

Confined, Controlled, and Violated: The Rohingya Women in Bangladesh Refugee Camps

Ena Tripura ^{1*}

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ABSTRACT

Encampment of the Rohingyas in the camps in Bangladesh has reinforced the continuum of male dominance and violence carried out on women's bodies. This article employs Judith Butler's concepts of precarious life and frames of recognition to analyse three layers of violence against Rohingya refugee women: the violence carried out by the humanitarian regime, by Rohingya men as spaces to express their anger and frustrations, and by local Bangladeshi men as sites to demonstrate their superiority over the Rohingya intruders into the national space. The article draws on secondary literature on Rohingya refugees' lived experiences in camps and semi-structured interviews conducted with humanitarian service providers.

Keywords: refugees, threat, encampment, gender-based violence, humanitarian service providers

INTRODUCTION

A majority of the Rohingya population have taken shelter in the neighbouring country Bangladesh since the 1970s, due to violent conflict in the Rakhine State of Myanmar (Sengupta, 2015: 15). In the initial years, tripartite talks among Bangladesh, Myanmar, and the United Nations (UN) succeeded in repatriating all of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recognised Rohingya refugees (Idris, 2017: 9), except 32,000 Rohingyas who still live in two registered refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. However, the Rohingyas who entered Bangladesh secretly through porous borders at different times were not registered by the UNHCR as refugees and became integrated into the local community. By early 2017, their number was estimated to be 300,000 to 500,000 (Chaudhury and Samaddar, 2015: 2). After 25 August 2017, approximately 730,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh again because of mass atrocities carried out against them by the Burmese (Myanmar) Military (Goodman and Mahmood, 2019: 9).

About 76% of the newly arrived Rohingyas are women and girls (Hutchinson, 2018: 2), the majority of whom have experienced different forms of sexual and gender-based violence in Myanmar, and on their way to seeking asylum in Bangladesh (Chowdhury and Mostafa, 2020). According to Goodman and Mahmood, 150 humanitarian organisations of both non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the UN agencies are working alongside the government of Bangladesh to help the refugees with necessary humanitarian assistance in camps in Cox's Bazar (Goodman and Mahmood, 2019: 9). Despite this effort, the Rohingya refugees, especially Rohingya women, continue to experience deprivations of their basic human rights and entitlement, and suffer gender-based violence in different forms with multiple implications for their bodies and sense of self (Chowdhury and Mohanty, 2020: 2). Their experience of living in the camps in Bangladesh remains relatively unknown with little research conducted on the issue. This article tries to address the gap by analysing the ways newly-arrived Rohingya refugee women's bodies have been subjected to control and violence in Bangladesh by focusing on three areas of inquiry.

1. The humanitarian regime that confines Rohingya women in the camps and uses their bodies as sites of control by imposing certain expected behaviours through a range of policies and regulations.
2. Rohingya men's use of Rohingya women's bodies as spaces to take out their anger and frustration, and to reaffirm their cultural position as head of household.
3. Bangladeshi men's use of Rohingya women's bodies as sites for conquest and violence to intimidate the unwelcomed Rohingya refugee community.

¹ Flinders University, AUSTRALIA

*Corresponding Author: trip0033@flinders.edu.au

METHODOLOGY AND FRAMEWORK

A major part of the article is based on the secondary literature review, discussing refugees' lives, refugee camps, and violence against refugee women in Bangladesh and other parts of the world. The article also includes other grey literature such as newspapers and official documents of different government and non-government organisations working for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. The secondary literature is supplemented with interview data from 13 humanitarian actor participants collected from February to April 2021. Interviews were conducted over phone and online with the male and female staff of NGOs and the UN agencies that provide humanitarian services to the Rohingya refugees in the new camps. In line with the Research Ethics approval granted for this research, all the participants have been de-identified and given a pseudonym. The interview data was translated from Bengali to English with great care to retain the richness and nuance of the original data in the process of data transcription and analysis.

To study Rohingya refugee women's experience of violence in Bangladesh, this article draws on Judith Butler's prominent work, *Frames of War* (Butler, 2009). Rohingya women's experience of violence in Bangladesh is shaped by how they are viewed or framed by others as threats, and perceived as lives not fully liveable, which can be appropriately analysed through Butler's concepts of 'precarious life' and 'frames of recognition'. According to Butler, all human beings are precarious in the sense that their bodies can be injured, violated, and destroyed willingly or accidentally. Precariousness is, therefore, a shared and interconnected aspect of human life, as human beings are dependent on other human beings or entities for survival. Dependency can expose a person to exploitation and cruelty, jeopardising one's possibility of persisting at all, and conversely to a protective environment with the 'possibility of being relieved of suffering, of knowing justice and even love' (Butler, 2009: 61). While precariousness is a universal condition of being human, under certain social and political conditions some lives become more precarious than others, which Butler identifies as precarity. This happens when some human beings are denied access to social and political support and are differentially exposed to harm in the forms of 'injury, violence and death' (Butler, 2009: 25).

