Gendered Access to Space and Infrastructural Challenges: Rohingya Women's Experiences in Refugee Camps

Master Thesis
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CHAPTER 1 - Introduction

"I have to live here whether I like it or not."
- Mahmuda Begum, 40

Cox's Bazar is a town on Bangladesh's southeastern coast and is home to the longest sandy beach in the world. A town heavily reliant on fishing and tourism for its thriving local economy, Cox's Bazar hosts families, honeymooners and few foreign tourists all year round looking to escape from the noise and chaotic energy of places like the capital Dhaka. Since August 2017, however, Cox's Bazar has also become well-known for Kutupalong camp, the largest refugee settlement in the world, providing shelter to the Muslim minority Rohingya people fleeing from persecution and genocide in neighbouring Myanmar.[1] Amid the sprawling camp environment of makeshift shelters and a constantly growing population, the narratives and perspectives of women residing in this camp provide a vital lens through which to understand the challenges unique to refugees.[2] This thesis seeks to explore the issues of infrastructural challenges and physical safety from a Rohingya woman's perspective, highlighting the necessity of analyzing the largest refugee camp in the world through the lens of feminist geography.

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[1] Kutupalong registered camp is one of two officially registered camps that have been in existence since the 1990s (the other being Nayapara Registered camp), and has sheltered the Rohingya population fleeing violence. With the influx of 2017, nearby towns like Balukhali were also incorporated to house incoming refugees in 33 makeshift camps on the mainland (and one on the island of Bhasan Char). For the purposes of this thesis, I refer to the camp as both Kutupalong and Kutupalong-Balukhali interchangeably.
[2] According to the Government of Bangladesh and UNHCR, the total population of Rohingya refugees located in Bangladesh numbered 984,591 as of June 30, 2024, with that number consistently climbing (UNHCR, 2024).

Fig. 1: Map of Bangladesh, location of Kutupalong-Balukhali highlighted in red[3]

A day in the life of a Rohingya woman in Kutupalong is marked by unique struggles that often remain overlooked in the broader displacement discourse. Women in the Rohingya refugee camps, who constitute more than half of the entire refugee population (UNHCR, 2024), grapple with concerns ranging from physical safety, discrimination, and access to essential services such as water and sanitation. Overcrowded camp conditions, inadequate policing, and lack of essential infrastructure jeopardize the health and well-being of women in the camp. Gender-based violence, including domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and trafficking, is disturbingly common and grossly underreported. These threats are compounded by an internalized and insidious sense of fear and apprehension that pervades the camp, where the gendered access to space further marginalizes women and girls.

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[3] Map collected from Rohingya Response: Road connectivity map inside the Rohingya camps - (August 2023)

This study is a testimony of the everyday challenges women must adapt to and overcome in order to survive in Kutupalong. The camp's infrastructure, wholly established in an ad hoc manner to tackle the incoming rush of Rohingya people in 2017, is woefully inadequate. Women, who most often take on conventional gendered roles within the family, bear the brunt of these inadequacies. Infrastructure plays a crucial role in providing a sense of security and comfort in any society and as such, Kutupalong should be no different. However, while the government of Bangladesh has hosted the Rohingya, the available infrastructure tells any onlooker that this is a *temporary* arrangement, and that the number one priority is to repatriate all Rohingya community members back to Myanmar. Homes are built using flimsy materials, sourcing water in tube wells is a challenge due to topography, and critical infrastructure such as latrines and light sources are few and far between.

In examining the perspectives of Rohingya women in Kutupalong on various issues, this thesis aims to shed light on the concerns of women in the camp, and what improvements could be made to make their living easier. Using a theoretical framework of feminist geography and centring women's voices, this research highlights the challenges faced by women in the camp, including the gendered access to space, gendered power dynamics that impact their physical safety, as well as infrastructural challenges they encounter daily.

Using semi-structured interviews, observations, and walks through the camp, this thesis investigates the struggles faced by women as they navigate the geography and the infrastructure of the camp in what has become a protracted, seven-year state of permanent temporariness. I do so to shed light on the lives of women, describing their everyday experiences, and their concerns regarding camp life. I go on to detail findings from field research, particularly the revelation of the sometimes stagnant, sometimes shifting roles that women play in the community, and find out

what matters to them the most. The thesis then ends with a discussion of key findings, and avenues for future research.

1.1 Thesis Development: Background and Research Problem

This section maps out the progression of thesis development, focusing on initial research plans and related theoretical framework, emergent themes while in the field, and the subsequent pivot resulting in the current research focus. It goes on to further state the research problem at hand, as well as a segment detailing the politics of semantics and particular conscious choices made in this research study's writing.

Initial Research Focus:

This research initially aimed to explore the concepts of materiality, liminality, and placemaking within the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, focusing specifically on how Rohingya women navigate and negotiate these aspects to create a sense of 'home,' and what that means to them. The goal was to understand if and how the physical makeup and the materials with which a shelter is built informed the process of home-making and shaped feelings of belonging amongst the residents. Given the higher percentage of women and children living in the camp, I hypothesized that they would employ strategies to make the 'temporary' camp more homely for themselves.

In the early stages of my thesis development, I had hoped to study three conceptual ideas: materiality, liminality and placemaking. Materiality, by definition, investigates the built environment of a particular space - buildings, shelters, camp infrastructure - but also the natural environment, non-human elements, and their agency. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of entities and their roles in shaping the urban landscape (Latham, 2015). By closely examining these material dimensions, I had hoped to uncover the ways in which Rohingya women navigate and

adapt the physical elements of their environment to create a sense of stability, identity, and belonging within the confines of their temporary shelters. I had further hoped to witness how lives are built in impermanence, and in so doing, learn about liminality, a concept rooted in anthropology. Liminality, a concept first theorized by Arnold von Gennep in 1908 and popularized by anthropologist Victor Turner is said to capture the in-betweenness and ambiguity of the refugee experience in the context of refugee studies (Skjoldager-Nielsen & Edelman, 2014; Boeren, 2021). This is most accurately exemplified in the case of Rohingya refugees who have faced discrimination, statelessness, and displacement since the independent state of Myanmar was created, and who continue to live in uncertain impermanence in the camps in Bangladesh (Zahra, 2019). Placemaking focuses on the way individuals and communities imbue their surroundings with meaning and a sense of belonging. Place and space are, in this sense, always embodied, physically located "and thus carried about," shaping how people experience and engage with their environment (Low, 2016:6).

Theoretical Framework:

In the original planning of the thesis, Critical Refugee Studies (CRS) was meant to serve as the foundational lens for observing and making sense of ground realities in the context of Cox's Bazar.

This framework places refugees at the centre of the discussion, recognizing them as individuals with inherent rights, aspirations, and voices that must be heard. Critiquing existing frameworks and institutions as not critical enough and in some cases complicit in the oppression and furtherance of Western perspectives, CRS emphasizes the agency, resilience and complex identities of displaced individuals, primarily through story-telling or 're-storying' feminist refugee epistemology, and by "unsettling notions of refugee distress and need…" (Espiritu et al, 2022:6)

beyond the victimhood narratives. I had hoped that a focus on materiality, liminality, and placemaking would reveal nuanced ways in which Rohingya women create meaning in their environment.

Informed by this theoretical framework, I anticipated observing how Rohingya women use everyday objects and spaces to foster a sense of normalcy and belonging, despite the liminal and precarious conditions of the camps.

Fieldwork and Emergent Themes:

During fieldwork in various Rohingya refugee camps in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, a series of interviews, conversations with I/NGO staff, and participatory observations indicated that although the initial theoretical framework could be *an aspect* of the guiding framework, the realities of Rohingya women's daily lives demonstrated challenges including personal physical safety, access to basic infrastructure, and the lasting and continuing impact of displacement on family dynamics took precedence over the ideas formulated prior to arriving in the field.

Pivot in Research Focus:

The narratives and urgent needs expressed by the women led to a pivotal shift in the research focus. This shift underscores the importance of responsive and adaptive research methodologies that prioritize the lived experiences and immediate concerns of participants. As such, the shift in research focus further necessitated a shift in theoretical perspectives. While CRS could help explain broader sociopolitical/geopolitical implications of displacement, specific challenges negotiated by women in Kutupalong required a more nuanced approach that could explain gendered experiences. Thus, feminist geography emerged as a more suitable lens through which these new dimensions could be explored. Feminist geography is a branch of geography that seeks

to "understand the relationship between gender divisions and spatial divisions, and to challenge their supposed naturalness and legitimacy" (Dartmouth Libraries, n.d). Feminist approaches dictate that women must be placed in the centre of the discourse, while CRS stresses the importance of prioritizing the perspectives of refugees. I pivoted in the direction that was telling me to place *women refugees* in the centre and rather than examining how women create a sense of home in the camps, expanding the research to address the broader spectrum of challenges they face.

Current Research Focus:

The adapted focus of this thesis examines the challenges relating to safety and infrastructure that Rohingya women encounter in their daily lives in the Kutupalong refugee camp. As such, my current research focuses on examining how Rohingya women strive to secure safety, access essential resources, and support their families amidst challenging conditions. The research emphasizes the impact of gendered access to spaces and growing safety concerns which have led to significant changes in the roles of Rohingya women, as well as the infrastructural challenges that afflict the camp.

Research Problem

The research problem of this thesis thus centers on understanding the challenges faced by Rohingya women in refugee camps, particularly examining how their spatial experiences and access to facilities are shaped by gendered power dynamics and infrastructural limitations. This study also delves into the broader implications of these challenges, including their impact on personal and family safety.

1.2 Research Question, Aims and Objectives

Initially, my research was aimed at exploring concepts of materiality, liminality, and placemaking within the Rohingya refugee camps. These themes were chosen to understand how refugees create a sense of place and belonging in transient and often challenging environments.

My goal before beginning the field research was to study the ways in which the Rohingya community, particularly the women, engage with their environment. I hoped to understand how the physical materiality of the refugee camp environment influences the processes of home-making and shapes the feelings of belonging among its inhabitants. In doing so, I hoped to illustrate how the materiality of the camp, whether constructed with concrete structures or temporary tents, influences the feeling of 'home,' the formation of social connections, and the development of a sense of belonging among the refugee population.

My first and initial research question therefore was:

"How do the Rohingya perceive and define 'home' in the context of permanent temporariness, considering the influences of materiality and memory politics? Additionally, how do these factors contribute to or impact community cohesion and the overall sense of belonging within the refugee camp, given the enduring state of temporary habitation?"

However, once in Kutupalong, having delved deeper into the camp's daily life, it became evident that women's experiences were significantly shaped by gendered power dynamics and infrastructural limitations.

At first, there was a realization that certain concepts and ideas that are easily conveyed in English do not translate into Bengali - but the issue was much greater than just that. Questions during initial

interviews regarding home and community-building, and conversations surrounding the materials with which their shelters were constructed elucidated deeper issues. It was clear that although women were implicitly engaging in varying levels of placemaking and thinking about the materiality of their shelters, spatial configurations, safety and gendered access to space featured more prevalently, and indeed were more crucial aspects of their lives.

As such, the research objective changed while actively engaged in fieldwork. Residents and NGO workers alike referred to the challenges of navigating the camp as women, which led to more Rohingya women opening up about the various concerns they have in their living environments. They often spoke of the dangers of camp life, as well as the simultaneous lack and overuse of existing infrastructure. Observations and walks around camps indicated similar problems across the board, regardless of the distance, topography, and population of various camps. This led to the following question:

"How do the material conditions and infrastructure of Rohingya refugee camps impact women's safety and well-being within the camp setting?"

As interviews progressed, a new angle came to light - gender and infrastructure do play a crucial role in women's spatial experience and their safety, as well as their perceptions of fear. However, these factors also impact their family dynamics, particularly in the context of a patriarchal society in a liminal space such as the camp. Thus, the research focus shifted slightly to address the final iteration of the question:

"How do gendered power dynamics and infrastructural limitations within Rohingya refugee camps shape the spatial experiences and access to facilities for women, and what are the implications of these conditions on their personal and family safety?"

This shift was driven by observations and interactions that highlighted very obvious disparities in women's access to essential facilities and spaces. The objective is to examine how these gendered dynamics influence women's daily lives, particularly their ability to move freely and safely within the camp. Additionally, the research aims to uncover the broader implications of these limitations on both personal and family safety, contributing to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between gender, space, and infrastructure in refugee settings.

1.3 The Politics of Semantics

To better understand the plight of the Rohingya people living in the camps in Bangladesh, it is of critical importance to grapple with the politics of semantics and the ways in which language shapes public opinion and sentiment.

The term "Rohingya" is as contested and politically fraught as the plight of the people. Deciding what to call the 'Muslims of Rakhine state' often reveals one's political motivations and exposes either support or disdain for their cause. Conflict, it is said, routinely tries "to control names, where they may be linked to legitimacy to reside in or self-govern territory, making them very political" (Ware & Laoutides, 2018: xvi). Studies suggest that the term 'Rohingya' may have existed for centuries, with linguistic and etymological scholars theorizing the origins, roots and meaning of the word. Others posit that it has only been actively used since the 1950s and increased in popularity in the last few decades (ibid; Ahmed, 2009; Leider, 2018; Ahmed & Mohiuddin, 2020; Rahman, 2022). The use of the term 'Rohingya' is inflammatory to many in Myanmar who believe that the people are illegal migrants from Bangladesh, thus referring to them as 'Bengali' almost nationwide, or worse, '*kala*' - a derogatory term for foreigner or stranger, particularly of South Asian origin (Bowser, 2022). These terms serve to exclude them from the national fabric with no

claims to Myanmar citizenship. In their book *Myanmar's 'Rohingya' Conflict*, academics Anthony Ware and Costas Laoutides opt for the 'least-worst option,' referring to the peoples as 'Muslims in northern Rakhine State' throughout the majority of the book, as it "aims to provide as reasoned and evidence-based an analysis as is possible, while causing minimal offense." When referring to the views of others, they use the language of those to whom they are speaking, choosing to use 'Rohingya' or 'Bengali' to best convey their positions (Ware & Laoutides, 2018: xv, xix).

Language is a site of immense power - Margaret Atwood (1981) once said: "A word after a word after a word is power."[4] I find Ware & Laoutides' stance to be neutral and balanced to the point of being problematic and intentionally non-committal. In a world that refuses to recognize the people and their right to belong, one should call the community by the name they are fighting to keep alive. As such, throughout this thesis, I refer to the people I am learning from as Rohingya simply because that is how they identify themselves, and because that is how the international community has come to know them.

The Rohingya people are considered the most persecuted ethnic minority in the world (UNHCR, 2023), and in the international arena are widely known as 'refugees.' According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is any person who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of [their] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themself] of the protection of that country." Since the inception of the concept, legal instruments in Africa and the Americas have expanded the definition of the term to include people who are forced to evacuate from their country due to external aggression, occupation, or

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[4] Margaret Atwood wrote these words in 1981 in her poem titled 'Spelling.'

disturbances of public order, and those whose safety, freedom, or lives are threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, or massive human rights violations (UNHCR, n.d).

As a legally binding framework, the Refugee Convention of 1951 and the subsequent 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees guarantee specific rights and protections to refugees. Scarcity of resources and infrastructure, as well as pressure to host refugees in the face of a massive population of its own means that although not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Bangladesh, under customary law has in many ways attempted to uphold refugee norms and has hosted Rohingyas fleeing violence in neighbouring Myanmar since the first major bout of post-colonial violence in 1978. As such, where the international community calls them 'refugees,' the Government of Bangladesh refers to the Rohingya people as "Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals" (FDMN).

In this thesis, I refer to the Rohingya population as refugees because they have been forced to flee their homes in Myanmar in the face of violence, persecution, and actions that have been widely recognized as genocidal. Despite facing continued discrimination and ostracization in host countries, their need to seek safety and refuge across international borders aligns with the fundamental definition of refugees under international law. This designation emphasizes their right to protection and international support as they escape reprehensible conditions in their homeland.

CHAPTER 2 - Methodology

> "... ethnography is a sensibility that goes beyond face to face contact. It is an approach that cares - with the possible emotional engagement that implies - to glean the meanings that the people under study attribute to their social and political reality." (Schatz, 2009:5)[5]

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[5] This quote in Edward Schatz's Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power deeply resonated with me and reinforced my motivation to study issues within the refugee camp environment.

This thesis aims to explore the challenges faced by Rohingya women in the Kutupalong-Balukhali camp, focusing primarily on qualitative inquiry to comprehensively understand their safety and infrastructural concerns. This method involves actively engaging with the Rohingya community, emphasizing ethnographic observations and walk-throughs inside the camps, complemented by semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion (FGD) with women in the community. Relating to the characteristics of a political ethnographer brought forth by Edward Schatz, I wanted to be "neck-deep in a research context to generate knowledge based on that context" (Schatz et al, 2009, p. 5). Natasha Behl's observation was particularly powerful: "What is common to all political ethnography, however, is that it makes power central to the analysis because political ethnography keeps the researcher in touch with those affected by power relations" - it highlighted the need to remain grounded in the lived realities of those who experience power most directly (Behl, 2017: 50).

Keeping in mind Schatz and Behl, the study draws on a qualitative approach to gain insight into the lives of women in the Rohingya camp, their challenges, and their lived experiences as long-time residents of the camp. A qualitative approach felt most appropriate for this study as it allows for exploring complex social phenomena and understanding participants' perspectives. The research is grounded in feminist geography, which examines the spatial dimensions of gendered experiences and the role of infrastructure in shaping safety and mobility.

