

**“Without Internet, We Have No Existence”:
Rohingya Refugee Representation on Social Media**

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Abstract

In the media, migrants, and refugee literature, representation of the refugees is one of the most recurring and contested issues. From the news media to digital or social media platforms to humanitarian communications, a dualism of refugee representation is evident: ‘threats’ vs. ‘victims.’ The humanitarian agencies have been widely criticized for the dehumanized representation of refugees as ‘weak,’ ‘victims,’ and ‘in need of charity for fundraising. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, almost 65 million forcibly displaced populations rarely have access to connectivity to raise their opinions. This research investigates the problem of representation about access to connectivity and the internet for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. I ask, *how are Rohingya refugees represented on social media?* This thesis argues that the humanitarian agencies and the refugees are creating a convergent portrayal of refugee ‘agency’ shifting from the traditional victim vs. threats representation. The thesis further strengthens the understanding of refugee self-representation, considering technological mediation. Analysis of 32 weeks of social media data of 4 humanitarian agencies and 10 Rohingya refugees and their interviews explore beyond the traditional ‘threats’ vs. ‘victims’ refugee representation. Through the qualitative data analysis, this research sheds light on how such a negative narrative has changed and leading humanitarian agencies working in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, for the Rohingya refugee response are creating an assertive representation of the refugees by showing them as ‘resilient,’ ‘active,’ ‘self-reliant’ and ‘peaceful’; reflecting how the Rohingya refugees represent themselves. As a policy recommendation, I highlight the importance of connectivity and the internet for refugees to express themselves.

Lay Summary

In common images of refugees and migration, the media and humanitarian agencies show refugees as ‘victims’ or ‘threats.’ Moreover, they are often not allowed access to connectivity and the internet due to their refugee status. As one of the largest refugee populations, the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh got access to connectivity and the internet in August 2020; this research compares how the humanitarian agencies represent the Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar and how the Rohingya refugees represent themselves and explores the similarities and differences between these representations. This research has analyzed 32 weeks of social media data and interviews with four humanitarian agencies and 10 Rohingya refugees and the findings show that the narrative has shifted, and the Rohingya refugees are framed as ‘resilient,’ ‘active,’ ‘self-reliant,’ and ‘peaceful.’ This research illustrates how the humanitarian agencies and the Rohingya refugees create similar representations to serve different purposes. Thus, access to connectivity and the internet is essential for the refugees to be able to speak for themselves.

Preface

This dissertation is original unpublished work by Shorif Sonia. This research received ethics approval from the University of British Columbia Research Ethics Board on April 30, 2021, code H21-00782, under the original title, *Access to Connectivity and Internet: Analyzing Representation and Self-Representation of the Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals in Bangladesh*.

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List of Abbreviations

BTRC – Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory

CDA – Critical Discourse Analysis

FDMN – Forcefully Displaced Myanmar Nationals

FDP – Forcibly Displaced People

INGO – International non-governmental organization

IOM – International Organization for Migration

ISCG – Inter Sector Coordination Group

NGO – Non-governmental organization

RRRC – Rohingya Refugee Repatriation Commissioner

UN – United Nations

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

WFP – World Food Programme

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This research is driven by my passion for growing as a humanitarian worker and advocating for social development and refugee rights. I wholeheartedly thank all the participants, refugees, and experts, for their contribution. The knowledge gathered from their insights has been the heart of this thesis.

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Dedication

“There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.” –Arundhati Roy

To all the displaced migrants. To all the people, who are disconnected by the technological inequity. To the Rohingya refugees, who strive to be recognized as Myanmar nationals.

Chapter One: Introduction

“Without Internet, we have no existence...”— One of the million refugees in Cox’s Bazar and a participant in this research¹.

In the dominant refugee and migration literature, the refugees are shown as ‘victims’ or ‘threats’ by the media and humanitarian agencies (Chatterjee, 2016; Chouliaraki & Tijana, 2017; d’Haenens et al., 2019; Yeung & Lennette, 2018). A lack of resources often accompanies the problem of negative refugee representation to access connectivity, which limits their scope of self-representation (UNHCR, 2016). The Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, one of the largest refugee populations, did not have access to connectivity and the internet until August 2020, having arrived in 2017 (BenarNews, 2020). Considering the existing criticism of the negative portrayal of refugees by humanitarian agencies, I investigate how access to connectivity and the Internet impacted the social media representation of the refugees. More specifically, *how are Rohingya refugees represented on social media?* The thesis employs the theories around representation and humanitarian communication to further investigate the formation of refugee representation by humanitarian agencies and refugees. This thesis argues that the humanitarian agencies and the refugees are creating a convergent portrayal of refugee ‘agency’ shifting from the traditional victim vs. threats representation. The thesis further strengthens the understanding of refugee self-representation, considering technological mediation. This chapter provides a brief background and overview of the thesis further to explore the social media representation of the Rohingya refugees.