According to Butler, this unequal distribution of precariousness is produced by power and selective means of framing which occurs through recognition, recognisability, and intelligible schemas (Butler cited in Taylor, 2018: 149). Recognition is the active identification of a human being as such and offering relevant treatment entitled to that human being within a social context. Recognisability precedes recognition and refers to a historically constituted normative structure that directs and enables recognition. To be recognisable, a subject or life at first must be part of the 'intelligible schemas', although not everything intelligible gets recognised in a frame. The recognisability that prepares some lives or subjects to be recognised, set a frame (what to recognise) to fit into a certain political purpose. By delimiting contents, framing thus produces some lives recognisable and liveable while making other lives difficult to be recognised (Butler, 2009: 2). The lives that are not recognised get exposed to harm differentially, and the loss of these lives is not fully grievable as they are already 'dead' socially and politically. They never lived and so were not lost fully in the true sense (Butler, 2009: 1). As Butler points out, framing not only excludes some lives from being seen as liveable, but also produces a condition, 'a certain field of perceptible reality' (Butler, 2009: 64) for precarity to be seen as normal. Without being critically challenged, precarity is thus perpetuated. Applying this argument, this article analyses the lives of Rohingya refugee women to reveal the layers of actual and symbolic violence in their lives.

HUMANITARIANISM, BODILY CONTROL AND VIOLENCE AGAINST ROHINGYA WOMEN

The Rohingyas are one of the ethnic minorities of Rakhine state, Myanmar. According to the UN, they are the most persecuted ethnic minority in the world (Costa, 2017). They could be described as one of the most ungrievable minority populations of Myanmar as they are not given any rights and entitlements considered necessary to flourish and persist as human beings. Due to violence and persecution in Myanmar, they have risked their lives by crossing the river, sea, and jungle to seek refuge in Bangladesh and other countries around the world (Zine, 2016: 8). Most recently, in August 2017, due to waves of persecution by the Burmese Military, about 730,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh, bringing the total Rohingya population in the country to about 1 million (Johnston, 2020:1). The Bangladesh government sheltered them in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, a district of Bangladesh close to the Myanmar border (Goodman and Mahmood, 2019: 9).

Humanitarian organisations supported the government in building camps for the newly displaced Rohingyas to provide them physical protection and ensure the delivery of emergency humanitarian services. Since then, the Rohingya refugee crisis has become protracted, and humanitarian organisations have continued to work in the camps. Despite good intentions, the human rights of the Rohingyas continue to be violated within the camps as

the camps are overcrowded and lack basic amenities, and the Rohingyas cannot enjoy their 'fundamental rights to the freedom of movement that is essential to the enjoyment of all other rights' (Verdirame and Harrell-Bond, 2005: 271). The camp authorities allow only small numbers of refugees to leave the camps on day passes for emergency issues like medical treatment. Anyone found outside the camps without permission faces harsh treatment, including physical beating by the police (Parnini, 2013: 288).

Their freedom of movement is not seen as a right afforded to any other human beings but as an exception (Odoloma Opi, 2021: 98) because, in Bangladesh, they are not seen as fully liveable lives but as economic burdens and security threats. For example, in Dhaka Global Dialogue -2019, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, referred to the Rohingyas as security threats not only for Bangladesh but for the region (Sheikh, 2019). According to Butler, human beings, particularly if they are vulnerable, feel threatened by other human beings who do not fit into the normative frame of their cultural recognition of human beings (Butler, 2009: 2). In Bangladesh, the Rohingyas are seen and treated as threats and intruders as they do not fit into the frame of Bangladeshi nationality (Guhathakurta, 2017: 650). The government of Bangladesh fears that because of their deplorable living condition, the Rohingyas are more likely to be easy targets of criminal groups and Islamic fundamentalists. Associated with such criminal groups, the Rohingyas are feared to become security threats in the country by being involved in 'terrorism, illegal drug and human trafficking, illegal logging, environmental degradation, maritime privacy, deadly violence and crimes' (Parnini, 2013: 294). According to Mr. Asaduzzaman Khan, the Home Minister of Bangladesh, desperation can make the Rohingyas easy targets for recruitment by terrorist groups. While he admitted that Bangladesh does not have any evidence of Rohingyas joining the terrorist groups, the country's security agencies still assume the Rohingyas to be a potential security threat due to their precarious situation (Khan cited in Bennet, 2017). Bangladesh's government also fears that Rohingyas may import drugs from Myanmar, a country known as a Narco-State in Southeast Asia (Mallick, 2020: 207). Of course, the criminalisation of asylum seekers and refugees has a long discursive history and is an enduring trope.