To gain access to Kutupalong-Balukhali camp for my research, prior authorization was secured from the Office of Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner to carry out my research activities. In accordance with government guidelines, I also met with the Camp in Charge (CiC) Mr. Sarwar Kamal, tasked with the management and oversight of Camps 9 and 10 to inform him of my research goals and plans while visiting the camp. Ethical considerations were discussed at

length with my thesis supervisor, who guided and supervised the development of my research endeavours before, and during my field visit.

Upon receiving clearance, the field research was conducted over the course of 20 days in May 2024 in the Kutupalong camp located in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, with observational visits to Camps 4, 8W, 11, 22 (in Teknaf), and a primary focus and interviews focused on residents of Camp 10.
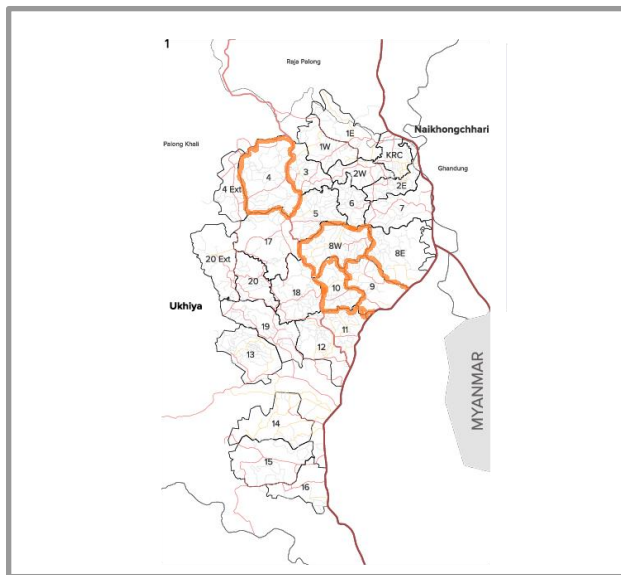
Fig 2: Kutupalong Camp in Ukhiya   Fig. 3: Camp 22 in Teknaf, 60 km south of Ukhiya
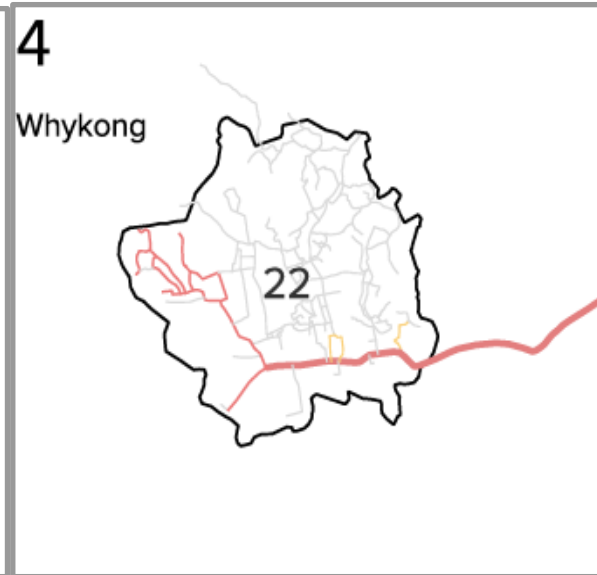
The study focuses on Rohingya women aged 18-59, as they comprise the largest demographic in the Rohingya refugee population (UNHCR, 2024). Owing to a connection made with a local NGO called Mukti Cox's Bazar (hitherto called Mukti), participants were selected from within groups of women who regularly frequented and utilized the UNFPA and Mukti Cox's Bazar-run Women Friendly Spaces (WFS) for training sessions and as a safe space. Information was also gleaned from conversations with camp residents met in passing, as well as several NGO staff and camp management officials who were not at liberty to speak freely without permission from their respective head offices. I also sat in on a Mukti community outreach meeting and held an impromptu conversation with a group of 13 women.

At the outset, it must be said that the language barrier between myself and the camp residents was the most significant challenge faced while conducting research in the camps. Born and raised in Bangladesh in a Muslim household, I wrongly assumed that my familiarity with the culture, customs and indeed the dominant language of the country would easily translate to the camp setting. The Rohingya people speak a language that has some 70% similarity to the Chittagonian dialect of Bangladesh, predominantly spoken in the district of Cox's Bazar. Although my skills in Bengali made interactions with local Bangladeshis easier, it did little to address the challenges of the language barrier with the Rohingya community. Some words and phrases are similar to the Bengali language, but during interviews, I was primarily dependent on employees of Mukti who kindly volunteered their time and language skills. Due to financial constraints, I was unable to use the services of a professional Rohingya interpreter, which would have been greatly beneficial for the purposes of the research.

I interviewed seven individuals (all Rohingya refugees) and conducted one FGD with five Rohingya participants aged 19-47, discussing topics related to women's daily lives, their safety, camp infrastructure, and community dynamics. The interview questions were developed in the planning phase of the field research, but were regularly adjusted while in the field to reflect changing dynamics, focus and in the direction led by informants. Due to the multiple layers of translation required, from English/Bengali to the Chittagonian dialect/Rohingya language and then back to Bengali, interactions were inevitably summarized, leading to a potential loss of nuance and contextual understanding. Furthermore, there were multiple instances where the local NGO staff felt it necessary to provide more details, interpretation, and examples to the questions being asked, which sometimes resulted in leading participants to a certain direction.

During one-on-one interviews and the FGD, when participants expressed hesitation and wished to make statements off the record, all recording devices were paused, and only handwritten notes were used to record information and secure sensitive data. Staff from various I/NGOs have been anonymized to protect their privacy and any possible repercussions from speaking without prior authorization. Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants. Conversations were recorded for the express purpose of note-taking and transcription. The audio interviews were transcribed with strict adherence to confidentiality and protective measures to ensure the safety and privacy of all interviewees.

Additionally, walkthroughs of the camp proved illuminating because they allowed me to make observations such as distances from households to adequate lighting, latrines, and water sources, as well as insights into the prevalence of gendered access to space. Sitting in during training sessions in the WFS provided a safe space in which to observe the social interactions of women in the community and their understanding of themes such as their individual rights, gender-based violence, community relations, and disaster preparedness.

Having never been to the refugee camps and having only read about it or seen it on television like much of the Bangladeshi population, I underestimated the difficulty in navigating the camp. Maze-like and disorienting, the camps are expansive and confusing to negotiate, even for the most seasoned NGO staff. Navigating the camps and finding willing participants without prior knowledge of the environment and camp culture necessitated that I be heavily reliant on WFS staff. Using their personal and professional connections, they connected me with women who felt comfortable sharing their experiences and concerns regarding the camp. I had to wait until Mukti staff were available to accompany me through the nearby alleyways, often enduring scorching heat waves and adhering to the exit time limits set by the Office of Refugee Relief and Repatriation

Commissioner (RRRC). This was in addition to their ongoing work at the Women's Friendly Space (WFS), thereby making it difficult to explore the camp for long periods. Furthermore, an absence of NGO and government staff on the weekend means the camps are less secure, and as a result, field visits to various camps were limited to weekdays.

In qualitative research, acknowledging the researcher's positionality is a fundamental aspect of ensuring transparency and reflexivity. Positionality refers to the various factors such as cultural background, social identity, personal experiences, and professional stance that shape a researcher's perspective and influence the research process. As England (1994) articulates, getting personal in research involves understanding how these elements affect interactions with participants and the interpretation of data. Reflexivity is a continual process, one in which we must take the time to "critique, appraise, and evaluate how [their] subjectivity and context influence the research processes," making sure to critically reflect on our own influence (Varpio et al, 2021; Olmos-Vega et al, 2022). This self-awareness is crucial not only for maintaining the integrity of the research but also for enhancing its credibility. By critically reflecting on one's positionality, a researcher can better navigate the power dynamics inherent in the fieldwork. Exercising this reflexive practice allows for a more nuanced and ethical engagement with the research community, particularly in contexts involving vulnerable populations, such as the Rohingya women in refugee camps.

As a Bangladeshi woman researching the Rohingya refugee crisis, my positionality is inextricably tied to my cultural and social identity, as well as my gender, academic privilege and social status. This positionality also necessitates a careful reflection on potential biases and preconceptions that may influence my research. Being fluent in Bengali and familiar with the cultural context allowed me to build rapport with the participants to a certain extent, but this assumed linguistic and cultural affinity did not necessarily facilitate deeper conversations and a better understanding of the

women's experiences. Despite recognizing my privileges and reflecting on potential biases, as an unmarried woman nearing my mid-thirties who grew up in a middle/upper-middle-class urban environment, I remain acutely aware that I cannot fully grasp what it is like to live as a woman in Kutupalong or even in a smaller town like Cox's Bazar. I can recognize my privileges, challenge my assumptions and biases, and empathize with the women, but I have to acknowledge my limitations.

My role as a student researcher tied to an elite international academic institution positioned me in a place of significant power and privilege. This dynamic could potentially affect how participants perceived me and how freely they shared their experiences. I also realize that my network in Cox's Bazar afforded me the opportunity to move with as much freedom as possible. I was keenly aware of my status as an outsider and its implications on the women with whom I was speaking. Some were initially skeptical of my intentions, possibly because they had been asked similar questions by other researchers, visitors, and NGO workers. Kubik (2009) emphasizes the importance of acknowledging such power imbalances and striving to create a research environment that respects and values the voices of all participants. In my interactions with Rohingya women, I made a conscious effort to minimize these gaps to the best of my abilities by remaining honest and open, making sure to encourage open dialogue and validate their narratives. In a community that encourages early betrothals, I fielded questions from refugees and Bangladeshis alike about my decisions to study, when I would marry, and how my parents would allow me to live abroad. I sat with NGO staff as they went about their work or engaged in the training sessions at the WFS and answered everyone's questions with as much clarity and honesty as possible. On two separate occasions, I sat with refugees who had their babies in their arms, and in all seriousness, they said: *"Apa, loi zan."* I knew that meant "*Apa,* take them." Both women were desperate, telling me how

difficult it is to raise children in the camp and that I would be able to give them a better life. On those nights, I found it difficult to fall asleep.

As a woman researching 'women's issues,' I found that my gender facilitated a sense of solidarity, ease, and trust with the female participants. This connection allowed for more intimate and candid discussions about sensitive topics such as gender-based violence, cultural practices, and daily struggles within the camp. To make sure I remain conscious of my position, I engaged in reflexive practices such as journaling, and discussed my findings with my newfound colleagues and peers to critically examine my interpretations and paid attention and due respect to the participants' voices.

Moreover, my academic background in urban studies and growing familiarity with feminist geography informed my approach to the research. This theoretical lens provided a framework for understanding the spatial and social dynamics within the refugee camps and guided my analysis of the data. Recognizing and reflecting on my positionality was a critical aspect of this research, because it taught me how to navigate the minefield that is fieldwork with greater sensitivity and awareness, making sure that the perspectives of the Rohingya women were heard and respected, and that the research that is ethical, credible, and truly representative of the participants' experiences.

To complement the qualitative research, I had hoped to engage in rudimentary spatial mapping, analyzing distance from informants' shelters to specific points, such as the closest latrines, nearest solar streetlights, and water sources using maps and infographics provided by IOM, and was in touch with representatives in the Cox's Bazar upon my return from the field. In orderto suppress nationwide protests stemming for a quota reform movement in civil service jobs, there was a

complete internet blackout in Bangladesh, where mobile internet and social media platforms were defunct for 10 and 13 days respectively (Corea and Erum 2024; Abdullah, 2024). As the political unrest increase and violence worsened, communications were severely hampered. I was therefore unable to source the maps from my connections in Cox's Bazar and was required to forgo the spatial analysis.

CHAPTER 3 - Understanding the Context

The international community has declared the Muslim Rohingya community in Rakhine State to be one of the most persecuted groups in the world, attributed to years of deeply-rooted grievances and prejudices centred on citizenship and nationhood (Al Jazeera, 2018).

Although Rohingya Muslim presence can be traced to the Rakhine State of Myanmar for centuries, the community has been systematically discriminated against and excluded from citizenship rights and protections with members of the Rohingya community fleeing to neighbouring Bangladesh for decades (Bari, 2018). Following attacks on police and military posts in 2017 by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), the Tatmadaw - Myanmar's armed forces - launched a campaign of brutal violence targeting the Rohingya community. Homes were razed to the ground, livelihoods were destroyed and the Rohingya were forced to flee after many were burned, beaten, raped, and shot to death.

This chapter provides a brief overview of Rohingya history and identity before, during, and after independence, the history of their forced displacement beginning in the 1970s, and the events leading up to the events of 2017. It then goes on to provide contextual information about the Rohingya community in Kutupalong-Balukhali refugee camps and a glimpse of their lives since seeking refuge in Bangladesh.

3.1 Who are the Rohingya?: Before, During and After Colonization

"Who are the Rohingya?" - although seemingly innocuous, the questioning of the origins and history of the Rohingya people is vexed and contested, and perhaps the basis on which they have been easily discriminated against for decades.

Consecutive Burmese government administrations have claimed that the Rohingya are immigrants brought to the region by British colonizers to work the land in the 19th and 20th centuries (Bari, 2018). However, Rakhine State (formerly Arakan) has historically functioned as an independent state within Burma (now Myanmar) with a large Muslim presence in the region (Ibrahim, 2018; Ahmed & Mohiuddin, 2020).

One theory suggests that the Rohingyas are descendants "of Moorish, Arab and Persian traders, including Moghul, Turk, Pathan and Bengali soldiers and migrants" (Ahmed, 2009). There were four phases of Muslim migration to Arakan, according to Bangladeshi historian Dr. Abdul Karim (Bari, 2018). In the first phase, traders came to Chittagong in Bengal between the eighth and tenth centuries while others continued to the Irrawady River Delta in Arakan. When many Arab traders were allowed to settle, it is said that people indigenous to this area may have accepted Islam at this time. In the second phase, during the early 15th and 16th centuries, relations between the Arakan kingdom and Bengal deepened, which prompted the arrival of professionals and creatives to Arakan, thereby enlivening the capital of Mrohaung "with religious, social and cultural activities" (Bari, 2018:4). The third phase began with the arrival of European (specifically Portuguese) traders in the 17th century, who in addition to large ships and superior goods, kidnapped Muslims and Hindus from the coastal areas of Bengal with colluding Arakan people and sold them into slavery, thus increasing the Muslim and Hindu population. The fourth phase occurred when Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb's brother Shah Shuja sought shelter in Arakan, bringing with him 1000 Muslims, who stayed long after his murder at the hands of the Arakan king in the mid-17th century (Bari, 2018). However, by the 1750s, Burmese kings gained significant ground throughout Burma, invaded and then conquered Arakan in 1784. The Burmese control of Arakan, however, caused tensions with British-ruled India, and in 1826 after an encounter in the First Anglo-Burmese War,

the British East India Company annexed Arakan in 1826 (Ware & Laoutides, 2018; Ibrahim, 2018).

During the rule of the British Empire, Arakan's civil ruler Thomas Campbell Robertson established a capital in Akyab (now Sittwe) and soon realized the potential of Arakan's fertile soil. This necessitated the migration of skilled human resources from Bengal who could farm the land better than the men in Burma, who Robertson believed to be lazy (Bari, 2018). So although there is *some* credence to the narrative of Muslim arrival in Rakhine State with British colonization, there is sufficient historical evidence to suggest that the presence of the Rohingya can be traced for centuries before the arrival of the British.

During the Japanese invasion of Burma in 1942, a sizeable section of the Arakanese Muslim population fled Burma and the Arakan and took shelter in Bengal (Ahmed, 2009; Pandey, 2017; Bari, 2018). Whereas Arakan Buddhists supported the Japanese, Arakan Muslims supported the British, who promised partial independence once the war ended but reneged on the offer (Ibrahim, 2018 Bari, 2018). The Rohingya population was targeted jointly by both the communalist (Buddhist) Rakhine and the Burma Independence Army, killing 100,000 Rohingya and exiling a further 50,000 towards the border to East Bengal (Milton et al, 2017). This resulted in Rakhine State being bitterly divided along communal lines, and has been called "a hotbed of communal and separatist conflict since Independence" (Ware & Laoutides, 2018:27). Following the expulsion of the British from Arakan in 1948, Burma's post-independence leadership saw the Rohingya as questionable and hostile (Ibrahim, 2018). Although the Rohingya were not granted full citizenship after independence in 1948, civilian Prime Minister U Nu stated "The Rohingya has the equal status of nationality with Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Mon, Rakhine and Shan." Legal frameworks also

suggested that the Rohingya were not seen as particularly different from any other ethnic minority -- until the military came to power in 1962 (Ibrahim, 2018:9; Bari, 2018).

Gradually over several years, the military justified their control of the country and decided that if it was difficult to use ethnicity as the litmus test for being Burmese, then being Buddhist would be used to define a "proper citizen of the state" (ibid). In 1974, the country's constitution was changed to strip the status the Rohingya had been given at independence. Imtiaz Ahmed states that the Rohingya were told they do not fall under a prescribed four-colour ID card system, and "that no such cards would be issued to them" (Ahmed, 2009:288), while Azeem Ibrahim (2018) writes that the authorities: "… insisted that they accept identity cards that described them as foreigners" (8). As the 1947 Constitution did not formally recognize the Rohingya as citizens, they could not become citizens in 1977, during an army drive to register citizens (Bari, 2018). In 1978, the military government of Myanmar launched Operation Naga Min (Operation Dragon King), aimed at expelling the Rohingya Patriotic Front (RPF) from Northern Rakhine State. The pent-up anti-Rohingya sentiment culminated in the military junta operation to purge Burma of 'illegal inhabitants,' which comprised harassment, violence, and arrest. Over three months, 250,000 men, women, and children arrived in Bangladesh (Martin, 2017; Bari, 2018).

