “to the dialogue, information sharing and general process through which prospective subjects choose to participate in research involving themselves” (p. 2.1).

Since accessing refugee camps in Bangladesh requires government permission, I was able to obtain the letter of permission from the RRRC office Bangladesh which allowed me to conduct my research in Bangladeshi refugee camps. I submitted this letter to York University Ethics Review Board along with my research proposal after the approval of my proposal by my supervisory committee early Fall 2015. By the end of the term, Office of Research Ethics of York University issued an official letter and informed me that Human Participants Review Sub-Committee had reviewed and approved my research project.

## **Reflexivity, Standpoint and Position**

Reflexivity is linked to the researcher's position, orientation, perspective, authority, and responsibility "through which meanings are made rather than found" (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 414). The use of a reflexive approach points to "being really there"—in the field, and "being really aware" of the effort ethnographers make to capture the reality (Jones, 2010). This is helpful to balance between authority and reciprocity—not to exercise control over the research participants but to emphasize gaining mutual trust between the researcher and the participants so that they freely and fearlessly share their subjective perceptions. Also, by "being really there" and "being really aware," ethnographers take responsibility to describe other's experiences. In simple word, being reflexive means reflecting on the relations between the researcher and the researched, reviewing or looking back to own perception, in order to contribute to the production of knowledge because knowledge is not produced merely by revealing what is out there but also by the way researchers perceive it and represent it. It begins at the moment the researcher enters the research setting. According to Madison (2011), reflexivity is "an act of labor when it self-consciously embraces a purpose toward a greater material freedom for others, beyond and extricable to the self, to enter a caravan of border crossings and discursive risks—beautifully, poetically, rhetorically, and politically" (p. 136). Despite being self-conscious, one should not assume that reflexivity can resolve all complexities and controversies of ethnographic research. Although reflexivity widens the chance of balancing many of the elements of methodological implications as discussed above influence research methods significantly but are often beyond the control of the researcher and raise controversies.

Regarding my positionality during my fieldwork, I noticed that my outward appearance labeled me as "one of them," while my partially different form of dialect identified me as



“other,” making me neither purely an insider nor fully an outsider. However, my partial familiarity with Rohingya’s cultural practices was helpful to understand their cultural references, concepts and expression that generated an intimacy with them. Yet, before I began my fieldwork, it was difficult for me to anticipate their preference to my insiderness or outsidersness, or in-betweenness, and in what ways my reflexivity would harmonize with that position. What I followed in my fieldwork was to “be really there” and “be really aware” of the phenomena that took place in the field to produce knowledge. One may relate the principle of “being really there and being really aware” of the present to Leo Tolstoy’s advice mentioned at the end of his *The Three Questions*, “Remember then: there is only one time that is important—Now! It is the most important time because it is the only time when we may have any power to act.” During my fieldwork, I exercised my “power to act” by participating in my participants’ everyday activities as well as observing, and hearing them in their social realities.

Since one’s self and one’s methods are implicated in the knowledge one produces, the strategies I used, e.g. participant observation and overtness, gave me confidence in my results and that I believe participants were candid about their identity, belongingness, the type of persecution they experienced etc.; and perhaps were less candid about other aspects, e.g. how they obtain a Bangladeshi identity card, as described in the summary section of this chapter. This way I was able to avoid deceiving them and crossing the boundary of ethical code of conduct. In conclusion, because of the nature of my research context, choosing ethnography was helpful in balancing between subjectivity and objectivity, harmonizing between my positions as an insider and outsider, and representing my participants’ dilemma, fear, hope with their identity amid their statelessness.

My interest in “Rohingya refugee crises” grew when I used to work with the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) in Cox’s Bazar from 2003 to 2005. During that time, my job responsibilities required travel in all eight *upazilas* of Cox’s Bazar, which gave me the chance to hear about Rohingyas from Bangladeshi people and see their situation from a running car. After eight years from that period, when I began my journey with Sociology in Canada, the number of Rohingyas in Bangladesh significantly increased by that time, and they were labeled as the victims of mass migration and ethnic cleansing in Burma. They became “troubles” for Bangladesh—a headache for the government, a burden for a densely populated nation—and media headlines throughout the world. It triggered the flashbacks of my travels through Ukhia and Teknaf. I realized that people whom I saw from a running car, and considered “crises” similar to the way Bangladeshi government viewed them, deserve human rights. I may not hold a position to end their difficulties, but my research on them can reveal their sufferings to others and have some influence on decision-makers and advocates, and it is possible only with a close study in their current location. Later, my initial visit to the camps in 2014 grounded the rationale of selecting these places for my research sites.

I was well positioned to pursue this research because of my positionality: being an academic from Canada, a Bangladeshi with status and resource, and being a Muslim woman wearing hijab. Although I felt that they accepted me positively, I noticed that most of my respondents had a tendency of highlighting their existing vulnerabilities regardless of the type of questions I asked. I did not consider it an exaggeration of the situation they were in. I gradually realized that their reason of stressing importance on their situation was to orient me about their situation in case I could help them with my social and/or professional status. My status related to my professional background. Through my experiences and training with the UNDP (United

Nations Development Program), FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN) and UNICEF Bangladesh (United Nations Children’s Fund), I gained skills in communicating with vulnerable individuals, in particular the coastal fishing community in Cox’s Bazar district, and received training on rapport building with the younger generation and women of the marginalized group of population. While working with the FAO from 2003 to 2005 as mentioned in the site selection section, I spent much of this period with the local community in Cox’s Bazar, where I became familiar with the language and culture of the local people.

Being a Bangladeshi by birth, my skills in the native language and familiarity with cultural practices allowed me to understand cultural references and concepts as well as nuances of speech expressions, which are taken for granted. In addition, my familiarity with the norms and practices of Cox’s Bazar made me alert of not roaming alone after the sunset. For example, a woman roaming the streets without any accompanying male at night is not an easily acceptable sight in these areas. Knowing this kind of information before coming to the field is always helpful for an ethnographer to plan accordingly and avoid acts—such as heedlessness and whimsicalness—that do not fit the research context.

Within Rohingya community, particularly when it comes to having informal conversation, initially they prefer to have it within same gender—women with women, men with men. Hence, I was in a privileged position to build rapport with Rohingya women first who later introduced me to the male members in their families. Because of the nature of my site, I noticed that my FGD participants felt more comfortable in sharing personal experiences to me as it created a common platform for them to share their stories of complex nature without feeling any risk or pressure. I cannot guarantee whether I missed subtle expressions or sarcasm or slang during my conversation with them, but I did try “to be really there,” and “be really aware.”

To summarize this chapter, Mead and others' theoretical frameworks of identity tell why Rohingya youth and young adults struggle with the development of their identity. Their liminality and the social condition they are in often create barrier for them to find an answer of the questions relating to their belonging. Considering the vulnerability of the Rohingya youth and young adults, I used ethnographic approach to explore how, amid their statelessness, they perceive themselves and construct their identity.

When it comes to the representation of others' experiences, it raises an inevitable question, in what ways ethnographers accurately represent human behavior in a world which is neither static nor fixed, rather is embedded in multiple realities. While such quandary and challenges are common in ethnography, I chose an overt type of fieldwork due to my research context. First of all, my participants are the world's most persecuted community. Except a very small number of the registered ones, all of them are unregistered and live in the makeshift camps amid untold suffering which has already been labeled as "the biggest refugee camp" (Sengupta & Fountain, 2018) in the world. Secondly, they have already experienced worst forms of betrayal and violence in Burma. Only an overt research can minimize the risk of further betrayal for this kind of vulnerable group. Following an important principle of ethnography—representing what is out there—my research focused on how participants perceived and expressed their perception of their social reality, regardless of what was right or wrong, and why was their behavior neither static nor fixed. However, despite employing participant observation in an overt research, having some forms of limitations in collecting data is a common phenomenon.

Although I adequately emphasized openness and rapport building, I noticed that a few participants were reluctant to give accurate information about their age, family members living abroad, steps they followed to obtain a Bangladeshi voter identity card, remittances received

from relatives staying abroad, or hiding their identity as registered Rohingya while accessing health service at the hospital established for the unregistered Rohingya etc. From this experience, I learned that accurate representation of human behavior would perhaps always involve some limitations despite the openness of the researcher. As an ethnographer, I did not aim to investigate the truth, but I did aim to represent the truth I found in my field.

I now present the reflexive account of my fieldwork, the excerpts from fieldnotes, and the main findings based on my participants' viewpoints. The following chapters present Rohingya's living situation inside and outside the officially recognized refugee camps in Bangladesh, their social world full of inequality and stratification, their Rohingyaness within their unsettled identity and lack of social citizenship, and also community building efforts of Rohingya people.

## CHAPTER 5

### STATELESS LIVES

This chapter describes the lives of stateless Rohingyas in the camps in two parts. The first part provides factual information and a brief history of the origin of Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh. It also describes the structural aspects of registered and unregistered camps. The second part offers a comparative scenario of the living conditions of the Rohingya people in the registered and unregistered camps, which serve to provide a basis for the focus of Chapters 6-7 on why some Rohingya youth and young adults try to hold onto their ethnic identity.

#### **History and Description of Rohingya Camps**

Literature shows that an estimated 250,000 Rohingyas sought refuge in Bangladesh between 1991 and 1992 (Abrar, 1995; Milton et al. 2017). Initially the government of Bangladesh thought that a bilateral meeting with Burma would be helpful to resolve the problem. The situation, however, soon became unmanageable due to the arrival of an increased number of Rohingyas in Bangladesh. Gradually, assistance and intervention from donor countries and the UNHCR became essential.

After several dialogues and negotiations with the Bangladeshi government, the UNHCR and international relief agencies opened twenty-one makeshift camps in Cox's Bazar to accommodate the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. At present, there are two government run temporary camps in Bangladesh, as nineteen camps have been closed. These two camps are in Nayapara and Kutupalong, located respectively in Teknaf and Ukhia *upazila*, at the southernmost tip of Bangladesh (see Chapter 4). Although the Bangladeshi Government website shows that several organizations—such as the UNHCR, the WFP, Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS), Technical Assistance Inc (TAI), Research Training & Management international

(RTM) and Action Against Hunger (ACF)—are involved in providing services to Rohingya refugees (Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief website, May 2014), literature indicates that Rohingya refugees, in fact, have been living in a vulnerable situation (Pittaway, 2008), which is multiplied by their non-citizenship status.

There are debates about what served as the basis of a small number of Rohingya refugees being granted temporary residence and becoming designated as “registered,” while a large number of them remained unregistered. I shall clarify the definition of the terms “registered” and “unregistered.” Immediately after the influx of Rohingyas to Bangladesh in 1991, the government provided them shelter and relief. Soon the government realized that Rohingyas would need long term support. Due to the lack of policy in place, the government then recorded Rohingyas’ names, along with family information, included them in the government data system, and provided them with shelter and other services. The registered camps are government operated. Since then, the Rohingyas have been known as registered refugees. At the same time, a series of forced repatriations took place during 1992-1994 that pushed a large number of Rohingyas to Burma. But because of insurmountable violence against Rohingyas in Burma, most of the repatriated ones came back to Bangladesh. These Rohingyas became and remain unregistered under the Bangladeshi government as they have never been officially acknowledged by the government. They formed their own camps adjacent to the government-operated registered camp in both Ukhia and Teknaf. The registered camps receive support from the government, the UNHCR, and other national and international agencies. Except for a few interventions by some NGOs regarding health and sanitation, the unregistered camps receive nothing, and yet manage to survive.

Before presenting the factual information of both types of camps, a brief description of the pattern of climate in Bangladesh will be helpful to relate to Rohingya's challenges and survival strategies with Bangladeshi weather. It will also show whether rain is really bad, as often reported by media, or there is any other factor that causes their sufferings.

The climate of Bangladesh consists of high temperature, heavy rainfall, excessive humidity, and moderate cold. The country is located in the tropical monsoon region. It is a country of mostly flat land with partial hilly regions. Climatic differences in different parts of the country are minor. I grew up reading in the textbooks, and experiencing the same as well, that Bangladesh was a country of six seasons namely, *Grishma* (Summer), *Barsha* (Rainy), *Sharat* (Autumn), *Hemanta* (Late Autumn), *Shiit* (Winter) and *Bashanta* (Spring). However, due to the rapid climate change and unplanned urbanization, it is now a country of three seasons: the pre-monsoon hot and muggy Summer from March through May, a hot rainy monsoon from June through November, and a warm-cool dry winter from December to February.

Maximum summer temperature in Bangladesh range between 38°C and 41°C (100.4°F and 105.8 °F). The average winter temperature for most part of the country range between 16°C and 20°C (61°F –68 °F) throughout the day, and nearly 10 °C (50 °F) at night.

While monsoon adds beauty to the lush green foliage, it causes suffering to the poor people, such as Rohingya community, in Bangladesh. Each year, excessive rain destroys hundreds of makeshift shelters, damages the pathways, causes landslides and mud-walls slides in the unregistered camp. Often large areas of the camp remain underwater for several days due to constant downpour. Yet, Rohingyas rebuild their shacks with whatever materials are available in the nearby forests and localities and survive until the next monsoon hits.



Media, along with government and non-government agencies, blame the monsoon for all the damages and destruction it occurs. However, one needs to know that excessive rain hardly causes any damage to the registered camps, such as making the roads slippery, even the Leda unregistered camp is much less damaged by rain. What conclusion can be drawn from this? It is simply the poor infrastructure work of Kutupalong unregistered camp which accommodates the highest number of people yet remains unplanned, unsupported and uncared from the beginning. In order to supply the raw materials for their shacks in this camp, nearby hillside forests have already been denuded of trees making the underlying soil vulnerable to landslides, particularly during the monsoon. A CNN news story on the consequences of the first monsoon rains hitting the fragile camps of the Rohingyas writes, “With the flooding and accumulation of stagnant water, water- and mosquito-borne diseases are all more likely to spread because of the refugees' severely overcrowded living conditions and very poor sanitation” (McKirby & Watson, 2018). The division created by the registration process of the government of Bangladesh is mightier than monsoon to cause sufferings to the unregistered Rohingyas at Kutupalong camp, which are detailed in the next chapter. I now present the factual information of both the unregistered and registered camps.

### **Unregistered Camps: World’s Largest Camp, a *Taal*?**

Kutupalong and Leda are two unregistered camps located 36 km and 68 km away from Cox’s Bazar town, respectively.

The unregistered camp at Ukhia is known by the name of its local area Kutupalong. It is over populated—chaotic, clumsy and sprawling—have sprung up without any planning. Batattiston (2018) calls the city of the Rohingya “a different, unexpected world.” There are multiple entry points to the camp, which indicates how vulnerable and unprotected this place is.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, Kutupalong’s unregistered camp is locally known as *Taal*. It is shapeless, unorganized, and insecure. The muddy roads inside the camp intersect and climb up and down the hills that are inhabited by the Rohingyas. The “homes”—shacks—are built of plastic sheets and bamboo sticks. At the end of the camp, there lies a thin forest that ends at the shore of the Bay of Bengal. “Kutupalong is not only the biggest refugee camp on the planet, with a population of 1 million and counting, it’s also the most densely populated” (Altman, 2018)—ahead of Dadaab or Kakuma in Kenya.

The unregistered camp at Teknaf is also known by its local area, Leda. This camp is relatively organized and on flat land, yet is situated in an almost similar environmental setting—thin forest and ocean at the end of the camp.

The following comparative scenario of the size of population in some of the world’s most populated refugee camps from 2014 until 2018 confirms the position of the refugee camps in Bangladesh:

1. Dadaab, Kenya: 235, 269 registered refugees as of January 2018 (UNHCR, 2018)
2. Bidibidi, Uganda: 272, 206 refugees as of July 2017 (ReliefWeb, 2017))
3. Kakuma, Kenya: 185, 449 as of January, 2018 (UNHCR, 2018)
4. Zaatari, Jordan: 78, 994 as of February 2018 (UNHCR, 2018)
5. Kilis, Turkey: 210, 000 as of February 2014 (McClelland, 2014)
6. Together at Ukhia and Teknaf, Bangladesh: 900, 000 as of March, 2018 (UNHCR, 2018)

The above figures tell why the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh are “the world’s largest.”

There are 40 schools at the Kutupalong unregistered camp that are run by the local NGOs. The unregistered Rohingya youth and young adults serve as teachers in the schools. There are tubewells and latrines set up by local NGOs. A hospital run by the MSF (Medecins Sans Frontieres) is dedicated for the unregistered Rohingyas. Though unemployment is acute among this community; there are some exceptions. Some of the unregistered Rohingyas, for example, are employed by the local NGOs who undertake construction projects such as building

drains and toilets, watertight seals to protect landslides etc. within the camp. Others are able to work as laborers in agriculture, or in small industries and grocery shops in the nearby villages, which are owned by the Bangladeshi people. There are a few tubewells in each block at Kutupalong unregistered camp, but the residents have to line up for the toilets or tubewells as there is no private washroom in the camp. Sometimes the waiting period is longer. However, they have trained themselves to lower the times they need to go to the toilets because these are located in open space, and a 10-minute-walk from their shacks. They try not to use the toilets at night because of the distance and also because of the lack of electricity. They would rather wait to use the toilets until it is dawn.

In the past, the Leda camp residents received housing support from local NGOs. The homes are organized in rows in a relatively cleaner environment. Local NGOs set up latrines and garbage stations for the residents. Unfortunately, there is no school in this camp. Children only go to *madrassa* which are set up by the residents themselves. *Madrassa* are the religious institutions where curriculum barely has any connection to mainstream education curriculum as these institutions are operated by the Rohingyas alone. The most difficult part of living in Leda camp is the ongoing water crisis. Due to geological conditions, the ground of the camp is filled with hard stones where setting up tubewells is extremely challenging. This causes long queues for water at the collection point where water is stored by the local NGOs and supplied to the residents only twice a day. Similar to the residents of Kutupalong camp, Leda residents also struggle with their extremely limited scope of employment although they, too, are able to find their sources of income outside the camp.

## **Registered Camps: Supported by the Government and the UNHCR**

Like the unregistered camps, both Kutupalong and Nayapara registered camps are known by the name of the local areas of this part of Cox's Bazar district. Both camps began their operation in 1992. Services improved and increased gradually. The distance to Kutupalong and Nayapara registered camps is 36 km and 70 km from Cox's Bazar town, respectively.

Kutupalong registered camp accommodates 13,985 registered Rohingyas in 2,620 families as of 31 July 2017 according to the government record available on the website. The camp compound is situated on 75 acres of land. The Kutupalong CIC did not share much information with me nor did he provide me with any factsheet of the camp during our meeting. However, it was confirmed by my participants at Kutupalong registered camp that they receive similar support as do the residents of Nayapara registered camp.

There are eleven primary schools offering education from Grades 1 to 5, and one secondary school offering education for Grades 6 and 7 as of March 2016. After the completion of Grade 7 in the registered camp, children are not legally allowed to enroll in Bangladeshi schools outside the camp. Out of the total 2972 primary students at Kutupalong registered camp, the number of male and female students in the primary schools are 1426 and 1546, respectively. Among the 483 secondary students, there are 267 males and 216 females. Shared tubewells and toilets are available for residents. A significant number of government agencies are involved in providing services to the registered Rohingyas. Although I did not receive any document from this camp, the same agencies are engaged in providing services in both camps. Therefore, information included in the factsheet of the Nayapara registered camp presented below gives an idea of the type and number of agencies engaged at Kutupalong registered camp.

Nayapara registered camp is situated on a land of 85 acres as shown on the government website. It accommodates 19,557 registered Rohingyas in 3,709 families as of 31 July 2017 according to the government record. Available facilities at Nayapara, according to the factsheet I received from the CIC (Camp-In-Charge), include a library, community technology access, a 26 bed hospital, 108 garbage pits, 955 latrines, 415 bathing units, and 69 water distribution points. Many families have private tubewells and toilets located within their house premise. The factsheet also shows that there are 12 schools within the registered camp. The number of students in these schools is 3,760 comprised of 1,820 males and 1,940 females. Similar to Kutupalong camp, the children studying in this camp's school are not permitted to get admission into Bangladeshi schools.

In both camps, the government, in collaboration with the local and the international NGOs, ensures basic services in terms of food, shelter, clothing, education, health, drinking water, sanitation, and skill development training. Other than basic services, both camps receive different types of services from the UNHCR, international agencies WFP, WHO, UNFPA and a number of local NGOs. These agencies mainly distribute non-food items and nutrition supplement, provide education and health services, assist in self-help activities such as home gardening, tree planting, tailoring, carpentry etc. From the perspective of an average condition of housing in rural Bangladesh, homes in both registered camps fulfill minimum standard requirements for the residents.

Table 5.1 uses the information from the government factsheet showing the types of supports given by the government and the UN agencies at Nayapara registered camp.

Kutupalong registered camp has the same.

Table 5.1: The staff number and activities of government agencies in the registered camps

SI	Agency	Ministry/ Department	Responsibilities	Staff
1	Camp-In-Charge (CIC) office	Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief	Maintaining law and order, Voluntary repatriation, Shelter and infrastructure Water management, Protection and resettlement, Overall coordination	22
2	RHU (Reproductive Health Unit)	Ministry of Health and Family Welfare	Running Out-Patient-Department (OPD) and In-Patient-Department, Health education, Immunization, HIV AIDS prevention, Referral patient, Laboratory, Pharmacy	38
3	Police	Bangladesh Police	Assisting the CIC, Ensuring security Communicating to Police Station	21
4	Ansar	02 Ansar Battalion	Assisting the CIC, Ensuring security	90
5	BGB (Border Guard Bangladesh)	42 BGB Battalion	Assisting the CIC, Ensuring security	20

Table 5.2: UN agencies and their activities in the registered camps

SI	Agencies	Activities
1	UNHCR	Funding, Protection, Voluntary repatriation, supplying non-food items, resettlement
2	WFP	Supplying food items, supporting Food For Training (FFT), Supplying biscuits to school children, monitoring food distribution
3	WHO	Immunization program
4	UNFPA	Funding at In-Patient Department (IPD) of maternal health

Based on the above brief description of the structural characteristics of the registered and unregistered camps, there are reasons to worry about the consequences of living in the *taal* as opposed to living in the protected camp. The next section describes the tragic part of the Rohingyas' life in the unregistered camp, which can barely offer necessary social conditions to Rohingya people for their development of the sense of self.

## **Rohingya Life: A Story of Inequality and Stratification**

The Rohingyas' sense of belonging and experiences of statelessness are very much tied to the structural and functional aspects of their lives inside and outside the camp. Although media and scholars repeatedly use the term "unregistered camp" to indicate a place where the Rohingyas live, there is actually no such officially known "camp" for the unregistered Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. It is true that the Bangladeshi government did not kick this group of people out of the country and force them to jump into Naf river, nor did it undertake a project of chasing out, burning out, murdering and other forms of persecution of the Rohingyas. However, the Rohingyas, except a small handful of them, have remained unacknowledged and unregistered from the beginning, which amplifies their susceptibility. The unregistered camp is nothing but the clusters of makeshift shacks on government owned vast and bare land, once uninhabited, adjacent to the registered camp, unbounded and unprotected.

The previous section showed the type and amount of support the registered Rohingyas received while the unregistered have remained uncared and unsupported for a long time. They are nowhere in the government database. Lately, a few Bangladeshi NGOs have started providing support for health and sanitation. A few international agencies have started providing occasional relief assistance. But the amount of services is inadequate compared to the need of such a large number of population. The lack of support and their unacknowledged status puts them into an extremely difficult situation. Within the same community one group receives support from the government and the UNHCR, and the other does not. It markedly stratifies the lives of Rohingya. They are the people who were once uprooted and displaced from their own place in Burma. Now when they have found a temporary place to live, their experience of statelessness is exacerbated by the stratification and unequal class structure created by the

government of Bangladesh. Their statelessness and socially stratified situation, particularly for the unregistered ones, are the clear signs of the lack of membership of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

This section elaborates on how becoming Rohingya and stateless—permanently or temporarily—is affected by their stratified camp life and their lack of membership. In other words, how this is the same or different for unregistered vs registered Rohingya youth and young adults. It also discusses what they have access to and what rights they have/do not have. In this section, I show in what ways unregistered ones are more vulnerable than the registered ones. The first part begins with the discussion on the unregistered Rohingyas and is followed by discussion of the registered ones. This section includes my reflexive account of my fieldwork.

### **Unregistered Rohingyas: Helplessness caused by Inequality**

**The beginning.** The first time I entered the unregistered camp was on a February morning in 2016. I took a walking trail—an unpaved pedestrian path—that began where the registered camp ended. My destination was Kutupalong unregistered camp. There are several pathways to access the unregistered camp—as I came to know later—but based on my memory of visiting this place in 2014, I took the one that went through the registered camp. I headed towards my destination without knowing the right direction. It was a hilly area full of brown sandy soil—dry and gritty—yet surrounded by trees. As I was walking through the path, which was a combination of slightly steep and gentle slopes, I saw Rohingyas passing by—some were staring at me. I was able to recognize them as “Rohingyas” because only this path takes one to the unregistered camp; Bangladeshi people do not use this path.