The media plays a key role in constructing and sustaining an image of Rohingyas as potential criminals in Bangladesh. For example, in October 2017, a Bangladeshi news agency *Dhaka Tribune* published a report entitled, 'Law and order situation dips in Ukhiya and Teknaf,' the two sub-districts of Cox's Bazar where the camps are located. It reported that just 3 months after the Rohingya exodus to Bangladesh, 7 dead bodies were found near the camps (Yasmin and Akther, 2020: 108). Likewise, another widely read newspaper, *The Daily Star*, published a news article with the title, 'Rohingyas threat to economy, security: ICCB' (*The Daily Star*, 2018). It ran another story on 17 May 2019 with the title, 'Refugee camps: Crime spikes while Rohingyas despair' (Molla, 2019). According to a study conducted by Rahman and Kamal, from 2017 to 2019, *Bangladesh Pratidin*, a Bengali newspaper, published 72 reports on Rohingya women, and 57% of the reports represented them as criminals (Rahman and Kamal, 2020). While the crimes reported could be real, similar crimes are also carried out in other parts of Bangladesh by Bangladeshi people. However, by focusing more on crimes involving Rohingyas, the media generates a perceptible reality about the refugees as associated with crimes and, therefore, as security threats (Butler, 2009: 10).

When the refugees, who themselves fled violence, are seen as threats, then for the sake of protection and securitisation, the camps are locked down even more strictly, and the behaviours and mobility of the inhabitants are monitored (Hyndman and Giles, 2016: 30). With Rohingyas represented as threats, the government of Bangladesh, in cooperation with global humanitarian organisations, monitors and controls their mobility and actions to bring the threats under control. The Rohingyas are, therefore, not only physically confined within the camps, but also continuously watched and controlled by the authorities. The Bangladeshi government restricted any kind of development planning and activity that would allow the Rohingyas to achieve any form of self-reliance. The government also ordered telecommunication service providers to shut down the mobile network in the camps so that the refugees cannot be organised and are increasingly isolated from the outside world (Hussain and Lee, 2021: 193).

Without mobility, communication, and livelihood opportunity, the Rohingyas are forced to become completely dependent on humanitarian aid. The humanitarian service providers claim that they are working in the best interest of the refugees, but arguably the mechanism they use to administer their services makes refugees more vulnerable to control. Humanitarian organisations, such as the UNHCR and their partner organisations, have introduced biometrics registration of the Rohingyas, collecting their identity details, including fingerprint and iris recognition, for the purpose of effective and personalised aid delivery to the Rohingyas, most specifically to Rohingya women. However, this biometric data is used by the government of Bangladesh as a surveillance tool and a biopolitical instrument to keep the Rohingyas segregated from the local community and to bar them from having access to any opportunity available for Bangladeshi citizens (Poyil and Chowdhury, 2020: 17). In addition, using their power over resource allocation and administration, the humanitarian actors regulate and control the bodily activities of the refugees to a great extent (Hoffman, 2011: 29). For example, to ensure better logistical support, the humanitarian actors regulate when and where refugees can fetch water for households. Humanitarian actors installed toilets and bathing facilities in the places they thought suitable as they cannot ensure these facilities in

every household due to limited resources. Consequently, the Rohingyas cannot have baths or use toilet facilities whenever they want to or need to as these facilities are either located in places far away from their tents or are insufficient in number in comparison to the camp population (Karin *et al.*, 2020: 8). As Schmidt writes, the Rohingya refugees are organised by 'daily routines that are introduced by an institution, i.e., waiting in line for food (...) and (...) medicine' (Schmidt, 2003: 6). Caroline Moorehead thus describes the poverty of camp residents as 'about more than not just having things; it is about having no way to get them, and no means of altering or controlling one's own life (...)' (Moorehead, 2007: 156). Once a person is inside a camp, the person seems bound to lose their individual agency and control, as the camp is the place where humanitarian actors decide what the refugees will get and what the refugees can or cannot do.