¹ This participant is coded as Ro 2 for this research, who identifies himself as a Rohingya youth, storyteller, and citizen journalist

The Problem of Refugee Representation

Media—whether news, digital or social—acts as a gatekeeper of creating a representation of the migrants. Media has shaped refugee identity and created a dualism of refugee representation as ‘threat’ vs. ‘victims.’ (Chatterjee, 2016; d’Haenens et al, 2019; Yeung and Lennette, 2018). In principle, humanitarian agencies² protect the refugees’ dignity (Betts, 2012). They also play the role of refugee representatives and mediators among the media, political institutes, and displaced migrants (Atkin & Rice, 2013). Humanitarian communication has been criticized for the ‘undignified’ portrayal of refugees in the media. While the news media have shown the refugees as a social, political, and economic threat, humanitarian agencies have been accused of creating a ‘regime of pity’ while showing the refugees as ‘suffering bodies’ or ‘victims’ (Bozdag & Smets, 2017; Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017; De Cleen et al., 2017; d’Haenens et al., 2019). Humanitarian organizations have been accused of projecting only ‘elite’ voices from experts or politicians and for the dehumanizing portrayal of the beneficiaries.

Humanitarian or development organizations mostly portrayed their beneficiaries as vulnerable or helpless to raise money and often omitted voices or ‘authentic’ representation from the ground (McPhail, 2009; Cameron et al., 2008; Chouliaraki, 2013; Smith & Yanacopulos, 2004; Orgad, 2013). For refugees who have been widely represented as victims or vulnerable populations by the media and aid agencies, advocacy for them should not be just about charity but a dignified portrayal while having their voices heard (Kirkwood, 2007; Leudar, 2008; Nyers, 2006; Pupavac, 2008; Steimel, 2016). When it comes to ‘self-representation’ of refugees,

² Humanitarian agencies are first responders in any emergency or crisis, such as armed conflict, or natural disaster, which require an immediate response. This involves UN agencies, INGOs, and NGOs, working in the field of emergency response (Robert E., et al., 2011). In this thesis, I specifically investigated the UN agencies, which play a vital role in the Rohingya refugee response.

research has revealed that they do not overlook the ‘realistic’ representation of their suffering by showing the ‘ugly truth,’ but they also emphasize a ‘balanced’ representation to humanize themselves (d’Haenens et al., 2019; Ma. Y et al., 2018). However, refugees cannot represent themselves on social media if they are not allowed to use the internet.

In a hyper-connected world, where consumption of media content is sprawling, and usage of social media is oversaturated (Cooper, 2018; Goldkind & McNutt, 2016; Guo & Saxton, 2018), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees states that almost 65 million forcibly displaced populations do not have consistent access to mobile connectivity and internet³ (UNHCR, 2016). It is challenging for the ‘unregistered refugees’⁴ to access connectivity as they do not have a proper identity document to buy a SIM card (Gillespie, 2016). Like many unregistered refugees, more than a million Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, also labeled as ‘Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals’ by the host, the Government of Bangladesh, were denied access to connectivity and internet due to their refugee status (Al-Jazeera, 2019).

The Bangladesh government has been firm on not allowing the recent refugees (as they are

³ Connectivity simply means modes of network connection. The Internet is an advanced connectivity mode, allowing someone to do more than just regular calls and texts (Mihovska & Sarkar, 2018). Having connectivity does not mean one will have access to an internet connection. In this thesis, by access to connectivity, I mean having a mobile network, and by having internet, I relate it to the affordance of an internet connection. Examples of connectivity include mobile phones, SIM cards, and mobile networks. Internet would require strong connectivity to allow someone to surf and browse. In this thesis, I look into the usage of social media, when I look into the use of the internet among refugees.

⁴ In the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol 149 State parties agreed on either or both to define the term ‘refugee’ and their rights, and the legal obligations of States to protect them. Bangladesh is one of the countries that is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol. As Bangladesh cannot afford to ensure the freedom of movement and their rights to work, the Bangladesh government did not recognize the Rohingyas coming after 1992 as ‘refugees’; rather, ‘unofficial’ or ‘unregistered’ refugees who are given temporary protection.

Please see,

<https://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html>

<https://thediplomat.com/2021/07/70-years-on-the-refugee-convention-still-struggles-to-gain-traction-in-the-asia-pacific/>

unregistered) to access the internet and connectivity (Al –Jazeera, 2019; The Guardian, 2019)⁵. These restrictions on a million displaced refugees were not only a human rights concern for limiting their information-sharing capacities but also tap into one of the pressing concerns: limitations of the self-representation of the Rohingya refugees. After immense pressure from humanitarian agencies and advocacy NGOs, the government of Bangladesh has allowed the Rohingya refugees access to connectivity (mobile network) in the camps since August 2020. It was the humanitarian agencies and the NGOs who advocated for the refugees because the refugees did not have any modes of communication. The refugees got access to connectivity, both mobile networks, and the internet, from August 2020 and were active on social media. I took the opportunity to explore the social media representations of the Rohingya refugees, created by both the humanitarian agencies and the refugees themselves.

From the Dark Ages to the World of Connectivity

“It seems, we have received a new ray of hope. We were thrown into the ‘Dark Age’ and now we get back to normalcy,”— Mohammad Illiyas, Rohingya refugee in Bangladesh.