The 1982 Burmese Citizenship Law was the final nail in the coffin. It created three categories of citizenship, namely *Citizenship, Associate Citizenship,* and *Naturalized Citizen* (Bari, 2018)*.* The Myanmar government proclaimed that there were 135 national race groups, or *taing-yin-tha* native to Myanmar. People in Myanmar must be able to prove they are from one of these 135 national race groups, or *taing-yin-tha*, to be considered Burmese. To this day, the Rohingya are still not considered to be *taing-yin-tha* (Cheesman, 2017). While they were permitted to reside in the country, the Rohingya have, since the passing of the 1982 Citizenship law, been denied citizenship,

made stateless and have no rights to political engagement or property ownership (Bari, 2018). To this day, the Myanmar government refers to them as 'illegal Bangladeshi migrants' (Rahman, 2023).

After a failed democratic election and subsequent military crackdown in 1990, the military presence in Rakhine State was increased, resulting in forced labour, relocation, rape, and torture of Rohingya men, women, and children. This resulted in 250,000 Rohingya Muslims fleeing to Bangladesh (Ibrahim, 2018; Bari, 2018). Although a large majority were repatriated in the decade that followed, many found their way back to Bangladesh due to the continued abuse at the hands of government forces (Human Rights Watch, n.d.). In 2012, the rape of a Rakhine Buddhist woman reignited communal conflict, resulting in arson, destruction of property, and death with 30,000 people - both Buddhist and Muslim - displaced and being housed in 37 camps across the Rakhine (BBC, 2012). To combat this, Myanmar President Thein Sein proposed resettling the Rohingya population in other countries, an idea that was quashed by the UN (Ware & Laoutides, 2018; Bari, 2018). In subsequent years, the Rohingya were excluded from the 2014 census and prevented from voting in the 2015 elections which saw the victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and its leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, making her the civilian leader of the country (Bari, 2018). Bouts of sectarian violence followed, spurred on by ultra-nationalist Buddhist monks and racist vitriol, resulting in the death, destruction, and displacement of Muslim and Buddhist residents of Rakhine, but with a disproportionate number of Muslims being impacted (Ware & Laoutides, 2018; Ibrahim, 2018).

Built out of existing resistance groups, the newer militant group Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) was able to weaponize the Rohingya community's growing disdain with their treatment, justifying their use of violence and focusing on attacks against military and state security

apparatuses (Ware & Laoutides, 2018). On August 25, 2017, ARSA launched a series of coordinated attacks on 30 border guard posts and a Tatmadaw base (Meixler, 2018), followed by ".... human wave attacks involving hundreds of people, mostly untrained local villagers armed with farm tools" in the hopes of inciting an uprising (Ware & Laoutides, 2018:52). Unsurprisingly, the Tatmadaw launched a campaign of brutal violence targeting the Rohingya community in response. Homes were razed to the ground, livelihoods were destroyed and everyday Rohingya people were subjected to gross acts of violence, resulting in their eventual escape into Bangladesh.

3.2 The Rohingya Refugee Crisis as it Stands

Since August 2017, upwards of 750,000 Rohingya refugees have fled neighbouring Bangladesh, as they have been forced to do several times in the past (Meixler, 2018; UNHCR, 2023), but this time escaping violent military crackdowns in Myanmar's Rakhine State. As of February 2024, 976,507 Rohingya refugees – most of whom are women and children — have been residing in thirty-three camps in Ukhiya and Teknaf Upazilas of the Cox's Bazar District, as well as on the island of Bhasan Char (Rohingya Refugee Response, n.d). This number reflects the already existing 250,000+ refugees who have been living in Kutupalong and Nayapara Registered Camps from previous displacements in camps since the 1970s. Administered by the Government of Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Army, the camps have undergone significant changes since first being built in an ad hoc fashion. Settlements have expanded over the years throughout the sub-district of Ukhiya, with learning centres, medical clinics, mosques, and internal governance within the camp to retain some sense of normalcy (Meixler, 2018). There are, however, several challenges within the camps, and in no way reflect spaces that are livable and sustainable in the long term.

When the Rohingya first arrived in 2017, 144 national and international NGOs descended upon the small sub-district of Ukhiya to provide emergency aid and necessities (Alsaafin, 2018). Since then, the number of international organizations has reduced to make way for more sustainable programming at the hands of local organizations - in 2022, 135 (Khan, 2023), and now in 2024, the joint response brings together 117 partners including UN Agencies, Bangladeshi and international NGOs. Nearly half of them are national organizations from Bangladesh (Rohingya Response, 2024). With Bangladesh not being a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention, the Government is not bound to the tenets of the Convention -- as such UNHCR has been *allowed* to operate within the country but has little say in decisions made by the government regarding any potential repatriation attempts (Farzana, 2017). The UNHCR continues to be in charge overall, while IOM, UNICEF, WFP, and the WHO are responsible for sector-based interventions with the involvement of the Government Bangladesh in various programs (Rohingya Refugee Response, n.d; Farzana, 2017).

Fig. 4: Completed shelters in Bhasan Char, off the coast of Cox's Bazar (credit: Javed Kaisar)

In 2018, plans put forth by the Government of Bangladesh to relocate 100,000 Rohingya individuals to a newly-founded, newly-emerged island in the Bay of Bengal called Bhasan Char raised eyebrows at home and abroad (Beaubien, 2019). This island 34 km off the coast of the mainland was previously nonexistent, only having emerged from the seabed in the last twenty years (Reuters, 2018). The Government justified its decision by saying the relocation would help to ease the overpopulation in the camps, as well as lessen the impact on the ecology and resources of the once uninhabited hills of Cox's Bazar on which the extension camps stood. It would further help appease the rising resentment of the host population, who felt slighted by international organizations and aid agencies who rushed to help the Rohingya. Much to the protest of the international community, the Bangladesh Army built the shelters under the auspices of the Government and with the help of British and Chinese engineers.[6] As of May 31, 35,255 individuals reside in Bhasan Char - far less than the 100,000 that was hoped for by the Government and camp administrators (UNHCR, 2024).

Soon after the 2017 displacement occurred, the "Arrangement on Return of Displaced Persons from Rakhine State" was signed between the Government of Bangladesh and Government of Myanmar in November 2017. The Rohingya identity, which is the crux of the displacement issue, was left out of the document, referring to the Rohingya people as "returnees." It insinuates that the Rohingya are a people who left the country of their own volition, after which the Myanmar government is willing to accept those who "voluntarily wish to return to Myanmar by themselves" (The Financial Express, 2018). A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was subsequently agreed upon by UNHCR, UNDP and the Government of Myanmar in May 2018. Much to the chagrin of

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[6] I consulted my colleague Javed Kaisar, a PhD scholar at the Max Planck Institute of Social Anthropology, researching the island shelters, about the accommodations for refugees. "The four-story buildings are officially referred to as shelters, and each shelter has one-storey cluster houses. However, within the camp, the military refers to these cluster houses as barracks, while the civil administration calls them "guccho gram" or cluster villages."

activists and humanitarian agencies, the document does not refer to the Rohingya people again, but refers to them as "returnees," stating that they will:

> "… enjoy the same freedom of movement as all other Myanmar nationals in Rakhine State, in conformity with existing laws and regulations, and in conformity with the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission" (Radio Free Asia, 2018).

The UNCHR called this MoU "a first and necessary step to establish a framework for cooperation" (UNCHR, 2018). Following the military overthrow of the democratically elected government in 2021, talks have stalled between the two governments. A vast majority of the Rohingya population continue to languish in the camps in Cox's Bazar, and others, desperate for opportunities outside the refugee camp, risk their lives and make dangerous boat journeys to Southeast Asia - in 2023 alone, 4,500 Rohingyas took boats across the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal in 2023, while 569 were reported dead or missing at sea (Al-Jazeera, 2024).

CHAPTER 4 - Literature Review

Rohingya women are taught from an early age to tend to the home, provide care for members of the family, and limit their contact with the outside world. Life outside the home is often considered a corrupting influence, leaving women homebound, and often unable to pursue higher education or economic opportunities, further limiting their exposure to the public sphere, and almost guaranteeing a gendered access to space. Interpreting the refugee camp as an urban environment and investigating the camp from a framework of feminist geography provides a lens through which the spatial experiences and challenges of Rohingya women in refugee camps are examined. Doing so provides a critical understanding of how power, safety, and belonging are negotiated in the context of displacement and forced migration.

4.1 Refugee Camp as an Urban Environment:

At first sight, the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar transcend the preconceived perception of refugee camps as transient and peripheral spaces (Diken & Laustsen, 2006:89). With a population density rivaling that of major urban centres, a thriving (informal) economy, complex social structures, and established infrastructure, Kutupalong mirrors the characteristics of a bustling metropolis.

Such urban identity is further illuminated through the work of theorists such as Michel Agier, who explores the concept of refugee camps as a form of urban space, coining the term camp-villes, or "city-camps." Agier argues that these camps, initially created as emergency protective measures, often house tens of thousands of inhabitants for extended periods, far beyond the immediate crisis (Agier, 2002: 320). It leads to the development of complex social, cultural, and economic structures similar to those found in urban environments, much like the refugee camps in

Bangladesh. Over seven years, the residents of Kutupalong have, in many ways, carved out a way of life that recognizes the reality of living in a camp, while still holding on to Rohingya traditions and ways of life. They have built relationships with newfound neighbours, married their children to other residents, and rebuilt their lives as much as possible with the little that they have. At the same time, some have found ways to earn a living by crafting handicrafts or engaging in manual labour for the ever-growing needs of the camp. Humanitarian interventions, while aimed at providing basic needs, also contribute to this urbanization by creating employment opportunities and supporting various forms of trade and crafts. Over time, these refugee camps, originally meant to be temporary shelters for those escaping war and destruction, become semi-permanent settlements where new identities and social dynamics emerge (Diken & Laustsen, 2006; Agier, 2002). They exhibit a level of organization, social differentiation, and economic activity not dissimilar from the workings of a small city.

As discussed later in Chapter V, refugee camps that are strained for space, money and infrastructure also struggle with maintaining security, managing ethnic tensions, and dealing with the psychological impact of prolonged displacement. Agier's ethnographic approach reveals the paradox of camps being both places of refuge and sites of social isolation. The Rohingya people must contend with and navigate their identities and formulate strategies to survive in an environment that is both temporary and permanent - a liminal space - in a country that barely tolerates them and relegates them to the margins, hoping to go back to a country that does not want them at all. By imagining the space as more than a transient, organic environment, we can better appreciate the dynamic nature of the Rohingya refugee camp, acknowledging it not merely as a site of displacement but as a vibrant urban entity with its own set of challenges.

If we understand the camp to be a city, it stands to reason that the residents are privy to certain rights and liberties as inhabitants of said city. In his essay titled The Right to the City, urban theorist David Harvey postulates that the right to the city is "a collective rather than an individual right since changing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization" (Harvey, n.d.:1).[7] Harvey takes his analysis a step further, writing that increasing urbanization can lead to the displacement of a population. The marginalization and displacement experienced by the Rohingya women due to safety concerns or societal restrictions can be seen as connecting directly with the concept of gendered access to space, where one's gender predetermines the spaces that are accessible or prohibited. Although aspirational in nature, the participation of women in the management of the camp could lead to the democratization of urban space to which Harvey refers. However, the findings from the research indicate that deeply ingrained societal expectations dictate gender roles, making it difficult for women in Kutupalong to rise from the ranks of residents to those in positions of power.

Although topically different, Agier's "Between War and City: Towards an Urban Anthropology of Refugee Camps" and David Harvey's "Right to the City" offer complementary perspectives on the urban condition of marginalized communities, providing a rich dialogue on the themes of exclusion, collective rights, and the role of state and institutions. Agier examines the evolution of refugee camps into semi-permanent urban spaces, where inhabitants construct social networks and informal economies, thereby exercising their agency within restrictive environments. This is self-evident as soon as one arrives at the entrance of camps, where Rohingya and Bangladeshi merchants and shopkeepers have built a thriving economy and communal space (mostly consisting

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[7] There are two versions of David Harvey's The Right to the City. The article posted on his website davidharvey.org reads as above, with no date mentioned. It states "the right to the city is "a **collective** rather than an individual right." The version of his article posted in the New Left Review in Sept/Oct. 2008 reads: "It is, moreover, a **common** rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization."

of men) out of once-uninhabited hills and forests. Harvey says: "The right to the city is...a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our heart's desire" (Harvey, n.d.:1), asserting that urbanization should be about reclaiming the city for all its inhabitants, emphasizing the collective right to shape urban spaces. But how can this 'city' be claimed for all, when not all people who live within it enjoy the same levels of access and interaction with the outside world?

A crucial intersection in the works of Agier and Harvey is the exclusionary nature of urban spaces and the emphasis on collective rights and agency. Agier sees refugee camps as spaces where new forms of urbanism and citizenship can emerge, despite their constrained circumstances, emphasizing the importance of recognizing refugees' agency in creating social networks and economies within the camps. Harvey, meanwhile, asserts that "the freedom to make and remake ourselves and our cities is … one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights" (Harvey, n.d.:2). Both scholars call on marginalized groups to be included in urban planning and governance to ensure their needs are addressed, which, of course, is nearly impossible to achieve in Kutupalong where residents - save a few in positions of leadership - have little to no say in the administration of the camp in which they live.

Chapter 5 details the findings from the field in Cox's Bazar but evidence from refugee camps around the world shows that if given the opportunity, refugees engage in small business ventures, bring skills, talents and ideas to not only have a positive impact on the local economy but also collectively advocate for their own communities. The Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, for example, which has housed over 350,000 Somali refugees since the early 1990s shows that refugee camps can be a commercial hub, with refugees running successful businesses, providing services and a market for locals - a 2010 report found that Dadaab's businesses generated a turnover of 25 million USD, with 1.8 million USD in sales of livestock from the host community to the refugees

within the camp, and pay a hefty tax for running their businesses, which only benefits the government of Kenya (IRIN News, n.d., Betts, 2021).

However, what is often missing in this discourse is a feminist understanding of space and place, particularly in relation to economic activities within refugee camps. Research shows that the nature, scope and object of economic activities different drastically between men and women, often resulting in a gendered division of labour. This division manifests not only within households but also within the broader power structures of the camp, within the power structures of the camp and wider social and institutional frameworks, reinforcing existing gender norms and shaping access to spaces for economic engagement (Callamard, 2002; Silvey, 2006).

In the context of Kutupalong refugee camp, these gendered dynamics are further complicated by strict regulations. Refugees are prohibited from growing their own produce or rearing their own animals - doing so could lead to camp administration being informed and confiscation of the animals (Farzana, 2017). It is easy to see that this is meant to make refugees feel less 'at home,' but doing so would not only make refugees more self-sufficient but would also provide avenues for business ventures. Barber shops and convenience stores in the camp blocks are a start, but stringent rules make expansion difficult.

Despite these challenges, Kutupalong has the potential to develop into a thriving small town or city. The camp has all the hallmarks of a thriving small town or city, with an established settlement, its own administration, infrastructure, resources such as the WFS, businesses, and consumers. The Rohingya, who were often engaged in farming or fishing in Myanmar, brought with them the ideas, knowledge and skills that can not only make the *city* a social space with its distinct culture but one with a vibrant entrepreneurial spirit. If given the chance, Kutupalong could not only become a

social space with a distinct culture but also a hub of economic activity, much like the Dadaab camps in Kenya.

4.2 Feminist Geography and Gendered Access to Space

We understand epistemology as a concept - i.e. a theory of knowledge - and feminist epistemology involves more than just listening to 'women's voices'. It also considers how gender as a social construct affects the responses of both men and women in research. It explores how the gender of interviewers and participants can influence the data and how research findings are shared with academic and public audiences. Furthermore, it requires examining how socially constructed gender roles, norms, and relations impact the creation of knowledge (Cope, 2002).

Feminist geography, according to the Women and Geography Study Group (WGSG) - of the Institute of British Geographers - is a geography that "explicitly takes into account the socially created gender structure of society; and in which a commitment both towards the alleviation of gender inequality in the short term and towards its removal, through social change towards real equality, in the longer term, is expressed" (WGSG, 1984:21).

Feminist epistemology and feminist geography therefore prove to be essential for research. They offer critical points of view which challenge conventional knowledge production, address biases and gaps in existing theories and emphasize the need for diverse voices, particularly from women and marginalized groups.

As a theoretical framework, feminist geography offers a critical lens through which to examine the specific challenges faced by Rohingya women in refugee camps, particularly concerning gendered access to space, safety, and infrastructural challenges. Within that framework, the concepts of 'space' and 'place' play a key role in understanding the world around us. Referring to 'space' in

Feminist Geographies: Explorations in Diversity and Difference, the WGSG writes "... the significance of a particular location in space derives not from its absolute location and not merely from its location relative to other locations, but from the content of the social and economic processes which link it to or separate it from other locations" (WGSG, 1997:6). In geography, "space" refers to both the physical locations and abstract areas where objects and phenomena exist and interact, encompassing dimensions such as distance, connectivity, and scale. It also includes the study of spatial relationships, human-environment interactions, and how different cultures perceive and value their environments. Place, in turn, encompasses the identity, emotions, and meanings that people attach to a space, making each place unique (Ibid: 9).