I noticed a woman in a black *burka*<sup>2</sup> whose entire body—except her eyes—was covered; she was carrying some vegetables in a plastic bag and walking along with me in the same direction. I then asked her whether this path went to the unregistered Rohingyas' place. She responded positively, and said that she was also heading there. We kept walking together; we walked down the hill, crossed the public bathing place with its few tubewells under the open sky beside the public toilets. After we crossed a narrow bamboo drainage ditch bridge, which had a safety fence made of dried tree branches on one side, we reached the unregistered camp. I found the bridge unsafe due to its rickety and shaky nature, and became extra careful and cautious to cross it. I noticed that the unregistered camp began where the bridge ended. We passed almost 8 to 10 shacks on both sides of the muddy way, and finally arrived at her “house”. She got the key from her waist under her burka, opened the fragile bamboo-made doors of her *ghar*, and invited me in. Later, she, a 25-year-old woman, became one of my participants.

It was a dim and extremely hot place where I could not stand straight up. She noticed me stooping. It was not because I was too tall. The height of the doorway and the interior of the shack was about little above four feet, allowing one only sitting or lying down inside it. Later, I found that most of the shacks in the unregistered camp were built in a similar way using minimum amount of materials to minimize the construction cost. She quickly dragged a plastic chair for me in this semi dark room, took a hand fan and sat on a stool in front of me.

By this time, my eyes adjusted to see in the low light in the room. Little holes of the torn plastic and bamboo roof let some light come in. I took the handmade fabric fan from her hand and started fanning her as I saw her sweating too much. She looked ashamed of having fanned by me. Perhaps this is first time in her life she has been fanned by a stranger, or a Bangladeshi. At

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<sup>2</sup> According to Oxford Dictionary, Burka is a long, loose garment covering the whole body from head to feet, worn in public by women in many Muslim countries.

the door, I noticed a small crowd of women, her neighbors. The 25-year-old woman started introducing me to her neighbors. A young woman came forward confidently and invited me to come to her “house” in the same block. Her invitation in nearly standard colloquial Bengali indicated that she, by that time, understood that I was an outsider. She, later, also became a participant and a helpful informant in my research. We all moved to her shack. After entering, I understood why she brought me there. This shack had higher ceilings, about six feet height, and the room had some ventilation. It is a small room made of clay, perhaps eight feet by ten feet, divided into two chambers by bamboo walls—one for sleeping, the other for cooking and washing. We sat beside her sleeping baby, perhaps an 8-month-old, lying on the floor mat. Small talk began. Soon, it turned into serious conversations; there were a few deep conversation starters in the group. Different aspects of their life as refugees in the unregistered camp came up.

**Living conditions.** Their housing conditions become deplorable when it rains. Heavy downpour not only fills the drains and ditches passing through their shacks but also weakens the mud walls of those. In the previous rainy season, the mud walls of many Rohingya shacks were collapsed. For some, the leaky plastic roofs and broken bamboo partitions of their shacks made it impossible to protect their kids from the rain and the storm. The ground remained wet and slippery for several days as rain water came inside through the holes of the plastic roof of the shack. Almost all unregistered Rohingya refugees have similar experiences with their housing problems. The 25-year-old unregistered Rohingya woman—a mother of 3 children—expressed her concern about the coming summer, which is accompanied by the heavy rain and storm:

The summer is coming, I am worried about the storm, our shacks are so weak, but how to build a strong home, whether we will fill up our stomach or save money in empty stomach, I don't know who will give us money...

This narrative is echoed in a 19-year-old woman, whose shack is relatively in better condition:

I don't like rains because children can't go outside and my house is...you see the condition of my house. We can neither stay inside it nor go outside during a storm, and we can't go to work if it rains heavily....sometimes we starve when there is a storm or heavy rainfall, people even die when roofs or walls fall down.



*Photo 1.5: Inside Kutupalong unregistered camp, One of the main walkways lined with the larger homes towards the far end of the camp. Photo: Ishrat*

Photo 1.5 shows a fairly cleaner and wider walkway inside Kutupalong unregistered camp. The Rohingyas use this path in their everyday life. While this photo shows a smooth walkway, Photo 1.6 shows sloppy walkways which is common for most part of the same camp.



*Photo 1.6: Walkways and toilet at Kutupalong unregistered camp. Photo: Ishrat*

One can imagine how the sandy sloppy walkways in Photo 1.6 would look like during the rainy season. In this photo, 2 four chambered shared toilets are found, which are located little away from the mud-shacks covered by black plastics and dried leaves. Photo 1.7 gives a better view of one of the many walkways inside the Kutupalong unregistered camp.



*Photo 1.7: Sloppy walkways between the clusters of shacks, at Kutupalong unregistered camp. Photo: Ishrat*

The mud shacks in Photo 1.5 are located at the end of the camp. The width of these shacks is twice the width of the shacks of my two participants—a 25-year-old woman and a 19-year-old woman. The door heights are also better, nearly six feet height. There is no drainage system in this area. Rain water is soaked up by the dried soil within a short time unless there is a constant heavy rainfall, which may last even for a week making the walkways muddy and slippery. One of the main reasons of the structural differences of the homes/shacks between this place and the entry point of the camp is environmental. I had to climb up a few hills to reach this place (Photo 1.5). It is located on a hilly land, much higher than the ground level. But it is

relatively flat than the pattern of the land near the entry point of the camp. It is easy to build wider mud shack in this type of land (Photo 1.5) than on the sloppy land (Photo 1.6, 1.8). I learned from my participants that Rohingyas living in this side (Photo 1.5) of the camp arrived much later than those living near the shack of the 25-year-old woman. The front side of the land, near the shacks of Rohingyas whom I met at the beginning of my fieldwork, was occupied by Rohingyas who came earlier. The late comers built shacks in the hilly part as shown in Photo 1.5.

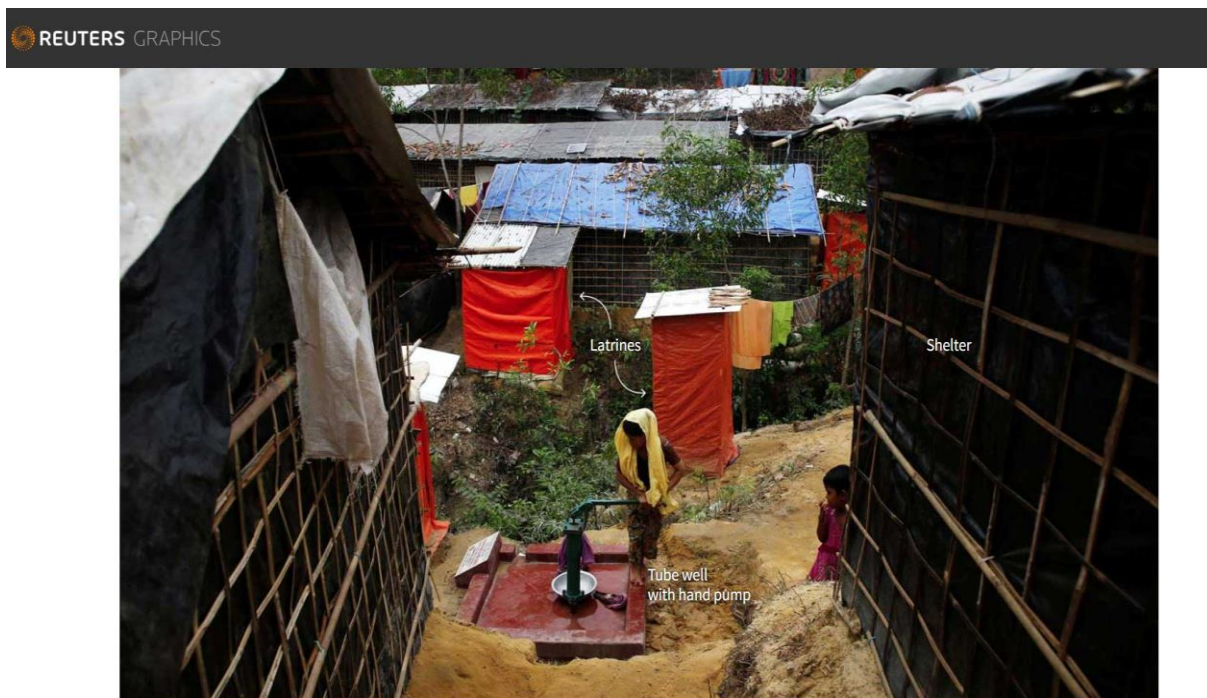
Photo 1.8 shows one of the most common walkways near one of the entry points at the Kutupalong unregistered camp; dirt flowing through in front of the shacks. Unlike Photo 1.5, Photo 1.8 shows sloppy and hilly land. Clearly, shacks in this place are much smaller in size and more congested. Plastic bags full of sand are left near the doorway so that they can step on them when the walkway is flooded by rain water. In Photo 1.8, an entrance to a participant's shack is visible on the right side of the picture (beside the blue tarp), which is less than five feet height. It is completely dark inside, with no windows. Bamboo chips, plastic sheets and mud are used as construction materials to adjust the shape of the shacks with the sloppy land. They collect these materials free from the nearby forest and hills.



*Photo 1.8: Inside Kutupalong unregistered camp, Photo: Ishrat*

Most children in the unregistered camp are barefooted unless they attend a special event such as wedding in the camp. The muddy stairs on the right side of the Photo 1.8, in front of the entrance of the shack where the little girl is leaning to the blue plastic, are often used as a common place of social engagements—a hangout—for neighboring women, usually in a small group of three or four. Instead of entering a dark shed, they use this place both for sharing gossip and engaging in arguments.

The tubewells and toilets at the Kutupalong unregistered camp are often located in inconvenient places.



*Photo 1.9: Image of tubewell accompanying number of tubewells established and gone out of order within a month*

Photo 1.9 indicates the lack of minimum living standard at the camp. The tubewell provides facilities for showers and washing clothes in a literally publicly open space. Using the toilets at night is difficult due to the lack of light. There are a few tubewells in each block at Kutupalong unregistered camp. Photo 1.10 gives an idea about what a tubewell looks like. In this

camp, the tubewells were set up by the local NGOs recently, as shown in a December 2017 report. They soon, however, became out of order.

ESH



### Water pumps

Access to clean water is critical in congested refugee sites. Tube wells should be drilled to a depth of at least 150 metres to reach aquifers free of contamination. By mid-October, more than 4,800 tube wells with hand pumps were installed. As of Nov 26, a third of wells were broken or dried up.

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*Figure 1.10: A Tubewell*

People line up for the toilets or tubewells due to the lack of a private washroom. The unregistered Rohingyas live with extremely limited resources. It often reminds them of their status as refugees and their restrictive entitlements. Some of them had big homes in Burma with a large backyard, private toilets and tubewell in each family. Yet, they consider them privileged to have public toilets and shared tubewells because the other unregistered camp at Leda does not even have any tubewell.

Both Kutupalong and Leda unregistered camps are divided into seven blocks. My study could not trace out the history of the origin of the block division. What most of the participants pointed out was the involvement of the local political leaders in dividing the camps into blocks and nominating block-leaders. The block leaders are locally known as *majhi*. Each block has its *majhi*, always a male Rohingya, selected by the block residents. The task of the *majhi* is to look after the problems the residents face, and help to find solutions to those. The tragic part is, the *majhi* has very little power to resolve the crises. Because he has no authority, no acceptance to

the local administration, not even to the CIC. *Majhi* is only a silent representative of the community—a community that is unrecognized, unaccepted, uncared and stigmatized. Hence, he is unable to get support from anyone outside the camp.

Ullah's (2011) study shows that “the average household size in the camp is six to seven persons, however, the dwelling size remains constant regardless of family size” (p. 152) because of the limited space. Their population increases each year, but the place remains the same. It indicates their statelessness that impedes the unregistered Rohingyas' minimum standard of living; it forces them to live in an inhuman living condition.

The division between the Rohingya community separates the families, too. A 24-year-old man who lives with his wife and children in the unregistered camp is an example of the division. His father is a registered refugee who lives around 20 minutes walking distance from this 24-year-old man's house, albeit in the registered camp. But the distance between two families is immeasurable. His parents came to Bangladesh in 1991. The 24-year-old man was born in Bangladesh. His father's name was included in the list of forced repatriation of the Rohingyas during 1991-1992, which compelled him to escape. By that time, his father married another Rohingya woman. To avoid force repatriation, his father escaped with his second wife, leaving his first wife and the children uncared. In few days, the 24-year-old man's mother and her children were forcefully repatriated. They returned to Bangladesh after a few years. In the meantime, the government of Bangladesh started a registration process for the Rohingyas. Using social networks, his father was able to include own name along with his second wife's in the list of the registered Rohingyas, which left the 24-year-old man and his mother unregistered. Upon coming back from Burma, this young man and his mother began their lives as unregistered Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. When grew up, he married to an unregistered Rohingya



woman and started living in the unregistered camp. His mother also married to an unregistered Rohingya man, and the couple started living in Bandarban, a hilly district in Bangladesh, approximately 130 km away from Cox's Bazar. One registration process has created multiple divisions within one community. Although the 24-year-old man has sporadic contact with his registered Rohingya father, he (the 24-year-old man) is expected to maintain distance from the registered Rohingyas because of their (unregistered Rohingyas') unregistered status.

Among other challenges of their living condition water crisis is crucial. Despite living on a flat land, the unregistered Rohingyas at Leda face acute water crisis. The water pitchers are always found lined up by Leda residents to collect water at the water collection points (Photo 1.11). Due to the nature of the soil in this location, setting up tubewells is extremely difficult as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Beneath the surface, there is plenty of hard stones in this area which cause scarcity of water. In 2007, UNHCR introduced water reservoirs both for registered and unregistered Rohingya refugees at Nayapara and Leda camp. Water is collected from a lake, purified, and supplied through a few supply units from the reservoirs twice a day, 7am and 3pm. However, water collection points are quite far from Leda camp causing another serious problem for the residents, especially for women who are mainly responsible for collecting water.



*Photo 1.11: Inside Leda unregistered camp, photo: Ishrat*

On the right side of Photo 1.11, blue plastics with bamboo chips are the closed doors of the toilets. The lower part of this structure is made of brick and the roof is made of tin with bamboo chips in the middle—much improved structural facilities compared to the Kutupalong unregistered camp. The height of the house on the left side of Photo 1.11 is also remarkable, one does not need to bend down to enter it. Moreover, the use of tin at the roof and bamboo chips in the middle makes this house stronger than the ones at the Kutupalong unregistered camp. Many homes in this camp follow nearly similar structural pattern. Camp residents use public bus and CNGs to as means of transport between Nayapara and Leda. I had to ride a local bus from Nayapara, which took 10 minutes to reach Leda camp. Despite being a highway, the road between Leda and Nayapara is considered unsafe for common people because this is a haven for the traffickers and kidnappers.

At Leda camp, homes are pucca (cemented floor). Seven years ago, an NGO named Muslim Aid gave cement bags to the residents for cementing the floors of their homes by the residents. Later, it was learned that all residents sold out the cement for money. After some days, Muslim Aid came again and cemented the floors of their houses. Although the floors are cemented, the walls and roof of most of the homes are made of bamboo chips and a few had tinshed homes in Leda camp. The homes at Leda are organized. The grocery and clothing stores are located on both sides of the road which is connected to the entry point of the camp.

Considering the housing pattern, a wide and clean drainage system, garbage collection points, a well-constructed *pucca toilet* system, Leda unregistered camp seems to be a better living place compared to the Nayapara registered camp and the Kutupalong unregistered camp, except the water crisis.

Collage 1.12 shows road conditions inside the Leda camp.



*Photo 1.12: Inside Leda camp. Photo: Ishrat*

In the above Collage, the colorful plastic mats being dried under the sun in Photo 1 were provided by the NGOs. My participants received these as relief items distributed some years ago. Usually, blankets and mats are the two main items NGOs distribute to the residents of this camp. In Collage 1.12, while Photo 1, 3 and 4 shows brick pavements inside the camp, Photo 2 shows one of the few unpaved muddy paths near one of the exit points. Conditions of the homes are mixed—the ones built later look strong while the old ones look fragile and flimsy.

**Hunger, a common problem.** The unregistered Rohingyas in both Kutupalong and Leda are trapped in hunger. One day, when the participants left after an FGD was completed in the 25-year-old woman's shack, she invited me to join her at lunch. Initially I had thought to have my

lunch by myself. But I changed my mind to have an experience. That day, all she had for five persons—my participant, her husband, their little son, her 6-year-old sister and I—was some rice, an egg, four pieces of fried eggplants, and some bottle gourd leaves. Immediately I gave her money to buy some eggs from the nearby store. In the meantime, I started helping her with cutting the leaves into pieces and washing them. Together we cut onions, garlicks, green chilies to add to the vegetables. Soon her younger sister came back with eggs. By that time, the husband also came back from work. She and I cooked the leaves and fried the eggs in her clay stove. We all sat on the floor mat to eat. Because of the nutrition facts and tastes, the bottle gourd leaves are one of my favorites which are rare in Canada. While I was enjoying them, I noticed that her sister was not really eating after she finished the egg, she was simply moving her little fingers in those leaves. I encouraged her to eat them explaining their health benefits. The elder sister then disclosed the reason: the younger sister does not like them much because this is one of the cheapest vegetables they can afford, and they eat them almost every day. I felt very sorry for the little girl. Later, I learned that they did not have chicken in their menu for several weeks. Dry fish and vegetables are the only usual items they consume. Hunger is a serious problem in this community. The 25-year-old woman also shared her family's struggle to manage food with little income: "it's not sufficient at all, sometimes we can't manage food for all of us. We borrow money from others to feed our kids. They don't see fish and meat for a long time".

After that day, I decided to take some food for the families in the unregistered camp in my next visit. Accordingly, very often I started taking vegetables, onions, potatoes, cooking oil, eggs, spices, snacks, cookies etc. for them from the local market on my way to the unregistered camp—sometimes for one family, sometimes more than one. Four eggs, half kilo of eggplants, half kilo of dry fish, half liter of cooking oil, 250 grams of onions, 250 grams of garlic, 250

grams of ginger, and other common spices like turmeric powder, chili powder, cumin powder, coriander powder, 1 kilo of salt – these are sufficient for preparing a meal for 3 to 4 persons in a family. Extra spices, oil, salt can be saved for the next day. Sometimes my grocery bag also had 1 kilo of mixed vegetables and 1 kilo of meat which were sufficient for a meal of a family of 5 to 6 members. However, I soon realized that it cannot be a solution to the hunger crisis of a huge group of population. Yet, I continued as much as I could but I remained careful and selective in carrying food for my participants. I prioritized barely surviving families, and families with more children, younger children. It was impossible for me to feed all of them. On the other hand, I tried to make sure that my generosity to some—who are in extremely poor conditions—is not perceived as my unfairness to others. In some situations, I explained my reasons of bringing food for some, and my limitations of not bringing for all.

While the struggle with managing food is a common problem for the unregistered Rohingyas, this poor community does not hesitate to borrow and spend a large amount of money on food when it comes to celebrate a “special occasion” in their families. For instance, the food arrangement in a 52-year-old man Rohingya’s family on the occasion of her daughter’s nose piercing was beyond my surprise. In Bangladesh, in the past, any typical middle-class, or even rich, family used to organize this kind of event in a very homely atmosphere, without spending much on food. At present, piercing is treated as an act of personal choice, and often the family members even do not know about it. However, the 52-year-old unregistered Rohingya man did not hesitate to invite his neighbors and relatives of the camp in his daughter’s nose piercing festival. It was a daylong event. They hired colorful shamiana, and a ceremonial tent shelter from the local market and set them on the narrow front yard of their shack. The place was in a great festive mood with music, foods and soft drinks. Although I was an invitee to this ceremony, I

gave a hand to others in peeling a large bowl of boiled potatoes to add to the chicken curry. I recalled, the other day a 52-year-old Rohingya man told me that he had a burden of a big amount of debts, and had no money for his treatment of his leg. Still, they were in party mood that day.

Later, I learned that these were part of their ethnic traditions. They bought 15 kilo beef, 10 kilo chicken, 150 eggs for the festival. I did not dare to ask the amount of rice, oil, spices etc. The event also included dance with Hindi music. As I was leaving, I was wondering about the justification of such lavish spending on nose piercing in an extremely poor family. Next week, his wife told me that their daughter from Malaysia sent them money to celebrate this occasion as it was the youngest daughter's nose piercing in their family. Although my participants were not much interested to talk about remittances they receive, their neighbors—who participated in my study—informed about this. It is not possible for other Rohingya families to organize this kind of events unless they have strong financial sources, remittance. By the way, receiving remittances is more common in the registered camp rather than in the unregistered camp.

On the one hand, they struggle with poverty. On the other, they do their best to maintain the customs of their ethnicity. The Rohingyas, who grow up seeing their parents' desire to follow their ethnic practices, feel connected to their ethnic traits. This is a process of socializing the younger generation. The continuation of such processes shapes the Rohingya people's world in conformity with their ethnic practices.

The unregistered Rohingyas receive no food support—neither from the government of Bangladesh nor from NGOs—except some recent initiatives taken by a few NGOs. They provide free healthy-baby food such as semolina but no food support for the adults as shared by a participant: “for us, the NGOs set up toilets, tubewells, and gave some facilities for treatment too, but none gave us food.”

During Ramadan and Eid-UI-Adha (the second important religious festival for the Muslims), Turkish Red Crescent sends them meat and other food items as relief. In the past, Turkish Red Crescent also sent blankets. Unfortunately, the interference of the local political leaders in the relief distribution process often makes it difficult for the unregistered Rohingyas to receive the relief items. Sometimes the Rohingyas do not even see the items that arrived for them.

**Health and hygiene.** Similar to the living conditions and food supplies, unregistered Rohingyas express grave concern about their access to health. The predominant health problems are related to the substandard living conditions in the unregistered camp. According to Refugees International, a USA-based advocacy organization providing services to refugees, malnutrition rates in one unregistered camp were double the emergency threshold in 2013, with 30 percent of the camp population malnourished. This is echoed in Pittaway's (2008) study which highlights their poor health conditions that include insufficient food with a very limited water supply where tuberculosis is prevalent along with skin diseases, respiratory problems, high fever, poor eyesight, and the physical manifestations of rape and torture.

A hospital was founded by the Medecins Sans Frontier (MSF) for the unregistered Rohingyas. The complex is located outside the unregistered camp in Kutupalong—beside Dhaka-Teknaf highway. Unregistered Rohingya refugees do not really get necessary medicine or advice when they go to the hospital. Rather, in most cases, they wait the whole day and at the end of the day come back without even seeing a paramedic. In a 20-year-old man's words, "MSF hospital opens at 8 am and shuts down at 4 pm. If I reach there at 8 am, sometimes I come back at 12 pm, even sometimes at 4 pm."

In most cases, patients are given *paracetamol as a common medicine*. The hospital staffs do not behave well with the unregistered Rohingya patients. Serious cases are referred to other hospitals by the MSF due to the lack of adequate treatment facilities at MSF. Regarding the quality of health services at MSF hospital, a 25-year-old woman says:

We wait in the long line at MSF. Sometimes they give us medicine, sometimes we come back without medicine. Their service is not good. On the other hand, we have to see outside doctors if there is any serious health issue. But that is too expensive.

What happens when MSF refers serious patients to other hospitals such as childbirth cases? The 19-year-old woman responds:

When MSF fails, they refer the case to the Cox's Bazar hospital. Unfortunately, the hospital pays little attention to normal delivery, it prefers cesarean. And if Cox's Bazar hospital fails to deal with it, the patient is sent to Chittagong, and that's the last point for us to reach for health services.

From Chittagong, which is approx. 170 km away from Ukhia, no unregistered Rohingya patient is referred to Dhaka, the capital city, even if there is a need. Depending upon the severity of the patient's condition, public transport such as bus or rented microbus are used as means of travel. However, the MSF pays for expenses required by the referred patient.

At MSF hospital, there is always a line of 30-40 patients, most of them are women with kids, sitting on the wooden benches in a rectangular waiting room with a tin-roof on bamboo poles, and no wall on its three sides. The waiting room is located after the entrance. It turns extremely hot in summer because the tin-shed roof absorbs the heat easily and makes this place feel like an oven. I find a similarity between my observations during my MSF hospital visit and the experiences of the unregistered Rohingyas. From block B3 at Kutupalong unregistered camp, it takes a 15 min walk to reach the hospital. There is a receptionist at the front desk. He is a Bangladeshi, seemingly annoyed with the patients and not paying attention to them. Before one is finished with her problems, he calls the next patient hurriedly.



My participants such as the 20-year-old man, 30-year-old woman, 25-year-old woman, 19-year-old woman, and most of my FGD participants complain against the services offered by this hospital. Yet, this is the only place to go for free health services. Although the purpose of the hospital is to serve the unregistered Rohingyas, in practice, it is dedicated to the registered Rohingyas and local village people. In order to avoid the crowd in the registered camp hospital, the registered Rohingyas go to the MSF hospital. They get privilege at MSF hospital over the unregistered ones. My FGD participants unanimously agreed with what one of them said:

They (local reach people) are welcomed by the security guards and the doctors at MSF while we keep waiting. They are very rich, and they come here for free treatment. But everyone knows that this hospital serves the unregistered refugees. We were exploited in Burma and have been exploited in this country too

**Education.** Parents in the unregistered camp are concerned about the future of their children because the Rohingya children grow up with little or no education. Grade 3 (roughly equivalent to Grade 3 in Canada) is the highest level of education for an unregistered Rohingya child. There are 40 schools in the camp. Unregistered Rohingyas who complete their education up to level 7 (roughly equivalent to Grade 7 in Canada) in the registered camp's schools, work as teachers in the unregistered camp's school. The registered camp approves the education of the unregistered refugee children in the registered camp's school. This may sound strange, yet what my participants inform is, many years ago UNHCR advocated with the Bangladeshi government for the unregistered Rohingya children's education. Since then one of the registered camp-schools has been running a free of cost evening-shift program for the unregistered children up to grade 7. However, the government did not want to dedicate this program only for the unregistered children. Registered Rohingya children who perform poor in the day-shift are asked to join the evening shift, along with the unregistered children. In addition to continuing education in the registered camp school, some unregistered children receive private tutoring from the

registered Rohingya youth and young adults, and eventually they (the unregistered ones) become teachers in the unregistered camp schools. As an unregistered Rohingya, a 24-year-old man shared his story on pursuing education in the registered camp:

I continued my study for over three years after coming to Bangladesh. My father arranged my admission to a private school, bought books for me...brought *ballo shikkha* [elementary book in Bangla that introduces alphabets to the children]. Then I was sent to a relatively better private elementary school which was named AAA. We used to study 5 subjects...no, 6 actually, such as Quran, Bangla, English etc. including Burmese. I along with other students did not really pay attention to learning Burmese. Because we used to think that Burma's situation is worse, what we would do learning Burmese language? I used to think that I would have to try hard to make my life better as much as I can. I then started learning Bangla, English in the AAA school and continued my study up to Grade 9, although privately.

