

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY:

SK. Tawfique M Haque, Bulbul Siddiqi and Mahmudur Rahman Bhuiyan (eds.). *The Displaced Rohingyas: A Tale of a Vulnerable Community*. Oxon and New York: Routledge. 2024, ISBN:978-1-032-06608-0, Pages 1–270.

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Globally, the numbers of refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced people have become a more pressing concern for both local and international communities. According to the UNHCR, 108.4 million people were displaced worldwide by the end of 2022 due to war, persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations. Addressing immediate and long-term issues of shelter, food, and health has become a Herculean task for host countries, the UNHCR, and concerned local and international organizations. The Rohingya refugee crisis that threatens security stability across Bangladesh – Myanmar borders originated in the late 1970s. Bangladesh started experiencing a massive influx of Rohingya refugees in the 1990s. In 2017, a new wave of refugees crossed the border into Bangladesh as the Myanmar government led by Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi got involved in ethnic conflicts and unleashed largescale violence on the Rohingya community. There is an estimated 1.1 million Rohingya refugees currently hosted by Bangladesh (UNHCR, 2023). Since 2017, these persecuted and forcibly displaced Rohingya people have been living in miserable conditions – in makeshift camps in various locations in the southeastern Cox's Bazar district, and they are still waiting for repatriation to their homeland (Siddiqi, 2021).

Haque, Siddiqi, and Bhuiyan's edited volume *The Displaced Rohingyas: A Tale of a Vulnerable Community* is a recent addition to the growing literatures on forced displacement, with a special focus on the Rohingya refugees. The editors, who are also chapter contributors to this book, are patient academics and researchers with deep interests in the Rohingya crisis. This book, comprising thirteen chapters under five broader sections, offers an extensive overview of the crisis, discussing and analyzing socio-cultural aspects of this humanitarian crisis in light of discursive analysis emerging in academic, media and related literatures – both local and international. There are five parts to the volume: Part one, titled “Forced Displacement and Statelessness,” comes with an introductory chapter by the editors that sets the background and the tone of the book as well as three chapters covering the historical background and contemporary situations of the Rohingya displacement crisis. The second part “Humanitarian Issues and Uncertainties” consists of two

chapters discussing the socio-political uncertainty of the Rohingya in Bangladesh. The third section, “Women, Children, and Vulnerability” presents two chapters focused on specific gendered and age related vulnerabilities of Rohingya inhabitants in different camps. The fourth section, “Rohingya Voice, Media and Representation” discusses the politics of the representation of Rohingya voice in national and international news media. The final part, “Policy and Sustainable Solution” covers two chapters pointing out the legal and policy related challenges of the Rohingya crisis with some practical recommendations as the way forward.

It is well recognized that the present Rohingya crisis that erupted in 2017 is traced back to the long historical roots of the Burmese political and social landscapes. However, the literature on this historical development is contested through different lenses. For instance, in the popular understanding of the Rohingya community, rigorous analysis on the politicization of religion as a root cause of the crisis and subsequent forced migration remains scarce. In their chapter titled, “A Historical Overview of the Rohingya: The Nexus among Refugeeeness, Religion, and Geopolitics” Sultana and Harun rightly argue that, along with many other reasons for forced migration, "the meaning and manifestations of religion often become manifold depending on the context" (p.30). Rohingya displacement is one classic example of such a manifestation.

Galeotti's idea of "tolerance for recognition" as a framework to understand the situation of the Rohingya community in Myanmar and in Bangladesh refugee camps could be an exciting tool, as Ismail and Rahman contextualize in the third chapter. However, the authors read Galeotti's analysis of tolerance as one-sided, as it suggests religious tolerance from the rulers' side only (Galeotti, 2002). The authors argue that reciprocal tolerance and acceptance from both Muslims and Buddhists are essential to reaching the point of tolerance as recognition and ultimate peace. This article talks about measures and mechanisms to tackle the distortion of minority religious beliefs in the home country, but it focuses less on the home country's cohesion and tolerance.

The fourth chapter, co-authored by Mahbubul Haque and Tawfique Haque, discusses the UNHCR's definition of 'refugee' and contextualizes it as relating to Rohingya refugees in Malaysia and Thailand. They reviewed the literature and analyzed data collected from these two countries, and argued that the displaced Rohingya struggle in the host countries in terms of their identity and legality as asylum seekers. The authors highlight that since Malaysia and Thailand did not sign the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol about the status of refugees, Rohingya people living in these two countries are deprived of assistance from national and international agencies, eventually making the concept of the 'right to exist' elusive for them.

The lives of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh turned into an uncertain future as their belongingness has been confounded in the makeshift camps, and their hope to return to the homeland remains undefined. Siddiqi, Kamruzzaman, and Kabir, in their chapter titled “ Living in Uncertainty: Vulnerable Rohingya in Bangladesh” present a synopsis of the lives of Rohingya refugees as they encounter multifaceted challenges, such as limited mobility and working opportunities, serious health issues, lack of education, gender-based violence, and alarming cases

of human trafficking. However, the authors did not elaborate on health vulnerability and religious extremist activities impacting security and restrictions for Rohingya people inside the camps. One major point the authors highlight is that the Rohingya refugees face the consequences for attempting illegal migration to a third country (Malaysia is the most desired one) through the sea, and *dalals* (brokers) take advantage of them by channeling human and sex trafficking (p. 86).