Space and place are not neutral -- they are imbued with power relations that are gendered, affecting men and women differently (Massey, 1994; Oberhauser et al, 2017:6-7). In refugee camps, where resources and space are severely constrained, these gendered differences become starkly pronounced, profoundly impacting the daily lives and well-being of displaced women. In Kutupalong-Balukhali, *izzot* (women's honour) and the inclination to maintain gendered, patriarchal relations dictate that women are sequestered in their homes, relying solely on humanitarian aid and men to sustain their families (WGSG, 1984; UN Women). The men meanwhile grapple with unemployment, sporadic financial opportunities, and its resulting frustrations, increasing the risk of violence in the household. Studies show that 72% of Rohingya women face intimate partner abuse (IPA) -- the most prevalent type of gender-based violence experienced by women in refugee camps -- and 56.5% had to engage in unwanted sexual intercourse with their husbands (Islam et al, 2021: NP11316).

Understanding the intersection of space, power, and gender is essential in analyzing how Rohingya women navigate the spatial constraints of the camp. It lets us see how the spatial arrangements

within camps — the placement of community spaces, food distribution centres, and shelters — can reproduce or challenge existing gender inequalities. For example, when essential facilities like latrines and washrooms are located in poorly lit or remote areas of the camp, women's fear of being out at night are heightened, compounding the real or perceived risks of gender-based violence. Spatial analyses such as this help to critique the design and layout of refugee camps, which significantly impact women's mobility, privacy, and safety, directly affecting their ability to participate in community life and access vital resources (Whitson, 2018:79).

This spatial critique is bolstered using the lens of feminist geography, which emphasizes the importance of women's voices and experiences in our understanding of space and place, particularly in the case of Rohingya women. In critically examining camp infrastructure and its direct impact on women's safety, and mobility, we can understand the delineation between the public and the private spheres. This analysis helps us understand how the camp environment not only shapes but limits a woman's interactions with the outside world. As Oberhauser et al posit: the home can be "... a site of multiple experiences and expressions; from being a site of safety and security, family and comfort, to being one of immobility, oppression, and even violence." Gendered access to space within the camp further restricts women within the confines of an imaginary border (Oberhauser et al, 2017:8).

In sum, using feminist geography to research the challenges faced by Rohingya women in refugee camps reveals the deeply gendered nature of their spatial experiences and is crucial for gaining a full understanding of how gender, space, and infrastructure interact in crisis settings.

4.3 Women and Displacement: Safety and Placemaking

The violence, trauma and hardship experienced by Rohingya women since 2017 and perhaps even before that have profoundly redefined their sense of safety and their practices of placemaking within the refugee camps. Forcefully and violently displaced from their homes and living in impermanent precarity, these women now navigate an environment in the camp where traditional notions of security and community are continuously challenged. The refugee camp, with its inherent overpopulation and limited resources, often exacerbates vulnerabilities, particularly for women.

Refugee camps are inherently gendered spaces, influenced by demographic and economic structures that often marginalize women. As Storkey observes, "Given the rapidly changing social, economic, and geographical structure, there is no sense of community, and this fragility surfaces every time a group arrives" (Storkey, 2015 in Jensen, 2019). As a result, safety concerns are not only confined to interactions with strangers but extend to accessing basic services within the camp. Social norms and safety concerns hinder women and girls from accessing essential resources and facilities, with many reporting feeling unsafe when using latrines — 23% of girls and 57% of women, according to ReliefWeb (Goodman & Mahmood: 2019). The lack of adequate lighting and secure facilities further limits their mobility and participation in community life, reinforcing their marginalization.

Within the camp, Rohingya women continue to face significant deprivations of their basic human rights and suffer from gender-based violence with profound implications for their bodies and sense of self (Chowdhury & Mostafa, 2020). As Malkki (2006) explains, "women are construed as more 'true' refugees, being the victims rather than the perpetrators of war and violence," but this

perception often reduces their agency and disempowers them, leading to a lack of education, individual documentation, economic self-reliance, and unreported gender-based violence (Jensen, 2019).

Owing to the factors suggested by Jensen (2019), the vulnerability faced by Rohingya women and girls is seemingly further exacerbated by their gender, refugee status, and ethnic affiliation, thereby making them easy targets for violence from perpetrators including displaced Rohingya men and men from the host community. The breakdown of family and community structures further compounds these risks, creating an environment where high levels of violence, abuse, and exploitation, such as sexual harassment, child labour, and child marriage, are prevalent (ReliefWeb, 2017; Goodman & Mahmood, 2019). These stressful circumstances of refugee life also put women at risk of gender-based violence both within the household and when they seek work in the community as volunteers and leaders (Akhter & Kusakabe, 2014; Goodman & Mahmood, 2019).

The literature on displacement highlights these intricate layers of vulnerability and the ongoing struggle for safety and agency among displaced women. By examining these dynamics through the lens of feminist geography, this subchapter aims to shed light on the specific experiences of Rohingya women, exploring how they navigate and reshape their environments to foster a sense of place and security amidst ongoing displacement.

4.4 Permanent Temporariness, Liminality, and Materiality

Refugee camps are designed to be spaces of liminality and impermanence to minimize contact with the outside world. These camps are purposely built outside city centres to create a sense of isolation. Their architectural design connotes a 'fear of touching' often idealizing order amid

chaos. It is what Sennet describes as an 'urban condom' (Diken & Laustsen, 20:87). As in Agier's camp-villes, inhabitants of the Rohingya refugee camp live in a grey space (Quddus, 2020) between statelessness and nonacceptance, raising questions about their "threatened, traumatized identity" (Agier, 2002:322). They continually undergo phases of liminality (Zahra, 2019), experiencing discrimination and displacement in Myanmar, neglect during their upheaval to Bangladesh and grave danger in their often perilous migration to southeast Asia.

The ongoing liminality not only has psychological impacts on the community but also has significant implications for the women of the community. Comprising 51% of the refugee population, women and girls are particularly susceptible to the risk of abuse, exploitation, and gender-based violence. The vulnerability is exacerbated by a rise in security-related incidents in the camps since 2023, including killings and violence perpetrated by criminal groups (Rohingya Response, 2023). Child marriage is commonly practised in the community, driven by social norms, the perceived safety of girls against harassment and assault, and economic constraints -- all factors that are further heightened in humanitarian contexts (Mazurana and Marshak, 2019). Strict adherence to religious interpretations and social customs often relegates Rohingya women to the four walls of their homes, and that is replicated in the refugee camps of Bangladesh. As Whitson (2018) explains, women's strategies in the face of fear "reinforce social norms that associate the masculine with public space, normalize women's fear of such spaces, and perpetuate the discourses that function to produce this fear" (2018: 88).

The concept of materiality encompasses not only the physical, built environment such as buildings, tents, and camp infrastructure but also the natural environment, non-human elements, and their influence (Latham, 2015). Materiality plays a pivotal role in the construction of homes for displaced populations and has, in various ways, been at the forefront of the growing tensions

between the Rohingya and the host community. How do Rohingya refugees navigate and adapt the physical elements of their environment to establish a sense of stability, identity, and belonging within the confines of their temporary homes?

Initially welcoming the refugees based on the country's own experience of displacement during the war of liberation in 1971, the citizens of Bangladesh have increasingly expressed their disdain for the ongoing presence of the Rohingya (Ansar & Khaled, 2021). The arrival of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh led to significant environmental degradation, putting immense pressure on already scarce local resources, including water, firewood, and land for agriculture (Martin, 2005; Ansar & Khalder, 2021), with a total of 8,001 acres of previously uninhabited forest and hills lost in the construction of the camps alone (ReliefWeb, 2022). Refugees are in charge of building their own shelters using locally sourced materials provided by humanitarian agencies (Hussein & Duggal, 2023; Garcia, 2023), while subsequent renovations to the structure are supported by IOM, the organization in charge of the shelter sector.

Tarpaulin, aside from bamboo and soil, is heavily used in the construction of shelters and is often the cheapest, lightest, and most readily available material, offering a modicum of privacy and dignity in the immediate aftermath of a humanitarian crisis, although it does little to secure or protect the Rohingya community. Conversations from within the refugee camp indicate that families have had to renovate their shelters at least three times in the last seven years (Mahmuda, 2024). Holes are deliberately cut into the plastic sheeting for strangers to peep into women's homes, and in the absence of solid doors, cannot defend residents from harassment, theft and assault (Garcia, 2023). Materials selected to build shelters do more than just provide protection — they also participate in constructing the social and spatial realities of the refugees. The temporary and flimsy nature of materials like tarpaulin reinforces the impermanence of life in the camps,

reminding refugees that this arrangement is far from permanent and shaping how refugees perceive their environment and their place within it.

This sense of impermanence was further exacerbated in the early days of their arrival when the land was still barren and infrastructure scarce, and refugees were compelled to go into nearby forested areas to gather wood for cooking and building shelters. This resulted in increased deforestation, extreme heat in the summer, and rapid soil erosion and landslides (Sarkar et al, 2023). The steady introduction of liquified petroleum gas (LPG) to local villagers and refugees (LPG stoves, fuel tanks, and access to refills) has resulted in the rehabilitation of some deforested land (IOM, 2019). Although a significantly more sustainable alternative to firewood, the materials with which refugee shelters are made and the sheer number of people who live near one another expose them to the risk of fire-related destruction - having already occurred on several occasions (Al Jazeera, 2023; 2024) and leaving refugees without shelter and their belongings once again.

This heightened risk of fire not only threatens the refugees' immediate safety but also underscores the fragile relationship between the materials used in the camps and the surrounding natural environment. As detailed in Chapter 5, for the Rohingya, their very existence depends on the natural environment, its structural integrity and the materials with which their shelters and surrounding infrastructure are built. The dependence on bamboo, soil, and tarpaulin not only highlights the impermanence of their living conditions but also reflects the broader environmental challenges faced by both the refugees and the host communities. Although they provide immediate shelter, these materials often fall short in offering long-term protection and security particularly to women, thereby further perpetuating vulnerability in the face of permanent temporariness.

CHAPTER 5 - Ground Realities

Fig 5: My first glimpse of Camp 10 in Kutupalong

On my first visit to the camp, it would be fair to say I was taken aback by the environment of the camp. It is crowded and perhaps overwhelming at first sight, but what struck me was the vibrancy of Camp 10 and the bustling economy that surrounds it. On the drive to the camp, even before entering the official premises, one zooms past barbed wire fences and sporadically placed watch towers. While entering the centre of the camp, the visitor is greeted by scores of small shops on either side of the road selling daily necessities, colourful clothing, home goods, and a surprising amount of pharmaceuticals. In field notes, I wrote: "Outsiders like myself know little to nothing about camps - I wasn't expecting such a 'town' vibe" (7 May, 2024). When entering the main 'square' by the Camp in Charge (CiC) office, a market sits in the corner, offering customers a variety of fruit, vegetables, and fish for various prices - relatively affordable for the Rohingya community, but three times more expensive when the hawker realizes you're an outsider. Walking

through the market and public spaces, I was immediately struck by the prominent presence of men, in contrast to the very noticeable absence of women.

Fig. 6: central market in Camp 10

Fig. 7: one of many pharmacies at the entrance of the camps

I quickly realized that if I wanted to interact with women, it was difficult to do so outside of the home unless they were volunteering with local organizations. It seemed to me that women rarely left the house unless it was to seek medical aid or legal counsel, or when they visited the Camp in Charge's (CiC) office to make official requests or complaints. Socializing, I noticed, was strictly limited to the boundaries of their homes,[8] or in one of the many women-friendly spaces run by various organizations. I understood that walking around, observing, and tagging along with volunteers as they do their rounds in the community might be the only way to engage and see women's interactions with one another and their material environment.[9]

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[8] On this day, I also realized that my initial idea - Rohingya women's perception of placemaking and 'home' - was incredibly difficult to convey to the women with whom I was speaking. There exists no real Bengali/Rakhine translation for the phrase 'feeling at home,' and speaking in abstractions, trying to express the concepts of 'home' and 'belonging' only added to the difficulty in conducting my first two interviews in a different language. Struggling to properly express 'home' and 'belonging,' I used words that evoked a similar feeling - আপন or 'own,' আরাম or in English, 'comfort.'

[9] Women in the camp kept referring to the safety of their families and themselves as a primary concern - safety from the elements, as well as safety from incidents of violence in the camps. Time and time again, in semi-structured interviews and passing

5.1 Negotiating the Everyday

The commute from Cox's Bazar city to Ukhiya offers a unique opportunity to witness the dynamic growth of the local environment, including the expansion of businesses, markets, and traffic. Spanning anywhere from an hour and fifteen minutes to two hours each way, this journey provides ample time for observing these bustling changes. During the peak of the refugee influx, conversations with locals and NGO staff revealed that what is now a manageable journey once could take up to six hours to cover just 40 kilometres, a testament to the drastic changes brought by the arrival of aid organizations.

In the early days of my partnership with Mukti, I familiarized myself with the area by riding along with staff from Cox's Bazar city to the camps. These trips, which for the staff involved overseeing training sessions and programming tasks, were invaluable in helping me get to know both my colleagues and the route to the camps. When I was comfortable travelling by myself, on one occasion, I traveled on one of the buses used by commuting staff members, but subsequently refrained from doing so, feeling it inappropriate to occupy a seat that could be utilized by someone else. I decided to travel alone by CNG autorickshaw,[10] taking the opportunity to be fully immersed in the local way of life. On the day of my first solo journey into the camp, I was dropped off at the entrance of the camp next to the checkposts[11] from which point people could either employ another

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conversations, I further learned that the Rohingya have come to terms with living in the camp, and that they were now more concerned about how to make the best of their situation, and how to keep themselves and their families safe from various afflictions in the camp environment.

[10] A CNG autoricksaw is a three-wheeled motorized vehicle, and is used as one of the primary modes of transportation in Bangladesh.

[11] In my twenty day field visit, I was checked only once by checkpoint guards, that too on my final day in the camp. As a precaution, I always carried a copy of all official documents including my Bangladeshi National ID, letters of reference from the University of Basel as well as the University of Dhaka, and a copy of the official permission granted by the RRRC. The checkpoint guard, a young man of no more than 22 politely asked where I was going, whether I was an employee or not, and whether he could have a look at my documentation. This interaction lasted only a minute as he rifled through my papers, looked at my face, and then said: *"Achha Madam, jaan"* - "Okay, Madam, go ahead." That very same day, on my way back, the CNG I was in was stopped at a Border Guard Bangladesh checkpoint halfway between Ukhiya and Cox's Bazar town, where I was briefly questioned about what I was doing in Ukhiya, what my research entailed, and if I could please get out of the CNG to be

small 'local,' as they are called, to be transported to the central area of the camp. Instead of whizzing past people in a CNG, I took the opportunity to walk instead and was met with a mix of curiosity and surprise by those I passed. I certainly looked like an outsider - instead of the more modest abaya or burqa, I donned a Bangladeshi traditional outfit called a *shalwar kameez* - a long tunic with loose pants and a scarf. I was often one of the only women in the main thoroughfares who did not cover herself head-to-toe. On most days, I did however find that I was stared at less if I happened to cover my head (if only to protect myself from the scorching sun).
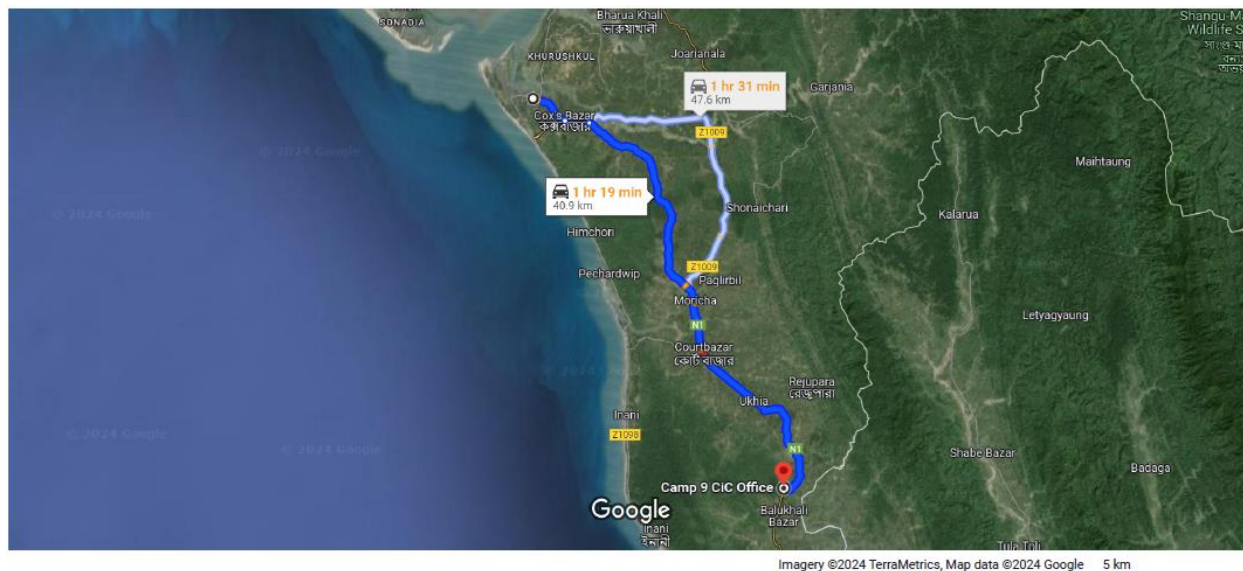
Fig. 8: Daily commute from Cox's Bazar to Ukhiya

Working closely with an NGO, I was surrounded by predominantly women from the Rohingya and Bangladeshi communities. This is in stark contrast to the scenes in Kutupalong bazar (market) on the way to the refugee camps, where the vibrant energy and bustling activity are noticeably devoid of women. As I would find out, this disparity is indicative of the gender dynamics that are ever-present in the camp environment: in NGO offices and homes, women are a constant presence,

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frisked by two female BGB officials. "Madam, please don't mind," they said in English, "ke ki jinish ana-nawa kore, bola jaina" - "you never know people people take back with them."

engaging in community efforts, socializing and carving out a space for themselves. However, stepping out into the public sphere reveals a different reality — a man's world, where women rarely appear.