By private schools, the 24-year-old man refers to registered camp schools. These schools are unapproved by the National Education Board (NEB) of Bangladesh. After grade seven, he continued receiving education individually from registered Rohingya teachers, and thus completed course curriculum up to Grade 9, secretly. The young man did not continue further study.

In this camp, many students continue going to Grade 3 for several years as they have no way to go beyond that. A UK based organization has been funding for the schools. Teachers maintain email communication with the funder when needed. For instance, teachers were not paid for January 2016 because of a conflict between the teachers and the local school management committee. A group of teachers informed the situation to the funder emails. In response, the funder contacted the local school management. As a result, the local management soon suspended two suspected teachers for contacting the funding authority. However, because of the united protests of 37 teachers against the decision of the suspension, the management assured them to soon withdraw the suspension. It took a few weeks to revoke the suspension.

No written record is available with the unregistered Rohingyas on how the schools began.

The 19-year-old woman gives a quick overview of how the school started:

At first...okay, we had a supervisor named Master Iqbal who was fluent in Burmese, Rohingya, and Bengali language...he studied in Burma. After coming to Bangladesh, he started to collect children one by one...He started to work tirelessly, he was a really nice person, you will find him on facebook, we respect him because if he hadn't taken initiative, we would not have schools in the unregistered camp. He is our teacher. He had set up schools for the first time in our community, perhaps... in 2006.

Did everyone accept his work positively? She said:

Oh no, in order to stop him, he was even beaten up by people, let alone the different types of obstacles created by others. But he continued it privately. One day a visitor...may be an NGO staff, came here, videotaped the school program, and took the video to a foreign country. After watching it, an international organization came forward to help us...to expand the school activities in the unregistered camp. First, a small house was built where children used to come to study. There was no black board to write on, so they used the mud wall of the classroom as black board, and coals as chalk to write the alphabets. This is how the school started. Now there are 40 teachers in the unregistered camp. But after our supervisor was changed, a complicated situation has emerged...Master Iqbal was sent to jail due to conflicts among ourselves, we fought for him and freed him, later he went abroad.

This young woman used the term "Master" to refer to that individual as a highly respected person. I was not able to collect enough information about the international NGO, and Master Iqbal, and their role in making education available for the unregistered Rohingyas.

At this point, it is necessary to clarify that the term "grade" is not a widely used term in Bangladesh, rather they call it "class". The unregistered Rohingya camp uses the NEB approved text books. Apparently, except computation strategies, the standard of curriculum to some extent is close to the Canadian curriculum for corresponding Grades. However, the standard of curriculum does not matter for the unregistered Rohingya children. Because of multifarious challenges with their present unregistered refugee status and uncertain future in Bangladesh, benefits of education remain beyond their reach.



*Photo 1.13: Inside an unregistered school at Kutupalong. Photo: Ishrat*

Photo 1.13 shows a classroom environment in an unregistered camp school. Construction materials of the classrooms include mud, thatch, water, bamboo and plastic. Most schools are shaped as rectangular huts. All of these are huts, mud homes, with approximately 160 sq feet space, and with a door, and, in most cases, with no windows. Some of the classrooms have two to four small windows through which sunlight and air enter the room (Photo 1.13). In Photo 1.13, the floor apparently looks like a paved floor. But both the walls and the floor are made of natural earth plaster made of clay. Both the interior and exterior clay plasters are done by hand in an efficient and environment friendly way. The clay plaster makes the classroom suitable to absorb the rain water, reduce hot during the summer, and increase warmth during winter. However, there is only one classroom in each school at Kutupalong unregistered camp—with insufficient light and without any furniture. Students carry their own plastic bags to use as a mat to sit on the floor. There is no electric or solar powered bulb inside the classroom. Natural light is the only

resort. Despite all these poor infrastructural system with limited education facilities in the unregistered camp schools, Kutupalong unregistered camp's Rohingya children are luckier than the ones living in the Leda unregistered camp. Because Leda camp has no school, except a few *madrasa*—religious teaching centers with no connection with mainstream education, and with little resemblance to actual religious teachings.

**Employment and freedom of movement.** Employment and freedom of movement of the unregistered Rohingyas are restrictive. They are not officially recognized in Bangladesh—rather are “illegal migrants” according to the Kutupalong CIC. The magnitude of Rohingya's struggle and sufferings for survival are doubled by their employment and movement restrictions. Some manage to find work with local NGOs as contractual/irregular workers inside the camp and nearby villages, while others manage to go to another city in search of work despite the restrictions.

A 30-year-old widow with four children, has no regular income. An extremely skinny woman with heavy eyes, she looked exhausted and worn out. She seemed much older than her age. She and her husband came to Bangladeshi in 2005, and started living in a Bangladeshi village near the camp. Her husband was murdered by Bangladeshi villagers in 2013. As she was fully dependent on her husband, she did not care much about what was going on outside the house. She was at a loss when I interviewed her. A few years ago, she joined the ACF (Action Contre La Faim), an NGO working with the unregistered Rohingyas, where her job was to feed nutrition to the babies. She continued there for a year. One day, without any prior notice, the NGO informed that the program has been changed, so she was no longer required. If needed again, they would contact her. Her unemployment forced her to send her 10-year-old son to work for earnings:

Finding no alternative, I had to send my elder son to a job to earn money, it's a tea stall where he works now. He earns 1000 taka per month. Can you tell me how to manage everything for a family of five with this little money each month?

A thousand taka, equivalent to roughly \$16 in Canadian dollars, would buy her items such as 22 lb rice (the cheapest brown rice) =300 taka, 2 lb lentils=120 taka, 1 liter cooking oil=100 taka, the cheapest vegetables (bitter melon, egg-plant or green beans, pumpkin, okra, gourd leaves, spinach etc.) =200 taka, 2 lb dry fish=200 taka, spices-80 taka. These are the simplest and minimum items a family can eat, which exclude meat, fish, eggs, and milk etc. All these make one meal a day for the 30-year-old woman's 5-member family for ten days only. How to survive the rest of the twenty days of the month? Moreover, working at a tea stall is not an easy task for a ten-year old boy. A description of a tea stall is perhaps necessary here.

A tea stall is a place of social gathering where tea is prepared and sold, sometimes with light snacks. Tea is one of the most popularly consumed and widely available drinks in Bangladesh. Tea stalls are usually opened by 7 am and continues until evening with a break during the lunch hour. Snacks, such as buns, small cupcakes, bananas, drinking water, beverages, chips, cookies etc., are always in stock to go with tea upon the customer's order. Children from the poverty-stricken families come to work as teaboys. Tea stalls are often made of bamboo chips with wood or tin walls, and thatched roofs. In the rural areas, clay burners or kerosene oil stoves are used to boil water for making tea.

A teaboy's task is to stand beside the burners, look after a large silver kettle with hot water on one, and a round saucepan with milk on the other. He makes tea instantly upon the order of the customers. In areas like Kutupalong, tea stalls are small, a roughly 20 square feet place, with wooden benches at the front. While the owner keeps a record of the number of cups of tea sold, and receives money from the customers, the teaboy remains busy in making and

serving tea to them. Despite the risk of burning out his hands when pouring boiled water from the kettle, he keeps making tea from the morning to the noon, or even in the evening as long as there are customers. Stall owners are not much concerned about child safety, wage rates, etc., as this is an informal job, and there is none to monitor child safety or wage issues in a remote area like Kutupalong. Wages of teaboys depend on the location of the stall and the age of the boy. If the location is in the purely rural areas where low income people live, and is inside the Rohingya camps, a teaboy earns very little. Regarding the age of a teaboy, the younger is the better for the stall owner. He does not need to worry about the wage of a teaboy if a teaboy is poor and young with no power of negotiation.

Women in my FGD group echo what the 30-year-old woman, the teaboy's mother, says:

In order to meet up the basic needs of their family young children, after or before their school, work outside the camp to ...these are odd jobs...even kids who are too young also work in the store or tea stall.

The 30-year-old woman thinks about starting a small business, but she cannot do it due to the lack of capital.

Making fishing nets is a common source of employment for some of the unregistered Rohingyas. They learn this skill by seeing how others do it. For a 25-year-old woman, it took 3 months to make the first net that was sold for 1,000 taka. According to her, the standard length of a single fishing net is 12-14 feet, which takes a few months to complete. But it takes longer for her as she has to do all kinds of household works such as cooking, washing, looking after children etc. Therefore, making fishing nets is not a good source of making money to run a family as she stated: "it's not sufficient at all, sometimes we can't manage food for all of us. We borrow money from others to feed our kids. They don't see fish and meat for a long time. What to do?"

Rohingya women are not expected to work outside their homes because of stereotypical ideas on gender roles. Some of them, however, have to work outside their homes to support their families. The 19-year-old young woman provides an account of the type of work unregistered Rohingya women do to earn a living:

Some women go outside for earning...some work in Bangladeshi people's land to collect vegetables, some work as helping hands in local people's residences, some just stand beside the road and beg, some sell clothes in association of the local clothing stores.

Men in the unregistered camp often go outside the camp area to work and earn. In a 20-year-old man's words: "I work outside, building and repairing people's houses, fencing their lands etc." His wife adds that sometimes he earns 100 or 200 taka a day and they survive somehow. There is no formal hiring process in the job market. Clusters of unregistered Rohingyas are found every day sitting beside the Kutupalong Bazar early in the morning. The Kutupalong Bazar is a Bangladeshi market where everything, from brooms to jewelry, is available. The market is located beside the Dhaka-Teknaf highway near the official entrance to the Kutupalong registered camp. Many participants acknowledge that both registered and unregistered Rohingyas, along with Bangladeshi people, either work as salesmen or suppliers of products in this market. Therefore, waiting beside the market to be hired by the employers is a common phenomenon for Rohingyas. Bangladeshi employers choose the workers they require. The 20-year-old man elaborates,

It's like when you purchase vegetables, you ask the price, right? Similarly, when we... say 10 people gather together somewhere near the bazar [the market], they [employers] come and ask us whether we are interested to work at his farm or land or house. If I say yes, wage negotiations begin between the employer and me. He may want to give me 300 taka while I ask for 400...this way we come to an agreement. We ask them what kind of jobs are available with him, and the person may tell me that he has jobs like cutting earth [earthmoving], building fences of houses, etc. If it fits my expertise, I accept; otherwise I wait for the next hirer and he approaches the next worker.



The above narrative is an example of a verbal contract of employment between an employer and an unregistered Rohingya. No one is available to offer legal support for the workers if the contract is violated. Because of their ‘illegal’ status, their payment of wages very often ends up falling through the cracks. The 20-year-old man’s wife explained that her husband worked for 15 days, but later he had to walk a long way to get the due payment. The 20-year-old man adds that at present his employer owes him 10,000 taka for several days of work. But the employer denies that. The 20-year-old man shares a recent experience:

I worked in a poultry farm at Maricchya [approximately 4 km away from the unregistered camp]...cutting earth [earthmoving], fencing the farm, etc. My payment was supposed to be 4,500 taka for 15 days. He gave me 2,000 taka and asked me to allow him some time to pay the rest. After a few days, I went to see him, but he was like I don’t have money now, it’s the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month, come back on the 5<sup>th</sup> for the money. I went on the 5<sup>th</sup> again. He said the same thing that he did not have the money. I told him that my parents were sick, I don’t have anything at home to feed my kid, please give me my money. He did not give me any money and did not even ask me to see him again.

Participants such as a 52-year-old man, and many others also have similar experiences. They admit that they go to work outside the unregistered camp and are exploited by the employers. But working with local NGOs, such as ACF, is safer, as the 52-year-old man states: “Yes, they give priority to those who are unregistered. I have been working with them for the last seven years... setting up toilets or tubewells inside our camp.”

A 40-year-old man, although an unregistered Rohingya, was able to manage to get a job and a piece of land to build his own mud house at Ghoom Dhoom, a nearby village in Kutupalong. He is a religious education teacher in a local academy established in 2009.

According to this 40-year-old man,

All these things are happening because of our lack of citizenship. We are not citizens, meaning we have nothing, no rights. None of our people are allowed to enter a job, like police, army, or whatever, and all the problems are rooted in this... in our lack of citizenship.

**Safety.** Although the vulnerability of the unregistered Rohingya refugees is exacerbated by their unsecured life, my participants have mixed experiences regarding safety and security in their everyday lives. For some, those registered are “the people of UNHCR, and the government of Bangladesh” because “they are supported by them [UNHCR and the government of Bangladesh], and we came late, so we were not included in the registration process.” According to my FGD participants in the unregistered camp,

If a kid from the registered camp is beaten up by a local villager, UNHCR will go and stand beside that kid, and resolve the matter in favor of the refugee kid, but in our case if the entire *taal* [unregistered camp] is burnt down, nobody is there to support us. We have no place to go for justice.

Lack of security is a crucial issue. People live in an unprotected place in a hilly area near forests and sea, making it convenient for the miscreants to do harm to this helpless community. A 19-year-old woman, and other participants too, acknowledged that nobody evicted them as of the day we met, yet as in Burma, they have been oppressed in Bangladesh as well, though not on a regular basis. In the unregistered camp, Bangladeshi people come at night and abduct unregistered Rohingyas from their shacks. Then they call the families of the abductee asking for money. The abductee is released if money is sent, but otherwise is killed. Such abductions include both men and women. Furthermore, women are raped and tortured by the gang.

Their safety is at stake in day time too when they are outside their unregistered camp, perhaps going to work or coming back from work. In the name of security checks, border guards often harass them, send them to jail, and claim payment. In the 19-year-old woman’s words:

The main problems occur at the check post. You know the Maricchya check post [approximately 4 km away from the unregistered camp], they [the security force] ask a lot of questions, like why you are here, what’s the purpose of your travel, and then if you can’t convince them, you are sent to jail. A large number of our Rohingya people are in jail now. And if we can’t pay, he will remain in jail for an uncertain period.

Despite abductions by local people and ill treatment by the security forces, some of the unregistered Rohingyas consider Bangladesh a safe haven compared to the extent of persecution took place in Burma. The 19-year-old woman is one of them:

One thing you know, here we have poverty, we have no house, no food at home, yet we can go to sleep with our children at night safely. These are the reasons that make this country better than our own country.

This 19-year-old unregistered Rohingya woman was born in Burma, and came to Bangladesh just after a few days of her birth. In her words, “I came to Bangladesh with my parents when I was like 30 or 40 days old, I heard about the insecurity and persecution in Burma from parents.”

The 40-year-old man, who has a positive impression about living a secured life in Bangladesh, came to Bangladesh in 2000. He was able to own a home in the nearby village soon after his arrival in Bangladesh. This is why he seems happy with the security in Bangladesh: “The villagers are very nice, they never cause any harm to me, I feel safe here, there is a police checkpost here, they know me and have good relation with me.”

In his view, safety and comfort are part of the life in Bangladesh, because the heart of the Bangladeshi people is full of compassion. He uses the example of Saudi Arabia and Malaysia to show how other countries deal with people without legal resident status:

Look at Saudi Arabia, if they find someone without a passport, what they call iqama, they will immediately force you to leave their country. Same thing applies for Malaysia. You will see the same thing in other countries. Only Bangladesh is an exception...people can't live this way in other countries as they do in Bangladesh.

An iqama is a government document issued for the expatriates. This document is a proof of legal residence in Saudi Arabia. After coming to Bangladesh, the 40-year-old man initially started living in the unregistered camp. He soon started to look for an alternative place because of the poor living conditions in the camp, and found a place close to the camp. The place—unoccupied and government owned— was 30minutes away from the Kutupalong bazar on foot, and is close

to the Ghomdhom police checkpoint. He is happy to live with his family in his “own” home, which has a large, and welcoming front yard and a backyard.

I now turn to the registered Rohingyas’ situations in both Kutupalong and Nayapara registered camps. Following section shows how registered Rohingyas’ living conditions, and support from the government, the national and the international NGOs differentiate the registered Rohingyas from the unregistered. It also shows the dimensions of the registered Rohingyas’ vulnerabilities.

### **Registered Rohingyas: Stratification Ensures Better Conditions**

**Living conditions.** Registered Rohingyas’ living conditions are remarkably different than those of the unregistered Rohingyas, mainly because of the structural set up. While many of the registered Rohingyas’ homes at Kutupalong have muddy floors, some have cemented floors too. The Nayapara registered camp has a different scenario; most of their homes have cemented floors.

Each registered Rohingya home at Nayapara has a living room. This is not a fully furnished or well decorated type living room, yet a space with a floor mat, or a few plastic chairs and a table, a portable fan on a side table, and sometimes a wooden bench to sit on. All of these elements are beyond imagination for an unregistered Rohingya. Registered Rohingyas’ homes are made of tin and bamboo, both at Kutupalong and Nayapara. I did not come across any mud house in the registered camps. Each house has at least two rooms apart from the kitchen. Although they share tubewells and toilets, the location of these facilities are convenient for the families. Some even have private tubewells and toilets. Life in the registered camps is peaceful for several reasons, such as receiving all kinds of support from the government, UNHCR and

other NGOs, being able to work outside the camps, receiving remittance from the family members living abroad etc.



*Photo 1.14: Outside of Nayapara registered camp. Photo: Ishrat*

Nayapara registered camp is located beside Dhaka-Teknaf highway. In the Collage 1.14, photos 1, 2 and 3 show a few signboards beside the highway. These photos hold the faded away names and logos of the Bangladesh government, and the international organizations who have been supporting Rohingya refugees at Nayapara registered camp in Bangladesh. Photo 1 shows the name of Canada near the bottom right corner. Canada was the first country to accept Rohingyas from Bangladeshi camps in 2006 (Champassak, 2007). 303 Rohingya from Bangladesh resettled in Canada between 2006 and 2010 (Kiragu, Rosi, & Morris, 2011, p. 32). A small grocery on the left side in Photo 3 often serves as a social interaction point for the registered Rohingyas. There is no residential area in close proximity to the Nayapara registered camp. Yet this is an important bus stop. A commonly used local vehicle known as CNG

(Compressed Natural Gas) is seen in Photo 4 along with a motorcycle facing the camp. It takes a 2-minute-walk to reach the camp from where the CNG is positioned. The tin-shed homes under the big trees on the left side in Photo 4 are for the security staff who are employed by the government of Bangladesh to look after camp security.

A 42-year-old registered Rohingya from Nayapara camp describes the changes taking place inside the camp. Since his arrival at the camp in 2004, this Rohingya man has been noticing changes in the living conditions of the camp residents:

The way we live now...like the homes were different back then...it's much better now and...you see the turning points on the road that go inside the camp, there are solar lights at each turning points now, so you are not in the dark at night, and...we have pucca roads now [mostly made of cement, sand and bricks] while all the roads were kutchra [made of mud and some amount of stones] in the past.

Gradual improvement in the infrastructure of Nayapara is evident in this account. The registered camp has street lights while the unregistered camp does not even have light in their shacks.

**Free food card.** The registered Rohingyas in both the camps have food cards. It was introduced in 2015. Although many Rohingyas think that this was done by the UNHCR, food card has been given to the registered Rohingya families by the WFP. A Bangladeshi national newspaper, the Daily Star (September 13, 2014) reports on this<sup>3</sup> quite clearly:

As per Bangladeshi law, the Rohingya refugees are not allowed to go outside of their camps for shopping. They only can buy items from the registered food shops inside the camps for a certain amount of money. The costs are borne by the WFP. There are six food shops in the two refugee camps, said WFP officials. Under the new system, the refugees will get eight more items -- potato, semolina, green leaf, dried fish, onion, garlic, chili and turmeric. Earlier, each Rohingya family maintained a log to collect rice, pulses, sugar, salt and oil. Each family will be allocated a Food Card and each member of the family will have over Tk 700 loaded on the card for a month. Whenever a cardholder will produce the Food Card at a shop, the staff there will check the card with a machine for the balance amount in it. Once the shopping is complete, the staff will adjust the amount from the card balance. To prevent misuse of Food Cards, fingerprints of cardholders will be stored in a database and it will be verified during every purchase of commodities.

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<sup>3</sup> The Daily Star, September 13, 2014: <http://www.thedailystar.net/food-cards-for-32-000-rohingya-refugees-41471>

The factsheet of Nayapara registered camp shows that the government provides basic food ration of 2,160 kilo calories per person per day compared to the standard 2,100 kilo calories. WFP supplies food items, supports programs on food for training, provides biscuits to school children, and monitors food distribution. WFP's food distribution system has no provisions for the involvement and interference of the local political leaders. Residents are happy with the food distribution system in the camp. The food card ensures access to free food for every family member. Therefore, residents do not need to spend money on food unless they desire to have a food item that is not listed in the card. The residents often sell the surplus food items to the unregistered Rohingyas and the local villagers.

The food card includes items such as rice, pulse/lentils, vegetable oil, salt, sugar, dried fish, fresh spinach, potato, onion, garlic, turmeric powder, chili powder, green chilis etc. The card provides them a variety of non-food items, too. The non-food items include compressed rice husk, kerosene, soap (bath and laundry), tooth powder on monthly basis, and mosquito net, floor mat, blanket and clothes, which are given on a yearly basis.

Food security may seem greater in the registered camps but this is not always the case. While most of the registered Rohingyas have no complaints about the food distribution system, a few of them complained about the amount and the quality of food. In their view, the little ration they receive through the food card is insufficient for a family. Moreover, they have the same food every day: a small bread and tea for the breakfast, rice and dal accompanied by eggs or vegetables for the lunch, and some snacks in the evening. In one of my participant's metaphoric words, "a bird living in the cage cannot eat whatever it wants to eat because it is bound to eat whatever is given to eat. But when it is free, it can look for its own food."

Clearly, his urge for a life with freedom and dignity is reflected in his narrative. Yet, in terms of food, the registered Rohingyas are in a better position compared to the unregistered ones. But they rarely acknowledge it. Rather, a few of them think that they are still in crisis of food because, in a participant's words, "we get rice but don't get fish, we get food but don't get clothes". The factsheet given by the CIC of Nayapara registered camp, however, shows that clothes are included in the list of non-food items, and are distributed annually among them along with blankets, mosquito nets etc. A few registered Rohingyas even envy the unregistered Rohingyas because they (the unregistered ones) receive occasional food items through international relief initiatives. A 20-year-old woman at Nayapara registered camp is one of them. Her husband lives abroad, and she lives with her son in her father's family in the camp. Being a food card holder, she is upset for not receiving the occasional relief items that arrive for the unregistered Rohingyas, a community having no free food card:

20-year-old woman: they don't have it (food card). But they often get help from people who come from abroad [Turkish Red Crescent]

I: you don't get those help in the camp?

20-year-old woman: no, no, we don't. Once we got little, but most of the reliefs go to them

Despite complaints with food, the value of a food card is immense to any registered Rohingya refugee as it ensures access to free food.

**Health.** There is a hospital in the registered Rohingya camp for its residents. Another was under construction as I saw during the early 2016. Yet they often rush to the MSF hospital to avoid bribing and long waiting period in the registered camp's hospital. The registered Rohingyas are given priority when they visit MSF hospital.

The 42-year-old man from Nayapara registered camp thinks that it is their status that lowers their dignity, and their disadvantaged position that makes the hospital authority apathetic



towards them. He recalls the hospital authority's disgraceful and humiliating behavior towards Rohingyas refugees:

Let me give you a practical example. [He rolls up his sleeves to show me a lump on his right arm] it has been on my arm for last 4 years, I went to them [to the hospital] for 4 to 5 times, they gave me very ordinary medicines, they told me that it's nothing serious, come later...I feel ashamed to go there again and again, but... [lowers his gaze] it's like they serve against their will, and they know that we continue visiting the hospital because we have no alternative, we keep nagging because we forget our dignity.

The Nayapara registered camp factsheet shows that 38 staff on behalf of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of the government of Bangladesh are engaged in providing health services in the camp. They offer an Out-Patient Department (OPD) and In-Patient Department (IPD), the immunization program, HIV/AIDS prevention, referral patient, and laboratory and pharmacy facilities. In addition, the government approved local NGOs also look after Rohingyas' health issues. For instance, the ACF is responsible for nutrition, the Growth Monitoring Program (GMP), mental health and hygiene promotion and sanitation. RTMI looks after reproductive health, referral services of refugee patients, family planning, anti-natal and post-natal cares. HI is responsible for logistic support for handicapped refugees, Primary Rehabilitation Therapy (PRT), and preventive eye camp. Above all, there is World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA) to oversee the immunization program, and ensure the funding at IPD of maternal health.