Encampment thus makes the lives of Rohingyas more vulnerable in general and the lives of Rohingya women in particular. This is because they need to adjust their gender roles and routines to the new rules imposed upon them. For example, no matter how busy women are with other tasks, they must fetch water around 11 am. This is the time when water is released from the reserved tanks in some camps, and traditionally fetching water falls under the responsibility of women (Karin *et al.*, 2020: 9). Furthermore, there are women who never left their house without being accompanied by their male family members but are now systematically compelled to deal with camp administrators to collect rations. To collect rations, they need to stand in a queue and present their biometric ration card to the humanitarian actors to demonstrate their entitlement (Haddinott *et al.*, 2020: 4). For some women, the new system can be empowering in the sense that it provides them access to targeted aid delivery and an avenue to interact with public space - the humanitarian system (Poyil and Chowdhury, 2020: 23). For the majority of the women, however, it can be an overwhelming experience as they are not accustomed to performing work outside of the home. Confirming Akhter and Kusakabe's study, an interviewee (Purnima, April 8, 2021) stressed that working and dealing with issues outside of the house was not part of Rohingya women's gendered embodiment. Their male members were always there to deal with the outside world (Akhter and Kusakabe, 2014: 234).

New systems imposed upon the refugees by the camp authorities also expose women to the risk of violence. Because of social mobility restrictions and other household duties, many women cannot stand in the queue for relief items and other necessary services. They need to depend on others to access the services and relief items - who may ask for a sexual favour in return (Karin *et al.*, 2020: 15). In order to survive, many women often deliberately produce and reproduce their gender identities as helpless victims to get an advantage. However, this strategy of victimhood diminishes women's agency (Tyszler, 2019). As Freedman points out, such re-appropriation of victimhood led to Rohingya women's exclusion from leadership and the decision-making process about their lives and made them vulnerable to violence (Freedman, 2010: 601).

According to a UN report, violence and insecurity increase at night. In the camps, humanitarian actors work from 9 am to 5 pm. After 5 pm, the camps are governed by the Majis, with few security forces deployed in some hotspots (United Nations, 2018). The Majis are influential Rohingya community leaders appointed by the humanitarian organisations and the 'Camp-In-Charges' (government officials) to represent the refugees in camp management and implement their customary rules where applicable. All the Majis are men except one in Shalbagan camp. While a few of the Majis are appreciated by the refugees as being supportive, the majority set rules in favour of themselves and other influential men (Parveen Kumar *et al.*, 2019: 43). At night, young Rohingya women are often forcefully taken away from their tents to provide sexual services for influential people. The Majis usually do not take any action (United Nations, 2018).

These incidents lead the young unmarried women to live in constant fear, and many spend whole days inside their tents to avoid attention from potential sexual predators. The tents are usually extremely hot and humid during summer which can be painful and distressing physically and mentally. Razia Sultana, a Bangladeshi Rohingya woman (Born in Myanmar in a Rohingya family, and raised in Bangladesh) and an advocate for Rohingya women's rights, thus compares the lives of Rohingya women in Bangladesh refugee camps with prison lives. In an interview with the magazine *Time USA*, she said

It is a jail. The women cannot move around, they cannot get much access to health care, or to education. It is not a life. They cannot even go outside of their tents, which are not even real tents, they are temporary shelters. Rohingya society is very conservative, so when there is no fence, no privacy, the women just stay inside, cooking and dreaming of their previous life (...). They have nothing to do in the camps. One day is like one year. Inside the camps, they have no future and are living like animals (Razia Sultana cited in Barron, 2019).

Sultana also compares the lives of young refugee women with animals' lives because the women are denied humanity. They do not have any say in the camps. A research conducted by a team of Bangladeshi researchers found that 42% of 3000 Rohingya women interviewed spend 21-24 hours a day inside their tents (Yousuf *et al.*, 2020: 164). Agamben argues that an animal and a human both have life, but what makes them different is the human being's 'capacity to speak and engage in political praxis' (Agamben cited in Owens, 2009: 750). Unable to

show these capacities, human beings in camps are, therefore, reduced to bare lives no different from animals, which Judith Butler refers as unrecognisable lives - not grieved and not protected (Butler, 2009).