Drawing from the broader cultural norms observed across Bangladesh, it is "... less common or unacceptable for women to walk alone at night, be present in public space without a defined reason (that is, just 'hanging out'), or engage in public leisure behaviours considered to be 'masculine,' such as drinking and smoking" (Whitson, 2018: 85). These restrictions are even more pronounced within the confines of Kutupalong camp, a more conservative, liminal space where the presence of strangers poses an unknown threat. In this environment, women's fear of public spaces significantly impacts their social interactions, spatial usage, and overall quality of life (Ibid, p. 87).

Fig. 9: Camp 10 WFS Hallway   *Fig. 10: Entrance of Camp 10 WFS*   *Fig. 11: Training session room, Camp 8W*

Within the premises of the WFS, however, exists a safe haven for the women who frequent it. A well-built structure made of bamboo poles and thatched bamboo roofs, the WFS in Camp 10 is a building with a large mango tree in the yard and a makeshift play area for the children who visit.

Inside, the staff members know regular visitors by name, asking about their families and inviting them to attend the day's sessions. When asked how often the same women come to the community space, my newfound colleagues told me there are those who come every day and use the day's training as a respite from the boredom and monotony in their days, while others visit less frequently due to familial obligations. The women who attend sessions are also treated to juice and snacks - they never indulge themselves, opting to take the snacks home to their families. They stay in the WFS after the training is complete, sitting and chatting in the main session room under the fan, avoiding their shelters, in which temperatures can soar up to 33 degrees Celsius during heatwaves. Rohingya men often spend their days outside the home - either socializing in tea stalls, mosques or on stoops or by working, leaving women to relax, sometimes without covering themselves entirely in the company of friends.[12] This was perhaps my first glimpse into female camaraderie and community-building in the camp. Women who likely came from far and wide in Myanmar, bound by a shared identity and tragedy, now live side by side in Kutupalong camp and come to learn about their rights, forge new bonds of solidarity, and support one another as they navigate the challenges of their environment together.

That feeling of camaraderie is infectious - it is hard not to feel a sense of kinship with the people who opened up their lives and their worlds to me. Each morning around 09:00 AM, I arrived to be greeted with cheery women saying *"Assalamualaikum, Apa!"*[13] from the entrance of the WFS gate, before sitting with Mukti case workers and case managers to go over the day's agenda. I was informed of the kinds of cases the staff would face and the training to be conducted based on plans

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[12] On weekends, when NGO staff and government officials are not on camp premises, women spend time at home with their families indoors, or go to their neighbours' shelters to socialize. The idea that I was curious about their daily activities was amusing to many of the women I spoke to, one of whom asked: "Why would anyone want to know about how I spend my days? I don't do anything special."

[13] Apa is a polite way of referring to someone like an older sister; in the Bangladeshi NGO sector, this word is commonly used to refer to colleagues.

made in cooperation with the Cox's Bazar head office. The women graciously accepted me, an outsider, as one of their own, sharing stories about their journeys with the NGO from the very beginnings of the camp, to stories about their own lives, and challenges juggling jobs and young families in a relatively conservative part of the country. They invited me to sit with them at lunch, breaking bread and sharing food with me on several occasions. In just twenty days, I was accepted as one of their own, gaining an understanding of how bonds of sisterhood made many Rohingya women feel at ease in the company of Bangladeshi women, and why they felt comfortable opening up the deepest parts of themselves to the NGO workers.[14]

Upon visiting the camp, one is immediately struck by the sheer number of children walking around and playing both in the central areas and the narrow alleyways of the camp. Most of these children have never seen Myanmar, or are far too young to remember the arduous journeys that brought them to Cox's Bazar. In essence, they belong to a lost generation, unable to return to Myanmar and disallowed from integrating with the host community. Although NGOs operate child-friendly spaces, few can provide an education that can meet the standards necessary for children of varying ages to thrive - except one in particular. When doing my preliminary research, I came across a Deutsche Welle (DW) documentary chronicling Rohingya women's acts of resistance and bravery, in which a learning centre called the Maiya School was featured (DW Documentary, 2023). Founded by two Australians, Dayna Perez and Philippa Nielsson who worked in Bangladesh during the height of the influx in 2017-2018, the Maiya School is a girls' school that operates out of Camp 4 in the Ukhiya subdistrict. In a society where norms dictate that adolescent girls cannot engage in activities outside the home, I was keen to see how the school administration was able to

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[14] "Apa, mone hoy apni amaderi ekjon, monei hoy nah apni eto kom shomoyer jonno achen" - "*Apa*, it feels as if you're one of us - it doesn't feel like you've been here for such a short time." I take it as a point of great pride and consider it a privilege that I was welcomed into the WFS, but also to staff members' home and two afternoons socializing with young women from backgrounds and stories so different from my own.

not only encourage but also ensure the attendance of girls who are usually considered 'disappeared' upon reaching the age of puberty (Maiya School, n.d.).

Fig. 12:, fencing around the Maiya School   *Fig. 13:, students in the classroom (Philippa Nilsson)*

Maiya School is intended to be a safe space for young girls. I was given the opportunity to not only visit the Maiya School but observe a Grade II class with 36 girls in attendance. It is very clearly a place where girls feel safe. Theys were engaged, attentive, and happy to show off what they were learning in class with the help of two Rohingya instructors. When asked how the school has managed to keep so many girls enrolled at a time when most are forced to stay home due to social pressure, instructors stressed the importance of time taken to build a trusting rapport with camp residents and community leaders, ensuring their safety while on the premises, where no men are allowed. To make sure students are regularly attending classes, in addition to parent-teacher sessions every three months, Maiya School must be notified regarding absences, and follow-ups are regularly conducted to ensure that children are not dropping out. The school curriculum is made to align with Rohingya culture, where classes are conducted by female instructors, following

the official Myanmar school curriculum teaching Burmese and English literacy, maths, science, etc. Hygiene kits are regularly distributed to encourage dignified menstrual hygiene and consistent attendance. Closely monitored by government bodies, the Maiya School, like all other learning centres, is strictly prohibited from teaching Bengali in their classrooms. I can hazard a guess that this is done to prevent Rohingya children from learning the language, escaping from the camp, and assimilating into Bengali society.[15] Secured fencing around the school premises ensures safety and respects the Rohingya girls' expectations of modesty. It highlights the importance of materials like tarpaulin, which people outside the camp may rarely think about, but within the confines of the camp, something that provides protection not just against the elements, but also from the prying eyes of the community.

5.2 Life in Motion: Rohingya Women's Everyday Experiences

Though women living in the camp might describe their days as monotonous, social scientists will agree that even in this apparent uniformity, conversations with Rohingya women offer profound insights into their everyday lives, their adaptation skills in the face of the permanent temporariness, and their aspirations for the future.

At the outset, it must be vehemently stressed that this is a day in the life of the average Rohingya woman interviewed in the WFS. These women seemingly have fewer restrictions placed on their movement by the men in their households and enjoy a certain level of freedom due to their older age, a privilege not afforded to most women in the community. Generally, Rohingya women and girls are expected to stay at home and not interact with male strangers, adhering to the rules of

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[15] In that same Deutsche Welle documentary, the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner says: "We are not liable to provide them (Rohingya people) with education. Why should we pay our taxpayer's money to educate the other country's people?"

'*purdah*,' wherein women are kept out of the view of men other than their immediate male relatives.

In Rakhine State, the practice of *purdah* has a socio-economic aspect: wealthier families can afford to keep women at home, whereas poorer families must send women to work. Therefore, observing *purdah* is a matter of cultural pride among the Rohingya. A study revealed that 53% of surveyed Rohingya refugee women believed women should remain at home, and 42% reported staying inside for 21-24 hours each day (Parmar et al., 2019).

Indeed, the research indicated that for older women in the community, their age allows them to pass on responsibilities to their daughters and daughters-in-law, thereby leaving them with more leisure time. Since they first arrived, however, NGO staff have observed a gradual shift in the mindsets of some men in the community, creating more opportunities for women to engage in social interactions outside of their homes.

When speaking with any from the Rohingya community, it is clear that prayers[16] play a central role in their lives, particularly in the lives of women.[17] Regardless of age, their days start early, between 04:00 AM and 04:30 AM, beginning with a shower, Fajr prayers, and reading the Quran. These morning rituals are a consistent part of their routine. Many women also shoulder the responsibility of water collection—a task globally recognized as predominantly undertaken by

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[16] The Islamic prayer cycle consists of five daily prayers, offered at particular times of the day. Fajr prayers are offered in the morning, just before the break of dawn. Zuhr prayers are said in the afternoon, somewhere between the hours of 13.00 and 13.30. Adherents offer the Asr prayers in the late afternoon. Maghrib prayers are said in the early part of the evening, at sunset, and the day's prayers end with Isha - said later at night.

[17] My conversations indicate that the Rohingya are a very pious people, often thanking God for their lives, their safety and even the Government of Bangladesh for giving them shelter.

women and girls, who are almost twice as likely as boys to carry out this duty and spend more time on it each day (WHO, 2023).

After securing water, either from previous storage or fresh collection, the women prepare and share food with their families. Once household chores are completed and their children are off to learning centres, they arrive at the Women Friendly Space (WFS). This visit offers a welcome break from their busy morning schedules, allowing them to engage with other women from the community. Meanwhile, men are less bound by domestic duties and often socialize at local tea stalls or engage in manual labour. They typically perform their prayers at small community mosques, which are essentially inaccessible to women.

Visiting the WFS gives the women a much-needed break from their already long day, and they use this opportunity to catch up with women from the community. They stay just long enough to be home in time for afternoon Zuhr prayers and lunch, when their children and husbands return, and spend the afternoon at home, doing household chores (water collection in certain instances), or socializing with neighbours nearby. As Asr prayer times near, the men of the household leave again, seemingly only returning after Maghrib prayers and in time for dinner. The women, in the meantime, prepare the evening's cooking, spend time with their children or read passages from the Quran, and finally end their day after Isha prayers.

At the WFS, participating in training sessions and awareness events organized by Mukti's staff provided valuable insights into the persistent issues within the community and how NGOs are equipping women with essential knowledge and information. Every day, trainers from within Mukti's staff conduct sessions for women on topics including but not limited to *"disaster risk preparation and management," "rights to equality,"* and *"right to be free from the curse of*

dowry." For adolescent girls, *"verbal and non-verbal communications," "expectations and responsibilities in relationships"* and *"glow with self-confidence"* teach lessons in self-empowerment and personal development. Believing these sessions could have a profound and life-changing impact on the women and girls who attend these sessions, the trainers hope not only to educate but also to prepare them to navigate their lives with confidence. They believe that these sessions and their lessons will have a snowball effect on other women and adolescents, as well as the men and leaders in the community. Indeed, during an outreach session, 13 women gathered in a neighbour's small, more centrally located shelter to hear about the WFS and the services they provided. Although initially skeptical about the distance from their shelter to the WFS compound and the time it would take away from household chores, the women who gathered were in agreement that they could benefit from a place to relax, sew clothes and practice handicrafts, and even see *Doctor Apa*[18] if necessary. Upon conclusion of the session, the outreach was considered to be a success, given the number of women who attended and engaged with the WFS staff.

One could see Mukti's source of optimism. Outsiders often hear that Rohingya women are oppressed, unable to speak, and often have little to no say in family affairs. However, observing these sessions provides onlookers with a glimmer of hope and optimism. On most days, training sessions I observed at the WFS were attended by no less than 10 participants, with some taking active roles in sharing their opinions and discussing their own experiences. They spoke on the importance of making family planning decisions together with their spouses, of the importance of saying no to child marriage and the dowry system, and on the ills of intimate partner violence (IPV).

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[18] *Doctor Apa* refers to the on-site midwife stationed at the WFS, who sees patients and provides preliminary consultations, contraception, condoms, emergency contraceptive pills, etc. *Apa* is a Bengali word meaning 'older sister.'

Despite these positive developments, however, the reality within the camp often tells a different story. Even as women learn to assert their rights and discuss issues openly with women within the four walls of the WFS, the prevalence of IPV, along with sexual harassment and rape, remains alarmingly high in the camp environment (Islam et al, 2021). Existing research and anecdotal evidence provided by Mukti staff indicate that IPV remains a pervasive and underreported issue faced by women and girls in the Rohingya refugee camp, perpetrated often by men for reasons ranging from food shortage, lack of employment opportunities, even "because the rice was not cooked on time" (WFS staff, 2024). The stark contrast between women's more public lives in the WFS and their private lives at home underscores a persistent atmosphere of fear and the challenges that women face daily, where education and awareness alone cannot enhance safety and security within the camp.

In such times of trouble, residents of the camp are meant to be protected by community leaders and representatives called the '*majhi*.' The system was first introduced to the refugee camps when Rohingyas fled from violence in Myanmar in 1991-1992, and the *majhi* was appointed by government officials to advocate on behalf of their community while helping CiCs and police manage camp affairs.[19] Over time, however, *majhis* have garnered a reputation for corruption and abuse of power, having been eliminated from the Kutupalong and Nayapara registered camps until the arrival of refugees in 2017 necessitated an immediate reinstatement (ACAPS, 2018; ReliefWeb, 2018). The appointment of the *majhi* is conducted informally, with one individual (almost always a man) responsible for one (or more) block of each of the 34 existing camps. Women are very rarely chosen for the position, because they are rarely, if ever, placed in positions

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[19] There is a majhi and a head majhi above him - the head majhi has direct contact with camp administration, whether that is the CiC or the armed forces.

of leadership in the conservative Rohingya community (Hölzl, 2019). As both community representatives and focal points for the government, armed forces and NGOs, *majhis* tend to wield immense power. Where once they were tasked with assisting in administrative tasks and distribution of aid, *majhis* are now responsible for mediating disputes, guaranteeing the safety of their block's residents, and are often the first points of contact for refugees in an emergency (ibid). This gradual increase in power and increase in importance for certain individuals within the camp environment has resulted in favouritism and preferential treatment of men over the concerns of women. While they all agree that *majhis* should be responsible for protecting women from violence in both the private and public spaces, at least two informants hesitated to speak up about concerns regarding the *majhi* in their own block or their direct vicinity. Under the condition of anonymity, they revealed that there are *majhis* who are known for having harassed women in the community and have in fact decreased feelings of safety for women-led households (Respondents X & Y, 2024). Indeed, studies have found *majhis* to be complicit in rape, trafficking, protecting perpetrators of intimate partner violence and other abuses of power (Parmar et al, 2019). One other interviewee disclosed that even though *majhis* are responsible for the equal protection of all residents, she avoids interactions with her block's assigned *majhi* as much as possible due to prior conflicts and threats of violence, preferring to keep to herself because there are no men in her family (Respondent Z, 2024).

In the Rohingya refugee camps, the pervasive fear among women — stemming from the unknown, strangers, and gender-based violence — casts a long shadow over their daily lives. This fear not only confines them within certain boundaries but also significantly limits their participation in public and social spaces. As Whitson discusses, such dynamics are critical in understanding the spatial restrictions that women face. She emphasizes how gendered perceptions of safety and fear

influence women's ability to navigate and inhabit urban spaces, which is equally applicable to the semi-urban environments of refugee camps (Whitson, 2018:87). In these camps, the constant threat of violence restricts women's mobility, denying them the full benefits of communal resources and opportunities for social interaction. This enforced isolation not only affects their social standing and access to communal support but also perpetuates a cycle of vulnerability and exclusion.

5.3 Rohingya Women's Reckoning with Camp Infrastructure

In studying these issues faced by women in the refugee camp, the goal is to explore the critical role that the physical environment of camps plays in shaping the daily lives and freedoms of Rohingya women. The camp's layout, with its dense clusters of shelters and uneven distribution of resources, creates a complex maze that women must navigate daily. This subchapter examines the intersections of gender and space within this unique setting, highlighting how limited infrastructure not only hinders women's mobility but also amplifies their vulnerabilities, forcing them to constantly negotiate their safety and autonomy against a backdrop of precarious living conditions.

Shelters:

Conversations with refugees, NGO staff, and camp management highlighted overcrowding as a significant challenge in the camp, and perhaps the most urgent issue that emerged from speaking with the women across various camps was the prevalence of infrastructural challenges. The camps are severely overcrowded, with an average population density of less than 15 square metres per person, which is significantly below the international guideline of 30-45 square metres per person for refugee camps (International Water Security Network, n.d.). As of June 2024, Camp 10 alone hosts a staggering 31,941 individuals, and this number continues to rise daily (UNHCR, 2024), further exacerbating problems relating to infrastructure.