All these programs give priority on maternal care, as a 20-year-old woman from the Nayapara registered camp states:

Their service for maternal health care is better than the regular health services. When the situation of the patient is very complicated, the hospital refers him/her to Cox's Bazar, even to Chittagong; and they usually refer the patients when they are almost dead. Often patients die when they are on the way to the referred hospitals at Cox's Bazar or Chittagong, just because of the delay caused by the hospital here [in the camp].

The registered camps have the physical structures dedicated to providing health services. Yet, the quality of the services raises questions, and many of them have the same answer, “In simple word, there is no health service for us.” Poor health services in the registered camp hospital involves limited resources and corruption. Would having another hospital resolve the problems?

A registered Rohingya’s response:

Yes, a new hospital is in progress, but...let me share my experience. I fought a lot for the better treatment for the women, old people, and children. The doctor is such a...we are poor Rohingyas, I proved it that once he took money from the patients to refer them to a better hospital, but he did not do so. He is still in the hospital despite his corrupt acts have been proven. Where would we go? He took bribes from an old woman who has been suffering severely for a long time!

I was curious to know whether it happened inside the camp. He continues:

Yes, inside the camp. I am talking about the doctor in the camp hospital. He is the medical team leader. He took money from an old lady but the lady did not get services. I was block leader at that time, so she told me everything. I took this issue to the magistrate. Each month we have a coordination meeting...UNHCR and Bangladesh government people remain present in the meeting. I raised this issue in the meeting and proved it clearly. But nothing happened! He [the doctor] secretly offered me 50,000 taka to convince the lady to give false statement. I refused it. But he resorted to conspiracy and proved that the old lady was wrong, and he is still in his job in the hospital!

According to the registered Rohingyas, the camp hospital provides poor treatment, and takes bribes from the patients. That is why they go to the MSF hospital, which may not provide satisfactory services, yet does not receive bribes from the patients. But registered Rohingyas are reluctant to admit that they go to the MSF hospital:

I: Don’t you go to the MSF hospital?

A 23-year-old man: we are not entitled to go there. That hospital is for the unregistered ones

I: oh really? But I have heard that the registered ones are given priority than the unregistered ones in that hospital

A 23-year-old man: that is for the unregistered refugees

I: sure, but what I am saying is I have heard that although that hospital is for the unregistered refugees, it actually serves the registered ones

A 23-year-old man: we can't tell them that we are registered, we have to keep it secret that we are registered. Otherwise they would tell us that you guys have a hospital in the camp, why do you come here. The number of unregistered refugees is much more than ours, that's why it is for them. Also, local poor people go to that hospital for treatment.

Both registered Rohingyas and Bangladeshi people visit MSF hospital for free treatment.

**Education.** The government of Bangladesh prioritizes “education” for the registered Rohingya refugees. Rohingya children in the registered camps, however, are allowed to receive education only inside the refugee camps up to Grade 7. After that they are neither allowed to go to Bangladeshi schools nor are able to utilize their certificate in Bangladeshi job market.

There is no such law denouncing their access to Bangladeshi schools but it is implied. Due to the lack of proof of identity, they have no access to education in Bangladeshi schools. According to the government website, there are 23 schools in two camps—21 elementary schools and 2 middle schools. Earlier it was Save the Children that used to fund Rohingya's education in the camp, now CODEC, a Bangladeshi NGO, implements the education program under the support of UNHCR as my participants from registered camp informed. Education program in the camp expanded gradually throughout the period of 1992 to 2000. Although education inside the camp is free, it is available only up to Grade 7.



Photo 1.15: three Bangladeshi textbooks and a Burmese textbook.  
Photo: a 20-year-old male research participant

Photo 1.15 shows three Bangladeshi textbooks and a Burmese textbook for Grade 1 students in the camp school. These are, as shown in the photo, 1, 3, and 4 are Bengali, Math, and English book, respectively, and 2 is a Burmese book. While the first three are approved by the Bangladesh government, the Burmese book is made available with the help of a local NGO. Rohingyas do not/rarely speak Burmese. Yet, the reason of including Burmese book in the curriculum is to establish the claim of the government of Bangladesh that Rohingyas are the Burmese citizens, and they have to return to Burma. This is why they should learn Burmese. Interestingly, they are taught Bengali, too.



*Collage 1.16: Inside and outside of a registered camp school.  
Photo: 20-year-old male research participant*

Rohingya children's school performance is poor. Many students fail in the exam, and remain in the same Grade for years. On the one hand, registered Rohingyas are privileged than

the unregistered ones for their (registered Rohingyas’) access to education. On the other hand, the limited scope of education—only up to Grade 7, and its poor quality make little changes in their lives.

In Collage 1.16, Photo 3 is the school signboard where the school name is written in three languages: Bengali at the top, English in the middle, and Burmese at the bottom. Logos of UNHCR and CODEC are also visible. Photo 1, 2, and 4 show the external and internal structures of the schools at the Kutupalong registered camp. Schools have spacious front yards. Wooden benches are available for the students in the well-lighted classrooms.

In the registered camp school, teachers are recruited from among the camp residents and Bangladeshi people. In the past, most of the teachers were the registered Rohingyas. At present, the majority of the teachers are Bangladeshi. According to my participants, this is due to the decision of the camp management, which is strongly influenced by the decisions of the local political leaders. Rohingyas are unhappy about having Bangladeshi teachers because it affects Rohingyas’ employment inside the camp.

Because of the limited education opportunity in the camp, and the restrictions of admission of Rohingyas into Bangladeshi schools, many registered Rohingyas use their social networks with Bangladeshi citizens to manage admission to Bangladeshi schools (see Chapter 6).

**Employment and free movement.** Registered Rohingyas are not legally allowed to get an employment, and to move freely in Bangladesh. They require CIC’s permission in order to work or travel outside. The permission does not involve any written procedure, rather it is granted by the CIC’s satisfaction regarding the reasons of going outside the camp. According to a few Rohingyas:

If a Rohingya is caught by the police who has left the camp secretly, it's not the responsibility of the CIC. But he [the Rohingya] may inform the CIC, and leave the camp for important reasons like going to see a relative in the hospital etc.

However, the actual practice regarding the registered Rohingyas' movement outside the camp for work or travel is different. Many registered Rohingyas are involved in different professions outside the camp such as driving, running grocery stores, doing small businesses etc. Some even work in the other districts such as in Cox's Bazar and in Chittagong. While a few of them acknowledge the fact that registered Rohingyas work outside the camp, others tend not to admit it as the following conversation shows:

A 23-year-old man: they are unregistered Rohingyas  
I: I know someone like this who is a registered Rohingya  
A 23-year-old man: they go there secretly, without permission

Although the CIC allows them to work outside the camp, it is kept secret from the high officials of the government because of official restrictions on Rohingyas' free movement. The driver I met was a registered Rohingya, an uncle of an unregistered Rohingya participant. He is a bus driver in Chittagong city. One of the main reasons for which Rohingyas are able to manage this kind of job in the Chittagong region is their fluency in local dialect. Other reasons include their network with Bangladeshi people. He is happy with his earnings, because he does not have to spend on food and accommodations. Rather his family often sells the surplus food items such as rice, oil, lentil etc. at Kutupalong bazar to buy items that they are fond of, but are not included in the food card. Another reason for him to be happy is he can spend money on jewelry for his daughters and wife. His only concern, however, is the intimate relationship between young boys and girls in the camp, which, in his view, is "illicit relationships." I asked him why he does not take his family to Chittagong, rent a house and live a life in their own way. He says that it is not permissible. They are refugees. They have no Bangladeshi identity card. Yet, he is happy with

his income. He enjoys being able to work outside the camp. He uses a latest model smartphone, and wears trendy clothes. His familiarity with the important places in Chittagong, such as *Bahaddar Haat, Cinema Place, Tiger Pass, Nizam Road, Haali Shohor* etc., tells that he is no less than a local (Bangladeshi) driver.

A large number of registered Rohingyas at Kutupalong own the grocery stores in the local Kutupalong market, and also in Cox's Bazar and Chittagong, while a few of them work as employees in the stores.

**The People of the UNHCR.** According to the unregistered Rohingyas, the registered Rohingyas are “the people of the UNHCR.” Because, the registered Rohingyas are privileged and protected by the UNHCR, and the government of Bangladesh, too. A few registered Rohingyas recognize that they are in a better situation in Bangladesh, which validates the labeling of the unregistered Rohingyas:

The most important thing for us is to live in peace. In Burma we were persecuted, here in Bangladesh, although there was oppression at the beginning, things have been improved, our life is much better than the past, and we are thankful for that.



*Photo 1.17: Inside a registered Rohingya's house at Nayapara. Photo: Ishrat*

Registered Rohingyas have hotline support given by the UNHCR. A laminated sticker, with a hotline number and the UNHCR logo on it, is available in the registered Rohingyas' homes. A hotline number gives them a sense of security. Those who already received support from the hotline seem satisfied with the service. They use the hotline number during emergency situations, such as accident, or a possible risk of murder resulted by rivalry among themselves. Therefore, they do not have much complaints about security issues in the registered camp, rather they find that their life is relatively peaceful, as a participant comments, "The only peaceful thing [in Bangladesh] is to lay down on the floor and go to sleep comfortably."

The above comparative discussion of the status and entitlements regarding their living conditions, food, health, education, employment, and security of both unregistered and registered Rohingyas in Bangladesh shows that the unregistered Rohingyas are more vulnerable than the registered Rohingyas. While both groups are refugees, a division between them is clearly visible. The division is the result of refugee registration process, which is discussed in the next section.

### **The Registration System: A Means of Stratification**

The registration system has successfully divided an ethnic community into two rival groups by providing food and other supports to one, and by not providing the same to the other. Both groups are stateless, and both seem to belong to the same place. But the registration process has the ability to create polarized groups within an otherwise equally stateless population. As a result, the registered Rohingyas consider them "privileged" and "upper class." They tend to exude their power and authority over the unregistered ones through their (the registered Rohingyas) acts and behaviors, and their social relations on different occasions. The following incident is an evidence of this phenomenon.



On my way to an unregistered Rohingya participant's shack in early 2016, I noticed a large vegetable garden, of roughly the size of a basketball court. The garden included vegetables such as cabbages, cauliflowers, tomatoes, white radish, and bottle gourds. The garden was located within the boundary of the unregistered camp, but it belonged to a registered Rohingya. Prior to the winter every year, some of the registered Rohingyas come to the unregistered camp, find empty land, cultivate what they want, and collect the produces by themselves. The vegetables are both for consumptions and for sale at Kutupalong bazar. Unregistered Rohingyas are not allowed to enter the garden, but they can purchase vegetables from the registered ones during harvesting.

Registered Rohingyas are aware of their status, position and power. They exercise their power by activities such as cultivating winter vegetables in front of the shacks of the unregistered Rohingyas, and selling these vegetables to the unregistered Rohingyas, too. Despite many limitations in the service provisions for the registered Rohingyas, they are aware of their superiority over the unregistered ones. Such awareness has been inculcated within the registered Rohingyas by the way they are treated by the government and the UNHCR.

To summarize this chapter, multiple dimensions of Rohingya refugees' lives in the registered and unregistered camps in Bangladesh clearly point towards a class structure within one ethnic community. At the same time, it is also worth bearing in mind that Rohingya refugees in the registered camps experience inequality in terms of education, and health services (or social rights). The registered Rohingyas' ID card, provided by the UNHCR and the government of Bangladesh, does not even include their Rohingya identity. The factsheet given by the CIC office includes a large number of services for the registered Rohingyas. The quality of the services remains a question. The lack of access to education after Grade 7, restrictions on Rohingyas'

admission to Bangladeshi schools, the lack of freedom etc. are the indicators of their status in Bangladesh. On the other hand, the stratification and discrimination created between the registered and the unregistered Rohingyas are also unacceptable.

Both the unregistered and registered Rohingya are the victims of persecutions in Burma. But now the former is the victim of inequality in Bangladesh more than the latter. The registration process of the government of Bangladesh has placed the unregistered Rohingyas at the bottom of social stratification, and deprived the registered Rohingyas of their access to social rights. Since the lack of a stable social world creates barriers in developing a strong sense of self within an individual, Rohingyas' overall living conditions in Bangladeshi refugee camps create uncertainty among the Rohingya people to develop a positive sense of self. This chapter shows that while holding identity amid statelessness is a challenge for the youth and young adults in both groups, it is even more complicated for the unregistered Rohingyas as they experience a divisionary system along with their refugeeness. Despite living in such complicated situations, the next chapter shows ways of becoming Rohingya, and the roles of Rohingya youth and young adults in community building.

## CHAPTER 6

### BECOMING ROHINGYA AND COMMUNITY BUILDING EFFORTS

This chapter focuses on how youth become Rohingya, then discusses ways in which they build the Rohingya community. Becoming Rohingya is to hold a sense of belonging to the Rohingya ethnic identity in the present that is connected to their past. But, due to their uprooted situations, the Rohingya youth and young adults find it difficult to see the connections between their present and the past. Moreover, they do not know yet whether they will go back to their country, or to other places. Thus, the Rohingya youth and young adults live in dilemma. Both Montgomery (2007) and Mead (1928) emphasized the importance of the social context for developing one's sense of self. For Rohingya people, their existing social context, which includes parents and other community members who feel a very strong attachment to the Rohingya ethnicity, and their lives in Bangladeshi camps, makes them unsure how to follow the social values, norms, and cultural practices of their ethnic group, and that of the host country. But, for youth and young adults, finding the connection between their ethnic and the national identity is important. Despite living in a perplexing social context that includes these two often-times conflicting forces, Rohingya youth and young adults engage in community building efforts for the Rohingya community. Their divisionary status-based social world cannot prevent them from being motivated to serve their community, and to express resilience. They adapt to their social world, yet they act, challenge and negotiate to create their identity as Rohingyas.

Their narratives demonstrate that despite challenges in both Burma and Bangladesh, Rohingyas have been able to maintain their ethnic identity through language, food, clothing, religious practices, ethnic symbols, gender perceptions, and social relations. This chapter is divided into three subsections on becoming Rohingyas. The first discusses how Rohingya

people's connection to their land/ancestry, and religion help them holding their Rohingya identity in the context of their lives in Burma and Bangladesh. The second discusses their family efforts, language, food and clothing, and gender roles to reproduce Rohingyaness. The third illustrates the role of Rohingya youth and young adults in community building. In the next chapter, I discuss how they make sense of their lives amid the challenges around their identity and liminality with their status.

### **Becoming Rohingya: Being a Rohingya and/or a Burmese and/or a Bangladeshi**

Land, ancestry, and religion are three key elements shaping Rohingya identity. Rohingya people's subjective perceptions of becoming Rohingyas are embedded in their connections to their unseen land as well as with their ancestors in Burma, and with the main religion performed in Bangladesh. They form an imagined togetherness with their community members on their land; Anderson (2006) calls it an "imagined community." Their desire for imaginary communion in Burma is, however, often affected by their attachment to Bangladesh. When it comes to their identity, my research participants draw on distinctions and resemblance to both Burma and Bangladesh in the context of their connection to land/ancestry and religion as discussed in the following two sections.

#### **Rohingya in the Context of Life in Burma**

Rohingyas believe that although they have connection to Burma, they are different than the Burmese in many ways such as religion, language, food etc. Such differences are manifested in the life-stories Rohingyas share. According to a 35-year-old man:

Burmese are those who are like a bigger group of population, they have power and control over Myanmar. They neither included the name of Arakan state nor Rohingya nation in the constitution of Burma. It helps them to continue oppressing the Rohingya nation. Actually, the ancestors of some Rohingyas traveled to Burma from Bangladesh, and some from other countries, and they settled in Burma.

He highlights the origin of the Rohingya community, and refers to a time when people from Burma, India and Bangladesh used to move freely. All three were British colonies. The colonization ended up with the birth of two independent countries in 1947, India and Pakistan. Bangladesh became a part of Pakistan, and was known as East Pakistan at that time. Burma became independent in 1948. What the 35-year-old man suggests is the geopolitical factors created boundaries between Bangladesh and Burma in 1948 that stopped free movement between these two countries. Yet many Rohingyas remained in Burma because of their attachment, and a strong sense of belonging to their land.

This 35-year-old man was born in Burma. He studied up to Grade 4 in Burma with a Burmese name imposed by the school authority. The overall oppressive situation forced his family to move to Bangladesh in 1992. Despite being a child at the time of moving, he still remembered the persecution in Burma, and moving to Bangladesh with his family. He stated that the facts and stories of their lives in Burma are passed down from earlier generations, which justifies the inclusion of adults in my study (see Chapter 4). The adult Rohingyas are the key agents of socialization for youth and young adults. Through their childhood and adolescence, Rohingyas learn about their attachment to their land and ancestors, and they carry forward these learnings into young adulthood.

The 35-year-old man's grandfather was a Bangladeshi citizen who used to live in the Chittagong region and moved to Burma in the late 1960s. He (the grandfather) started living in Burma after marrying an Arakanese Muslim woman. The 35-year-old man has Bangladeshi relatives. They offered support after the arrival of his family in Bangladesh. After coming to Bangladesh, the 35-year-old man's family stayed in his relative's house for three months until the family moved to the camp. Later, they were included as registered refugees at the

Kutupalong camp. His admission to a Bangladeshi school was possible with the help of Bangladeshi school teachers. His parents secretly completed the admission process because of the restrictions of Rohingya refugees' access to Bangladeshi schools. This is why, his admission was completed using a different name and address to confirm his Bangladeshi identity. Using the actual name and camp address would prevent him from being admitted to Bangladeshi schools. Thus, he completed his HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate, the nationwide Grade 12 final exam) in Chittagong. However, after the HSC he came back to the camp because of the sudden enforcement of strict rules of the camp authority to force the residents to stay in the camp. He also learned that a group of conspirators was after him. The group, which consisted of the Bangladeshi people from the nearby villages, the camp management, and the local NGOs, searched for residents living outside the camp. Because of this fearful situation, he discontinued his study, and continued living inside the camp. Although, by that time, his preparation for his TOEFL exam was complete as he aimed to go abroad to live in peace and security. He thinks that Burma failed to protect its people, the Rohingyas. In his words, "the state governing system [of Rohang state] was not so strong to provide security and everything to its people, therefore gradually the traditions, practices of this nation [the Rohingya] had been obliterated." The narrative points to a weak governing system failing to ensure stability for the Rohingyas that eventually led to exclusion of the Rohingya community within Burma.

While the 35-year-old man relates Rohingya identity to land/ancestors, and historical events, some of the participants are more interested in relating their identity to their religion, citizenship, the right to free movement, and a sense of belonging. A 34-year-old registered Rohingya at the same camp is one of them. He traveled 6 countries, excluding Burma and Bangladesh, without a passport. The countries he visited chronologically are India-Pakistan-Iran-

UAE-Turkey-Oman-UAE. Instead of using land borders, and avoiding border security, each time he used water borders to enter a country. However, during his second time to Dubai, he was deported to Bangladesh in 2013.

Similar to many other Rohingyas, this participant was also born in Burma. He spent his childhood until was 11 years old in their own house in Burma. They wanted to expand their house, but neither extension nor renovation was allowed by the Burmese government. His family produced crops. Once the crops were harvested, they had to give a major share of the produce to the Burmese military which made it difficult for them to manage food for the family members. He also informed that the Burmese battalion used to come to their home without any notice. The Burmese military destroyed their houses and property, took their chicken, goats—whatever they wanted—and warned them that Burma was not a country for the Muslims. In Burma, he did not have a chance to go to school as the schools were shut down all the time. It was because they (Burmese) denied Rohingyas' access to education. Being compelled, one day the family left the country, and headed for Bangladesh with a group of 22 families. They started their journey at midnight, leaving all their belonging behind. He has been in Bangladesh for about 25 years. He still holds his Rohingya identity. When I ask him to explain the link between being a Burmese and being a Rohingya, he puts religion and citizenship together. In his words, "Rohingyas are like... no these two are not same. Burmese are those who are citizens of that (Burma) country, and Rohingyas are Muslims." This 34-year-old man uses two different types of indicators to show the difference: one is concerned with the status of citizenship, while the other is with religion, the former is linked with national identity, while the latter is part of their ethnic identity.

This narrative also suggests that being non-citizens and being Muslims make Rohingyas different than the Burmese. Because of their non-citizenship status, Rohingyas lack civil,

political and social rights. By being deprived of their rights, they become victims of violence by the Burmese; because they are Muslims in an anti-Muslim country. On the other hand, by virtue of being citizens, the Burmese exercise coercive power over the marginalized Rohingya. The 34-year-old Rohingya man does not particularly say anything about the religious identity of the Burmese, who are Buddhist, He is aware of the differences between the Burmese and the Rohingyas. There may not be any connection between one's citizenship status and religious identity, but such connections and their implications are discernable in the way Rohingyas are identified by others, and by themselves. Drawing on Mead's perspective, they receive particular types of conceptions from others regarding their individual identity and their (Rohingyas') religious identity; and they respond to others indicating that they put religion as an important trait for their ethnic identity. This is also indicated in the accounts of a 40-year-old registered Rohingya man:

Rohingyas are Muslims and the Burmese follow Buddhism. And they (the Burmese) say that there is no place for the Muslims in Burma, if you still want to stay here you have to consider yourself as temporary guests in the land of the Burmese. Some Rohingyas accept it as their fate while some flee to Bangladesh. If the situation of Burma was normal, no Rohingya would come to Bangladesh.

The above narrative confirms that, the Burmese use religion to create a division between the Rohingyas and the Burmese. In his words, religious identity is important for their ethnic identity, and "some Rohingyas accept" the state-imposed status "as their fate," because maintaining their Muslim identity is more important than their status of citizenship. Thus, they become temporary guests in their own land. Such acceptance does not come out voluntarily, rather it is imposed by the Burmese government. The act of the Burmese government does not endorse the Rohingya's existence as an ethnic community with distinct religious identity, and Rohingyas' connection to Burma. Rohingyas who cannot accept the assertion that "there is no place for the Muslims in



Burma,” feel safe to flee Bangladesh. The consequences of the religious dissimilarity between the Rohingyas and the Burmese are also pointed out by my FGD participants, “you know a Muslim family is not allowed to keep a *boti* [a traditional cutting tool for fish, meat, vegetables, fruits etc.]”. I asked them how they managed to cut vegetables and fish to cook. They replied, “we can’t explain it to you how hard life was there [in Burma].”

Their narratives confirm that being a Burmese and being a Rohingya is not the same. Clearly, Rohingyas are not citizens of Burma. The lack of citizenship (see Chapter 3) turns people into simply “a collection of humans” (Tully, 2000, p. 213) who have no voice in their self-governing process, and they cannot struggle for justice, peace, and freedom including economic, social and cultural rights (Isin, 2012). The statements of both Tully (2000) and Isin (2012) are echoed in my FGD participants’ remarks, “who would seek justice, to whom we would seek justice? there is no justice for the Muslims [in Burma].”

Holding a sense of attachment to their land and not being a citizen of that country complicate Rohingyas’ lives in Burma. Furthermore, the burden of their deprivation of rights and injustice in their own country are affected by the chaotic political situations in Burma. The 40-year-old man, who was born in Burma and later moved to Bangladesh, informs that the situation until 1988 was not as bad as it is now in Burma. Violence started after 1988. A series of nationwide demonstrations, marches, protests, and civil unrest in Burma took place in August 1988. Key events occurred on 8 August 1988, and therefore, it is known as the 8888 Uprising. The following years remained full of turmoil, which created an overwhelmingly difficult situation for the Rohingyas. The 40-year-old man’s family decided to leave Burma, and they arrived in Bangladesh in 1992. After coming to Bangladesh, he resumed his study in a Bangladeshi school from Grade 5, indeed with an adopted name, and completed his SSC

(Secondary School Certificate—the nationwide Grade 10 final exam held under the education boards of the government of Bangladesh) from a semi-government school at Ukhia.

Since he left the land of his ancestors, Burma, he did not like living in Bangladesh. Therefore, he planned to go abroad, and got his “Bangladeshi passport” with the help of a *dalal*. *Dalal* is a Bengali derogatory term often used to refer to a person who works as a middle-man, especially in the area of human trafficking. They arrange false offers for travels and jobs, and even manage air tickets for the clients to go abroad for jobs. The clients pay them a large amount of money and, most likely, end up suffering abroad. Being unaware of all these labyrinths of corridors, the 40-year-old man relied on the *dalal*. The *dalal* assured about the Rohingya man’s Bangladeshi passport. One day this Rohingya man flew to Saudi Arabia with his “Bangladeshi passport”. It was only after being caught by the Saudi government, he realized that his Bangladeshi passport was a false passport. Along with other Rohingyas, he was sent back to Bangladesh. Interestingly, he followed the same path again in 2004, knowing all the risks and challenges associated with the travel. This time, he succeeded to stay in Saudi Arabia for three years. But, once again he was caught by the Saudi police, and was deported to Bangladesh immediately. I asked him whether he has further plans to do the same again. He looked sad. In his view, this is no longer possible for two reasons: the first, the Saudi system is more restrictive, and no one can stay there until he/she possesses an *iqama*—a government document issued for the expatriates to prove their legal identity during their stay in Saudi Arabia; and second, the Bangladeshi government digitized its passport system introducing the MRP (Machine-Readable Passport) making the *dalal*’s job extremely difficult.