At the end of August 2020, the Bangladesh government lifted the ban on the use of connectivity and internet inside the largest refugee camp in the world—the Rohingya camp of Cox’s Bazar⁶, Bangladesh—after receiving enormous pressure from the international

⁵In Bangladesh, to be able to buy a mobile connection, one needs to have a proper identity card. The Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh do not have any national identity card as they were not considered Myanmar citizens, nor they are registered as ‘refugees’ in Bangladesh. The Government of Bangladesh labels them as “Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals”. Moreover, the news articles highlight how the Government of Bangladesh restricted any internet communication in the camps due to the fear of potential criminal activities.

⁶ Bangladesh is densely populated with more than 160 million people in a land of less than 148, 000 square kilometers. The Rohingya population came through the Myanmar-Cox’s Bazar border, and Cox’s Bazar was selected as their primary location of settlement, as relocation of more than a million refugees would be extremely difficult. Cox’s Bazar being a hilly coastal area, with dense forest has been considered one of the poorest regions due to the available resources and natural calamities. This shall be noted that Bangladesh has previously allowed more than 200,000 Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar in the 90s, and the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina further declared before the influx that Bangladesh had no capacity to take more refugees. However, an influx of 750,000 people in the

humanitarian communities (BenarNews, 2020). The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) ordered all mobile operators to block high-speed internet access in the camps of Cox's Bazar in September 2019 (Reuters, 2019). With more than a million Rohingya refugees in the camps, such a decision disturbed the refugees and the humanitarians working there. BTRC officials also asked the mobile operators to withdraw any mobile connection possessed by the Rohingya refugees and stop selling any further SIM cards to them. The official of BTRC remarked that such a decision was made due to security concerns (Reuters, 2019). The BTRC official also mentioned that the Rohingya refugees are not permitted access to SIM cards or connectivity. To purchase a SIM card or a mobile phone connection in Bangladesh, one must have a valid national ID or a passport, which the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh do not have (Licasnews, 2019). However, in the camps, it was not difficult for the refugees to buy a SIM card without proper identification (Reuters, 2019). Many Rohingya refugees had their Myanmar mobile connection with them. Since the Myanmar-Cox's Bazar border is nearby, they somehow obtained a connection through their Myanmar SIM card (Hussain, 2019). Shutting down fast internet in the camps was not a result of unauthorized SIM card usage or fear of crime.

A series of events in the camps alarmed the Bangladesh camp management authority to call for such action. Before the shutdown was declared, a young leader from Bangladesh's ruling party was killed by the Rohingya refugees in the camp. Four Rohingya refugees were shot dead by the police (Reuters, 2019). The security officials feared further threats when a large

border, who escaped in dire condition to save their lives, could not be returned under humanitarian grounds. Thus, the humanitarian agencies are already spending hundreds of millions in a year for the refugees, but given the large population, in a country of scarce resources, they would require a billion US dollar per year to upgrade the living condition of the refugees. For details, please see:

<http://www.bbs.gov.bd/>

<https://population.un.org/wpp/>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2012/7/28/pm-says-bangladesh-cannot-help-rohingya>

procession of 200,000 Rohingya refugees came out to commemorate two years of the Rohingya exodus (Licasnews, 2019). Though the demonstration was in appreciation of the Bangladesh government, organizing such a big rally led the security officials to think that with such good communications, the Rohingya refugees could lead any riot, especially when there are more than a million refugees in the camps. After that event, BTRC decided to shut down all connectivity in the camps, fearing further crime by the Rohingya refugees, who may be frustrated by the continued uncertainty of safe repatriation (Reuters, 2019). However, the Rohingya refugees and humanitarian leaders were against such a decision from the beginning as it was not only a violation of human rights but also would make the refugees more vulnerable (HRW, 2019; Amnesty International, 2019).

The advocacy around access to connectivity further strengthened due to the Covid-19 breakout. The Rohingya refugees were in distress as they were afraid of further crimes in the camps, and due to the lack of connectivity, they would not be able to inform the security officials on time (Reuters, 2019). Refugees could not contact their families outside of Bangladesh, which left them emotionally drained, feeling like ‘prisoners’ in the camps (TheNewHumanitarian, 2020). Furthermore, the Rohingya refugees were under severe threat of infection, as they had no information about the Covid-19 virus (HRW, 2020). One of the Rohingya refugee participants of this research exclaimed,

There was a global crisis going on, a pandemic, but we didn't know anything about it. We did not know which country is infected...what is happening...nothing— Ro 3

The refugees could not do much to advocate for themselves, disconnected from the outside world. It was primarily the advocacy and humanitarian agencies advocating continuously, especially after the Covid-19 breakout in a camp in May 2020 (France24, 2020).