The Sphere Minimum Standards for Shelter and Settlement is a set of guidelines to ensure that housing in humanitarian contexts fits a minimum requirement in alignment with the Humanitarian Charter. The layout and population in Cox's Bazar have required IOM (in charge of the shelter sector of camp management) and the 'Site Planning and Site Development Working Group' to adapt standards for this specific context (SMSD, 2023:19). Shelters made of brick and mortar and compacted graphite iron (CGI) are not allowed in Kutupalong-Balukhali (HEKS/EPER, 2021:7), and are only found in shelters in Bhasan Char constructed by the Bangladesh Army.

The shelter walls in Kutupalong are supported with bamboo frames - quickly erected but with higher rates of erosion due to weather - while the walls are made of tarpaulin sheets, which, while thin, do little to aerate the shelters in the hot summers, get chewed through by rodents, or deteriorate over time (Mohsena, 2024). When asked about women's strategies to beat the heat in their shelters, a Mukti staff member said: "*Apa*, it's so hot inside shelters, but the women often choose not to go anywhere. If they do, they would have to wear their burqa, cover their faces in this heat, and walk outside in this temperature. So they often prefer to be indoors where they can be more free" (WFS Staff, 2024).

Spending more time in the camp environment revealed that in many cases, the gendered access to space available to women is seemingly self-imposed, where they find refuge from exploitation, harassment or indignity they face in public (Silvey, 2006). While gendered roles feature prominently in Rohingya society, the women have seemingly created safe spaces for themselves, but continue to suffer challenges within the confines of their homes. As primary caregivers in charge of household affairs, the provision of LPG tanks has meant that Rohingya women do not face the risk of bodily harm when collecting firewood or expose themselves to harmful smoke emanating from firewood stoves, but have no option but to cook inside flimsy shelters under the

near-constant threat of fires. Based on the field research, most women spend the majority of their time inside the shelters and are therefore acutely aware of the problems that exist in their living quarters, such as soil erosion and general repairs necessary in the home and issues regarding nearby public facilities.

Latrines:

During interviews, every woman lamented the challenges of being a woman in the camp and expressed their frustration about the difficulties they faced, specifically concerning the lack of adequate washroom facilities. In 2017 when the refugees first arrived, latrines were a loose concept - people were forced to dig and use holes on the sides of the hills, surrounded by nothing but thin tarpaulin and some bamboo sticks and no roof. Humanitarian organizations first on the ground have since installed communal toilets and bathing facilities in the Rohingya refugee camps, but due to resource and space constraints, have been unable to provide these amenities in every household. As a result, many Rohingyas face difficulties accessing these facilities whenever needed, as they are often located far from their tents and are insufficient for the camp's population (Karin et al., 2020:8). This lack of accessible sanitation facilities particularly affects women, who face additional barriers and safety concerns when trying to use these distant and overcrowded amenities (Tripura, 2022). At least half of the women interviewed stated that accessing the facilities presents the biggest challenge in their daily lives and that these challenges begin early when they have to use the latrines before their morning prayers. Due to most shelters lacking an attached latrine, many residents often walk five to ten minutes to access the nearest government/NGO-provided communal latrine. Often, these latrines are also significantly overused. A walk to a sub-block of Camp 10 prompted my guide, Fatema (2024), to tell me that there are blocks in the camp in which one single latrine is used by 80 families -- upwards of a

hundred men, women, and children -- despite there being gender-segregated toilets. UNHCR standards stipulate that no more than 20 people should share a communal toilet during the emergency phase of a camp, and in longer-term accommodation, one latrine should be dedicated to one family of four and six people. Due to the overcrowding of camps, however, 19 out of 33 camps in Cox's Bazar are operating beyond the UN guideline (Hussein & Duggal, 2023). When asked the reason why there are so few latrines in the camp overall, a source close to site management very frankly said: "It's just not logistically possible to have so many people living in such a small area and to be able to provide them with adequate facilities" (Person A, 2024).
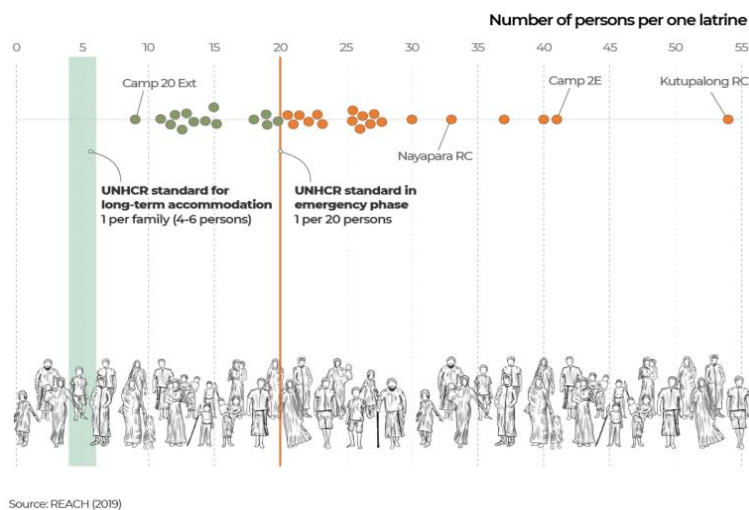
Fig. 14: number of persons per latrine across all 33 camps[20]

Relatedly, findings show that unless urgent, women seemingly limit their use of bathroom facilities - due to the distance and the lack of available toilets, I surmise that they make use of the latrines only for defecation. That, too, is done with extreme caution. Women and girls limit their

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[20] Fig X: number of persons per latrine across all 33 camps; image collected from Mohammed Hussein and Hanna Duggal, "What Is Life like inside the World's Largest Refugee Camp?," Al Jazeera, August 25, 2023, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/8/25/what-is-life-like-inside-the-worlds-largest-refugee-camp.

movements both during the day and particularly at night out of fear, as there is a heightened risk of being sexually harassed or assaulted by men and young boys who lurk and hide near the latrines. The 2023 Joint Response Plan Report found that between 2022 and 2023, six key indicators worsened relating to the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector including the safety of women latrine users at night (-13 percent) (Joint Response Plan, 2023, p. 13; Cordova, 2023). A staff member tells me "*Apa,* it happens too often, but no one talks about it. You know, I have heard of young boys crouching in the latrine, waiting to attack women" (WFS Staff, 2024). This fear transcends all camps and almost all age groups but exists most prevalently in younger women. When asked how late they feel comfortable outside the home, all women say that regardless of where they are, they return before Maghrib prayers, just before nightfall. When asked if they use communal latrines at night, Ambia Khatun, 50, (Camp 22) and Asma, 30, (Camp 10) both responded: "If I go in the middle of the night, I take my husband with me" (Ambia, 2024; Asma, 2024). Others, still, lessen their water consumption and wait until they can use the latrines again at the break of dawn.

Water Sources:

Water shortages in the Rohingya refugee camps pose a severe challenge to the daily lives and health of its residents. Since Kutupalong "was hastily hewn from the existing landscape" and "cumbersome and devoid of necessities" (Ahmed, 2023, p. 130), access to clean water is limited, with many refugees relying on inadequate and sometimes contaminated sources, exacerbating the risk of waterborne diseases.

The quality of available water is often compromised by contamination from nearby sanitation facilities and improper waste disposal. A 2021 study conducted by Mahmud et al indicated that

"74% (n = 4,644) and 34.7% (n = 2,179) of drinking water samples collected from stored household sources contained fecal coliform and Escherichia coli, respectively" (Shapna et al, 2023, p. 1387). Furthermore, this issue is particularly taxing for women and children, who are primarily responsible for water collection, a task that often involves long queues and arduous trips to water points (UN Water, n.d). Speaking with residents in Camp 10 also revealed that the gendered nature of the task raises concerns that these arduous walks to water collection points may result in harassment from ill-intentioned community members (2024). The high demand for water in these densely populated camps strains the already scarce resources, and calls sustainability into question, especially during the dry season. These factors collectively hinder personal hygiene and effective sanitation practices, leading to health problems such as typhoid, diarrhea, cholera, and other communicable diseases (International Water Security Network, 2020).

Ambia Khatun and Samjida, 33, have lived in Camp 22 in Unchiprang, Teknaf, mere kilometres from the border with Myanmar since they first fled seven years ago. Each day, Ambia undertakes the laborious task of walking down a steep hill to fetch water for her family's daily use, often making this difficult journey twice a day. On rainy days, this task can often cause injury and broken bones.[21] Despite the physical challenge, it is a necessary routine in Ambia's day, much like many other women's, to ensure her family has enough water for drinking, cooking, and hygiene. She says: "My son is eleven, and the water jugs we use are too heavy for him. So on most days, either my daughter or I collect the water - rain or shine. Sometimes, my son will help to fill up the water, but leave it at the bottom of the hill so that we can carry it up later" (WFS, 2024).

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[21] A walk-through of Camp 8W prompted my WFS guide *apa* and female passersby to comment on the precarity of the hills on which 8W is built. *"Apa, bishhash korben nah, ei camp-ey jokhon prothom kaaj korte ashchi, borshakale onek pislaye porsi"* said my guide. "Apa, you won't believe how many times I've slipped during the monsoon when I starting working here." The resident *apas* said: "We know a woman who slipped, fell and broke her arm and had to be taken to the hospital to fix it!"
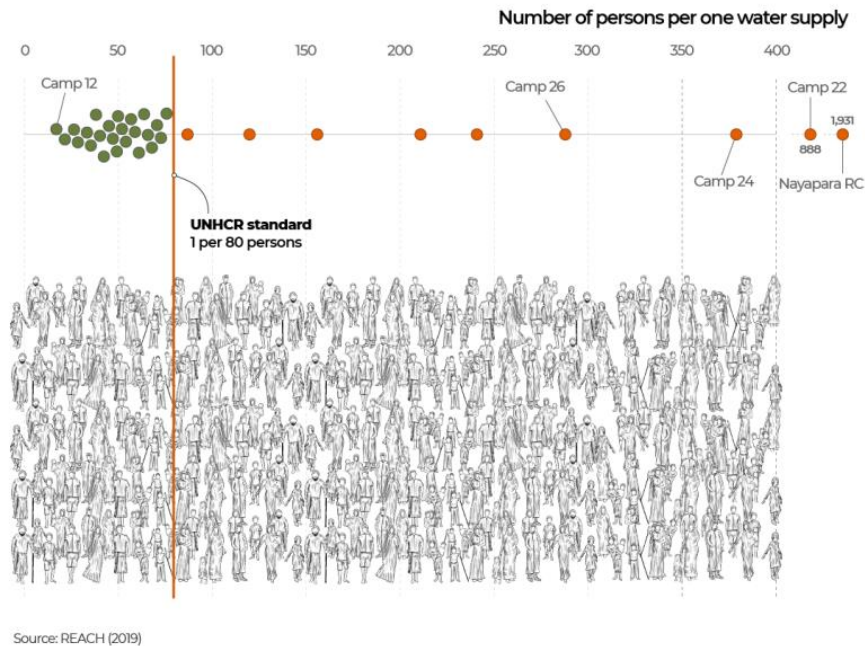
Fig 15: Number of persons per one water supply[22]

Meanwhile, Samjida faces a different but equally troubling challenge. Although there is a water

source relatively close to her shelter, the supply is insufficient to meet the needs of all the residents

in her block. Although 22 out of the 33 camps are operating within the UN standard of one water

supply for every 80 people, Camp 22 -- home to Ambia and Samjida -- and the Nayapara camp,

surpass this "by a factor greater than 10" (Hussein & Duggal, 2023). Samjida often finds herself

in competition with neighbours, waking up in the early hours to line up for the morning's supply

of water. A Camp 22 WFS staff member reflected on the dire situation: "Drinking water is hard to

come by in this camp. As part of an organization, we can afford to buy water, but what about the

people that live here?" One mid-afternoon when temperatures rose to 39 degrees Celsius, I was

walking through Camp 10 during afternoon water collection hours when I noticed that instead of

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[22] Fig 15: number of persons per latrine across all 33 camps; image collected from Mohammed Hussein and Hanna Duggal, "What Is Life like inside the World's Largest Refugee Camp?," Al Jazeera, August 25, 2023, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/8/25/what-is-life-like-inside-the-worlds-largest-refugee-camp.

women, 10 water pitchers were neatly lined up one after another, indicating the order in which water was to be collected by the jug's rightful owner. The system was orderly and all too necessary to combat the heat and physical demands of water collection -- it was also the Rohingya women's silent yet effective communal strategy to manage their daily necessities.

Lack of Adequate Light:

Fig 16: Main road in Camp 22, Unchiprang   *Fig 17: No lights in alleys: Camp 22, Unchiprang*

Building on the challenges related to the lack of access to water, another critical issue that compounds the daily struggles of Rohingya women in the camps is the inadequate lighting infrastructure.

Low light in the interiors of shelters presents a problem, where most are lit by solar power providing just enough energy to power low-energy bulbs. Naked wires are often rewired manually to power a single fan during the daytime to combat extreme heat. In the monsoon season, solar panels run the risk of being damaged due to extreme weather. If they work, the light emitted from bulbs is weaker due to the lack of sunlight, making essential household tasks more difficult, and

the shelter less secure. A simple walk through the camp demonstrates the bigger problem - there are solar-powered street lamps along main thoroughfares and near important landmarks such as the field hospital and CiC office. Guidelines set forth by the SMSD stipulate that solar streetlights should be placed at 20-30 m intervals, particularly close to WASH facilities and key access points (SMSD, 2023:19) but light sources are essentially nonexistent in the alleyways and in front of homes. Ambia said: "There is a light not far from my shelter, but it hasn't worked in four years and IOM has not replaced it yet. We just walk around in the dark, or with a flashlight" (Ambia, 2024). This lack of lighting not only restricts men's *and* women's mobility but also exacerbates the risk of gender-based violence (Oxfam, 2018).

The absence of sufficient light has become a significant barrier to daily activities, impacting women's overall sense of safety and well-being within the camp environment. Women across several age groups, such as Fatema, Ambia, and Laila Begum each recounted experiences of fear while navigating the camp after dark, particularly on their way to and from the latrines, and described how poorly lit pathways and communal areas heightened their sense of insecurity. When asked what changes they would like to see in their camps, every respondent asked for more light sources. As previously mentioned, women often fear harassment from strangers outside their homes, and that exponentially increases after dark, further inhibiting their movements. In the event that they do venture outside their homes to access the facilities, women prefer to do so in the company of a male relative but also stated that having light en route to the communal facilities makes them feel significantly safer. This situation is not dissimilar to refugee camps globally. Refugees across the Middle East, Africa and Asia report access to light at the household and community levels as their top priority (Perkins, 2017). A study of Rhino Camp in northern Uganda found that women fear sexual violence in 7% of their night-time visits to unlit locations, and 13%

of the time when walking between home and the location of the activity, but no one fears sexual violence in lit locations (UNHCR, 2017). The local economy has adapted to this need, selling cheap alternatives such as flashlights and 'charge lights,' while various NGOs work towards providing solar-powered lights and maintenance training to locals and refugees alike (Defis Humanitaires, n.d.; Electriciens Sans Frontières 2020).

Over the course of the research, I also learned something new that speaks to the challenges of being a refugee, and the ways in which some people can adapt to their surroundings. Before arriving in Cox's Bazar, though it may seem obvious, I did not comprehend that the infrastructural challenges people face - shelter renovations, access to latrines, etc. - are easily fixed if the family has the financial means. Like many others with preconceived notions (or no notions at all), I assumed that most people who live in Kutupalong would have lost all their money either when they had to flee, or in the years since. In fact, most people I spoke to were only able to escape their villages in Myanmar with only the clothes on their backs. However, field research also shows that some, like WFS volunteer Fatema's family, were relatively more well-off and managed to escape Myanmar with assets like gold jewelry and money. In doing so, soon after he arrived in 2017, Fatema's brother was able to afford modifications to the shelter - sturdier beams made of thick bamboo, cemented floors, long-lasting batteries to provide power, and an attached latrine-cum-shower area - while Fatema, her sister-in-law, and her nieces and nephews waited at an acquaintance's shelter to join him (Fatema, 2024). Seven years on, Fatema's brother owns a small shop in the camp , while Fatema is a paid volunteer five days a week at the WFS - her family continues to live in relative comfort compared to others who invited me into their homes. As and when required, Fatema's family can afford to source materials themselves and tend to most small/medium renovations themselves. In contrast, there are women like Mohsena Begum, who in

Myanmar lived in a *jhupri* (shack) with very little income, and continue to live in similar conditions in Kutupalong. Unable to afford modifications and repairs to their shelter, they are compelled to follow bureaucratic procedures with applications to the shelter sector in charge of renovations and repairs. Residents often wait several months before their requests are processed, and even longer until they might be fulfilled due to the volume of requests that come to the IOM.

However, ask if they would prefer to move to Bhasan Char, and you are likely to hear a resounding "no" - at least that was my experience. Given all the infrastructural challenges and security concerns within Kutupalong, I wanted to know if the women or their families would ever think of moving to the relatively larger and better-constructed shelters on the island -- every Rohingya person I spoke to categorically rejected the idea. Gura Mia in Camp 8W, the only man with whom I had a brief chat, said "*Maa*,[23] I'm old now - my family lives here. If Allah wants, I will go back to Burma, but otherwise, I'm likely going to die here (Gura Mia, 2024)." The elderly man has come to terms with the idea of spending his remaining days in the camp, tending to a small shop attached to his shelter, with his children (one married nearby) and his wife. For better or for worse, I was told, the camp on the mainland was home - people had built their shelters to the best of their ability, were raising their children, become part of a community, and had grown accustomed to the ways of the mainland. "We don't think about going to Bhasan Char, we only think about being able to go back to Myanmar," Fatema said, while Mohsena Begum beautifully proclaimed: "Wherever I live is home" (2024). It seems that the infrastructure alone does little to lure people out of Kutupalong. The promise of more space in the shelter - a family of four is provided with a room measuring 3.5m x 4m - fewer people sharing facilities, and the freedom of movement within the

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[23] *Maa* - the term literally means mother in many South Asian languages, but when used by elderly people, the word is used as a term of endearment for younger women.

island does not seem to appeal to people (Islam et al, 2021). It is simply too far from the mainland, with no real way of being able to return. A woman named Naima[24] told me that her neighbour was offered 50,000 BDT (approx. 368 CHF) to move to the island by their *majhi* and camp administration, but her neighbour rejected the idea, which prompted the administration to approach a different, more willing, family. It seems that for all its faults, Kutupalong has become a place of some comfort. I had pivoted from my idea of researching home and placemaking, but it somehow found me.