REASSERTION OF MASCULINITY AND VIOLENCE AGAINST ROHINGYA WOMEN

Encampment and the way humanitarian aid is administered also have huge effects on men's sense of self. Being physically confined within camps means they cannot fulfil their traditional gender roles as decision-makers and income earners, which they strongly believe to be their assigned duties as men. As Krause posits, through their 'aid projects, humanitarian agencies take over these positions of provisional and hegemonic institution' (Krause, 2020: 201). In this humanitarian system, Rohingya men feel frustrated and emasculated. Since gender is relational, the destabilisation of men's lives affects women's lives. When masculine domination is asserted to cope with the vulnerabilities imposed by humanitarianism (Turner, 2019: 17), women find themselves forced into more traditional roles (Horn and Parekh, 2018). Rohingya men, frustrated with being confined and unable to earn income, are in fear of losing their status as heads of the households. One response to this precarity is to show or uphold their masculinity as decision-makers and heads of the household 'through irresponsible sexual behaviour, domestic violence and other forms' (Women's Commission cited in Akhter and Kusakabe, 2014: 228).

According to the humanitarian actors interviewed for this study, gender-based violence in the forms of domestic violence, forced marriage, and early marriage are widespread in the camps. Domestic violence is directed mostly by husbands to wives and is linked with polygamy. After marrying a new wife, the men abandon their previous wife/wives and children. The men collect family rations, sell them, and spend the money on themselves or the new wife, which creates conflict and violence in the family. There are many influencing factors for polygamy. According to Bangladeshi researchers Alam and Sobhan, polygamy is used as a weapon by Rohingya men against Rohingya women (wives) to teach them a lesson for disobeying their husbands (Alam and Sobhan cited in Khan, 2019). Contrary to this, Simul, an interviewee who has been working in the camps for 3 years, states that frustration and idleness among Rohingya men lead to polygamy. She said:

The Rohingyas sit idle in camps without any purpose in life. It causes frustration and anger in them, especially for men, as women can still be busy doing household work and looking after children. The men try to express their masculine dominance by engaging in domestic violence and by preying on women and girls growing up in the camps. They try to develop relationships with them or their parents to pursue them for marriage (Simul, February 25, 2021).

Simul acknowledges the camp situation as responsible for polygamy but also blames the Rohingya men for the violence. To address such violence in camps, the humanitarian organisation she works with implements several gender-sensitive programs. Similarly, Research Initiatives in Bangladesh implemented a participatory action research education program called *Kajoli* in the 2010s, actively engaging Rohingya women as teachers and decision-makers for the program to give them a sense of ownership and agency (Guhathakurta, 2017: 657). However, these kinds of efforts are inadequate compared to the protection needs of women and to ensure their full empowerment. Simultaneously, the humanitarian organisations, in cooperation with the 'Camp-In-Charges', continue to promote and strengthen male leadership by appointing them as Majis.

Irrespective of its cause, polygamy helps men gain increased access and control over women's bodies. To prevent their husband from marrying another wife, women are under pressure of pleasing their husbands in every possible way. Having more children increases men's social status among the Rohingya community as children are considered the 'Gift of Allah' (Ainul *et al.*, 2018: 1). To help men increase their social status, women endanger their reproductive health. Although bearing children does not automatically endanger women's health, the overcrowded camps with limited health care and other necessary supports can make women more precarious (Chowdhury and Mostafa, 2020: 157). According to a study report published by Save the Children, an international NGO, in May 2020, the Rohingya refugee camps contained 76,000 children aged under 3 years born in Bangladesh (Save the Children, 2020). This indicates a high birth rate among Rohingya refugees.

Jony, an interviewee, who has been working with an UN agency in Cox's Bazar for both the refugees and the host communities, confirmed the high birth rate among the Rohingyas. He stated:

If you ever visit the camps, you will see women almost 50 years of age with a breastfeeding child and pregnant with another child, although they already have many other children. It is a kind of gender-based violence against women (Jony, February 26, 2021).

He identifies the high birth rate as a form of gender-based violence because he assumes many women do not want to have children at such an age but have no say over their reproductive health, sexual rights, and means to control fertility. Adnan, another interviewee, offers another perspective, suggesting that despite going through so much

physical and mental difficulties women do not refuse to have children. Women think it is their duty to fulfil men's needs and act in the way family and society expect them to. This is, he suggests, not only in the case of Rohingyas but also for marginalised Bangladeshi communities from remote villages (Adnan, March 23, 2021).

According to Butler (1990), gender is a frame of recognition that visualises human beings through the male-female dichotomy. Within this frame, human beings recognised as women are constituted and understood as inferiors and subordinated to men. Such ostensible framing of women as inferiors makes it more difficult for women to be viewed and to view themselves as fully liveable lives. As they are not recognised as fully liveable lives, they accept everything attributed to them by society as their roles and duties (Taylor, 2018). In the camp environment, without social and legal support, women become more submissive and vulnerable to such violence.