The humanitarian agencies were equally concerned, as their mobility was restricted due to the Covid-19 safety protocols. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Cox's Bazar spokesperson Louise Donovan shared,

When the Internet was suspended, UNHCR was advocating vocally with the government that it should be reinstated so that, especially during COVID-19, refugees could be in contact with their families...but also that they could use social media and the Internet as a means of spreading accurate information... On COVID-19 there were a lot of rumors, misinformation, and fear in the camps, not only in Bangladesh but globally, and so we needed to share accurate information with the refugees. —UNHCR spokesperson

After continuous pushes from the advocacy and humanitarian agencies who are advocating for and echoing the voices of the refugees, the Bangladesh government finally lifted the ban as the three years mark of the Rohingya exodus was near (Reuters, 2020). Saad Hammadi, Amnesty International South Asia spokesperson, shared,

The Rohingya refugees, they can really organize many, many things. That was the narrative provided by the Government of Bangladesh behind the decision to shut down access to high-speed Internet and prohibit them from further organization or rallies of this sort. But they had no opportunity to talk about their access to internet or the right to freedom of expression. So, in this case, it wasn't ground up. It was more from the different actors who advocated for them. — Amnesty International spokesperson

The Covid-19 breakout was a catalyst to pressure the Bangladesh government to provide access to connectivity and internet for the Rohingya refugees. However, this research highlights how access to connectivity and the internet can hinder the process of self-representation, which may result in a lack of advocacy. Comparative analysis of representation vs. self-representation of the refugees in this thesis has been possible as the refugees now have access to connectivity and the internet.

Research Questions

Initially, the research considered focusing on the importance of access to connectivity and the internet for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. The importance of the research intensified as pressure from local and international organizations forced the Bangladesh authority to lift the ban on the Rohingya refugees, allowing them to have SIM cards and internet in August 2020 (BenarNews, 2020; RFA, 2020; NewAge, 2020). The change in the situation and allowing the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh access to connectivity extended the scope of research to examine how ‘self-representation’ differs from ‘representation.’ To understand the phenomenon, I explored the questions,

a) How are Rohingya refugees represented on social media?

- Explore how the Rohingyas represent themselves on Twitter compared to the leading humanitarian agencies.

b) How has access to connectivity and the internet impacted the social media representation of the refugees?

- Explore how self-representation has been possible, considering that the study of this thesis has been carried out once the refugees gained access to connectivity and the internet.

To study these questions, I specifically look into how the Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN)⁷, known as the Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar, represent themselves on

⁷ As explained earlier in the footnote, Bangladesh is one of the countries that is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol. Bangladesh government did not recognize the Rohingyas coming after 1992 as ‘refugees’; rather, ‘unofficial’ or ‘unregistered’ refugees who are given temporary protection. The recent refugees are labeled as “forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals” by the Bangladesh government. However, complying with the UN’s refugee convention, I am using the word refugee, for my thesis.

social media platforms like Twitter through public content and how is it different or not compared to the way leading humanitarian agencies, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organization for Migration (IOM), and United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP) and Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) represent the refugees. It is important to mention that I have worked with UNWFP, as a communications officer, which is one of the participants for this thesis. My experience as a communications professional, working directly with the Rohingya community encouraged me to employ an insider-outsider perspective to the research. From a neutral standpoint, in this research, I aimed to explore refugee self-representation in comparison to the leading humanitarian agencies.

The comparative analysis of this thesis presents nuances of representation and self-representation to understand how and why specific representation is created. Based on the qualitative data analysis, this research sheds light on how both humanitarian agencies and the refugees in Cox's Bazar have been challenging the negative representations of the refugees. Both the refugees and the leading humanitarian agencies working in Cox's Bazar for the Rohingya refugee response are creating positive images of the refugees. Analysis of 32 weeks of social media data of four humanitarian agencies and 10 Rohingya refugees and their interviews challenge the traditional 'threats' vs. 'victims' refugee representation (Bleiker, Campbell, & Hutchison, 2013; Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2017; Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017; d'Haenens et al., 2019; Devetak, 2004; Gale, 2004; Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017; Orgad, 2012; Rajaram, 2002). Through critical discourse analysis, further discussed in the theoretical framework and methodology, this thesis also explores why humanitarian agencies and the Rohingya refugees create different representations than 'victim' or 'threat' dualism for advocacy purposes. I explore how and why the humanitarian agencies and the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar create a

positive refugee representation and represent the refugees as ‘resilient,’ ‘active,’ ‘self-reliant,’ and ‘peaceful.’ While the humanitarian agencies primarily focus on the fundraising aspect through such representation, the Rohingya refugees not only advocate for more funding but also for safer and faster relocation, conveying their political opinions regarding the Rohingya crisis by representing themselves as ‘strong’ citizens of Myanmar. The thesis argues that the humanitarian agencies and the Rohingya refugees have their agenda for creating an agentic representation of the refugees, which is more collaborative than contrasting. The convergence around an assertive representation of the refugees presents a critical understanding of refugee representation, where the refugees and the humanitarian agencies reflect each other. The thesis explored how technological mediation and access to social media can help researchers like me to compare refugee representation and self-representation. As a policy recommendation, I highlight the importance of connectivity and the internet for refugees, especially since they live in a remote area of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Considering this research's timeline and novelty, the comparative analysis of how the Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN) in Bangladesh self-represent on social media, compared to their portrayals by the leading humanitarian agencies, is a crucial addition to the existing media, migration, and humanitarianism literature.