5.4 The Gendered Experience of Violence and Coercion

The gendered experience of violence and coercion in Rohingya refugee camps is a critical issue that disproportionately affects women and girls - this is a fact known and repeated ad nauseam by researchers and humanitarian actors alike. Existing studies have consistently highlighted that Rohingya women face a heightened risk of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, assault, trafficking, and exploitation, both at the hands of Tatmadaw and Burmese authorities and afterward within the camp setting in Bangladesh.

Further studies show that within the camps in Bangladesh, Rohingya women are at risk of sexual assault and harassment by refugees, camp authorities, and security personnel (Farzana, 2017). According to Fatema (2024), it is common knowledge amongst younger female refugees that there are certain checkpost guards who are lenient, allowing people, particularly women, to go out as and when they might need to. For those who are recognized -- by voice due to their head-to-toe coverage -- as being NGO volunteers also receive friendly treatment. This is counter to what I had heard before going to the camp, when media coverage and conversations with laypeople indicated

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[24] Using a pseudonym

that the Rohingya are categorically prohibited from leaving the camp premises. It is also known which guards and *majhis* to avoid. Although she did not disclose details, people in Fatema's friend circle have come across unsavoury characters, and like the women I spoke to in the WFS, avoid certain individuals out of fear.

There are existing accounts of young boys being trafficked or coerced into forced labour and being recruited into smuggling rings, illegally transporting drugs into Bangladesh and throughout the country (Rabbi, 2018; Coorlim & Page, 2019). During the course of field research, I was emphatically told by women at the WFS that boys and young men are also increasingly at risk and that this time, it was for a different reason. When the question of women's security concerns within the camp came up, women would say: "Our boys are being taken to fight. How do I protect them? They are not safe - they can be picked up at any time." Informants say young boys between the ages of 13 and 20 are being kidnapped by Rohingya gangs to be trafficked back to Rakhine State to fight as part of the guerilla army against the Tatmadaw. During the focus group discussion, Ayesha,[25] aged 30, disclosed that her 12-year-old son was kidnapped by a religious elder three months ago. Ayesha and her husband have been repeatedly told that they will have the opportunity to speak with her son, but that promise is yet to be fulfilled. A staff member at the WFS has said that in some cases, it has been rumoured that a ransom in exchange for the boys' lives has managed to pry them loose from the alleged gangs, but that cannot be confirmed.

As the days went by, there was a palpable tension in the air. Although it has been difficult to verify this particular narrative, this allegedly growing trend of abduction and forced conscription into the guerilla army not only devastates individual families but threatens to unravel the social fabric of

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[25] Ayesha is a psydonym to protect the individual, given the sensitive nature of our conversation.

the entire community. There is heightened mistrust in the community - no one seems to know (or openly disclose) who is involved in the kidnapping of these boys, but it seems well-known to the NGO workers that there are gangs who live in and around the extension camp who work with a network of various traffickers responsible for luring boys out. It turns out, Camps 1 (Lambasiya Bazar), 14 and 18 are known for having hilly terrain that is difficult to navigate, and therefore ideal grounds for miscreants to operate. In other camps, I spoke to women who were increasingly anxious, worried that their children or brothers would be taken next: "I am scared. What will happen to us if our boys are taken away, *apa*?"

It was at this time that I discovered the importance and indeed the convoluted *necessity* of the patriarchy within the camp. Threatening to abduct the young men in the family or following through is placing women, particularly those in female-led households, in a more vulnerable position in the camp.[26] It places the onus of care *and* protection on the women of the household.

On one of my final days of research, one of the volunteers at the Camp 10 WFS I saw every day was absent. I was told that the night before, the volunteer *apa* and her family were threatened with the abduction of her son by locally known gang members. As a result, she decided to stay home to prevent anything untoward from happening.[27] Increasingly, I heard of parents on high alert, trying to relocate their children with friends or family members to other blocks. I had hoped to speak with at least a few more women at the WFS about these abduction and trafficking concerns in the community, but it seemed that even rumours of these occurrences had frightened women into

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[26] Staff members of the WFS said that women who have no male presence in their home are more at risk from outside harassment - from the community leaders (*majhi*), neighbours and security forces because they are viewed as more vulerable, easy targets.

[27] The gang members allegedly told her that her son could be abducted at any time of day. The next day, I saw the volunteer *apa* back in the WFS. I did not think it appropriate to pry for details, especially so soon after the threats. A case manager at the office said that she decided not to take more time off than she already had, because the threat would always be looming overhead, but she needed to earn money for her family.

staying home - the number of attendees in the WFS was dwindling so that women could stay home and protect their children. The marketplace, which usually at 9 AM was bustling, was seemingly devoid of people - particularly young boys - and it looked as if for once, women were moving more freely in the public spaces than before.

Visiting the refugee camps was a stark reminder of the realities behind the academic study of gendered spaces and experiences. I had intended to focus on the experiences and challenges facing women in the Rohingya camp, not fully cognizant of the fact that complexities within the camp environment can and would have an impact on the experiences of women. Talking to people on the ground and trying to understand their situations firsthand brought a new level of nuance and clarity to the study, revealing findings I could not have grasped without being in the camps in person.

CHAPTER 6 - Discussion

The findings from this study bring to light the challenges within the Rohingya refugee camps, all of which converge to influence the lives of the women who live there. It becomes strikingly evident that the camp environment is not merely a location in which these women's lives are lived, but rather one which actively shapes their experiences in profound ways.

Gendered Spaces and Restricted Movements

Findings in this field research indicate that within the confines of the refugee camp, spatial arrangements and access to facilities are predetermined based on gender, and camp infrastructure is experienced by men and women differently. One of the key observations is the extent to which women's movements within the camps are restricted due to gendered power dynamics. This is reflected in the works of feminist geographers Massey and Rose, both of whom emphasize how space is gendered and how these gendered spaces impact the daily lives of women (Massey, 1994; Rose, 1993). It is a mechanism of control, the purpose of which is to maintain the status quo. In the Rohingya refugee camps, as in the Rohingya community, women and girls are often compelled by societal expectations to remain in their homes, bound to certain roles within the familial and societal unit (Guglielmi et al, 2021). In limiting their movements, women are prohibited from engaging with the community at large. This spatial confinement presents itself in the cultural practices of the community but also due to the perception of fear outside the home (Whitson, 2018) but also a response to the very real and pervasive risks that women face in the refugee camp. For the women of Kutupalong, infrastructure can be seen as either a source of security or a site of vulnerability. The lack of security in shared spaces like latrines leaves women vulnerable to harassment and assault, reinforcing their sense of danger and limiting their freedom of movement.

Poorly lit alleyways in front of their shelters and inadequate sanitation facilities often pose significant risks to women's safety, particularly after nightfall. Men, on the other hand, typically interact with these spaces differently and can move with relative ease without the same level of concern for personal safety. The fear of violence, including sexual violence and abduction, coupled with the infrastructural inadequacies, contributes to a heightened sense of vulnerability among women. This restriction on movement exacerbates their isolation and limits their access to resources and opportunities that might improve their living conditions.

Prior to engaging in field research, I hypothesized that women would have their own strategies for navigating gendered spaces, and as it turns out, they do. They travel in pairs or with male household members, keep their activities outside limited to daylight hours and avoid certain places altogether - markets, public squares, tea stalls, etc. However, research finds that the growing fear of the abduction and subsequent trafficking of young boys from within the camp poses a new and unexplored challenge of security for both men and women. This means that women are doubly burdened -- they are expected (out of parental duty) to be protectors of their children and must do so in an environment that they have been told is dangerous, unsafe, and hostile.

Gendered Experience of Violence and Women's Shifting Roles and Responsibilities

The risks to young boys, including trafficking and forced conscription to guerilla forces, was a new and unexpected finding, adding a layer of complexity to already existing security concerns within the camps.

The study also brings to light how women's roles within the family and community are shaped by these dynamics. Contrary to my hypothesis that women are only expected to be carers with little engagement with the outside world, field research shows that society demands women take on a

dual role of both caregiver and protector, prioritizing the safety of their children and families in the face of significant personal risk. There is an inherent shift in the roles they are expected to play, at once shedding their cloistered selves when faced with local abduction gangs who threaten to break up their family. This protective role is both a reflection of traditional gender roles and a response to the specific dangers present in the camp environment, at once maintaining, but also challenging traditional gender roles. The women's demands for infrastructural improvements are not only about improving their own living conditions but are also deeply connected to their concerns for the safety and future of their children.

Infrastructural Challenges and Possible Solutions

Infrastructural challenges, particularly those related to sanitation, lighting, and water access, have a grossly disproportionate impact on women. The scarcity of latrines, coupled with the risks associated with using these facilities after dark, highlights the well-founded connection between infrastructure and safety concerns (UNHCR, n.d.). Despite the use of solar energy alternatives, the insufficient amount of light leaves most lived-in areas of the camps in near total darkness, further restricting women's movements after sunset and exacerbating their vulnerability to violence. These findings are consistent with the concept of "gendered access to space," which refers to the discriminatory access to physical and social spaces based on gender, which often leads to the marginalization of women in public spaces (Kabeer, 2000; Valentine, 1989). This is particularly concerning in the context of Kutupalong, where the high population density exacerbates the lack of safe and accessible facilities, impacting not only women's daily lives but also has long-term implications for their health and well-being.

Findings also indicate that certain infrastructural challenges can be overcome *if* the refugee family has sufficient financial means of their own. Where the shelter sector overseen by IOM is perhaps overworked and underfunded in the Rohingya refugee context, refugees with an income are able to source their own building materials - tarpaulin, bamboo, and cement, usually - to renovate and/or fortify their shelters. If, as in the case of Fatema, the refugee has assets like gold or money with which they managed to escape Myanmar, or they are able to earn enough working informally in the camp, they can also build latrines attached to their shelters to ease the stress on communally available sanitation facilities, while also ensuring the safety of the women of the household. However, this option is unavailable to most refugees in Kutupalong. 51% of residents in Kutupalong are women (UNHCR, 2024), and as previously mentioned, women are expected to tend to the home and rarely engage in paid work - a small fraction work as paid volunteers in the various NGO offices and medical facilities, or as interpreters for researchers and international organizations, although it is particularly challenging to pinpoint exact numbers. The men who are employed in manual labour earn just enough to put food on the table, and likely cannot afford to make large-scale renovations to their shelters.

The infrastructural challenges experienced by refugees elucidate not only a gendered imbalance in accessing infrastructure within the camp but also shine a light on the economic disparity which is not often heard of, which influences not only the quality of life of the Rohingya community but also the ability to maintain a basic standard of living in the humanitarian context. Whereas some families have comparatively more wealth to be able to afford renovations and improvements to their shelter, a majority of the refugees are unable to do so means they are living in unsafe, structurally deficient shelters at the mercy of aid organizations. The challenges point to the gaps

left in the efficiency and responsiveness of camp management, suggesting that those with fewer financial resources are disproportionately affected by long waits and inadequate support.

Avoiding Bhasan Char: Refugee Sentiments and Relocation Concerns

All the Rohingya refugees I spoke to are unwilling to relocate to Bhasan Char - this came as a surprise, but also not entirely. Currently, the population of the island refugee camp hovers at just above 35,000, which is far less than it is designed to accommodate. However, it seems that to the people I interviewed, no amount of money or level of comfort would make them relocate, unless it was back to their villages in Rakhine State.

Consistent with my very first hypothesis and line of questioning, I found that the Rohingya have adapted to their surroundings - perhaps out of compulsion - and made themselves "at home" in the camps in Bangladesh. It is exactly as Zahra said: "A refugee camp can never provide the same feeling of being at home while the possibility of returning home in Myanmar is a far reaching dream" (2019: 225). Their home will always be Myanmar, yet they have also transformed the camps into "a site where everyday life unfolds, often in the company of close family … a place imbued with a sense of belonging, where they can 'feel at home'"(Olwig, 1999: 83). They have learned to adapt to a challenging new environment, built and continue to maintain social connections with a certain level of comfort and familiarity (Archambault, 2012). Like refugees forcibly displaced all over the world, the Rohingya people highlight that home is not limited to just a physical space, but rather one that is both a place and "the imaginary of feeling at home" (Archambault, 2012: 38).

What does this mean for the broader discourse? Findings suggest that the reluctance of the Rohingya community to relocate in addition to their desire for improved living conditions in the

mainland camps raises important points about refugee resettlements and people's agency. It indicates that although every refugee is thankful for being given shelter in Bangladesh, they are in their own ways expressing the need to be taken seriously as active decision-makers instead of passive recipients of whatever is handed to them, no matter the intention. In rejecting offers of relocation to Bhasan Char, they are signalling that rather than just offering alternative living arrangements, there needs to be a deeper understanding of basic human needs, motivations behind refugees' decisions, and their perceptions of safety, stability, and community.

CHAPTER 7 - Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the lives of Rohingya women in refugee camps and the challenges they face, particularly in the context of gendered access to space and safety. By employing a theoretical framework of feminist geography, this research has provided a nuanced understanding of how these women navigate their lives in the refugee camp while complying with and also contesting traditional gender roles in response to the challenges they face.

The central research question is as follows: *"How do gendered power dynamics and infrastructural limitations within Rohingya refugee camps shape the spatial experiences and access to facilities for women, and what are the implications of these conditions on their personal and family safety?"*

Infrastructural challenges, including but not limited to latrines, water shortages, and low light in and outside shelters pose significant challenges for the residents, and in particular, have a detrimental impact on women's everyday lives. The research further illustrates that Rohingya men's and women's experiences of infrastructure are vastly different. The available infrastructure further perpetuates gendered access and therefore has a critical influence on the ways in which women are able to negotiate the spaces and places that are available to them. Interestingly, a significant finding of this research is the economic disparity within the camps, where only those with sufficient financial resources can make renovations to their shelters at will without going through lengthy bureaucratic channels. This means that they can fortify their homes against the elements and make them more livable. This financial freedom is also found to have a direct relation with the ease of access to sanitation facilities and also ensures that women who have access to latrines attached to their homes have one less challenge they must face, compared to those who must traverse to the nearest communal latrine and risk harassment or worse after dark. Finally, the

abduction and trafficking of male members of the household further exacerbate women's security concerns, placing them in a burdensome dual role of caregiver and protector, despite possible dangers to their security.

Although every attempt has been made such that it provides valuable insights into the lives of Rohingya women in refugee camps, this research is not without its limitations. This fieldwork was conducted as a partially funded Master's thesis with a very short timeframe, which has a significant impact on the levels of trust and engagement required to ask thought-provoking, often sensitive questions. Furthermore, given time, funding, and linguistic constraints mentioned in the methodology section, the sample population remains small and specific to a certain camp, and on the basis of experiences and perspectives of a limited number of Rohingya women who frequent the UNFPA/Mukti-run Women Friendly Space. As such, the findings cannot be generalized to all camps and refugee populations. They represent the perspectives of a group of women with significantly more freedom and opportunities for engagement with outsiders than most women in the community. In addition to refugees, it would be helpful to have spoken to government officials in camp administration and the focal points within IOM and UNHCR in charge of the shelter and protection sectors. With camp administration being understaffed, it was impossible to schedule a meeting with the CiC, who would be the ideal candidate to shed light on challenges in the camp from an official perspective.

Future avenues of exploration could address aspects that were left outside the scope of research due to time and resource limitations. As a result of the narrow scope of research, there was no opportunity to visit community spaces that are frequented by men, and they were also deliberately excluded from the study sample. A future study could incorporate both men's and women's perspectives on infrastructure to understand the issues of the camp more holistically. Additionally,

the use of specific materials like tarpaulin could prove to be an illuminating topic of study, comparing the purposes for which it is used in and around the refugee camps. A third potential topic would be to compare camps in both Bangladesh and Myanmar, investigating the ways in which they are both similar and different.

This thesis contributes to a body of work that highlights the importance of placing women at the centre of planning and infrastructural considerations in refugee camps. This research also highlights the confluence of gender, security and infrastructure, and calls for a more grounded and thoughtful understanding of the challenges faced by the women in Kutupalong-Balukhali extension camp and beyond. Doing so also provides avenues to learn and explore the ways in which women in refugee camps navigate these challenges. Finally, these insights not only contribute to a deeper understanding of spatial and social constraints in the context of refugee camps in South Asia, but also highlight the importance of employing a gendered lens to understand the lived experiences of refugees the world over.

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ChatGPT Prompts

Chapter 1:
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "Does this make sense?" reply to author 16/08/2024.
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "Does this citation follow the correct format according to Chicago?" reply to author 16/08/2024.

Chapter 2:
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "Improve for flow" reply to author 16/08/2024.
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "Does this make sense?" reply to author 17/08/2024.
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "Explain ground theory" reply to author 29/06/2024.
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "How can I make it more reflexive?" reply to author 16/08/2024.
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "Make clearer or more concise?" reply to author 13/07/2024.