In hetero-patriarchal societies, especially in developing countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar, women's value as human beings depends on sexual service, producing children, and upholding traditional cultures and norms formulated by men (Ganguly-Scrase, 2012: 79). To continue to exist as a community with a distinct cultural identity, women are protected. Men have social entitlements and responsibilities to control women's behaviours in the name of protection (Sengupta, 2020: 117). Such efforts of disciplining and protecting women are highly prevalent in the Rohingya community. For example, the Rohingya women are not allowed to talk to outsiders without permission from their husbands or without being accompanied by a male family member. Any woman who tries to break this norm is treated with harsh punishment, often with physical abuse (Sengupta, 2020: 117). However, according to Olivius, the deliberate controlling of women by Rohingya men increases in the camps as men resist humanitarian actors' efforts to engage women in their gender project activities while they themselves are ignored. Consequently, as an anti-feminist stand, men restrict their women from meeting and working with humanitarian actors (Olivius, 2016: 57).

Rohingya women are not only controlled by their male family members but also by the community leaders (religious leaders), who consider that women talking to strangers and leaving their house are against their religion. For example, an official from a humanitarian organisation called Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) stated that about 150 of their Rohingya women teachers in the camps stopped going to work fearing violent threats from men of the Rohingya community (Karim, 2019). Likewise, some Rohingya women health care workers had to abandon their jobs upon receiving threats from Rohingya militants (Parveen Kumar *et al.*, 2019: 43). Working in the health sector and education provision is intended to have a positive influence on society. However, the men fear that by working outside the home, the women will disobey them, and fail their culture and social responsibilities. As one interview participant stated, some of the Rohingya men think that women will become shameless and tempted by humanitarian actors, which can make their families vulnerable to breaking (Nasir, March 27, 2021). Consequently, women are pushed back into the home and to their traditional gender roles.

The violence and control of Rohingya women within their families and community affect their potential necessary to flourish as human beings. But within the frames of recognition, Rohingya women stand at the very bottom of the priority list. Hence, violence against them is accepted in the Rohingya community and goes unchallenged or insufficiently challenged by the government of Bangladesh and other humanitarian actors, although they have a moral and legal obligation to foster every life within their care equally.

ROHINGYA WOMEN'S BODIES AS SPACES FOR THE EXERCISE OF POWER BY BANGLADESHI MEN

Rohingya women are also violated by members of the Bangladesh host community. As time goes by, the number of refugee increases and the possibility of their returning to Myanmar remains uncertain in the foreseeable future; the majority of the Bangladeshi people's attitudes and thinking have shifted from initially welcoming nature to rejecting the Rohingyas (Yasmin and Akther, 2020: 108). Popular local opinion asks their government to repatriate the Rohingyas soon and to stop providing rations so that the Rohingyas feel discouraged to continue living in Bangladesh. They fear that giving Rohingyas a good life in Bangladesh will act as a pull factor and invite them to stay (Guhathakurta, 2019: 30). This view is articulated by Mr. Shahriar Alam, the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, who stated in an interview with the *TIME News Magazine*: 'if we are offering them a better life than what they're used to, they will not go back' (Alam cited in Solomon, 2019). Such a statement not only denies the Rohingyas from being 'treated as fully endowed rights-bearing subjects' (Hyndman and Giles, 2016: 13) but also shifts Bangladeshi people's thinking on whether the Rohingyas deserve public sympathy, support, and shelter in Bangladesh (Esther and Hajo G, 2017). The tension between the Rohingyas and the host community people has increased after a Bangladeshi man (Omar Faruk) was killed by some Rohingyas near a camp at night on 22 August 2019 over a dispute. Following Faruk's murder, 6 accused Rohingyas were killed by the state security forces in a so-called 'crossfire' (Brad, 2019). However, Bangladeshi people felt more outraged about Faruk's death than the killing of refugees because, as Butler points out, our feeling is to some extent 'conditioned by how we interpret the

world around us' (Butler, 2009: 41). Since Faruk is Bangladeshi, he is a culturally and nationally recognisable human, hence people felt outraged and aggrieved by his death, while seemingly accepting the violent death of Rohingyas as justified and deserved.