Overview of the Chapters

This chapter introduced the research questions with a background to further understand the research problem. It discusses the problem of refugee representation, and the context of this research.

Chapter two provides the theoretical framework for the analysis of this thesis. The theoretical framework looked into representation, how it is created, and how representation is

influenced by power and knowledge. The framework provides a critical understanding of refugee representation and discourse, further explained in the literature review and the thesis analysis.

Using the theoretical framework, I conceptualize representation as a political tool for ‘recognition’ and gaining ‘agency.’

Chapter three reviews the literature on the media, migration, and humanitarianism to provide an understanding of refugee representation and humanitarianism. I discuss the critical literature to analyze the problem of humanitarian communication and refugee representation to compare self-representation with representation by others. I discuss how the Rohingya refugees have been represented in the media and how refugee representation can be altered by including refugee voices using different technology and media platforms.

Chapter four provides the methodology of this thesis. I discuss ethical considerations while researching vulnerable communities like the refugees. I share the popular methodologies in the existing literature for similar research. I discuss the data collection, participant selection, and data analysis process step by step. This thesis has employed visual methodologies developed by Gillian Rose and critical discourse analysis for the theoretical and empirical analysis of the primary and secondary data.

Chapter five illustrates the findings from the data analysis to argue how refugee representation has shifted from the dominant ‘victims’ vs. ‘threats’ dualism. It discusses the nuances of ‘victimhood’ to argue that victimhood does not mean losing agency; it can be used to seek justice. Both the Rohingya refugees and the humanitarian agencies are showing the refugees as ‘active,’ ‘resilient,’ and ‘self-reliant,’ which is novel to the predominant understanding of refugee representation. Moreover, the data analysis also discusses how the Rohingya refugees

challenge their representation of being a ‘threat’ and share humanitarian characteristics by showing empathy and expressing solidarity with others. This chapter brings some unique findings to the existing literature to further explore the critical understanding of refugee representation.

Chapter Six critically analyses the findings to discuss further why the refugee representation has shifted. This chapter further discusses the theoretical understanding and historical analysis to speculate refugee representation and the influence of power relations. It discusses the criticisms against the negative representation of the refugees and why a positive narrative of the stories was much needed for continuous refugee assistance. The refugees and the agencies highlight the importance of funding, but the refugees strongly advocate for justice through their representation as ‘Myanmar citizens.’ Advocacies around funding or demanding justice emphasize the continuing dependence on the existing humanitarian discourse, and the chapter argues how power relations continue. This chapter presents a critical understanding of representation and its politics.

Chapter Seven provides the concluding remarks. I discuss the politics around refugee representation and the exclusion of Rohingya refugees, my recommendations, and the future scope of research. As a policy recommendation, I highlight that access to connectivity is vital for the Rohingya refugees.

Chapter Two:
Understanding Refugee Representation: Theories and Practices

And, indeed, representation undertakes to represent itself here in all its elements, with its images, the eyes to which it is offered, the faces it makes visible, the gestures that call in being. But there, in the midst of this dispersion which it is simultaneously grouping together and spreading out before us, indicated compellingly from every side, is an essential void: the necessary disappearance of that which is its foundation—of the person it resembles and the person in whose eyes it is only a resemblance. This very subject—which is the same—has been elided. And representation, freed finally from the relation that was impeding it, can offer itself as representation in its pure form. – **Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things***⁸

This thesis explores Rohingya refugee representation to examine how self-representation differs from the representation created by humanitarian agencies. I argue in my analysis that the refugees and the humanitarian agencies create an assertive portrayal of the Rohingya refugees on social media. I further emphasize the continuing power relations between the refugees and humanitarian entities, influenced by the discursive nature of representation. To understand the criticality of representation, I heavily focused on Foucauldian understanding of representation, where I discuss how representation is created, how existing discourses influence the creation of meaning, and how the existing discourse can be challenged. I explain in this theoretical framework that our acquired knowledge influences our way of knowing. The general knowledge or the history we know is always influenced by those in power. I discuss how representation exerts power and serves the purpose of those in power. All representations are valid and reflect the interests of those that shape them (Foucault, 1983). Referring to Foucault’s statement above, with respect to the Rohingya refugees in this thesis, I argue that the inclusion of refugee voices offers a more compelling representation of their plight than the messages of humanitarian

⁸ See page 18 in “The Order of Things” electronic edition published in the Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2005.

organizations. Influenced by the theoretical framework of power and subjectivity, I highlight the importance of access to connectivity for the refugees to speak up for themselves as a policy recommendation for this thesis.