In line with this, the seventh and eighth chapters present the health and life scenarios of adolescent and young Rohingya girls living in camps in Bangladesh. Mahmudur Bhuiyan reviews the global scenario of camp life for refugee adolescent girls, analyzing the security and self-dignity among those living in Bangladesh Rohingya refugee camps. Although local and international NGOs are running different service programs for adolescent Rohingya girls, yet makeshift housing, inadequate water and hygiene facilities, lack of education, and scope of work lead to a mortifying life and insecurity for young girls in camps. However, the authors did not focus on the implications of these barriers on adolescent girls' menstrual and mental health. Moreover, lack of supervision and personal safety, poverty, restricted mobility, and mistrust of the local community also lead some young girls to be subjected to drug and sex trafficking. In Chapter Eight, Nderitu and co-authors show that, among others, not considering illness symptoms related to sexual and reproductive health due to lack of education and awareness is a significant barrier to adolescent girls' healthcare provisions in the camps.

Life in refugee camps is not the same for all Rohingya. Sultana shows in the sixth chapter that registration as a recognized refugee by the UNCHR and Bangladesh state has a significant role in living standards and access to basic amenities in the camps between Rohingya people living in the camps since the 1990s (registered) and those who arrived after 2016 (unregistered). The author argues that the registration process created complexities like stratification and divided group interests among the Rohingya who arrived at different times in Bangladesh, as the recent influx of Rohingya from 2017 are treated as unregistered "Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals" (FDMN), contrasting the long-standing Rohingya from previous exoduses living in Bangladesh as registered refugees with access to better services. Hence, the unregistered status of FDMNs hinders the repatriation process and develops negative dints with registered ones.

Oral narratives can be a powerful tool to represent the Rohingya community's voice, revealing facts of violence and forced displacement (Uddin, 2022). In Chapter Nine of this volume, AQMA Bhuiyan analyzes the concept of the Holocaust and argues that the oral accounts of Rohingya people must be heard to acknowledge the genocide that occurred to this community as their voice becomes a marker of their identity facing such atrocity.

The role of media at the international level is always crucial in the context of projecting refugee situations. In the case of forcibly displaced Rohingya, we encounter media biases from neighboring countries that hold political and economic power to intervene to mediate the crisis. Rahman analyzes major representations from four newspapers about Rohingya refugee issues in India and China. He argues that as it appears in newspaper reporting, these two major powers in

Asia, dictated by their economic and strategic interests, not only oppose various international initiatives to intervene, but also remain lenient to the Myanmar government's role in addressing the Rohingya crisis. They even remain reluctant to use factual phrases in presenting Rohingya issues, such as 'violence,' 'atrocities,' 'persecution,' or 'genocide' (p. 192). The representation of Rohingya in Bangladesh newspapers is more focused on issues like vulnerable living conditions, potential threats to the host country, and the rise of violence or extremism in the makeshift camps, as we see in the following chapter by Kamruzzaman, Kabir, and Siddiqi titled, "Representation of Forcibly Displaced Rohingyas in Bangladeshi Newspapers". The authors also point out that the two major daily newspapers in the host country indicate that although all the concerned parties are stressing the necessity of repatriation as a solution, it remains only on table, without real actions to move forward.

Despite not being a signatory country of the 1951 Refugee Convention and Protocol 1967, Bangladesh has been hosting more than a million Rohingya in the second wave after 2016, for more than seven years now. In her article, Dutta shows that Bangladesh has no specific law or policy regarding refugees, but the constitution accords some basic rights to non-citizens under different articles. The Rohingya people in various camps are managed with UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) guidelines. Still, full-scale repatriation is a distant reality since no effective bilateral initiatives have been undertaken as of now.

Interestingly, a non-refoulement approach from Bangladesh has resulted in an unsuccessful repatriation situation for the Rohingya but also created pressure on Myanmar, proving Bangladesh to be a peace-loving nation. In this volume's last article, Haque and Rahman analyze the Bangladesh government's policy formulation processes regarding Rohingya refugees until the end of 2020. They argue that the lack of domestic consultation for more comprehensive policy development in the management of the Rohingya crisis has led Bangladesh to have unrealistic hopes from the international community and to suffer from frequent local adjustments. Bangladesh's "pacifist approach", as the authors pointed out, is a "strong selling point" (p. 260) in this regard. Yet, it is not enough since a multi-layered and multi-pronged approach is essential to achieve a sustainable and secure repatriation of the Rohingya to Myanmar.

Overall, this edited volume offers an extensive collection of research-based scholarly analyses of the crisis concerning the Rohingya community, from grassroots realities in the refugee camps and their media representations to policy implications at Bangladesh's national level and beyond. Nevertheless, this volume could have added discussions on issues, such as tolerance and cohesion in the host country, religion-based extreme movements and mental health challenges in camp life, which could make this book more comprehensive.

The issue of forced migration has grown increasingly complex over time, giving rise to new challenges, including geopolitical, diplomatic, socioeconomic, developmental, cultural, and political issues. Protracted Rohingya people in Bangladesh camps became a classic example of such a complicated crisis and suggest a rethinking and more dynamic approach in the study of

forced migration, conflict and international relations. The politicized representations from stakeholders in different countries also indicate who speaks for whom in the Rohingya context is relative, and representations in media become hyperreal (Baudrillard, 1994), while the truth might remain behind the curtain of their geopolitical and economic relationships. As discussions and evidence in this edited book suggest at the local level, Bangladesh must take sustainable management of the Rohingya population based on humanitarian grounds, and simultaneously, multilateral, hybrid, and proactive diplomatic efforts need to be employed for the dignified and voluntary repatriation of the Rohingya population.

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