A significant minority in Bangladesh, especially in Cox's Bazar, live below the poverty line and depend on natural resources and day labour wages. They are in fear of losing their means of livelihood to Rohingyas as the latter offer cheap labour and live in the camps built on lands that once belonged to Bangladeshis (Yasmin and Akther, 2020: 109). There is also a sense of deprivation of opportunities and unequal treatment by the UN and the NGOs among this marginalised host community. They believe that the Rohingyas are getting more attention from humanitarian organisations. They fear that by providing shelter to the Rohingyas, they are losing their natural resources (Chowdhury and Mostafa, 2020: 164) and potential development projects. According to Md. Shahadat Hossain, the Acting Director-General of Bangladesh NGO Affairs Bureau, after 2017, NGOs have shifted major parts of their development budgets and programs to the refugee camps. In an interview with *The Daily Star*, he said that most of the foreign donors and their personnel who worked in Bangladesh on education, river erosion, and skill development had shifted to the Rohingya refugee camps from 2017 onward (Hossain cited in Islam, 2019). Despite this shift in development funding, the assistance provided to refugees is still insufficient. And public grievance is generated 'from perceived inequalities of treatments in resource-constrained settings where refugees receive free shelter, firewood, food, and health care, while the host do not' (Jerin and Mozumder, 2019: 172).

Hostility between the Rohingyas and the host community has had different impacts on women. Rohingya women have become more vulnerable to violence with different manifestations, including rape, abduction, and forceful captivity, which are used as weapons to terrorise the Rohingyas. As Mitra argues, violence against women by a group in conflict is not only intended to subordinate women but also to humiliate and intimidate the opponent (Mitra, 2018: 186). In camps located in the remote hilly-forested area, women must go to collect water from streams at the edge of the camp boundary, which puts them in proximity to violence from host community members. In one study, a Rohingya woman is quoted saying:

Whenever we go near the Bengali village (to collect water), they call us bad names. However, if we are lucky, then things stop there. In some cases, they attack us and rape us. Sometimes, they keep us in their homes or villages for 2 to 3 days and we have to suffer from sexual assaults throughout the whole time (A Rohingya woman cited in Krehm and Shahan, 2019: 25).

Many women do not know where to complain against such violence, and even if they complain, justice will be denied as they do not have the legal right to be protected. As Uddin argues, the Rohingyas are born into human society but treated as subhumans everywhere because they do not have space in the legal framework of any state, neither in Myanmar nor in Bangladesh (Uddin, 2020). In Bangladesh, the newly arrived Rohingyas are not officially recognised as refugees but as 'Forcefully Displaced Myanmar Nationals' and are not given any associated rights as refugees, which are vital to protect them from injustice, discrimination, violence, and exploitation (Uddin, 2019: 10). Hence, they might instead be arrested and harassed for leaving the camp and for breaking the rule of the encampment. Moreover, the women will lose dignity within the refugee community and their families will be dishonoured as their family and society's honour is linked to the virtue of their women folks (Sengupta, 2020: 117).

According to an Inter-agency research conducted in 2020, Rohingya women have been forcefully taken out of the camps by the host community members and sexually assaulted (Ahsan, 2020: 51). After being raped, the women are subsequently sold into the commercial sex industry, and in households as domestic maids (Chowdhury and Mostafa, 2020: 161). In very rare cases, Bengali men marry these domestic maids to get household work done for free and to have their sexual desires met, as sex outside of marriage is against their religion. The displacement of Rohingyas has created opportunities for many Bengali men, especially older men who cannot find a suitable wife in the Bengali community, to marry young Rohingya women. They hang around in the camps looking for Rohingya women of their desire. They can marry whoever they want, as the women do not have much choice or say in whether and whom they wish to marry. Similar to women in other hetero-patriarchal societies, Rohingya women are suppressed by social norms that do not allow them to construct themselves as capable of making decisions about their lives or sexual choices, including in marriage which worsens in a refugee situation (Ussher *et al.*, 2017: 1902). If any Bangladeshi wants to marry a Rohingya man/woman, Rohingya parents accept the proposal without any delay with the hope of having a better life for their daughter/son, which can also potentially lead to permanent residency for the family eventually. The number of Bengali women marrying Rohingya men is very insignificant, but Rohingya women marrying Bengali men is very common (Uddin, 2021: 2048). This reflects the unequal power dynamics between the communities - the local community is in the position of power, hence can access the women, the property, of the powerless Rohingya community.