Representation in Theory

In its simplest form, representation produces meanings and creates discourse or knowledge through language, signs, and/or visual materials (Foucault, 1970). Representation involves description or depiction, portrayal, or imagination, to resemble or symbolize something, which can create a more comprehensive set of meanings through language (Hall, 1997). For this thesis, I investigated the texts and images of social media posts as a form of language, creating meaning for the audience on social media. Instead of looking at images and texts separately, Foucault strongly emphasizes analyzing the relationship between them to understand the homogeneous meaning they produce (1983, p-39). To understand the meaning, we depend on a process of resemblance and symbolizing a known object to stimulate a sense of recognition (Foucault, 1970). We investigate the signs and connect them to the existing knowledge to understand something. Signs are ‘signified’ through the existing system or ‘the significant’ ideas to create meaning (Foucault, 1970; p.58). Representation through resemblance is problematic, as we overlook the invisible relationship between recognition through resemblance and our affirmation of the existing knowledge (Foucault, 1983; p. 33-34). How we know an object is driven by a set of ideas in a specific social or political context (Foucault, 1983). In this thesis, I emphasize that representation cannot be construed as reality without analyzing power relations. I analyzed both the visual and textual materials and associated them with the political context of the Rohingya crisis to understand the formation of Rohingya refugee representation.

How we know something and read the ‘signs’ to find the ‘signified’ meaning through signifiers, is a systemic process (Hall, 1997). Stuart Hall discusses three approaches, reflective, intentional, and constructionist, to understand how meanings are created (Hall, 1997). The reflective approach acts like a mirror that reflects the already existing meaning or knowledge (Hall, 1997). In this thesis, the data analysis has shown that humanitarian agencies ‘reflect’ what the refugees are doing when it comes to representing them, and vice versa. The collected data from the humanitarian agencies and the refugees share a convergence around refugee representation. However, Foucault argues that such an approach of representation through resemblance is problematic as it overlooks power relations (Foucault, 1970).

The creation of representation through ‘reflection’ is influenced by power and the existing discourse. In the process of creating meaning, the ‘subject’ is the entity in power to control its ‘objects’ and develop ideas in society (Foucault, 1982). Foucault argues that the subject is not necessarily always an individual or an institution but a set of ideas and knowledge in a distinguished period (Foucault, 1982; p. 782). Foucault emphasizes that we need to use our instincts to rationalize the knowledge in a particular scenario to evaluate the signs (1970; p-61). In any given context, to study representation, we must remember that the process of creating meaning happens through an existing system that forces us to think in a certain way concerning the existing knowledge we have. Even though a particular discourse is altered, we must evaluate the situation to understand how it happened. Foucault argues that discourse is strategic, and the formation of representation is a controlled process by those in power (Foucault, 1980). Hall discusses the intentional approach of representation which is connected to power dynamics as it serves the subject in power (Hall, 1997).

The intentional approach of representation relies on what the speaker/ author or the subject wants to imply, using his or her way of creating meaning. The created meanings serve the objective of the subject. In this thesis, I asked both the refugees and the humanitarian agencies to understand their objectives behind creating a specific refugee representation on social media. Within the small sample size of this research, it has been evident that each 'subject' has different intentions while creating meaning. For example, both the agencies and the refugees showed happy, smiling children, which created a meaning of a normal childhood. However, different intentions for such 'representation' were found upon analyzing the codes, signs, and signifiers. For the agencies, the happy children appealed to their audience for more funding to embed this message that these smiling children can keep smiling with external help or assistance as the refugees depend on humanitarian aid. Some agencies also shared that they are trying to generate empathy amongst their audience to make them realize how innocent children are suffering and deserve a normal life like any other child, convergent to the refugees who also shared similar messages. For refugees, they tried to show the resilience of the refugee children through smiling faces. They highlighted the innocence of refugee children not knowing about their sufferings or 'reality.' However, the refugees want the children's right to citizenship in their homeland Myanmar besides access to education and healthcare. This is just one example of how this research has conceptualized the 'intentional' approach to understand why specific 'representation' is created but for different objectives.

The constructionist approach helps us further to understand how meaning is changed to serve the purposes of the subject. The constructionist approach further analyses how a subject is trying to alter the existing 'representation' to create a new meaning. The 'constructionist' approach is critical and relies on the objective and the context to understand how it is trying to

alter past knowledge to a reformed meaning. Hall explains how the ‘constructionist’ approach branches out to Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure’s ‘semiotic’ approach and French philosopher Michel Foucault’s ‘discursive’ approach. The semiotic approach looks at signs, codes, and signifiers and how they create meaning. Foucault’s discursive approach not only investigates how meaning is created but analyzes how the creation of meaning is politically driven. I emphasize the discursive approach of representation as it explains how knowledge connects with power to construct a sense of recognition and how knowledge is practiced and situated in the system. This approach of creating representation is also visible in the data and analyses of this research. The key finding of this research is that the refugee representation has shifted from a ‘negative’ to a ‘positive’ narrative, whether the refugees or the agencies create it. This research shows how the agencies, and the refugees are heavily focused on the ‘constructionist’ approach to serve their long-term objectives. For years humanitarian agencies have been criticized for ‘negatively’ representing the refugees or their beneficiaries. Thus, they are trying to alter their reputation by changing refugee representation. Analysis of this thesis discusses and uses this concept of ‘constructed’ representation, to examine why and how one is opting for alteration of representation. Also, in the data and analysis of this thesis, I explore how the refugees are systemically altering their ‘victim’ vs. ‘threat’ representation to be recognized as humans, dignified citizens of Myanmar, which they have failed to achieve. The whole process of representation and creation of meaning and identity is heavily influenced by knowledge and power.