The 40-year-old man got married in Saudi Arabia to a Rohingya woman. His wife has been in Saudi Arabia for 20 years—holding a false Bangladeshi passport. She works as a tailor.

She has no *iqama*. The couple has three children who live with their mother, and have never been to school due to the lack of an *iqama*. This Rohingya man, clearly exasperated by the events happened in his life, likes neither living a life in the camp, nor staying away from his family. Although he has no way to escape this situation, he identified himself a Rohingya from Burma:

I am from Burma – that’s all I can say. Because here when I go outside, the first question I am asked is where am I from. And I have to tell that I am from Burma. I can’t say that I am from Bangladesh. And why would I claim to be a Bangladeshi? I was born in Burma, and I am here because I was forced to leave my country.

His narrative points to a clear connection between his ethnic identity and his country, Burma.

This 40-year-old man called “Burma” his country, but he did not identify himself as a Burmese.

It shows that living in Burma does not make one Burmese. In Burma, Rohingyas are called “temporary guests.”

Being uprooted from their land, and turning into “temporary guests” are emphasized in the above narrative. He relates the situation of Rohingyas to being a *musafir* (an Arabic word, meaning a traveler). Both a *musafir* and a temporary guest have little or no belonging. In his words, “We are Rohingyas, and Rohingyas are like *musafir*, who has no belonging.” Here the term “belonging” indicates having an emotional connection, and having material possessions, such as owning a house, or land, or property, in a stable social condition. They are in a social condition that does not allow them to own material possessions in their country, Burma. Still, Rohingyas’ sense of belonging, and emotional connections to Burma have not been wiped out. They may not find similarities between the Burmese and the Rohingyas, yet their strong sense of belonging to Burma makes them Burmese Rohingyas.

## **Rohingya in the context of “life in Bangladesh”**

While Rohingyas are dissimilar to the Burmese, they (Rohingyas) are similar to Bangladeshi citizens to some extent, particularly to the Chittagonian people in Bangladesh, in terms of appearance, language, food and clothing, and most importantly, religion. This section first highlights the religious similarities between Rohingyas and Bangladeshi people, and later it describes Rohingyas’ life in the context of Bangladesh, showing how their lack of proof of a clear identity and legal citizenship differentiates them from the Bangladeshi people.

A major driving force behind Rohingya exodus to Bangladesh is religion (see Chapter 2). The Rohingyas assume that Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country; the commonality of religion between the Rohingyas and the Bangladeshi people would enable a safe resort for the Rohingyas to live in peace in Bangladesh, and let them do their religious practices. Their assumptions became true partly, as my participants expressed their satisfactions with performing their religion in Bangladesh. However, religious similarity does not resolve the issues around their legal status and identity crisis. Despite being exploited, many Rohingyas retain a firm belief in their connection to their land, Burma, and their ethnic identity. They do not want to adhere their identity neither to the Burmese, the Mog, nor to the Bangladeshi people. In the 19-year-old young woman’s words,

Whatever the degree of oppression is, Rohingyas would identify themselves as Rohingyas. The Mog wants us to be identified as Bangali, but how is that possible? The Mog wants us to be treated as Bangali, even the ID card that they gave us said that we were Bengali. Our point is we are Rohingya Muslim, not Bengali Muslim.

The Mogs’ oppression could not shake Rohingyas’ perceptions of their self as a Muslim ethnic group. Rohingyas attach their religious identity to both Burma and Bangladesh as expressed in one of the FGDs, “I think Burma and Bangladesh were Muslim countries in the past, now they

have made so many divisions.” Although religious resemblance does not always play a crucial role in uniting people of the same religion, it raises hope for people who are in disadvantaged situations. For instance, Bangladesh and Pakistan separated into two countries in 1971 despite having religious homogeneity. On the other hand, Rohingyas considered Bangladesh as a safe haven to flee from persecution in 1976, 1991, 2012, 2016, 2017, and onward (see Chapter 1) because of religious commonality between Rohingyas and Bangladeshi people. Life in Bangladesh offers them religious freedom that they longed-for. According to an FGD participant at Kutuplaong unregistered camp:

We had no chance to celebrate anything, in the Ramadan, they used to lock the mosque so we couldn't go to pray. [We] couldn't sacrifice animals during the Eid-Ul-Adha [the second largest festival of the Muslims], couldn't send kids to schools. They will kill you if you practice your religion. Now tell me, how we would stay there [in Burma].

Practicing religion, in general terms, refers to saying five times prayers every day, either at home or in the mosques, fasting from dawn to sunset for 30 days, and performing night prayers as part of observing Ramadan, celebrating Eid-Ul-Fitr and Eid-Ul-Adha—two significant religious festivals, going to Mecca to perform hajj, giving charity etc. Religious freedom in Bangladesh allows Rohingya Muslims to perform these activities except hajj. Since hajj requires traveling to Saudi Arabia, Rohingyas in Bangladesh do not have freedom of movement. In addition, their lack of the proof of identity, and the lack of Burmese and/or Bangladeshi passport restrict their travel to outside Bangladesh. As shown in the previous section, a 34-year-old man was able to travel 6 countries without any passport, but his deportation to Bangladesh from the 6<sup>th</sup> country reconfirms the necessity of the proof of identity and a legal passport for traveling. However, Rohingyas are happy with their religious freedom in Bangladesh. Even Rohingya youth and

young adults who did not have practical experiences of persecution in Burma are also clear about the reasons for which their parents came to Bangladesh,

I heard from my parents that it was impossible for them to live there, and they couldn't claim their own country, so they had thought that people in Bangladesh are Muslims, they won't kill us like the Burmese. That is why they moved to Bangladesh. Nobody came here voluntarily; everyone was forced to leave their own country.

The Rohingyas have been refugees in Bangladesh for over four decades. Yet, they do not consider Bangladesh as their “own,” as they were “forced to leave their own country.” They look forward to their place of origin because of an incredible amount of hope encompassing the Rohingya identity. The Rohingyas' belonging is intangible—a sense, or a feeling, or an emotional attachment to their ethnicity, and their land, not to Bangladesh.

Officially Rohingyas in Bangladesh are not permitted to own any property or land in Bangladesh due to their refugee status. They are allowed to stay in Bangladesh but their movement is restricted. Even if they attempt to move unofficially, their identity is often examined by the government security authorities, particularly in Ukhia and Teknaf; two Rohingya-inhabited areas. The main challenge associated with Rohingyas' movement is the proof of identity, a piece of paper, which is highly valuable to the state as shown in the following excerpt:

The 34-year-old man: I am of course a Rohingya, why? If I want to go to Cox's Bazar, they [the check post] will ask me to show the proof of my citizenship, but I don't carry any proof of my citizenship, do I have anything to show them? they will not ask you anything about this

I: but I don't carry my proof of citizenship with me either

The 34-year-old man: still it's different, why? Because if you are asked, you can tell your address, you can tell about your family relationships—who lives where, can I say this?

Do I have any address in this country?

It is noticeable that Rohingyas are not willing to interchange their ethnic identity (Rohingya) with their national identity (Burmese). Rather their desire to have “a proof of citizenship” is

linked to the right to free movement, and to have an “address,” in other words, belongingness and membership to a place. It is implied that their ethnic identity in Burma can only be accepted if they are given national identity. By saying “I am of course a Rohingya,” the 34-year-old man informs his connection to his own ethnicity in Burma, and indicates the consequences of lack of legal citizenship in Burma. Human beings attach their addresses to their identity. Address is attached with their “proof of citizenship”—a document that not only guarantees one’s belonging to a particular place, but also confirms free movement within that particular place. Rohingyas have neither a proof of Burmese citizenship, nor a proof of Bangladeshi identity. They are Rohingyas by default. They have a sense of belonging to Burma but, in the eyes of the state, a document is more valuable than a sense of belonging.

Examining one’s identity and asking about the purpose of travel is a common phenomenon at several checkpoints in Cox’s Bazar district. The government of Bangladesh often orders the security forces to remain vigilant in this area in watching the movement of the Rohingyas. These two are not only border areas but also serve as a popular route for smuggling, particularly for the yaba smugglers. Yaba is an addictive drug available in a red tablet form with WY imprinted on it. This drug has been made popular in Southeast Asia mainly because of a joint venture of Thailand and Burma. Thailand is known to be the largest distributors of yaba, while Burma is one of the biggest producers. It is available in the United States as well. Media reports that yaba smugglers come to Bangladesh from Burma, in disguise of vulnerable Rohingyas (Mahmud, 2017). Sometimes the arrested smugglers are residents of Rohingya camps in Bangladesh (Shyamol, 2017), and involvement of Bangladeshi people, even of Bangladeshi political leaders, in yaba is not rare (Hasan, 2015).

The registered Rohingyas have their refugee identity cards issued by the government of Bangladesh and the UNHCR. However, the unregistered ones have neither a proof to show at the checkpost, if asked, nor a local address to tell the security force. Hence, the unregistered Rohingyas' free movement in the host country is challenging. For Rohingyas, the consequences of failing to show the proof of citizenship can be serious. The border guards at the checkpoints are certain that Rohingyas would never be able to tell their addresses, because they have no address in Bangladesh. Sometimes it is even dangerous for the Rohingyas to disclose the family ties they have in Bangladesh. Instead of getting convinced, the border guards will more likely arrest him/her for the "offence" of having family ties in Bangladesh because the government of Bangladesh neither recognizes the Rohingyas, nor their Bangladeshi family ties. What the 34-year-old man emphasizes is carrying no identity card/proof of citizenship is one thing, while possessing no identity card is another. Legal citizens of a country are not concerned about carrying a proof of citizenship when they are within the geopolitical boundary of their country; they know that they possess a proof of their citizenship. But not possessing any proof of citizenship invites complicated situations for Rohingyas as it indicates their illegal status, and unclear identity in Bangladesh.

Rohingyas cannot call themselves Bangladeshi; they cannot call themselves Burmese either. They decline both propositions. Rather, they prefer to use the term "nation" and/or "group" interchangeably to refer to their Rohingya ethnic identity as reflected in a 19-year-old young woman's account:

In Burma we are known as Rohingya. Here in Bangladesh we are also known as Rohingya while some people call us Burmese. We are from Burma and we identify ourselves as Rohingya... it is the name of our own group...our nation, like you are a Bangladeshi. In Myanmar, the Mog come to our homes, and ask us whether we are Rohingya or Bangladeshi. We tell them that we are Rohingyas.



Her narrative asserts that their identity has a lot to do with their ethnic group living in Burma, signifying their membership and belonging to their ethnic group. She shares her experiences of life in Bangladesh. She was born in Bangladesh and was raised in *Eidgah*, a place near Cox's Bazar, moved as a 10-year-old with her parents to the *taal*. The family moved with a hope that they would be given a shelter by the government of Bangladesh. But along with other Rohingyas, the family ended up living in the unregistered camp, the *taal*. She elaborates on this:

We came here because...even if we continue staying there, we won't be able to obtain Bangladeshi citizenship. We thought that lack of identity might cause difficulties for us if we continue staying here, so it's better to move to the place where other Rohingyas live. Thus, we came to this place. We also thought that if we go to the unregistered camp, perhaps we would find a way to go back to our own country, or maybe the government of Bangladesh would help us somehow.

Finding no way to return to their country, the family decided to live in the camp. But receiving no support from Bangladeshi government makes them disappointed, and puts them in severe hardship. Such disappointments and hopelessness point to their statelessness. Their social experiences indicate that the lack of status and a proof of identity are the main problems for them. But this young woman has happy memories with her early days in Bangladesh. She recalls her childhood in a Bangladeshi village:

I did not see how Burma looked like, I loved Bangladesh, I used to think it was our country...gradually I came to know that we are from Burma, we are Rohingyas. However, local people used to love us, I got admitted into school, we had our own land, own house, I was happy with those days, and I recall people used to treat us in a way that we were Bangladeshi. Unfortunately, we had to come to this camp one day.

Although she does not speak Burmese language, her local language skill is excellent which makes no difference with the local people's dialect. Her language skills rather create a challenge for others to figure out her identity—whether she is actually a Rohingya or a local resident, “I don't know Burmese language, I speak Bengali [the Chittagonian dialect], that's why if I go to the village, nobody believes that I am a Rohingya”. She speaks nearly standard colloquial

Bengali, too. Her language skills in Chittagonian dialect and colloquial Bengali make her integration to Bangladeshi community easier. Since subtle differences in accent often create distinctions between a native and an outsider, she even has the skills of using accent like the natives. As a core principle of symbolic interactionism, language helps individuals to assign meaning and interpret the social world through interactions with others, which eventually generates the process of gaining acceptability to a certain community, as happened in the case of this 19-year-old young woman. She is comfortable in interacting with local Bangladeshi people. She has already established some forms of networks with local Bangladeshi families where her access is welcome.

Her family consists of her husband and two sons. The couple works as teachers in the schools located in the unregistered camp, and their earning helps them to live in a relatively well-ventilated shack. During our conversation, I see an English Grade 2 text book on her floor mat with some other books and papers. I pick it up and open a page that describes a house—a yard at the front with chicken, goats, cows etc. All these elements portray a peaceful image of a Bangladeshi family. I ask her what kind of image of a home does she imagine when she describes this home to her students in the classroom? In despair, she sighs. She says that their reality is different than the images of the textbooks. They have nothing—no material possessions such as no land, no poultry, no cows, nor chicken. Their children also know that they have nothing. The Rohingya community just has a tiny shack to live in.

To sum up, nearly all of my participants point to the differences between Rohingyas and Burmese, and less so with Bangladesh. Despite having some forms of similarities between the Rohingyas and the people of the Chittagong region of Bangladesh in terms of religion, their identity is embedded in their sense of belonging to their ethnic community. In addition, their

connection to Burma does not make them feel they are Burmese people. They are not concerned with the present day's complicated geopolitical definitions of the state and the concept of citizenship. They simply put their ethnic identity at the top to identify them as the Rohingyas. The political game of labeling them a Bangladeshi or a Burmese, however, cannot spoil their sense of belonging to Burma. Their narratives demonstrate that the Rohingyas accept violence, oppression and uncertainty caused by the state authority's denial of their (the Rohingyas') existence. The state of Burma neither considers Rohingyas' connection to their land/ancestry in Burma nor their (Rohingyas') distinct religious identity. Rather, Burma shows the reluctance of admitting the Rohingyas into membership. Yet, many Rohingyas' subjective notions of individual and group identity of being Rohingya remains unspoiled. The next subsection discusses a set of elements, such as family efforts, language, food and clothing, and gender roles, reproducing Rohingya identity.

### **Becoming Rohingya: Family, Language, Food and Clothing, and Gender Roles**

#### **Family Efforts**

Family ties and family lessons significantly influence the constructions of one's ideas of the self. Many Rohingyas have ancestral connections in Bangladesh as their grandparents or great grandparents were born and lived in Bangladesh until they migrated to Burma, married a Rohingya in Burma, and embraced Rohingya identity. Despite having such connections to Bangladesh, my participants identify themselves as Rohingyas; an outcome of how family efforts reproduce Rohingyaness.

The 35-year-old man has Bangladeshi ties, yet his notions of identity are tied to his immediate family, his parents and close relatives, who are registered refugees in a Bangladeshi camp:

I am aware that I could have exercised my right to gain my citizenship because my grandfather was a Bangladeshi...I also have relatives who are the chairman and leaders in the village but I didn't want to use their name to my advantage. All of my family members are registered.

Having ancestral connections in Bangladesh is common phenomena for the Rohingya people, which was affected by the past geopolitical structures of Burma and Bangladesh (see Chapter 2). Movements between these countries for trade or family visits did not require a proof of identity. At present, a proof is indispensable. Although some Rohingyas manage a proof of Bangladeshi identity with the help of social networks, the 35-year-old man is not interested in it because of his sense of belonging to his ethnic group, and also because of his moral values that prevent him from receiving other people's help. Like the 35-year-old man, a 42-year-old Rohingya woman also has Bangladeshi relatives. Her mother-in-law is a Bangladeshi citizen, but the 42-year-old woman describes herself as Rohingya. They prefer to adhere to their ethnic identity instead of achieving Bangladeshi identity. It is important to note that compared to the 35-year-old man, the 42-year-old woman and others who are in their forties, the younger generation among the Rohingya people holds different perspectives regarding their identity. The perspectives of the youth and young adults are often shaped by their dilemma, confusion, uncertainty around their identity, and sometimes around their sense of belonging, too.

Like many other Rohingyas, Bangladesh is the birth place of an 18-year-old Rohingya youth, a registered refugee. He speaks Bengali, he dresses like a Bangladeshi, and he listens to Bengali music—all these are enough for him to be identified as a Bangladeshi, as he assumes. Yet, sometimes he feels confused: “In my childhood when I used to go to school, people used to call me ‘hey, Burmese!’ I was like I am a citizen of this country, I was born here, why do you call me a Burmese?” To his peers, he was a Burmese because his parents were from Burma but he wanted to identify himself based on his birth place. When asked which one, the Bangladeshi

or the Rohingya-ness, carries more weight for him, his reply accompanies a question: “I was born in this country and was raised here. Wouldn’t it be appropriate to call me a Bangladeshi?”

Clearly, he is in dilemma with his identity. His parents identify themselves as Rohingyas, and are not comfortable with his self-declared Bangladeshi identity. His silence to my question speaks volumes:

I: Alright. Since your parents consider themselves Rohingya, how do they look at your Bangladeshi identity?

18-year-old youth: [silence]

I: Okay, if you have to pick one of these, which one will you pick?

18-year-old youth: I think, Rohingya because your parents’ identity is important, you go with this.

Even though he favors his Bangladeshi identity, he resorts to his Rohingya identity because that is what his family expects of him. Moreover, he cannot go back to Burma because of the hostile situations in Burma. On the other hand, he cannot be accepted as a Bangladeshi citizen no matter how attached he feels to Bangladesh. In this situation, it is his parents who protect him from all adversities. But questions arise: are his parents themselves always comfortable and confident with orientating their children as Rohingya, and does this orientation, amid their statelessness, ensure that their children will hold onto family lessons in the future?

Mead asserts that the social environment is the place in which one experiences others’ perceptions of their self, and processes these perceptions internally in order to create a self-image. The Rohingyas struggle with the perceptions of others. Burma calls them “temporary guests” and/or “Bangalis,” while Bangladeshi people call them “stateless Rohingyas” and/or “Rohingya refugees,” and their family and/or community calls them “Rohingya,” and finally, their Bangladeshi peers often call them “Burmese.” Indeed, this is a complicated situation for Rohingyas. They process all these perceptions internally to create a self-image. This image,

however, varies within themselves because of the socialization process they go through. Eventually, the social environment, others' perceptions, and the socialization process of Rohingyas shape their adulthood. This is consistent with Mead's suggestions that others' perceptions of an individual also indicate the influence of the process of socialization of an individual over his/her adulthood. From their families, the Rohingyas learn that they are neither Bangladeshi nor Burmese. Thus, the Rohingyas create an internal self-image of their Rohingya identity influenced by the family, as happened with the 18-year-old youth.

The parents' perspectives are explained by a 42-year-old man, a registered Rohingya who was born and raised in Burma. He arrived in Bangladesh in 2004. His two children who were born in Bangladesh have never visited Burma. How does he identify his children? He replies, “[sigh] They will live as Rohingyas unless Burma recognizes them, and will be citizens when Burma does so. Until they go back, they will simply hear the word “Rohingya”, but perhaps will never feel it.”

I ask the 42-year-old man about his children's perceptions of the Rohingya identity in the future, whether they would be able to fully claim their Rohingya identity like their father does. His response gives an emphasis on the role of the family in shaping the identity of the next generation. As a father, he passes down knowledge of their roots to his children. His constant reminders of their Rohingya-ness encourages his children to maintain their Rohingya identity, he believes. However, his fear about the effect of statelessness, and his children's connection to Bangladesh, is not baseless. Already he has noticed that many of the Rohingya youth and young adults consider themselves both the Rohingyas and the Bangladeshis.

For the young generation, the sense of self has two dimensions: many young Rohingyas express their attachment to their Rohingya-ness, which is rooted in Burma, while feeling a sense

of physical attachment to Bangladesh as they dwell in Bangladesh. This is a result of the juxtaposition of their ethnic identity and a sense of belonging to Bangladesh. However, elderly Rohingyas are straight forward in acknowledging that their attachment is tied only to their ethnic identity, not to Bangladesh. These two self-perceptions are the outcomes of the lessons learned from their families and ancestors.

The above analysis shows that the older generation is more concerned about maintaining their ethnic identity. They constantly try to pass down their stories and share experiences with the next generation to help them (the younger ones) maintain Rohingya identity, yet statelessness—the lack of a stable social process—problematizes the way the Rohingyas see their ethnic identity. Although many of them never visited their ancestors' land, Burma, stories heard from their parents around their lives in Burma have been strongly imprinted on their (the youth and young adults') mind in a way that has established a connection with their history, language, culture – all of which are part of their living environment and socialization process.

### **Language**

The relation between language and identity is closely intertwined. The commonalities between the Rohingya and the local dialect suggest a positive basis for integration and the transfer of Rohingya identities; however, the variations which exist between the Rohingya language and the Bangladeshi language are sufficient to impede the assimilation and development of Rohingya youth and young adults' identity.

The philologists “assume that language existed for the purpose of conveying certain ideas, certain feelings” (Mead, 1934, p. 16,), which influence the development of the sense of self. Language is a “part of conduct” (Mead, 1962, p. 124), and as such plays a crucial role in differentiating between the conduct of the Rohingyas and the Bangladeshis, as well as the

Rohingyas and the Burmese. The narratives of my participants make me curious to delve deeper to know whether Rohingya language has changed to some degree to become closer to the local dialect due to proximity/diffusion.

British traveler Buchanan's account in 1798 confirms the existence of the Rohingya language in Arakan during his travel period (see Chapter 2). The Rohingyas' struggle for securing their own language is a less discussed subject, although language serves as a key symbol of one's identity. From the past, Rohingya language has been maintaining similarities with the Chittagonian language. However, a difference between these two is, Rohingya language does not use Bengali alphabets in the written form. It uses Arabic and English alphabets. Yet, the similarity between Rohingya and Chittagonian languages lies in the spoken form.

A script is an essential element for the survival, reproduction and preservation of a language. Rohingya community believes that originally Rohingya language was written in Arabic script, and English letters were incorporated later. In his narrative, a 35-year-old man refers to Maulana Hanif, a Rohingya Islamic scholar who fled Burma because of violence, and studied the distinctions of the Rohingya language. Maulana Hanif developed an alphabetic script written from right to left in the 1980s, known as "Hanifi Rohingya" (Pandey, 2016). In Maulana Hanif's words, "If a people do not have a written language of their own, it is easier to say that as an ethnic group you don't exist" ("Language of the Rohingya to be digitized," December 19, 2017). Although books written in the "Hanifi Rohingya" script are now being taught "in some faith schools catering to the Rohingya in Malaysia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Canada", in order to meet the criteria of the global standardization of digital characters and numbers, the script is yet to be encoded and synchronized with computer and online use ("Language of the Rohingya to be digitized," December 19, 2017).



My participants are certain about the differences between the Rohingya and the Burmese language. According to them, the Rohingya language is close to the local dialect of Cox’s Bazar. They are not able to categorically identify the differences between the Burmese and the Rohingya language, yet they provide examples of the use of the alphabets and the accent that differentiate Rohingya language from the Burmese language. For instance, the 42-year-old woman shows the distinctions between the pronunciations of the first alphabet of the Burmese and the Rohingya language, “in Burmese language you call it *qazi* [the first alphabet of Burmese language] and in Rohingya language it is *aaa* [the first alphabet of Rohingya language].”

Undoubtedly, these two languages are dissimilar to each other. My online search on the differences of three languages—the Burmese, the Rohingya and the Chittagonian dialect—shows the following scenario in Table 6.1:

<b>Rohingya (A)</b>	<b>Burmese (B)</b>	<b>Bangladeshi and local dialect (C)</b>
Existed even during 1798 or before as British traveler Buchanan (1992) found.  A very accented type of Bengali	No similarity with A and C	an eastern Indo-Aryan language; uses Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic words
The oral form is very close to the Chittagonian dialect. Almost no similarity with the formal Bangladeshi colloquial		Formal and colloquial are two parts. Many of the regions have own colloquial which are different than each other’s. For instance: the dialects of Sylhet and Chittagong – two regions in the country- are totally different
Written form has no similarity with C		Has its own written form, derived from Brahmi (a system ancestral to all Indian scripts)
Originally used Arabic script. Use of English, Urdu and		Use of English, Portuguese, and few other words began as a result of colonization

<b>Rohingya (A)</b>	<b>Burmese (B)</b>	<b>Bangladeshi and local dialect (C)</b>
Farsi words began during the colonization		
Fifteen in spoken form is “fundoroh”	Fifteen=ဆယ့်ငါး (she-nga)	Fifteen in Chittagonian spoken form is “funoroh”, and in Bengali, “পনেরো”

Sources: “Number in Burmese: Omniglot”, “Rohingya numbers—Of languages and numbers”, “Numbers in Bengali: Omniglot.”

In a study on Sudanese refugee youth in Australia, focusing on how mother tongue plays a crucial role in youth identity, Hatoss and Sheely (2009) look into the issue of language maintenance and shift in the context of the adjustment of Sudanese refugee-background youth in Australia. Since the acquisition of the language of the host country and the maintenance of the mother tongue are necessary for a successful adjustment in the host country “for identity, cultural and other purposes” (Hatoss & Sheely, 2009, p. 128), this study shows that the majority of Sudanese refugee-background Australian youth expresses their identity and belongingness by their attachment to their mother tongue and their tribal language.