Butler argues that human beings are bound up or exposed to other physical entities/beings, which can offer protection, love, justice or exploitation, and cruelty (Butler, 2009: 61). Likewise, being exposed to the Bangladeshi men through marriage, some Rohingya women may find true love, while others are abandoned or brutally tortured

by their Bengali husbands. They are left helpless, without any rights or support from anyone. The precariousness of their lives has been maximised by unsupportive state policies. In 2016, the Bangladesh government banned marriage between Bangladeshi and Rohingya. Anybody found guilty of such a marriage is punished under the law (Uddin, 2021). This leaves Rohingya women who marry Bengali men secretly with no recourse or opportunity to seek justice against violent Bengali husbands.

The Rohingya people come from the Rakhine province in Myanmar, that 'has the highest concentration of HIV/AIDS-affected people' (Yasmin and Akther, 2020: 111). So, Bangladeshi people often see them as potential bearers of HIV/AIDS, although baseline information on their health status is unavailable. As potential bearers of deadly diseases (modern AIDS/HIV medication is not available), the Rohingya women are seen as undesirable to live in the host community, and such perceptions make local people feel reluctant to offer necessary social support to these Rohingya women. As Butler argues, people's response to the sufferings of other people depends largely on the power of representation that generates perceptible reality, different from actual ontological quality, and delimits certain lives as unworthy of protection and existence (Butler, 2009). Hence, as lives unworthy of protection, Rohingya women are left to violence and even death.

The prevalent public discourse about Rohingya women in Bangladesh is as women of bad moral character. They are seen and framed as potential enchanters who try to trap the Bangladeshi men into marriage to obtain Bangladeshi citizenship for themselves and their families. Hence, they are blamed for drawing sexual attention. Sexual violence against them by the host community is often made invisible, as sex between Rohingya women and Bengali men is seen as wanted or consented to by the women; hence it does not come under the framing of violence. To solve this problem, women must take responsibility first, most of the time by limiting their mobility and covering themselves up not to be seen as inviting or available. The women who do not adhere to such norms are cruelly blamed for their own abuse both by the Bangladeshi people and by their fellow refugees. They are often seen as deserving of such punishment for not following social norms (Taylor, 2018: 157). Such public discourse mitigates the perpetrator's action and helps the perpetrators get away without being punished for their behaviours.

CONCLUSION

Feminist research on violence against women's bodies during the war has brought attention to redress the injustice of the violence carried out against women. However, despite several decades of such activism and campaigning, women's bodies continue to be sites of control and conflict for people in the position of power. Violence against women's bodies continues to be one of the major pressing concerns at present for women across the globe, which constantly restricts women's agencies and understanding of self, affecting every minutia of their lives (Thistlethwaite, 2015).

Such violence against women increases in situations like the vulnerable refugee community of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh, who are framed as threats, worthless, and ungrieveable. Along with some real challenges, such as resource scarcity in Bangladesh, social media and public discourse play significant roles in portraying the Rohingyas as threats to Bangladeshis. The camps are established to protect the refugees physically and to provide better humanitarian services. But because of perceived threats, the Rohingyas are strictly confined within the camps, which enforces and reinforces women's vulnerable femininity, bodily control, and subjection to violence carried out by different actors. Inside the camps, the Rohingyas are physically confined, but the administration process within the camps enacted further control over women's bodies. Rohingya women have been pushed more towards the margin of power structures and rendered vulnerable to systematic violence and exploitation by the humanitarian actors, community leaders, and male family members combined.

Being confined within the camp does not spare them from the violence carried out by host community men of Bangladesh. As the conflict and tension between the communities increase over natural resources, job market access, illegal business, and politics, local Bangladeshi men forcefully kidnap and rape Rohingya women from inside and outside the camps. Using their position of power, Bangladeshi men also marry young Rohingya women of their desire, although marriage between these unions is illegal in Bangladesh. Being illegally married, Rohingya women are unable to seek justice from the formal legal system, and neither do they have recourse to seek social redress. Public rhetoric about them as of bad moral character serves to socially criminalise their marriage and other relationship with Bangladeshi men and justify their punishment in the forms of rape and other violence.

Since the Rohingya women are not considered worthy human beings, their embodied experience of violence remains insufficiently challenged by the government of Bangladesh and other humanitarian actors. They claim their policies and programming to be pro-women's rights, which absolves them from taking responsibility for the violence carried out against Rohingya women within the camps. And the number of women who experience insecurity and violence over their bodies is so significant that it cannot be overlooked as a by-product of refugee settlement but rather must be acknowledged as systematic exploitation of women's bodies by the people in a position of power within the space of humanitarianism. By highlighting the location of Rohingya women's bodies,

this article has problematised and challenged the taken-for-granted attitude of the state, family, and women themselves about their bodies as something fragile, to be violated, and precarious.

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