Representation, Knowledge, and Power

This thesis uses Foucault’s concept of power and discourse to argue how refugee representation has been a political tool to serve the purpose of humanitarian entities. Foucault

argues that the production of meaning is influenced by a specific discourse of that period, serving specific people to justify their actions (Foucault, 1970). As mentioned above, the ‘subject’ in power may not be an individual but is a very specific set of ideas that dominate the system and the people in it (Foucault, 1982). Knowledge and power are interwoven, as whatever the subject creates as a ‘regime of truth is accepted as reality (Foucault, 1980, p. 131). Therefore, to understand an alteration of knowledge, one needs a historical awareness of the present situation and why something is happening concerning what used to happen (Foucault, 1970). Foucault writes the word “History” with a capital H to emphasize that it possesses power like God. By ‘history,’ he means our knowledge, the sense of identity, and differences. The power of knowledge to influence our capacity to comprehend something is not fathomable, but it operates silently in the system. Foucault argues that,

In any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice (1970; p.168)

The existing knowledge creates a sense of ‘recognition,’ which is politically created by those in power. When we try to learn about history, there is no limit to that, and it comes from various subjects. In this thesis, I emphasize that the refugees have experienced the systemic ‘division’ for so long, that now they reflect their humanitarian counterparts. The convergence of refugee representation by two agents, the refugees themselves, and the humanitarian agencies, show how they are reflecting each other. This shows that the refugees only know what they have learned and seen in the existing humanitarian system. The refugee community with no authority to speak up for themselves can barely be a subject. However, the subject-object relationship can be altered (Foucault, 1982). The refugees need a medium to speak up for themselves. Therefore, access to connectivity played a huge role in refugee self-representation. However, as mentioned

earlier, power relations are critical, and subjects can be an object of knowledge if they are being controlled by a specific discourse. In this thesis, I discuss how refugees are convergently creating an assertive portrayal with the humanitarian agencies.

Power, Subject, and Object

Power relations can only exist if it is mutual between the subjects and objects. Exercising power on the 'powerless' does not form any relationship or struggle, and becomes futile (Foucault, 1982). To understand how one becomes a subject, we must investigate how certain groups are in 'power.' Humanitarians are considered subjects in the humanitarian discourse as they create the narrative around refugee representation (Malkki, 1996). Refugees are rarely considered a subject in the humanitarian context as they lack agency and instead become an object of aid and charity. The refugees become passive in the humanitarian narrative as they do not act like active agents, unlike their humanitarian counterparts. In this power dichotomy, the humanitarian agencies historically have had the upper hand as the refugees mostly depend on humanitarian assistance (Wilson & Brown, 2009). Foucault argues that one can be a subject to someone else by depending on them and by self-knowledge of one's identity (Foucault, 1982). In the process of self-representation, objects of humanitarian discourse, such as refugees can be subjects by projecting their own voices. However, Foucault argues that while creating a self-identification, we transform our identity to fit into a system (Foucault, 1982). I use this understanding of situating subject-object in a narrative to analyze how refugees are reflecting the humanitarian agencies and may continue to be disempowered by depending on international actors, despite showing 'signs' of agency in the narrative. I argue that the refugees reflect the

existing knowledge post-humanitarian discourse⁹ could offer. However, the subject-object relationship can be altered by challenging the situated discourse.

Foucault brings the argument of ‘contestation,’ which is not a physical contest but rather a confrontation of rights, freedom, and justice (Foucault, 1982). He drew the example of the Greek concept of ‘agonism,’ a public display of argument to evoke people to act. He presents one interesting concept a public debate sets the negotiation stage. Power is everywhere and flows through everyone, and Foucault argues that power relations only exist if both parties participate in the argument. He brings the example of slavery and argues that such an exercise of powerlessness on captives does not cause any struggle or power relations. Power can be only exercised when there is resistance, resulting in a conflict (Foucault, 1982). Even in such a public domain of disputation, one can sustain power by setting objectives to pursue the ones who would be acting. One needs to control the flow of information, institutionalize different actions, and rationalize the continuing action (Foucault, 1982). In this research, the Rohingya community did not even have a platform to have a public discussion on their rights. Access to connectivity and the internet was their first step in getting into the arena of ‘contestation’ with international agencies.

In the context of refugee representation, this theoretical framework explains how they have been seen as the ‘others’ by the political institutions and the humanitarians. The process of ordering things considering their similarities has changed over time (Foucault, 1970), and one needs to critically analyze how it is happening to understand the politics of representation

⁹ Post-humanitarianism critiques humanitarian communication for shifting from ‘dehumanizing’ emotion-oriented appeals to creative communications through positive narratives (Chouliaraki, 2013). Chouliaraki emphasizes on solidarity-based messaging to drive social justice, instead of evoking sympathy for fundraising. I further discuss it in the literature review.