In the context of the adjustment of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh, language maintenance is an easy task for the Rohingya youth and young adults because of the linguistic similarities between the Rohingya people and the Chittagonian people. The Rohingya people do not speak Burmese language, rather they are attached to the Chittagonian language which is also spoken by most of their parents. All Rohingyas I spoke to inside and outside the camp speak Chittagonian dialect with slight variations in word-choice and tones. Based on their local language skill, it is almost impossible to differentiate between a Rohingya and a local Bangladeshi unless one is familiar with the impalpable variations in the tone and certain specific words used by the Rohingyas. My online research reveals that the Rohingya TV channel R Vision also uses the

same dialect as my participants do, although a subtle difference is noticeable due to using a lot of English and Arabic words. All these intrigued me to know the Rohingyas' views on the existence and the use of Rohingya language, and in what ways it is different than Burmese language.

A 65-year-old man, a Burmese language teacher in the registered camp school, was one of the few Rohingyas who speaks the Burmese language. He learned it in his childhood in Burma. Although he did not identify himself as a Burmese, he had been working as a Burmese language teacher in the camp since he arrived in the camp. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Bangladesh government includes a Burmese book as part of camp school curriculum, in order to help Rohingya children learn Burmese language. Adult Rohingyas like the 65-year-old man are appointed as Burmese language teachers to serve that purpose. The books come from Burma and are approved by UNICEF as shown in the following photo:

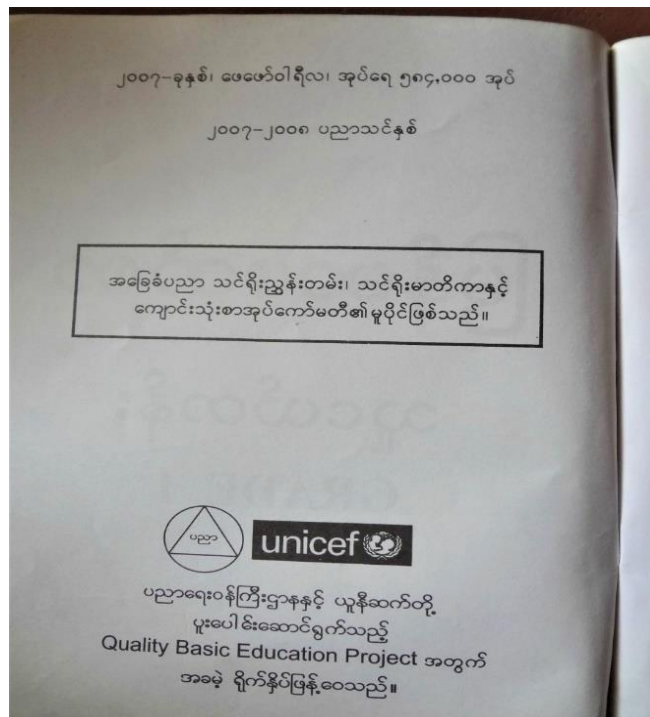


Photo 1.18: Inside the Burmese language book. Photo: Ishrat

My participants inform that the number of young teachers of the Burmese language in the camp is less than that of the elderly ones because the younger generation does not speak the Burmese language. They have mastered the local dialect while some of the elderly ones still maintain a difference in their identity by showing reluctance in using local dialect. In the 65-year-old man's words, "they may get confused talking to a young individual whether he is a Burmese or Bangladeshi because young people's language has been almost transformed into the local dialect, but my language hasn't been changed."

By "they," he refers to the Chittagonian people, i.e. the local residents. The reason of the local residents' confusion is Rohingya people's skill in local dialect which rarely differentiates them, the youth and the young adults in particular, from a Chittagonian. This narrative shows how young people adapt themselves to a new social environment regardless of the linguistic differences.

The 42-year-old woman was another Burmese language teacher in the camp school. She was a relatively short and lean woman, like any ordinary Rohingya woman wearing a black burka and two strap flat sandals. Although she looked much older than her age, the bright yet gentle eyes on her wrinkled face clearly told that she is confident and courageous. Similar to the 65-year-old man, she was also able to use her own name in a Burmese school. She completed her Grade 10 at Akyab (former name of Sittew, the capital of Rakhine state in Burma) and got a school completion certificate with her original name. It was possible because of her family reputation and aristocratic status in Burma. Her father was a manager in a government-owned bank and her elder brother used to work in the army at Rangoon (now Yangon). She acknowledged that she was in a privileged position in Burma, yet she was very much concerned about the gravity of the situation which was fueled by the gradual increase of oppression of the

Burmese military: “my brother is an army major, my father was a bank officer. So, our family is privileged... but most of the Muslims are deprived of their entitlements. They can’t even travel from Buthidaung to Rachidong without government permission....”

Although her family wanted her to live in Burma, she followed her husband’s decision of leaving for Bangladesh at the age of 19. Her mother-in-law is a Bangladeshi who went to Burma, married a Rohingya man, came back to Bangladesh, and gave birth to the son. Later, the family moved to Burma. The 42-year-old woman’s husband was born in Bangladesh, but, according to her, he considers himself a Rohingya, as he was brought up in Burma; an example of the influence of the social world on one’s identity (see Chapter 3). She was aware that there is a possibility for her to acquire Bangladeshi identity because of her husband’s status as a Bangladeshi, but she has yet to claim her identity as a Bangladeshi. The couple felt more connected to Burma. Regarding her attachment to Rohingya identity, she said:

I come from Rohingya nation. Every nation has its own way. You know, Rohingyas in Burma tried hard to start Rohingya subject in the school, publish books in Rohingya language...they sacrificed their lives, they were killed by the [Burmese] military.

The existence of Rohingya language is acknowledged by all of my participants unanimously. Maintaining and reproducing Rohingya language in Burma has been a longstanding challenge for the Rohingya community, which is clearly stated in her narrative. Rohingya language was there in the past (see Chapter 2), which possibly have been modified because of the migration of people from corners of the world including the invasion of the colonizers. There has been a lack of sufficient evidence to support the assumption around the existence of Rohingya language. A 20-year-old unregistered Rohingya man from Kutupalong camp, confirms that Rohingya language is not a new creation: “it [the Rohingya language] was there in the past, and we had books, too, but they [the Burmese] destroyed everything.”

In Burma, this 20-year-old man studied up to Grade 4, and his wife up to Grade 5. Both used Burmese language in the school while their ancestors used to speak in Chittagonian dialect at home. In order to eradicate the existence of the Rohingyas from their land in Burma, it was necessary for the Burmese government to abolish all kinds of materials, and practices related to the Rohingya's education, language and culture, which is clearly reflected in the narrative of the 20-year-old man. As a result, those who are uninformed about the existence of the Rohingya language, and have seen their parents speaking Chittagonian dialect, consider this dialect as their language.

Interestingly, a mixed response is noticeable among the Rohingya youth and young adults regarding the maintenance and reproduction of the Rohingya language. A young Rohingya woman of little over 18 years old is an example. She wears a typical Bangladeshi *3-piece salwar kameez* with *dupatta* around her head and neck. While many Rohingya women of her age wear traditional Burmese dress, 2-piece *lungi*-like skirt and top, she wears Bangladeshi dress. She was born at Kutupalong camp. She completed her *Dakhil* (a degree that is considered equivalent to school final, it is the biggest public examination of Madrasa Education Board in Bangladesh), and is now aiming to pursue her *Alim* (equivalent to college level education in Bangladesh for which one needs to sit for Grade 12 level public examination of Madrasa Education Board). This young woman shares very little on the origin and the use of Rohingya language. Her Bangladeshi dress and Chittagonian dialect seemingly indicate her connection to Bangladesh.

Rohingya community uses a lot of English and Arabic words in the local dialect, especially the younger generation does so more than the older ones. The use of English language could be an outcome of globalization—using social media, watching movies etc., but the use of Arabic words in Rohingya language remains a question. A 35-year-old unregistered Rohingya

man shares his thoughts on this. He completed his study up to Grade 4 in Burma and came to Bangladesh at around 15 or 16 years old. His grandparents used to live in Saudi Arabia and died there. A few of his uncles still live in Saudi Arabia, while others live in Pakistan and India. The reasons for Rohingyas to go to Saudi Arabia is connected to their religious sentiments, and their desire to perform hajj (an Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca). They also believe that because of the religious similarity between Rohingyas and the Saudi people, they will remain safe in Saudi Arabia. The 35-year-old man's parents and a younger brother, however, chose to live in Burma, and look after the family property. His parents often send money for him, as he is in a difficult living situation with financial hardships, and does not have any stable income source yet.

I ask him to write down his name on my notebook in both the Burmese and the Rohingya language. He does so happily. His name in the Rohingya language looks similar to that of English language. Regarding the similarity with the English language, and regarding the use of Arabic words, he explains:

Burmese is actually the language of Mog [Mog are the descendants of the Arakanese, now known as the part of Burmese military who exploit the Rohingyas], and Rohingya language is written in the form of Arabic language...Rohingya language was developed by our Maulana Hanif sir... and Engineer Siddique, who lives in Saudi Arabia, also contributed to the development of Rohingya language. That form is close to the form of English language.

With the conquest of Arakan in 1785, the Burmese planted the seed of oppression against the Rohingyas. Because of the religious and cultural similarities between the Mog and the Burmese, it became easy for the Burmese to persecute the Rohingyas with the help of the Mog. From the 35-year-old man's accounts, it is clear that the Burmese language could not influence the language spoken by the Rohingyas, and it remained the same as it was before the persecution. Their language has been influenced by their identity that traces back to their "descendants of Arab and Persian traders including, Indian, Bengali migrants who settled in the Arakan region

between 9<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century” (Ahmed, 2009; Ullah, 2011; Kipgen, 2013). Although few enthusiastic Rohingyas who stay abroad have taken initiatives to develop a written form of the Rohingya language, they could not reach consensus on which form the language should take. Therefore, as the 35-year-old man says, some use the Arabic (right to left alphabet), while others use English in the written form.

Rohingya people are the agents of preservation and reproduction of Rohingya language. But Rohingya community members, particularly the youth and young adults, in Bangladesh have little or no chance to use Rohingya language in their everyday conversation and education. Since the mediums of instructions in Bangladeshi schools are Bengali and English, Rohingyas feel attached to these two languages. A strong impact of the continuation of this process on their sense of belonging is obvious. As a result, adopted identity among the Rohingya youth and young adults is a common phenomenon because of their physical presence in Bangladesh, their experiences with Bangladeshi language and culture, and their distance from the Rohingya language.

Although their parents hope to go back to their own place someday, their experiences of uncertainty, oppression, and persecution force them learning survival strategy first, putting their concern with their identity aside. My 25-year-old woman participant is one of them. She is a 25-year-old Rohingya female from the unregistered camp at Kutupalong. She never went to school, but knew how to write her name in the Burmese language. She is not concerned about language, culture, and identity as most of her narratives are around her survival struggle. A few of the participants, such as the 35-year-old man, express their concern about their language suggesting that in order to survive, they should learn English. He is a critic of the Rohingya



language, and is one of them who has some level of education. He is aware of the benefits of learning English in the present world:

Today who claim among us that they speak Rohingya language, they are unaware of the language they speak. Because it's just a mix of local dialect, English, some Arabic etc. What kind of language is this? But if they learn English, that will be accepted everywhere in the globe... they can go to England or Canada and have a decent life. But learning Bengali or Burmese won't come to any use.

Such reactions are obvious for people who have been the victims of long-term oppression. This narrative gives an emphasis on the global acceptance of a Rohingya, which is possible by learning English. Moreover, by saying "learning Bengali or Burmese won't come to any use," the participant expresses his doubts about going back to Burma or staying in Bangladesh permanently, perhaps indicating "resettlement," one of the three options of durable solutions for refugees. This participant is not concerned about the impact of English language on Rohingya identity, rather, he emphasizes the survival strategy.

To summarize, Rohingyas who went to schools in Burma, were forced to learn the Burmese language. Similarly, Rohingyas who go to schools in Bangladeshi camps learn the Bengali language. There is no scope for the Rohingyas to have the Rohingya language as medium of instructions in Bangladeshi schools. Speaking the Chittagonian dialect, making books or written documents available in Rohingya language, and learning both the Bengali and the Burmese in Bangladeshi camps affect the identity of Rohingya youth and young adults in a complicated way.

### **Food and Clothing**

Although food and clothing are two important components of one's culture, my participants were more interested to share their views and experiences of their struggle embedded in poverty, oppression, and statelessness than their food and clothing. Like dialect, a commonality in food is also found between the Rohingyas and the Chittagonian people.

Traditional Rohingya food includes rice, fish, meat, vegetables, chillies, and onions. Dry fish is a widely popular item consumed in the form of curry and *vorta* (mash). Beef, mutton and chicken are served with rice, *polao*/pilau or *khichuri*/khichri during religious festivals and/or family programs. Desserts include *semai*/vermicelli cooked with milk, sugar, and coconut, *jilipi*/jalebi, and varieties of rice cakes. Rohingya festivals remain incomplete without *Paan* (betel-leaf), which is served at the beginning or end of the events accompanying a wide range of spices. Their current situations of poverty and statelessness, however, offer little scope to arrange traditional food in their everyday life. While the registered Rohingyas get free food, the unregistered ones struggle to manage food. Because of extreme poverty, families in the unregistered Rohingya community find it difficult even to manage light snacks such as noodles or *semai* in the wedding of their children. As an invited guest in a teenage girl's wedding of one of my participant's relatives at Kutupalong unregistered camp, I observed that the impoverished family was only able to manage noodles and soft drinks for the invitees. On the other hand, a 52-year-old man's family was able to prepare a variety of food items in his daughter's nose-piercing program (see Chapter 5). Both families live in the same camp; only financial ability produces different scenarios in terms of food consumptions in a family event.

While Rohingya food is similar to Chittagonian food to some extent, Rohingyas' clothing is similar to that of the Burmese. *Lungi* (loincloth/coarse cloth) and long or short-sleeved shirts are the common dresses for Rohingya men. The *lungi* is worn around the waist covering till ankles. On religious festivals and special occasions, Rohingya men wear Panjabi or Jubba, a long dress, with lungi or pajamas, and a *tupi*/hat. Rohingya women wear a long or short-sleeved blouse with a lungi or skirt-like cloth full of colorful traditional patterns. They often use a scarf or a dupatta to cover their head. They wear burka as a mandatory religious dress when they go

outside as they believe that burka is an obligatory dress for Muslim women according to Islam. In fact, the Quran, the religious book of the Muslims, does not mention wearing burka, rather the book asks women to maintain modesty by guarding the private parts, and wrapping the headcovers over the chests (Chapter 24, Verse 31).

Young Rohingya women use scented paste as makeup, which is prepared from the bark, roots, and stems of herbal plants. Both male and female Rohingya youth and young adults dress differently than the older members of their community. The clothing of female Rohingya youth and young adults, *3-piece salwar kameez* with *dupatta*, bears a resemblance to that of the Bangladeshi females. The clothing of male Rohingya youth and young adults is distinguishable than that of the older male Rohingyas. Young male Rohingyas rarely wear *lungi*, rather t-shirts and jeans are popular dresses among them. Both male and female wear sandals as footwear. Few male youth and young adults in the registered camps tend to follow the latest trends of the western fashion by wearing accessories such as bracelets, band ring, necklace etc. Many of them use smart phones with internet, and are active on social media.

### **Gender Roles**

The perceptions towards gender roles play significant roles in defining an individual. Gender identity is closely linked with Rohingya ethnic identity. The Rohingya community holds to specific gender roles. Men are the sole breadwinners, women take on reproductive roles and look after domestic affairs, boys are prepared to earn a living for the family and girls are encouraged to get married as early as possible, sometimes as young as eleven or twelve years old. In this community, a widely held belief is that, girls are not safe in their father's house after puberty. It is because they might be tempted into intimate relationships by young boys on their way to the grocery store or water collection points. It is not always possible for parents to protect their adolescent girls from the "evil eyes" of young men. This causes anxiety for the parents. The

only solution to this problem is marriage. Being a wife is like having a shield that protects girls from being harassed or assaulted, or even from becoming intimately involved of their own volition. Therefore, Rohingya women are mostly dependent on their husbands, psychologically and economically. Even in Burma, getting married at an early age and depending on a husband's income was a common trend in the Rohingya community. Thus, Rohingya gender roles have a strong influence on their identity as they have been maintaining over generations.

A young unregistered Rohingya woman of 18-year-old lives with her infant daughter. Her husband works in another district. He only occasionally visits his family, which leaves the young woman alone most of the time. She wants to go back to Burma to live with her parents, but she believes that she should follow her husband's decision:

I feel like I want to go back to my parents...but I don't know about her [the daughter] father's choice [smiles]. If her father asks me to stay here, I will have to do that, right? I can't go beyond his word.

In the Rohingya community, "going beyond" a husband's word is a serious offence because the husband is the caretaker and protector of the family.

Most Rohingya women do not work because of the stereotypical notions about women's role. They are expected to remain at home to look after children, even though there is a dire need of money to feed the children. At one point in my conversation with a 20-year-old man and his wife, an extremely poor couple in an unregistered camp, I ask whether the wife could work in order to make money to support the family. Her response, "if we get food we eat, if we don't, we starve. But we are afraid of being abused [by outside men]. Moreover, if I go outside, other people will see me, that's a sin." Her husband adds, "I know, but I did not let her go outside." And the wife continues, "my husband is capable to earn, whatever little it is." Clearly, her

response was an attempt to justify her staying at home and her husband's restriction of her mobility to earn income even though the couple lives in extreme financial hardships.

Some Rohingya women are compelled to work for a living as they have no male family members. This is not always welcomed by other registered Rohingya women who are relatively better off, either because of receiving remittances from relatives staying abroad, or having other sources of income. But what a woman who does not have a male member in the family should do to earn a living? 40-year-old woman, a resident of the registered camp, replies, "we can help her collectively. If it were in Burma, we all would have raised funds for her so that she did not need to go outside." This woman considers herself lucky to have a husband and son who earn. But would the community raise funds to support the helpless unregistered Rohingya women as they used to do in Burma? Her comments:

It is difficult for us because all of us are struggling with poverty now. We can't really help much if a woman has no male member in her house. She has to survive, that's why you will see some women working outside, in the market, and sometimes they get involved in illegal acts too.

By "illegal acts" she refers to prostitution. Later, she explains that poverty forces them (the women) to get involved in illegal acts, and women involved in illegal acts are from the unregistered camp as they are the poorest. Her account reveals that her notions of a woman's role along with her class consciousness are closely linked to her Rohingyaness, which reinforces the belief that women should stay at home.

But does staying at home ensure a woman's safety? The 40-year-old woman acknowledges that wife battering does happen in the camps. She also adds that a husband works hard and is always anxious about supporting his family with his small income. It is not surprising to find him angry and distant when he returns home from work and the wife begins complaining about household matters, financial crisis etc. As a result, their arguments, screaming, and

shouting soon end with the husband hitting the wife. It is the responsibility of the wife to remain quiet and not to rush to the CIC (Camp-In-Charge) office to file a complaint because afterwards “you have to return to his [the husband’s] house, depend on his earning, and stay with him.” This perspective points to a particular type of social structure in which the Rohingya community lives and their “social position, status, role, authority, and prestige, refers to relationships derived from how people act toward each other” (Blumer, 1969, p. 7). The Rohingyas’ behavior toward each other is the expression of their perceptions of each other that shapes, and is shaped by, their social interaction. Accordingly, they assign status, roles, and authority to Rohingya men who are perceived to be responsible for their women while Rohingya women are perceived to be dependent on Rohingya men. Such conduct is embodied in their Rohingya identity.

When a Rohingya woman goes outside, she wears a black *burka*. Some women cover the entire body—except their eyes—while others keep their face unveiled. A 20-year-old woman informs that all Rohingya women wear a *burka* because “this is how we show respect to our religion, and this is our Arakanese practice,” a confirmation that using a *burka* is both a religious symbol and an important element of ethnic identity. Understanding gender roles in a certain way, and women wearing a *burka* are Rohingyas’ part of their traits and beliefs reaffirming Rohingya identity. Although women are considered less capable than men in problem solving/decision making, and are more likely to be the victims of domestic violence within Rohingya community, it is part of their social process. These norms are embedded in their ethnic values, which do not encourage them to negotiate their gender roles.

To summarize, while many of them tend to integrate into Bangladeshi culture, they are cautious about not incorporating Bangladeshi gender roles into the Rohingyas’ gender roles. According to Rohingya women, leading a family, running a business or driving etc. are

“Bangladeshi women’s jobs,” and these are against the normative behaviors of Rohingya women. In their views, appropriate gender identity for Rohingya women lies in staying at home and looking after the family.

### **Becoming Rohingya: Community Building Efforts and Rohingya Agency**

I now turn to the third subsection of this chapter to show how, despite living with limitations and challenges, Rohingya people build community as part of their ways of becoming Rohingyas. Agency in Rohingya youth and young adults is noticeable in their efforts to organize social events, provide services, and resist existing social structures of injustice. Before describing Rohingya people’s community building efforts, a brief discussion on how Rohingya agency is related to identity and citizenship is necessary here.

Agency is linked to both citizenship and identity. For identity, Moore’s idea of ratification, Mead’s self-consciousness, and Goffman’s societal norms, assumptions and social constructionism, as discussed in the earlier chapters, require “others”—the larger society. Although Rohingya youth is often unable to involve “others” in the host country, they are capable to generate necessary support from within themselves. Their individual efforts turn into a collective action as they undertake social projects beneficial to their community members. Providing education to the younger generation is an example of such projects. Within Rohingya community, the Rohingya youth and young adults thus become known as change makers. They give a positive impression of themselves to others, members of Rohingya community, amid their unsettled identity.

However, the link between citizenship and agency is not straightforward. By exercising agency, the Rohingyas endeavor to exercise their social rights in their own way within their protracted situations. Since citizenship is a formal and legal status, gaining access to a welfare

and security of the state is difficult for the Rohingya because of their statelessness. Although Rohingya agency may not be helpful to achieve citizenship, Rohingya youth and young adults are organized and committed to do the wellbeing of the Rohingya community with whatever resources they have amid their non-citizenship status.

The Rohingya youth and young adults are able to get around the barriers to make sense of their lives. This section mainly highlights activities performed by Rohingya agency within and outside the refugee camps. The activities include their efforts in teaching the younger generation in the camp schools, participating in voluntary blood donation to save fellow Rohingyas, and conducting advocacy for durable solutions to the Rohingya crisis. The Rohingya youth and young adults may not enable their social rights of citizenship via legal recognition, but they are able to exercise their social rights of citizenship through their agency within their community.

### **Spreading the Light of Education Amid the Darkness of Refugeeeness**

A key area which explicitly shows agency is Rohingyas' involvement in teaching. Regardless of their status in Bangladesh, and despite having multiple limitations in their social world, Rohingya youth and young adults play an active role in teaching younger Rohingya children. Rohingyas know that education plays a key role in shaping one's identity, and they are ready to face the challenges involved in teaching. For instance, the 19-year-old woman, a camp school teacher, is concerned about the patterns of education in the school, and the contents of the lessons, as they do not represent Rohingya lives. She says, "I teach four subjects: Bengali, English, Math and Environmental science...what we teach has very little resemblance to the reality we are in." The textbooks are suitable for Bangladeshi children, who are familiar with the symbols and description of the social surroundings of Bangladesh. Rohingya children study something that does not reflect the stories they have heard from their parents about their life in



Burma, and the life Rohingyas going through in Bangladesh. She observes that the stories in the textbooks portray a happy family environment, i.e. the parents and their children working in a beautiful backyard garden, growing flowers, and making their environment beautiful. These kinds of depictions indicate that she and her students are exposed to an idealized image of an environment while, in reality, they are forced to live in shacks. Their shacks are built so close together that the spaces between them are barely wide enough to walk through. Moreover, sewage flow through the narrow passages in front of the shacks. Therefore, Rohingyas find very little resemblance between the education they receive and the reality they experience. Although such awkward situations place them into dilemmas about their roles as teachers, Rohingya youth and young adult teachers are capable to handle these situations and do their best for their students.

In addition, the amount they earn by teaching is insufficient to maintain a livelihood, yet their struggle and commitment in running schools, particularly in the unregistered camp, reflect their hope for a better future for the children within their community. I asked a 23-year-old man, a Rohingya teacher in the unregistered camp, what is his motivation behind teaching children up to Grade 3 when he knows that these children will not have a chance to further their education. He replies that having them in the school up to Grade 3 can at least save these children from being involved in odd unsafe jobs at such a young age.

### **Voluntary Blood Donation Project**

Rohingya agency is also visible in life saving initiatives for their own community members. In the registered Rohingya camp, youth and young adults started a voluntary blood donation project for the camp residents. The key beneficiaries of this initiative are infants, pregnant women and patients in need of blood urgent basis. It was started in 2009 under the

leadership of a Rohingya youth who later moved to Canada. There are 35 voluntary members in this project as of 2016. All members age ranges from 16 to 32. There are no blood collection and preservation facilities in the camp hospital. Therefore, patients in need of blood are referred to hospitals located outside the camp which involve expenses related to travel and blood test.