Chapter 3:
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "Does this source directly support the argument presented in the thesis? If not, how could it be better integrated?" reply to author 08/07/2024.
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "Check for repetition.?" reply to author 03/08/2024.
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "Paraphrase." reply to author 07/07/2024.

Chapter 4:
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "Lit review tips" reply to author 15/07/2024.
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "Does this make sense here??" reply to author 20/07/2024.
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "How well does this source complement the others in the paragraph?" reply to author 02/08/2024.
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "What are the author's key arguments?" reply to author 04/07/2024.
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "Simplify." reply to author 09/08/2024.
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "Doreen Massey 1993 works" reply to author 06/07/2024.
- 4. ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "Is this source credible and reliable? How can you tell?" reply to author 19/07/2024.
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "What is the main point of the article?" reply to author 11/07/2024.

Chapter 5:
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "Does this flow or feel natural? Suggest improvements." reply to author 28/07/2024.

- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "Can I use I/me in methods section and findings?" reply to author 11/08/2024.

Chapter 6:
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "How do I sound less developmentey?" reply to author 09/08/2024.
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "Make this flow better. How can it be reworded for smoother reading?" reply to author 14/08/2024.
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "Does the summary of this article make sense? Further clarified?" reply to author 07/08/2024.
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "Reword better clarity and impact." reply to author 11/08/2024.
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "Summarize how the author proves their argument in this article." reply to author 03/08/2024.
- ChatGPT version 4, OpenAI: openai.com/chat. "Reword." reply to author 02/07/2024.

PROPOSED LIST OF QUESTIONS *

* Subject to change.

(VERSION # 1)

1. Name, age, and your hometown?
2. Before arriving in this camp, what work did you do?
3. What does a typical day in your life look like? What are your hobbies?
4. How long have you lived in this camp?
5. Who are your neighbours? How long have you known them?

Home:
1. ~~What is the Rohingya word for home?~~ How do you personally define home?
2. What makes a place feel like home?
3. How has your idea of 'home' changed over time?

Memory:
1. Can you tell me about a significant memory from your time in Myanmar before you began living in this camp?
2. What has been the experience of displacement, and the impact of your move on your sense of belonging?

Community:
1. How has the community around you contributed to a sense of home?
2. Who are some specific people or social connections that make you feel at home (women, support groups, community initiatives)?

Materiality:
1. What changes have you made to your living space since you first arrived?
2. Are there any items that are particularly meaningful and that you brought from Myanmar? Why?
3. Are there any specific materials or resources that you find essential for maintaining a sense of comfort or security in your living space?

Culture:
1. How do you maintain your cultural identity and heritage? How important is that for you?
2. What are some of the practices or traditions that you perform to connect to your roots?

Challenges:
1. What have been some challenges of living here?

Future thinking:
1. What are your hopes for the future?
2. How do you envision your future home?
3. Do you want to go back to Rakhine state?
4. If there is something you would like to take back from here, what would it be and why?

১. আপনার নাম, বয়স?
২. এই ক্যাম্পে আসার আগে আপনি কি কজ করেছেন?
৩. আপনার জীবনের একটি সাধারণ দিন দেখতে কেমন? শখ কি কি?
৪. আপনি কতদিন ধরে এই ক্যাম্পে বসবাস করছেন?
৫. আপনার প্রতিবেশী কারা? আপনি তাদের কতদিন ধরে চেনেন?

বাড়ি:
~~1. হোমের জন্য রোহিঙ্গা শক্তি কী~~ নিজ্স্ব কিংবা আপন বাড়ি বলতে কি বোঝেন? মিয়ানমারে বাড়ি ছিল?
2. কোন জায়গাকে আপন মনে হয়? নিরাপদ করলে ২য় ?
3. সময়ের সাথে বাড়ি সম্পর্কে আপনার ধারণা কীভাবে পরিবর্তিত হয়েছে?

স্মৃতি:
Tweak {
1. আপনি এই ক্যাম্পে বসবাস শুরু করার আগে মিয়ানমারে আপনার সময়ের একটি উল্লেখযোগ্য স্মৃতি সম্পর্কে আমাকে বলতে পারেন?
2. বাস্তুচ্যুতির অভিজ্ঞতা কী হয়েছে, এবং আপনার নিজের অনুভূতিতে আপনার পদক্ষেপের প্রভাব কী?

সম্প্রদায়: পাড়প্রাতবেজ্কাবৃা   মিয়ানমারহত্ত্ব/আপনে
1. আপনার ~~চারপাশের সম্প্রদায়~~ কীভাবে বাড়ির অনুভূতিত্ত অবদান রেখেছে?
2. কিছু নির্দিষ্ট ব্যক্তি বা সামাজিক সংযোগ কারা যা আপনাকে বাড়িতে অনুভব করে, নারী, সহায়তা গোষ্ঠী, সম্প্রদায়ের উদ্যোগ)?   - আপনের আপন করে হয়.
3. আপনার থাকার জায়গাতে আরাম বা নিরাপত্তার অনুভূতি বজায় রাখার জন্য আপনার কাছে প্রয়োজনীয় কোন নির্দিষ্ট উপকরণ বা সম্পদ আছে কি?— থাকা উচিত

বস্তুগততা: (materiality)   বদলেছেন ?
1. আপনি প্রথম আসার পর থেকে আপনার থাকার জায়গাতে কী পরিবর্তন করেছেন?
2. এমন কোন আইটেম আছে যা বিশেষভাবে ~~অর্থবহ এবং~~ আপনি মিয়ানমার থেকে এনেছেন? কেন?
3. আপনি কিভাবে আপনার থাকার জায়গার চারপাশের জায়গা আপনার প্রতিবেশীদের সাথে ভাগ করবেন?

সংস্কৃতি:
✓ 1. আপনি কিভাবে আপনার সাংস্কৃতিক পরিচয় এবং ঐতিহ্য বজায় রাখেন? এটা আপনার জন্য কতটা গুরুত্বপূর্ণ?
✗ 2. আপনার শিকড়ের সাথে সংযোগ স্থাপনের জন্য আপনি সম্পাদন করেন এমন কিছু অভ্যাস বা ঐতিহ্য কি?

চ্যালেঞ্জ:
1. এখানে বসবাসের কিছু চ্যালেঞ্জ কি?

ভবিষ্যতের চিন্তা:
1. ভবিষ্যতের জন্য আপনার আশা কি?
2. আপনি কিভাবে আপনার ভবিষ্যত বাড়ি কল্পনা করবেন?
3. আপনি কি রাখাইন রাজ্যে ফিরে যেতে চান?
4. যদি আপনাকে এখান থেকে কিছু নিয়ে যেতে হয়, তাহলে সেটা কী হবে এবং কেন?

Questions To Consider:

- How would you describe your living conditions in the camp — Shelter, access to water, sanitation, electricity?
- What are the biggest challenges you face in the camp (safety, security)?
- Experiences or concerns relating to women & girls (SGBV, harassment).
- How do you feel about the layout & design of the camp? Any improvements or changes you'd like to see in the infrastructure or facilities?
  - ↳ would you consider moving to Bhasan Char?
- What are your main concerns re: the camp (overcrowding, waste, natural elements)
- What challenges have you faced in accessing essential services (healthcare, education, livelihood opportunities)
- How do you navigate camp infra. & layout to meet daily needs (food distribution points, healthcare facilities, communal spaces)
- Do you know of any initiatives or community efforts aimed at improving safety & infra. w/in camps, and to what extent are you involved?
  - ↳ pathways to report/fix/complain?
- What needs to be done to improve safety & wellbeing of w & g?
- role of leaders, NGO, govt. in addressing challenges of Rohingya women, particularly about safety & infrastructure?

VERSION #2.

100

১/ নাম, বয়স, বাড়িতে কয়জন, কে কে, আগে বায়ুসার অভিজ্ঞতা

২/ সারাদিন কেমন কাটে? যখন WFS বন্ধ তখন কি করেন?

৩/ মাসে আবার, ration, LPG কবে দেয়া হয়, কালেকশনের process কি, কে collect করতে যায়?

৪/ দিনে পানি কয়বার collect করা যায়, কয়টায়, এবং পরিবারের কোন সদস্য পানি আনতে যায়?

৫/ TURN OVER. → ans 9 questions.

৬/ কত রাত পর্যন্ত বাইরে থাকেন কিংবা থাকা নিরাপদ মনে করেন?

৭/পাড়া-প্রতিবেশীদের সাথে সাথে দেখা করতে হলে কোথায় যান?

১/ আপনার বাসস্থান থেকে সবচেয়ে কাছের LATRINE, পানির কল, Solar street light কত দূর?
↳ আইনআনা, স্বাস্থ্যসেবা, আহার সেবা

২/ বাড়িতে কোন সমস্যা দেখা দিলে কাকে দরখাস্ত দেন?

৩/ কাজে আসার পর বাড়িতে কি পরিবর্তন এনেছেন বা আনতে চান?

৪/ দুর্যোগ ব্যবস্থাপনার ক্ষেত্রে কি করেন বা করা উচিত?

বাংলা VERSION # 2.

→ এলাকার বাসস্থান, পানি, স্যানিটেশন, বিদ্যুতের কি অবস্থা - বর্ণনা দিন।
→ ক্যাম্পে দৈনন্দিন জীবনে কোন বড় সমস্যার সম্মুখীন হন? (নিরাপত্তা, সুরক্ষা, খাড়িতে)
→ ক্যাম্পে নারী ও ছেলেমেয়েদের নিয়ে কি চিন্তা? বাসস্থান নিয়ে?
→ ক্যাম্পের ব্যবস্থা/সুবিধা নিয়ে কি পরিবর্তন/সুযোগ দেখতে চান?
└ ভাসান চর যাওয়া নিয়ে কি চিন্তা-ধারা?
→ ক্যাম্পে থাকা নিয়ে সবচেয়ে বড় ভয়/সমস্যা কি? (overcrowding, services)
→ ক্যাম্পে services access করতে সবচেয়ে বড় বাধা/সুযোগ কি? এমন কোন জটিলতা আছে? কিছু বদল করতে হলে কাকে বলবেন?
→ ক্যাম্পে নিরাপত্তা ও ব্যবস্থা উন্নয়নের জন্য কি সুপারিশ করবেন?
→ ক্যাম্পে নারীদের নিরাপত্তা ও সুরক্ষার জন্য কি কিছুর দরকার?
→ NGO, মাঝি, GE দের নারীর নিরাপত্তা ও ক্যাম্প ব্যবস্থাপনায় কি দায়িত্ব ও কর্তব্য?

→ নাম, বয়স, কতদিন ধরে এই ক্যাম্পে?
→ বাংলাদেশে আসার আগে কি কাজ করতেন?
→ বার্মাতে নিজস্ব বাড়ি ছিল? দেখতে কেমন?
→ ক্যাম্পের বাসস্থান কেমন বদলেছেন?

বাংলা VERSION # 2.1

APPENDIX B: Draft of Focus Group (FGD) Discussion Questions (English/Bengali)

Extra:

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):
1. Can you provide an overview of the living conditions and infrastructure within the refugee camp?
2. How do refugees access basic materials and resources for constructing and maintaining their living spaces in the camp?
3. What role do cultural traditions and practices play in shaping refugees' interactions with the physical environment and materials in the camp?
4. In your opinion, what are the most significant challenges or obstacles refugees face in relation to material resources and home-making in the camp?
5. How have refugee communities organized themselves to address material needs and promote community-building within the camp?
6. Can you discuss any initiatives or projects aimed at improving living conditions and material resources within the camp?
7. What strategies or interventions have proven effective in enhancing refugees' sense of home and belonging in the camp environment?
8. How do external factors such as donor assistance and NGO programs impact material conditions and community dynamics within the camp?
9. What are your recommendations for policymakers and humanitarian organizations to address the material needs and well-being of refugees in the camp?
10. How do you envision the future of refugee camp settings in terms of material resources, infrastructure, and community development?

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):
1. What does "home" mean to you in the context of living in the refugee camp? *What are some things...*
2. Can you describe the materials or objects in your living space that hold special significance or contribute to your sense of comfort and security?
3. How do you and your neighbors collaborate or support each other in addressing material needs and challenges within the camp?
4. Are there any communal spaces or shared resources in the camp that are particularly important to you and your community? How are these spaces utilized?
5. How have your cultural traditions and practices influenced the way you interact with the physical environment and materials in the camp? *How is your day to day life different?*
6. Can you share any experiences or stories about adapting your living space to better meet your needs and preferences?
7. What changes or improvements would you like to see in terms of material resources and infrastructure within the camp?
8. How do you maintain a sense of identity and connection to your cultural heritage through the objects or materials in your living space?
9. How do you think the availability of material resources affects community cohesion and well-being in the camp? *If you could change anything about where you live...*
10. What are your hopes and aspirations for the future of your living conditions and community life in the camp?

These questions aim to gather insights from both individual perspectives (KIIs) and group discussions (FGDs) to provide a comprehensive understanding of life in the refugee camp, home-making practices, and the role of materiality in shaping refugee experiences.

Certainly! Here are the translations:

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) Questions:

1. আপনি কি শরণার্থী শিবিরের জীবনযাত্রা এবং অবস্থানের সম্পর্কে সারমর্ম বলতে পারবেন?
2. শরণার্থীরা শিবিরের জীবনযাত্রার জন্য মৌলিক উপকরণ এবং সম্পদের অ্যাক্সেস কিভাবে পান?
3. শরণার্থীদের ভৌতিক পরিবেশ এবং শিবিরের উপাদানের সঙ্গে আপনার সম্পর্কে কোনো ভূমিকা প্রদান করে কি?
4. আপনার মতে, শরণার্থীরা শিবিরের মৌলিক সম্পদ ও বাসস্থানের সাথে যে প্রধান সমস্যা অথবা অবাধ্যতা মুখোমুখি হয়েছে, তা কী?
5. শরণার্থী সম্প্রদায় কোন কতিপয় উপায়ে নিজেদের আত্মীয় নিয়ে নেওয়া এবং শিবিরের সম্পদের আবারণ করার জন্য নিজেদের ব্যবস্থা করেছে?
6. শরণার্থীরা সম্প্রদায়ের মধ্যে সহায়তা ও সম্পদ সম্পর্কে কিভাবে সহযোগিতা বা অবস্থানের মধ্যে সমস্যার সামনে তাকিয়ে তুলেছেন?
7. শরণার্থীদের শিবিরের জীবনযাত্রায় মৌলিক সম্পদ এবং প্রস্তুতি বাড়ানোর উদ্দেশ্যে যেকোনো প্রয়াসগুলি আছে কি?
8. শরণার্থীরা জন্য ঘর ও অনুপ্রাণিত হওয়ার উপায় কী?
9. এসব বাসস্থান ও সম্পদ সংস্থা গুলি কীভাবে শরণার্থী শিবিরের অনুভূতি এবং সম্প্রদায়ের উন্নতির জন! কাজ করে?
10. ভবিষ্যতে কীভাবে শরণার্থী শিবিরের বাসস্থান সংক্রান্ত ব্যবস্থাপনা করতে পারেন?

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) Questions:

1. ~~আপনি শরণার্থী শিবিরে বসবাস করার সময় ঘর সম্পর্কে কীভাবে মনে করেন?~~
2. ~~আপনার জীবনের এই মৌলিক বসবাসে কোনও অবশেষজনতক অথবা অংশগ্রহণের জন্য যে বস্তু বা অবস্থান অনুভব করতেন?~~
3.

~~কিভাবে আপনি এবং আপনার পাড়ের মানুষরা শিবিরের মৌলিক সমস্যা ও অবস্থানের চালেঞ্জ সম্পর্কে আলোচনা করেন?~~
4. ~~শরণার্থীরা শিবিরের মধ্যে কোন আত্মীয় স্থান বা ভাগের উপাদান ব্যবহার করে কোন মহৎকর কাজ করে যা এখানে ব্যবহৃত হয়?~~
5. শরণার্থীদের সংস্কৃতি ও প্রথাগুলি কীভাবে শিবিরের ভৌতিক পরিবেশ এবং উপাদান সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করে?
6. শিবিরের জীবনযাত্রায় আপনি আপনার পছন্দ এবং প্রয়োজন পূরণের জন্য আপনার বাসস্থান কিভাবে অনুসরণ করেন তা নিয়ে কিছু অভিজ্ঞতা বা গল্প শেয়ার করতে পারেন?
7. আপনি কোন পরিবর্তন বা পরিবর্ধন চান যেগুলি শিবিরের মৌলিক সম্পদ এবং প্রস্তুতির দৃষ্টিতে?
8. আপনি কীভাবে সাংস্কৃতিক পরম্পরা এবং প্রতিষ্ঠানের অবস্থানের মাধ্যমে আপনার প্রত্যক্ষতা বজায় রাখেন?
9. ~~আপনি কীভাবে মনে করেন যে মৌলিক সম্পদ শিবিরের সম্প্রদায়ের সঙ্গে সাহসীতা এবং ভালবাসা তৈরি করে?~~ কি তাজা রয়েছে ?
10. ভবিষ্যতে আপনার বাসস্থানের ও সম্প্রদায়ের জন্য আপনার ~~কীভাবে আশা ও অগ্রগ~~ কি ?

১১. হিমালয়ের ফিরত যেতে পারলে অন্যান থেকে TURN OVER →
কিছু নিয়ে যাবেন ? কি কি ?