The youth and young adult volunteers donate 100 taka (CAD \$1.60 as of October 2018) to collect a fund on monthly basis to provide travel cost to the patients. They maintain a blood group list of the voluntary members who can be a donor when needed. All members in this group are Rohingya men as Rohingya families do not allow their female members to donate blood with a notion that blood donation may cause harm to their health. However, Rohingya youth and young adults make sense of their lives by forming a voluntary blood donation group while they are in a stateless situation which is exacerbated by their liminality, poor income, little education, lack of necessary facilities in the camp hospital etc.

### **Advocacy and Negotiations**

The Rohingyas are active in conducting advocacy for durable solutions to Rohingya crisis. They have very little to do because of their protracted situations, yet their awareness of their situation is reflected in their dialogues and negotiations with influential visitors and delegates. They are not allowed to demonstrate or organize movements inside or outside the camp. Therefore, whenever representatives of the UNHCR and other international organizations visit the camps, Rohingya youth and young adults come forward to meet the visitors and explain their situations. Such proactiveness is rare among the elderly Rohingya people. The Rohingyas express their concerns and demands through written letters to the UNHCR. Increasing allocations for education materials for the camp schools is an outcome of their negotiations with the NGOs and the camp management. The following narrative excerpted from the 35-year-old

man's interview provides an example of the Rohingya people's agency to serve the interest of their community:

It took years to expand the education program. We kept appealing to the government through the RRRC, UNHCR. After receiving series of applications from us, the government recognized this program, but then Save the Children stopped their program with us. Then came Concern [a Bangladeshi NGO]. After that TAI [a Bangladeshi NGO] came. All these years, I was with the schools. We requested the government and NGOs for having sports and games for the students. But we did not have any field to play. Then I gathered over 100 students, and we worked together to prepare a field. There were a lot of obstacles, cases were filed against us, it was said that Rohingyas were destructing the forests for their playground which goes against environment protection. But we worked inside the camp and didn't go beyond the government approved map to select a place for our field. And we won the cases.

The above strategies and initiatives taken by Rohingya youth and young adults define their identity as responsible human beings who want to build a better future for themselves and for their next generation. Compared to Bangladeshi citizens, who are entitled to free movement, have right to education, and are even allowed to organize protests and demonstrations against state-decisions that are against them, Rohingyas live a different life full of restrictions, inequality and uncertainty. In the capital city of Bangladesh, Dhaka, Bangladeshi youth and young adults organize movements, and protest government's decisions that often seem impeding rights of the youth. Their recent demand at Shahabag is a latest example of how thousands of university students in Bangladesh, boycotting classes, joined a protest, which ultimately transformed into a national protest, calling for an end of the quota system in government jobs (Mahmud, 2018). Exercising such agency is possible only when an individual has an identity and a citizenship in the country s/he resides. Rohingya youth and young adults wrestle with their identity because they are non-citizens of Bangladesh. Yet they constantly try to overcome the barriers regardless of their status in Bangladesh. The state disenfranchises them from access to rights. But

Rohingyas do not deprive themselves of utilizing power and abilities they have within themselves to create and maintain their identity in the social conditions they are forced to live in.

Elderly members of Rohingya community rarely come forward with the initiatives discussed above. While scholars and media often portray youth as reckless, nervous, incompetent, stressed, disturbed, deviant, dependent, ignorant, rebellious, powerless etc. (Montgomery, 2007; Tyyska, 2009), the Rohingya youth and young adults challenge these labels. Despite living in a protracted situation and in a constant struggle with achieving an acceptable identity, Rohingya people's agency is exposed through their thoughts, actions and motivations.

Now I move to the final chapter to show how Rohingya youth and young adults maintain connection to both their Rohingya identity, and Bangladeshi identity, and how they conceptualize hybrid identity, legal citizenship, and social citizenship.

## CHAPTER 7

### IDENTITY AND CITIZENSHIP OF ROHINGYA PEOPLE

Rohingya youth and young adults attach their Rohingya identity both to their ethnicity, and to where they currently live, Bangladesh. Thus, they form a hybrid identity. Despite having a hybrid identity, their self-image represents their sense of sharing in Rohingya ethnic membership. But this membership is not recognized by the Burmese national. On the other hand, even if some of them feel a sense of belonging to Bangladeshi nationality, this is also not recognized by Bangladesh. Thus, a lack of recognition turns them into non-members in both states.

Mead, Moore, and Goffman emphasize the requirement of membership for developing an inner sense of self, a self-image (see Chapter 3). It is clear that because of their sense of belonging, Rohingya youth and young adults have acceptance to their ethnicity, i.e. their society/nation/group, which confirms their social inclusion in their ethnic community. Such confirmation, however, does not grant their legal status, nor does it help them in exercising their social rights in Burma and Bangladesh. They have an ethnic identity, but their lack of national identity problematizes their access to their rights, because “nationality need not be a prerequisite to becoming a citizen” (Oommen 1997, p. 232).

In this chapter, the narratives of my participants around citizenship are linked to security, free movement, the right to exercise free will, their desire to purchase land and own their own house, having education, pursuing a career of their own choosing, etc. None of these activities is possible for a Rohingya both in Burma and Bangladesh, unless the issues of their lack of recognition and the lack of membership are resolved. Based on my participants’ narratives, this chapter highlights three key areas around the identity and citizenship of the Rohingya people.

These are, their hybrid identity, legal citizenship, and social citizenship. The discussion on social citizenship gives a special emphasis on persuasion of education, a social right, of Rohingya people in Bangladeshi schools.

### **Hybrid Identity**

While a 23-year-old man claimed status in Bangladesh, some Rohingyas form a hybrid identity combining both their past and present experiences. The 18-year-old young woman was one of them. She was clear about how citizenship is conferred, and she thinks that she fits in a bi-cultural identity of who she is:

Citizenship is determined in two ways: by birth [by descent, regardless of the place of birth] and by the place of birth. I fall in the second category, since I was born in Bangladesh, I am a Bangladeshi (smile), but since my parents are from Burma, I am a Burmese, too...I consider myself a Bangladeshi, too.

This narrative denotes the formation of a hybrid identity among the Rohingya youth and young adults. Her awareness of the types of citizenship is reflected in her self-identification as “a Burmese.” The term “Burmese” is often used by Bangladeshi people as a pejorative term; it’s use offends some Rohingyas as they identify themselves as “Rohingyas.” She, however, seemed comfortable with the use of Burmese. She was conscious in her formation of her hybrid identity regardless of how the states may consider it. She may not expose her self-perceptions of her hybrid identity to the adult Rohingya members in her family, yet she is clear to herself about who she is.

Unlike the 18-year-old woman, an 18-year-old young man was contemplative about his citizenship. He lived in Nayapara registered camp. He is convinced that people call him “Burmese” because his parents are from Burma. But he has no connection to Burma, and he was neither born in Burma nor has ever lived in Burma, yet he is known as “Burmese.” He, along with his Rohingya peers, are often called “Burmese” by some of his Bangladeshi peers. Although

Rohingyas find it offensive, this is an age or a generational pattern, and the Rohingya youth and young adults accept such offensive remarks without showing any reaction.

This 18-year-old youth was born and raised in Bangladesh. But, he refrained from identifying himself as Bangladeshi because of the Rohingya adults' perceptions and attitudes of him. Mead's theoretical framework stresses the importance of social attitudes in the process of an individual's identity formation; in other words, it is constituted both by individual and collective attitudes. The attitudes of Rohingya youth and young adults towards the self and the social attitudes of the generalized other towards the youth and young adults—both raise questions about the individual's belonging. Which social group do Rohingya youth and young adults belong? They do not belong to the Burmese, nor they belong to the Bangladeshi youth and young adults. They find themselves nowhere, or in the middle of Rohingya-ness and Bangladeshi. This tension caused by their lack of a sense of belonging is exacerbated by the role of the state in conferring citizenship.

Rohingya youth and young adults go through the act of adjustment as part of forming their hybrid identity. In this act, they hide their original identity when it is unsafe, and reveal when it seems safe as a 20-year-old man said, "When I go to school, I am a Bangladeshi, and when I am here in the camp, I am a Rohingya. No particular identity is written on my forehead, right?" On the one hand, Rohingyas are capable of maintaining social relations with Bangladeshi people because of linguistic, religious, and outward similarities between themselves and local Bangladeshi. On the other hand, their vulnerabilities instill a fear within Rohingyas of being stigmatized or even abused. Therefore, instead of protesting the discrimination they experience, they may accept and cope with the situation they find themselves in. These are the lessons they have learned from their experiences of statelessness, delegitimization, and persecution.

Being bullied or attacked by Bangladeshi peers is nearly common for Rohingya students when their “disguise” is revealed. But they prefer not to engage in arguments or fights with local youth and young adults, even if they (Rohingyas) win the competition in the playground, or excel in school. Protesting this kind of situation would invite a negative response, hence, keeping quiet or protecting oneself seems the best tact. In response to my question, whether they are afraid that their Bangladeshi friends may not accept them if their actual identity is revealed, the 20-year-old man stated:

Well, that’s one thing, but most importantly, it would create a problem for me in my college. I might be forced to withdraw, the administration won’t accept it... That’s why I maintained the same identity everywhere, be it with my friends or at my college.

The 18-year-old youth expressed similar sentiments regarding hiding his identity. Both the 20-year-old youth and the 18-year-old youth indicated that ensuring their safety is the most important factor. The 18-year-old young Rohingya believed in passivity as he never protests when Bangladeshi people of his age attack him and engage in disputes or fight with him. His response to my question whether he fought back was immediate:

Oh no, we are from a different country, if I chase after them or do anything, they will hit me, no? We don’t even tell anyone in the school that we are from the camp, if we disclose it, we will be kicked out from the school.

In order to avoid stigmatization or being kicked out of the institution, Rohingyas resort to passivity, and maintained their hybrid/adopted identity.

This is an example of identity as situational and fluid: Bangladeshi in some situations, Rohingya in others, yet Burmese in others, too. Their hybrid identity with the self is, sometimes, helpful for them to maximize benefits depending on the social environment and situations.

Rohingyas, usually, do not reveal their actual identity for fear of losing their mutual relationship—between the Rohingya and the Bangladeshi—and their achieved status in their



social surroundings. While the self is in a constant dialogue between I and me, the source of originality and creativity of many of the Rohingyas lies in their hybrid and/or adopted identity.

But an adopted identity does not resolve the problem of their non-citizenship status.

Those who get a chance to go to mainstream schools or colleges in Bangladesh find it problematic to see how textbooks reinforce certain types of messages which contradict their reality. According to the 20-year-old man:

I read in the civics book in Grades 9 and 10 that there were two types of citizenship in Bangladesh: one is by birth and the other is by naturalization process. But none of this applies to me, isn't the book wrong then?

According to the Citizenship Act 1951 of Bangladesh, a person shall not be a Bangladeshi citizen if at the time of his/her birth, his/her father/mother was a non-citizen of Bangladesh (The Citizenship Act 1951, 4a). It applies to both the 18-year-old and the 20-year-old youth, and other Rohingyas who were born in Bangladesh to non-Bangladeshi fathers/mothers. This is Rohingya's social condition, which they cannot change, but they are capable of navigating the situation in order to give themselves, and to the larger society as well, an identity of their own. They end up with an identity that combines their Rohingya-ness and Bangladeshi identities.

Mead's analysis indicates that a stable social process and the organization of individual and social attitudes in a particular context are crucial to the development of the self. For Rohingya youth and young adults, some of these are absent, some are imaginary, and some uncertain. All affect the ability of Rohingya youth and young adults to reach their full development. The "I" of Rohingya youth and young adults "gives the sense of freedom, of initiative" (Mead, 1934, p. 177) to exercise their agency, to identify them as part of their ethnic community. This "sense of freedom" is nurtured and shaped by their ethnic sense of belonging. But the "me" of Rohingya, is divided into two parts. The first, when the "me" of the Rohingyas

take the attitudes of the others (social attitude), the Rohingya become aware of the social contexts that leave them unrecognized, and may cause their emotional instability. At the same time, another part of “me” of the Rohingya also becomes aware that by taking the attitudes of the others, they find justification for forming an adopted/hybrid identity because of their physical disconnection to their parents’ land, and may develop emotional resilience. Based on these two, the “I” of the Rohingya “gives the sense of freedom” to their “me” to act, or adjust to “fit” themselves, or exercise their agency.

To a greater extent, a constant adjustment of Rohingya youth and young adults turns them into individuals practicing Bangladeshi culture yet maintaining Rohingya ethnic traits, which affect the mutual relationship of the youth and young adults and the Rohingya community. But the youth, within the self, may feel that adjustments to their current social setting may conflict with Rohingya culture and the views of the older members of the community; and thus, they are unable to freely express the self. Because of prolonged living in their present environment, Rohingya youth and young adults are unable to escape from the feelings and attitudes that were developed through a long-term social process. Due to their seemingly temporary stay, they are unable to fully embrace the present social and cultural environment (because it is not their own). In such a complex situation, Rohingyas try to harmonize their inner sense of self with their community’s perceptions of their Rohingyaness, as Mead (1934) notes that both “I” and “me” constitute the self, “the ‘me’ setting the situation to which ‘I’ responds” (p. 277).

The connection of Rohingya youth and young adults to Bangladesh is vivid in the following photo taken from inside a shack in the unregistered camp. For furniture, the shack has a broken plastic shelf, a broken wooden cloth rack, and an old rusted metal storage trunk. The

torn plastic mat on the muddy floor with two dirty pillows indicate that this place is used both for seating at day time and sleeping at night.

Interestingly, despite living in such conditions, a Bangladeshi flag, or a calendar with pictures of Bangladeshi natural and cultural symbols, or quotes in Bengali are found hanging on the wall inside their shacks. A painting on the mud wall captured my attention right after entering one participant’s shack.



*Photo 1.19: Inside a shack, Kutupalong unregistered camp, Photo: Ishrat*

In Photo 1.19, the dark red paintings on the muddy wall are done by the resident as a house decoration. Along with two posters framed on the wall, one showing an Arabic verse with its Bengali meaning and another a Bengali saying “mother’s blessing is the best gift”—a Bangladeshi flag is posted. Although the use of such symbols may not demonstrate Rohingyas’ unconditional love for Bangladesh and the Bengali language, it does carry meaning. The resident of this shack, the 19-year-old woman, claimed that they are Rohingya, but they were born and

raised in Bangladesh. Putting a Bangladeshi flag on the wall inside their shacks, therefore, hints of a coherence of Rohingyaanness and Bangladeshi: their hybrid identity.

### **Legal Citizenship**

Individuals need to be legally recognized citizens in order to exercise rights. Feeling attached to a country and being recognized by that country is different. States reserve the right to confer citizenship to an individual depending upon several criteria. These criteria are more strictive for people who are officially unidentified, and are unable to produce evidence of their membership and belonging to the land they are from due to a lack of their citizenship, such as Rohingya. This section shows how legal citizenship is perceived.

Compared to the adult Rohingyas, the younger people among the Rohingya perceive citizenship from a more legal point of view. A 23-year-old unregistered Rohingya was born in a Bangladeshi camp which led him to identify himself a Bangladeshi. He believed he had a valid point to support his claim. In his words, “I can file a case in order to obtain my identity as a Bangladeshi, if I choose, because I think I am a citizen of this country.”

He perhaps knew in the back of his mind that the possibility of winning a case like this is almost impossible because they are not recognized as ‘legal’ residents of Bangladesh, hence it is most likely no court would accept such cases, even though he was born in Bangladesh. In his view, young people of his age lose their confidence and strength when placed in extreme crises and poverty for a longer period. From his narratives, it stands out that the absence of citizenship is a barrier to developing a sense of self and becoming an active and confident member of a particular political community. The 23-year-old man is concerned about the future of the young generation of his community:

If I won't have any parents, then how could I come into being. Similarly, if we don't have a place...a country of our own, how come I am here in this world? I feel like it is a sort of

disability... we are here in this world but we are not part of this world. Even a paralyzed person can do many things despite his limited ability...he can be a terrorist if he is put in that type of environment. Similarly, a person from a place like this who is deprived of food, health service, education, money...he can easily be a terrorist. We don't see our future.

A sociological analysis of how socialization shapes one's way of becoming is reflected in this narrative. Rohingyas are uprooted from their own place, and they are unaccepted everywhere. The 23-year-old man emphasized that such unacceptance has not only complicated their present situations but also pushes them towards an uncertain future. Seeing a viable future is linked to having access to human rights, which consist of, in his words, "your free movement, independent living in a country, which is possible if you are granted citizenship." His narrative clarified that citizenship is so powerful that people cannot develop their full potential unless these are granted by a formal legal status. In other words, it is the state that grants both human rights and social citizenship. As discussed in Chapter 3, citizenship can be defined as a legal concept which grants access to a wide range of duties, rights and power (Marshall, 1964; Isin & Wood, 1999; Miller, 2000; Tan, 2005; & Pinson, 2008), and enables a sense of belonging, too.

Citizenship and a sense of belonging to a nation-state play an important role in shaping people's identity as well as a sense of self. This is challenging for Rohingya people because of their statelessness. Senay (2008) points out that "citizenship in its simplest form implies a status which defines the nature and range of rights and duties bestowed upon acceptable members of the society" (p. 963). This definition indicates that the notion of citizenship portrays individuals in different ways – recognizing some as citizens while others as non-citizens/ non-members/ refugees. Scholars note that the exclusionary form of citizenship views young refugees as dangerous, while the inclusionary form considers them as human beings, creating an opportunity for them to develop a sense of "the self."

Similar to the Rohingyas in Burma, residents in India's Assam are in an ordeal because of the "politics of citizenship flare" (Lekhi, 2018). The provincial government of the Indian state Assam has prepared a new citizenship registry in 2018 called the National Register of Citizens (NRC), threatening exclusions of nearly four million Muslims. These people—once migrated from Bangladesh, and having several generations of ancestors born in Assam—used to think they were Indians. Now India does not think of these four million of its own (Bhaumik, 2018). It is because the NRC does not include them due to the lack of proof of their citizenship. They are accused of being "illegal Bangladeshis" by local political leaders. Poor accused residents do not know about politics, but are the victims of politics; the politics of religion, ethnicity, and nationality. The local political leaders in India's Assam accuse them for not having proofs of their nationality/citizenship. Strategies of flawed exclusions place a huge number of people in a nightmare with the question of their identity. The NRC of India, similar to the Burmese Citizenship Act 1982, has opened the door of making a Rohingya-like refugee crisis. Human rights and citizenship are empty words for the residents of Assam and the Burmese Rohingya.

On a visit, my conversation with a 52-year-old man's wife continued sitting on the *hogla* mat, made by elephant-grass, in the living *cum* bed room of their bamboo-made shack. A strong sewage smell coming from the public toilets located just a few yards away from this shack made it difficult to sit there for long. The man came back from work. His wife served him lunch. He asked me to join the lunch but I gently declined. It is indeed impressive to notice their courtesy of asking an outsider to join the lunch despite living in extreme poverty. He expressed his pain and agony of living a life without recognition and without a place to live which, he thinks, are the results of non-citizenship. He said, "our ancestors lived in Burma, we lived in Burma, still we

have not been recognized as citizens [in Burma]... even a calf has its home, it lives in a certain place, but we have no place to live.”

The 52-year-old man is the father of four children, three daughters and a son. Two daughters got married and had their own families while the man and his wife live in this shack with their youngest daughter and the son. He was a part time temporary construction worker employed by a local NGO in Ukhia. He thought that the issue of recognition in Burma is attached to their religious identity. The Burmese government hates Muslims and that is why Rohingyas are not allowed to live in Burma. The Burmese government’s restrictions on Rohingya’s access to the job market in Burma is also another problem associated with their non-citizenship status and their religious identity, as the 52-year-old man noted, “no Muslim is allowed to get a job in the police or the administration of the country as everything is controlled by them [Buddhists].” This is an example of the exclusionary form of citizenship. This form—unscrupulous in denying Rohingyas’ rights—establishes Rohingyas’ failure to fulfill the condition of belonging, status, identity and rights. The man feels sad when he talks about voting, a political right of a citizen:

I regret that I am not a citizen of this country. Had I been a citizen and lived in the village, I would have been welcomed by the people working in the voting booth, I would have sat with them...a vote is such a valuable thing, but I am not entitled to cast a vote. What can I do?

This 52-year-old man’s desire can be fulfilled upon receiving legal status of a citizen. Although it is widely believed that non-citizens cannot vote, in some places, such as Bolivia, Colombia, Switzerland, non-citizens have voting rights. Non-citizens of some EU member countries have also voting rights similar to the non-citizens of some Commonwealth countries. For the Rohingya people, the state-imposes barriers on their political rights, but cannot impose the same on their desire to live a life with rights and dignity with full participation in politics. This 52-

year-old man also added that, despite having some forms of cultural, religious and linguistic similarities, Rohingyas feel that only citizenship can grant them opportunities to be a part of Bangladeshi to be in the voting booth and with Bangladeshi people. Following the 52-year-old man, the frustrated 35-year-old man stated:

We are the citizens of Arakan state but actually we are stateless. Okay? A citizen has the right to vote. We don't have this right. Citizens are entitled to apply for jobs and enjoy necessary facilities provided by the government of that country. We can neither apply for jobs nor can enjoy government facilities. It's because we are not citizens of Bangladesh.

The 35-year-old man was aware of the rights and entitlements of a citizen. Although he began with his claim of being a citizen of Arakan (Burma), his account told how his statelessness affected his ability to reach his full potential in Burma, and how the same applies to them in Bangladesh. One's sense of belonging does not require any evidence. But a proof is essential to claim citizenship, as he notes:

We have no birth records, no documents. The basis of our claim [of citizenship] is our birth place, but we are unable to prove that. In Europe, if a woman gives birth to a child in an airplane, the baby would be considered a citizen of the country that owns the carrier. But these are not important here, it seems like we were born on the street.

His narrative resonates with the concept of legal citizenship which points to both recognition and acceptance in the social and civic domain of a state.

The 1982 Citizenship Act of Burma is a legal apparatus of the state. This Act and the Burmese government's non-signatory status to the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol pave the way for the violation of the rights and oppression of Rohingyas, denying their longstanding existence in Burma. In fact, by being the non-signatories of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the status of refugees, both Burma's and Bangladesh's lack of responsibility to ensure human rights for Rohingyas are manifested. However, being a signatory of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Bangladesh



is committed to protect the rights of all children within its territory. Despite living within its territory, Rohingya children do not fall under the category of “deserving” due to their parents’ non-citizen status and statelessness. Today’s Rohingya youth and young adults were yesterday’s children. If Rohingya children were guarded with human rights and benefits of legal citizenship in the past, today’s Rohingya youth and young adults would have opportunities for self-actualization. Although many young people having full access to rights indulge in violence and crime, the Rohingya youth and young adults in my study—despite their lack of legal citizenship—seem confident and self-assured, particularly because of their engagement in community building efforts, and individual persuasion of education in Bangladesh.

### **Social Citizenship**

Social citizenship confirms individuals’ access to social rights of housing, education, etc. The Rohingyas are ineligible to enjoy social citizenship in both Burma and Bangladesh because they are not legal citizens. Yet, they are aware of these rights. The following narrative is the 34-year-old man’s definition of citizenship encompassing all three forms suggested by Marshall, social, civil and political:

A citizen has an address, this is an important thing. Say, I am a citizen of this country. My citizenship would have helped me to purchase land, and homes in this country, ensure free movement. But our situation is like...every human being is driven by his wish or will, our wishes have no value, we die with unfulfilled wishes.

Social citizenship can fulfill his desire of purchasing land, and home in a country. The politics of citizenship, however, objectify people with papers and proofs, which make accessing social rights extremely difficult for Rohingyas.

Staples’ (2012) political theorization shows that due to misplacing of documents showing proof of residence, schooling, and birth registration, which could establish their connection to their land of origin and support claims to rights, refugees suffer. The consequences of misplacing

documents (or not being issued documents in the first place) invite multiple problems for all, including younger people. And this applies to Rohingya youth and young adults. Many studied in Burmese schools but they could not bring any proof of education in Burma which could be used as a proof of their identity to get admission to Bangladeshi schools in a legal way. Rohingyas do not have access to Bangladeshi schools because they have no proof of nationality and have no status in Bangladesh. Thus, they are unable to access their social rights.

The following passages use the example of Rohingyas' individual persuasion of education, and their capabilities of using social networks to achieve their (social) right to education.

Having no birth registration certificate until 2017 could not stop Rohingyas from searching for alternative routes for pursuing education in Bangladeshi schools. One of the strategies Rohingya parents used was negotiating with influential people, such as local elites and Union Parishad<sup>4</sup> members/chairmen, in order to acquire a birth registration certificate for their children born in Bangladesh. This was not only done unofficially between Rohingyas and local elites, but was also a guarded matter as it involved risks of violating government regulations regarding Rohingyas' admission to Bangladeshi schools. However, negotiations worked. All who undertook such negotiations were successful in obtaining birth registration certificates and gaining admission to Bangladeshi schools.

The negotiation between Rohingyas and local elites did not happen overnight. Rohingya parents were referred by other Rohingyas to local elites, religious leaders, political leaders, school teachers, or local businessmen under whom the referrer worked as a labor. Such working relationships often developed trust and a positive attitude towards each other, which encouraged

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<sup>4</sup> The lowest tier of local level administration in Bangladesh

Rohingyas to ask for a favor to enhance the possibility of their children being admitted to a local school. Once Rohingya parents were able to convince such a person about the importance of their child's education, it became easy for the parents to obtain a Bangladeshi ID to use for admission into Bangladeshi schools.

Rohingyas often use a Bangladeshi address in the admission application to prove their identity as Bangladeshi. I asked a 20-year-old man, which address he used in his applications:

Cox's Bazar, for both my current and permanent address. In fact, my friend's father told me that he would help me in getting an ID card. So, he let me use his address, and...he had a son who died long ago, so he told me that it would be done in his [the son] name.

Kutupalong refugee camp is almost thirty-five kilometers away from Cox's Bazar, yet he used it as his current and permanent address. A camp address would never work for getting a Bangladeshi ID card, rather, it would jeopardize the entire process. Therefore, using a false name and address is the only option for Rohingyas to acquire a Bangladeshi ID. needed to complete the admission application. The 35-year-old man followed the same path, too. He informed, "I used fake information. I did not use my actual name and address of this camp, because you know they won't accept it. So I used a different name, different address like a village address."

In Bangladesh, a birth registration certificate, a proof of national identity, is a prerequisite for school admission. This is a government issued document that certifies the name, date, and place of the birth of a child in Bangladesh. Because of the government's ban on Rohingya's stay, no Rohingya was eligible for a birth registration certificate even though most Rohingya youth and young adults were born in Bangladesh. Very recently birth registration for Rohingya children has been started in Bangladesh. In terms of the debate on whether Rohingya children born in Bangladesh can be called Bangladeshi by birth, the Bangladeshi government was undecided about issuing the birth registration certificates to Rohingya children until another

wave of fresh Rohingya inflow in 2017. Finally, the government of Bangladesh started registering the newborns in Rohingya refugee camps as “Myanmar citizens” as reported in January 2018 (“Steps taken for birth registration of Rohingya babies,” January 22, 2018).

Clearly, Rohingya’s strategies of using social networks override the implied restrictions regarding Rohingyas’ education in Bangladeshi institutions. It is interesting to see how local Bangladeshi people support Rohingya refugees in their pursuit of education. Not only education, Bangladeshi citizens in two Rohingya-inhabited *upazilas*, Teknaf and Ukhia, show supportive attitudes towards the Rohingya people as found by Xchange, a migration research organization. Findings show that 70% of local Bangladeshi reported having *ever-helped* a Rohingya and 97% respondents find that Rohingyas’ fear to return to Burma is reasonable, although 85% respondents do not consider them as friends (“The Rohingya Amongst Us”, August 28, 2018).

Along with social networks, bribing is often necessary to complete admission procedures in Bangladeshi schools. Rohingya parents bribe local political leaders, school authorities, or local elites, which not only helps them to acquire a Bangladeshi ID for their children but also guarantees their admission to a local school, albeit with a false name. However, there is a risk for the institutions of being caught by law enforcement agency as the ID is false, therefore it is preserved with the institutions instead of giving it to the client. One should not naïvely assume that the camp administration is unaware of the strategies Rohingyas adopt to pursue education in Bangladeshi institutions. It is an open secret. The camp administration works under the direction and supervision of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), which is a wing of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief. According to my participants, the camp administration and the RRRC office know about this, yet they remain silent. Perhaps because this is a way to unofficially promote Rohingyas’ right to education, a social right.

Interestingly, as opposed to the young Rohingyas, the adults seem less concerned about social rights in Bangladesh as they view their attachment and sense of belonging differently, with a greater connection to Burma. A 65-year-old registered Rohingya's account shows that even living in the camp for decades does not change his perceptions of who he is. He has been living in Bangladesh for over 24 years. In response to my question of whether he considers himself a Bangladeshi, he said, "I don't think that way, not even 1% out of 100%. I am thankful to Bangladesh, they gave us shelter. Where would we go if we were refused?" While a 20-year-old registered Rohingya man was eager to manage a Bangladeshi national ID card, the 65-year-old man did not agree with the views of the younger generation. Rather a sense of belonging to the place where he was from seems more precious to him than a piece of paper: "Wherever I am asked about my identity, I tell that I am from Burma. What would the papers [ID card] do?"

Registered Rohingyas' ID card issued by the UNHCR does not mention their Rohingya identity. It simply identifies them as refugees. Granting social citizenship in Bangladesh at present, and legal citizenship in Burma in the future are necessary for the Rohingya people. These two elements can give them opportunities to live in a stable social context enabling them holding their sense of belonging to their ethnic community, ensuring their access to rights as citizens, and facilitating the construction of their perceptions of self in a positive manner.

Despite an absence of formal social citizenship, Rohingyas practice and access their perceived right to education by using social networks and unfair means. What they desire is a recognized identity, and social, civil, and political rights. Since self and identity are social products, healthy living conditions and opportunities for self-development for the Rohingya ethnic community can generate a sense of self among the Rohingya youth and young adults. They would also benefit from feeling that their ethnicity is worthy of recognition.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

One does not simply belong; one feels belonging. My research question was, how does the experience of displacement and refugeeness in Bangladesh shape Rohingya identity among youth and young adults. The answer to this question lies in their struggle to belong. They are historically connected to both Burma and Bangladesh, yet they are alienated from both because of their lack of legal citizenship, and recognized identity. Their sense of belonging to their ethnic community is, therefore, inadequate for them to be able to access rights in both places.

This study examined the construction of Rohingya identity based on their subjective notions, experiences of statelessness, hopes, fears, struggles, and everyday acts within and outside the camps. The findings show that their social world creates hybrid identity for some youth and young adults, while it forms an unsettled identity for others. Some of them firmly hold onto their Rohingya identity amid their statelessness, but, for others, their Rohingya identity conflicts with their self-claimed Bangladeshi identity. As a result, their liminal living conditions and separations from their country of origin, Burma, exacerbate their feelings of temporariness and disenfranchisement. Their attachment with the host country, Bangladesh, however, does not help them to overcome their marginalization, and to integrate them into Bangladesh.

The situation of youth and young adults, is different than that of children and the adults (Chapter 3). My study shows that, because of their age, youth and young adults are in a liminal situation; they are often considered vulnerable because of their liminality. On the other hand, youth and young adulthood is believed to be a time of spirit, vigor and exercising free will, too. Rohingyas, however, due to their statelessness, are in a static situation, a complete impasse, and a deadlock. Their “uncertain legal status” place a heavy brick wall in front of their hope and aspirations. They know youth and young adulthood is prospective, yet their statelessness turns

them into “illegal” group of people. Their awareness of their uncertain legal status is reflected in their strategies of integration into the host country. They draw a line between Bangladeshi, and themselves through which they maintain distinctions from the society despite managing to develop friendships with Bangladeshi peers by using a false Bangladeshi identity. While many Rohingya youth and young adults claim their Bangladeshi identity, they are different than contemporary Bangladeshi youth and young adults because of the subtle linguistic differences between the Rohingya language and the local dialect in Bangladesh. The linguistic similarities between Chittagonians and Rohingyas bring them close to each other. Yet, the distinctions between Rohingya and Bangladeshi is visible in their clothing. Their ways of wearing “*lungi*” and “*burka*”, for male and female Rohingyas, respectively, carry markers of distinctions. However, by pursuing education in Bangladesh, Rohingya youth and young adults find a sense of self-fulfillment within themselves, which is necessary to make their life meaningful.

Consistent with Mead’s formulation of self-consciousness, the social surroundings of the Rohingya youth and young adults impede the development of the fullest sense of self within themselves in a positive way. As shown in Chapter 3, individuals influence the social world they live in, and individuals are influenced by the dominant meanings held in society. This reciprocal process shapes one’s identity. From a sociological perspective, the process of developing a sense of self, and holding a sense of belonging are crucial for any individual. Mead suggests that other people’s conceptions, and reactions of the “self” to those conceptions, create a strong impact on one’s identity. The self is developed through a continuous dialogue between the responses of the conceptions of the self, *me* and *I*, and their responses to others. According to Mead, in order for their dialogue to happen, and for their sense of self to develop, a platform is necessary. Arguably, they have a social space, but not one conducive to fully realizing their potential.

The study of developing a sense of self and identity is greatly impacted by the theoretical contributions of Mead, Goffman and Moore. All of them unanimously stress the importance of stable social conditions, membership and identity for an individual to form a sense of self. On the other hand, Staples's theoretical framework also plays a key role in developing an understanding of how the exclusionary policy of the states works. States enable individuals to have an identity and access to legal and social rights by conferring citizenship while they exclude others from the same entitlements by labeling them as refugees. State exclusion, therefore, adds a dimension to individuals' identity.

However, a critical assessment of Mead's concept of identity and self indicates that Mead does not focus on youth identity, particularly those who are in susceptible conditions. Based on Mead's theoretical approach, Chapter 3 attempts to fill the gap by discussing the distinct characteristics of youth and young adults, and the implications of both identity and citizenship for the refugees. Goffman also does not pay attention to the experiences of refugees. Applying Goffman's perspective one can see that a dilemma between social identity and the other two types—personal and ego identity—is often unavoidable because their membership is not granted by the country (or its people) in which they live. For Rohingya youth and young adults, holding the marginalized ethnic identity, which is linked to their personal and ego identity, and living in a place where their membership is not yet accepted, the emergence of tension in their identity formation process is obvious. Although the theorists do not categorically point out the issues of identity conflict, the absence of the conditions and requirements illustrated in table 3.1 (see Chapter 3) may result in identity conflict for an individual. The issue of identity conflict is reflected in the identity formation process of the Rohingya people. The table shows that all three theorists, Mead, Goffman, and Moore, give an emphasis on individuals' relations and



compliance with the existing social conditions, and societal and cultural norms through which individuals can present the “true” self, and individuals’ identity is ratified, and accepted by others. Following the theoretical perspectives of Mead, Goffman, and Moore, it is clearly understood that both identity and citizenship are essential for an individual to construct a sense of belonging. Rohingya youth and young adults, however, remain unaccepted by the state, Bangladesh. Because, as Staples (2012) suggests, states are unwilling to admit stateless persons for their “unclear identity,” and “uncertain legal status,” (see Chapter 3). Yet, their sense of belonging to their ethnic group remains alive.

This study demonstrates that the lack of legal citizenship in Burma has problematized Rohingya’s identity. They can form a viable identity on the basis of their membership in a political community, once their rights are acknowledged, and participation is granted in that community. For Rohingya people, attaining legal citizenship in Burma is crucial. Only the legal membership can turn them into legal members, provide them with required documents, such as passports, and make them part of the political community in their place of origin, Burma. Although passport is treated as a proof of citizenship, it is actually an attempt to restrict people’s movement (see Chapter 3). Therefore, while I agree with the scholarly definition of citizenship, I contend that Rohingya’s claim to return to their land, and their desire to retain their sense of belonging should be considered to confer Burmese citizenship on them.

The issue of Rohingya identity construction cannot be isolated from the issue of the Rohingya refugee movement more generally. Despite being the largest refugee population on earth (see Chapter 1), Rohingyas have been able to draw very little attention of the global community mainly because this is a Southeast Asian problem, posing no threat to Europe, or the US. Therefore, organized and sincere efforts to finding a solution to the Rohingya issue is

lacking, and it is at a crisis point. From the passive role of UNHCR (see Chapter 2), it stands out that this organization exists in structure only, not in solving the Rohingya crisis. In April 2018, the government of Bangladesh and Burma signed on a jointly agreed MoU regarding Rohingya-repatriation which was never enforced. The basis of signing the MoU even raised questions about the enforcement. According to the Human Rights Watch report (2018), the MoU did not consult the Rohingyas regarding their willingness to go back to Burma. Furthermore, the Burmese government did not give any guarantee of safe living conditions in Burma upon the Rohingyas' return. A similar observation is recorded in Bob Rae's (2018) report based on his visits to Burma and Bangladesh twice, first in November 2017, and second in February 2018. The report of the Canadian Prime Minister's Special Envoy to Burma, Bob Rae (2018), suggests that the situations in Burma is still unsafe for the Rohingyas to return.

But this issue is rarely discussed. Rather, programs and initiatives for the well-being of Rohingyas in Bangladesh mainly focus on providing relief, and humanitarian assistances. While Bob Rae's report underlines the importance of humanitarian assistance to Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, it warns that such assistance would turn the camps into "the long-term warehousing of refugees" (Rae, 2018). Surprisingly, while Canada was the first country to accept Rohingyas from Bangladesh in 2006 (see Chapter 5), Rae's (2018) recommendations do not suggest the Canadian government do the same for the Rohingyas. The sixth recommendation of the report lightly touches on the resettlement issue as it states, "Canada should signal a willingness to welcome refugees from the Rohingya community in both Bangladesh and Myanmar, and should encourage a discussion among like-minded countries to do the same" (Rae, 2018). Even if this light-touch approach to "welcome" Rohingyas to Canada gets approval

of the Canadian government one day, it is only the bureaucratic process of the government that knows how long Rohingya would have to wait to hear about resettlement.

One big challenge for Rohingya youth and young adults is to prove themselves “deserving”, in order to be considered for inclusionary projects taken by both states. But their liminality—a “becoming”, not a “being”—and a susceptible individual with no legal status poses difficulties for them. They have no access to free movement. Their access to education in Bangladesh is restrictive. Amidst these situations, agency in Rohingyas is noticeable, which is used in community building. They go through a life filled with questions, inequality, uncertainty, and stigmatizations. Yet they challenge their disenfranchisements. They may not have evidence of their national identity but; they have proof of being responsible human beings. Agency in Rohingya youth and young adults shows that they are not disturbed, deviant, and dependent (see Chapter 6); rather they are organized, and are ready to use their abilities for the well-being of their ethnic community. Their proactive strategies and initiatives reflect in their persuasion of education, providing education to the younger children, organizing blood donation programs, and even negotiating and advocating to bring a change in their situations. Despite living in a challenging environment, Rohingya people find their own strategy to identify themselves as confident and competent human beings, and thus define, and create their own identities.

On the one hand, Rohingyas struggle with their identity. On the other, the challenges and barriers give them strength to develop their capabilities and create meaning out of a Rohingya identity. Therefore, it is imperative that with a view to support Rohingya youth and young adults to reach their full potentials and human beings, initiatives should be taken to end Rohingya refugee crisis. Only formal recognitions of their membership in Bangladesh can ensure their access to social rights during their stay in Bangladesh. This can generate within them a sense of

belonging, the feeling of being a responsible and dignified human being, and the ability to develop a meaningful present and future.

One of the limitations of this study is the absence of the views of the government and non-government stakeholders on Rohingya issue. Due to time constraints, this research did not allow me any scope to interview various stakeholders involved in providing services to the Rohingya people. Another limitation is the lack of updated data. Very few scholarly works are available with updated data on Rohingya issue. Only media makes Rohingya related data available, which are sometimes biased and overlapping. Hence, for this research, obtaining necessary data on Rohingya people from credible sources was extremely difficult. A major challenge this study faced was to collect information from the concerned government authority that was reluctant to share necessary information regarding Rohingya population. Therefore, relying on the website of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief of the government of Bangladesh was the only source for me to collect updated information on Rohingya issue. For the purpose of this research, I observed this website regularly since 2014, and each time ended up with the same old data until the end of 2018. It was only the end of November 2018 when the website was updated, which still lacks some of the vital information regarding Rohingya people.

The purpose of this research was to examine how Rohingya people's experience of displacement and refugeeness in Bangladesh shape their identity. It also enquired about the ways Rohingya identity is retained in the context of their statelessness. Finally, it studied their experience of citizenship. We must remember that absence of proof is not the proof of absence. Rohingyas' strong sense of belonging, rooted in Burma, dismisses the Burmese government's accusations of absence of the evidence of Rohingyas' nationality. It also invalidates the ill-motivated arguments of whether or not the Rohingyas' used to live in Burma before 1823. The

claims of millions of Rohingyas regarding their origin, and living dating back to long before 1823, and their consistent struggle to belong to Burma for decades are the proofs of their connection to Burma.

While most scholarly studies on refugees are on the mental health issues and the challenges they face after being accepted for resettlement in a third country such as Canada, the US, and Australia, my focus on identity and citizenship fills the knowledge gap in the areas of Rohingya refugee youth and young adults. Furthermore, the findings of this study may have important policy implications to implement relevant resettlement programs for them to get successfully resettled. Out of three solutions to Rohingya crisis—repatriation, reintegration, and resettlement—I would suggest that Rohingya people be consulted to find a viable solution for them. Resettlement can be an immediate small-scale option, while the long-term durable option is repatriation in a voluntary and dignified manner to a safe and sustainable home in Burma as Burmese citizens. For repatriation, the first step should be ensuring safety in Burma and, based on Rohingyas' opinions, arranging their safe return from Bangladesh with full rights and dignity. This would help them achieve membership, and legal citizenship in Burma. Their non-citizenship status and disenfranchisement would come to an end if their citizenship is granted based on their sense of belonging.

Several Grammy Award winner Sting's song, "Inshallah," released in 2016, is an example of showing empathy for the Syrian refugees. The Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh has already passed its 40<sup>th</sup> year, and yet it fails to knock at the door of the world's conscience, and earn empathy of the international community. Letting this situation continue generation after generation is a huge waste of human potentials, and an extremely disgraceful episode. They deserve the rights to live in a more equitable and just world.

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## Appendix A: List of potential interview questions

### *Demographic questions*

1. Tell me about yourself and your family.
2. What is your age?
3. Where were you born (in what part of Burma or Bangladesh)?
4. Where did you spend your childhood?
5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
6. What is your marital status?
7. Are you employed inside or outside the camp? What kind of job is that?
8. What is your citizenship?
9. How did you come to live in this camp?

### *Rohingya identity*

1. What is your connection to Rohingyas? Do you consider yourself to be Rohingya? What does being Rohingya mean to you?
2. Is being Rohingya important to you? How?
3. How is being Rohingya different from being Burmese?
4. How is being Rohingya different from being Bangladeshi?
5. How does it feel to be a Rohingya living in a refugee camp in Bangladesh?
6. Which one is more important to you – your Rohingya identity or your citizenship? Why?

### *Life in Burma*

1. Have you ever been to Burma? What do you remember?
2. Tell me about your/your family's life in Burma
3. How connected do you feel with Burma? Why?

4. Tell me about the festivals/cultural events you used to have in Burma.
5. What were the best parts of living in Burma?
6. If Burma's situation improves, would you like to go back or stay in Bangladesh? Why?
7. In your view, what do you think Burmese government needs to do to resolve Rohingya crisis?

### *Life in Bangladesh*

1. Tell me about your/your family's life in Bangladesh.
2. How connected do you feel with Bangladesh? Why do you think you feel this way?
3. How long have you been living in this camp? Where were you living before this camp?
4. How do you compare your life in this camp with your past life in Burma?
5. Are there Rohingya cultural events in the camp? What is your experience of celebrating your own cultural events in the camp?
6. Do you have a doctor? Where do you go when you are sick?
7. Did you go to school in this camp? Are you going to school now? Tell me about what school is like. Do all children go to school here?
8. Tell me about work. Do you have a paid job outside the camp? Have you looked for a job outside of the camp? What has been your experience?
9. Tell me if you are given Bangladeshi citizenship, would you accept it? What does it mean to have Bangladeshi citizenship?
10. Have you heard about National ID card? Birth registration certificate? Do you think these documents are important for Rohingyas? Why?
11. Would you like to vote in Bangladesh? Will you be happy if you are allowed to vote? Why?

12. Did you hear any political campaign or see any political leader around this camp before election (example: January 2014)? How did you feel then? How do you feel during the election?
13. What do the older Rohingyas think about voting? Do you think the same way? Why or why not?
14. Do you feel connected to Bangladesh? Why or why not? How do you feel about the Bangladeshi government? The people? Do you feel accepted? Why or why not?
15. What are some of the ways that Rohingya youth are different than Bangladeshi youth?
16. Did you hear that Bangladesh plans to relocate Rohingyas to a southern island? What are your thoughts on this initiative?
17. What do you think about the role of Bangladeshi government regarding the protection of Rohingyas?
18. What are the best parts of living in Bangladesh? What do you like about living here?
19. What are the worst parts of living in Bangladesh?
20. Are you able to move around in Bangladesh? How do you feel about not being able to move or travel freely around in Bangladesh?
21. Tell me about your friends. Are they Rohingyas? Bangladeshis? Others? What do you do with your friends?
22. Do you think anyone who gets married to a Bangladeshi citizen would still feel like ‘Rohingya’? How are they accepted by their in-laws/their society?
23. Did you know the Bangladeshi government has now banned the marriage of Rohingyas with Bangladeshis? How do you feel about this?

24. Do you have access to the Internet? Do you use smart phone, Facebook? Do a lot of people in this camp use these? Are they all young or older people? What do you do with internet and smart phone?
25. Do you have any contact with Rohingyas who are in England, Canada and other countries? How do you feel when you talk to them?
26. Would you/your family like to go to these countries? Have you ever asked them for help? To take you there? Is it possible anyway to go to other countries from Bangladesh?
27. Does cell phone, Facebook help you better to get connected with the services providers/ the NGOs/ UNHCR? How?
28. What kind of services do they provide?
29. How do they distribute food rationing, water etc.?
30. Do you have any leaders among you to help with food distribution, contacting with NGOs in case of emergency? How do you select leaders? Are they always helpful?
31. Do you receive support from NGOs/UNHCR/government during the emergency situation such as conflict or violence between the leaders and others in the camp, accidents, abuse, and delivery time for pregnant women? How do you contact with them? What do they do?
32. Are young girls safe in the camp? Have you seen/heard of any harassment/abuse/violence inside the camp? If serious offences (such as rape, abduction etc.) take place inside the camp who do you report to?
33. We have talked about health, education and employment. Now tell me what do you think about your rights as human being?
34. What rights do you have as Rohingyas compared to others in Bangladesh?

35. In terms of receiving support from the government/NGOs/UNHCR, who do you think is in a better position - your generation or the older generation? Why do you think so?

*Questions about the future*

1. What are your thoughts about the children in the camp? Do you think their situation is better than your childhood in the camp? Why or why not?
2. What kinds of services the NGOs provide for the children? Do you participate / volunteer in any program for the children?
3. Does anyone (government/NGO/UNHCR) ever ask your opinion for future programs/initiatives to improve your situation? Do they come and listen to what you want? If yes, what kind of opinions do you generally give? If no, what do you think about the reason for them not to ask you?
4. What would you like to see happen in the future? What would make things better for Rohingyas?
5. Would you like to go to (further) school? Would you like to live in another country?
6. Would you raise a family in Bangladesh? Why or why not?

Appendix B: List of participants

Location		Male		Female		
		Age	Status	Age	Status	
<b>Participants in individual interview</b>						
SI	<b>KUTUPALONG</b>			SI		
1		52-year-old man	Unregistered	1	19-year-old woman	Unregistered
2		35-year-old man	Unregistered	2	30-year-old woman	Unregistered
3		20-year-old man	Unregistered	3	19-year-old woman	Unregistered
4		24-year-old man	Unregistered	4	25-year-old woman	Unregistered
5		40-year-old man	Unregistered	5	18-year-old woman	Unregistered
6		50-year-old man	Registered	6	19-year-old woman	Unregistered
7		20-year-old man	Registered	7	A woman (age unknown)	Registered
8		65-year-old man	Registered	8	18-year-old woman	Registered
9		40-year-old man	Registered	9	40-year-old woman	Registered
10		23-year-old man	Registered	10	42-year-old woman	Unregistered
11		35-year-old man	Registered			
12		34-year-old man	Registered			
<b>Participants in Focused Group Discussions</b>						
13		40-year-old man	Registered	11	19-year-old woman	Unregistered
14		48-year-old man	Registered	12	30-year-old woman	Unregistered
15		45-year-old man	Registered	13	25-year-old woman	Unregistered
16		42-year-old man	Registered	14	28-year-old woman	Unregistered
17		35-year-old man	Registered	15	35-year-old woman	Unregistered
18		50-year-old man	Registered	16	25-year-old woman	Unregistered
19		20-year-old man	Registered	17	30-year-old woman	Unregistered
20	23-year-old man	Registered	18	30-year-old woman	Unregistered	
21	22-year-old man	Registered	19	35-year-old woman	Unregistered	
<b>Participants in individual interview</b>						
1	<b>NAYAPARA</b>	18-year-old man	Registered	1	20-year-old woman	Registered
2		18-year-old man	Registered	2	25-year-old woman	Registered
3		42-year-old man	Registered	3	18-year-old woman	Unregistered
4		46-year-old man	Unregistered	4	20-year-old woman	Unregistered
<b>25 male participants</b>			<b>23 female participants</b>			

Legends: 18-35: 33 participants; 36-45: 8 participants; 46 and above: 6 participants; 1 unknown



C: Informed Consent Form

**Date:**

**Study name:**

**Researcher**

Researcher's name:

Please select- Candidate

Graduate Program in Please select-

Email address: Office phone

**Purpose of the research:**

**What you will be asked to do in the research:**

**Risks and discomforts:**

**Benefits:**

**Voluntary Participation:**

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of your relationship with me, the Bangladeshi government, local organizations, or York University either now, or in the future.

**Withdrawal from the Study:**

You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with me, the Bangladeshi government, local organizations, or York University. In the event you withdraw from the study, you will still receive the incentive, and all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

**Confidentiality:**

Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

**Questions about the Research?**

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University’s Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, you may contact the Senior Manager and Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University, telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca

**Legal Rights and Signatures:**

I \_\_\_\_\_, consent to participate in

conducted by \_\_\_\_\_ . I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

**Signature**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

**Date**  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal investigator

**Date**  
\_\_\_\_\_