(Foucault, 1983, p.45). Foucault argues that this process of ordering things to ‘recognize’ their individuality creates an invisible sense of division. In this research, I analyze how the division resulted in the formation of ‘us’ vs. ‘them’, which further created a problematic representation of the refugees. Segregation for exactitude is a system of ‘othering’ which excludes one group from another, creating a sense of hierarchy (Foucault, 1970). I conceptualize these ideas around power relations to draw on the concepts of post-humanitarianism. Post-humanitarianism investigates the ‘politics of pity, and ‘solidarity’ and critiques how western communities respond to the suffering of others (Chouliaraki, 2013). Foucault emphasizes that the production and circulation of specific meanings are driven by a set of objectives, which continues to create a power relation (Foucault, 1982). To break free of an existing power relation, Foucault highlights that it is not necessary to retaliate, ‘recognition’ of the others over whom power is being exercised is necessary (Foucault, 1982). The suffering bodies need to have a voice and speak for their rights, and a platform or medium is required for agonistic solidarity (Chouliaraki, 2013). In the literature review, I discuss how the sense of division created the victims vs. threats dualism for the refugees. The messaging to create such divisions are dependent on a medium. Modes of communication have played an enormous role in exerting power and transmitting specific ideas into a community. The theoretical framework is further understood through the literature review, where I discuss how refugee representation is created and the criticism of humanitarian communication. The concepts and ideas around representation and the power-knowledge nexus help us to understand the convergence between refugees and humanitarian agencies toward an assertive refugee representation.

Chapter Three:
Literature Review on Media, Migration, and Humanitarianism

This chapter provides an overview of the existing literature on the media, migration, and humanitarianism literature to further understand the scope of this research. This research analyzes the criticality of refugee representation and argues that the Rohingya refugee representation has shifted to an agentic portrayal of the refugees. In the theoretical framework, I used Foucault's post-modern approach to conceptualize representation as a political tool to maintain power. In this chapter, I discuss the literature to provide an understanding of how the concept of segregation creates the 'victims' vs 'threats' refugee representation. I explore how Rohingya refugees are represented in the existing literature, the criticism of humanitarian communication, and most importantly the literature around post-humanitarianism. Through the post-humanitarian literature, I present the shifted narrative of refugee representation. This chapter also discusses the emphasis on refugee voices and the importance of connectivity for the refugees. The literature review not only provides an understanding of why this research was needed but also how it further extends the critical understanding of refugee representation in the existing literature.

Construction of Refugee Representation

News media acts as a gatekeeper for creating the representation of the migrants, which can create a sense of ‘otherness,’ further stimulating refugee representation as threats or victims (Bleiker, Campbell, & Hutchison, 2014; Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2017; Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017; d’Haenens et al., 2019; Devetak, 2004; Gale, 2004; Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017; Orgad, 2012; Rajaram, 2002). Representation creates a sense of identity that results in ‘in-group favoritism’ and ‘outgroup discrimination’ (d’Haenens et al., 2019). The media construes reality and represents migrants as threats (Knudsen & Bajde, 2016). People associate characteristics with the group they belong to and negative characteristics with the group they do not belong to, and thus induce an ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ concept (Hogg, 2016;). The host community often perceives the migrants as “criminals, cunning, immoral invaders” compared to lawful, hardworking, and innocent hosts (Orgad, 2012). On the other hand, the aid-giving agencies show the vulnerabilities of the migrants to induce sympathy, showing the refugees as ‘victims’ (Sunata & Yildiz, 2018). These concepts further build the understanding of how refugee representation is created to serve the political purposes of the group creating a particular narrative.

The understanding of ‘framing’ and ‘agenda-setting’ is fundamental for this research to critically understand why the empirical data of this thesis shows a shift to refugee representation (d’Haenens et al., 2019). The media can ‘frame’ the information from the field in a way that influences the audience’s response to an event (Scheufe & Tewksbury, 2019). Framing causes a certain approach towards one group and is highly associated with limited accessibility and visibility. The process of ‘framing’ involves ‘agenda-setting,’ and they are both interconnected. While framing focuses on why a story should be told in a certain way, agenda-setting is about how the narrative is serving certain purposes of the group creating the messaging.

The refugees are labeled by different names depending on the political situation, objectives, and interests of different actors or institutions. The terms refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers are used interchangeably depending on political interests (Devetak, 2004). d'Haenens et al (2019) discuss eight frames around refugee representation; while most of the migrants are portrayed as 'intruders', 'threats', and 'victims', some approaches frame their 'resilience and potential' (d'Haenens et al, 2019). It is important to highlight that refugee representation is a political process, in which the representation serves the intended objective (Malkki,1996). Contrary to the 'powerless' representation of the refugees, refugees in the pre-60s era were shown as 'heroes' who were actively working towards political freedom (Pupavac, 2008). The white European refugees after WWII were shown as dignified heroes fleeing persecution (Johnson, 2011). It soon shifted to the narrative of vulnerability to evoke sympathy, for fundraising. The formation and re-formation of refugee representation depend on the notion of getting the attention of people or generating public opinion (Johnson, 2011). These ideas provide an understanding of why refugees are represented in a particular way and whose interests are served. The existing literature on Rohingya refugees reflects the dominant understanding of victims vs. threats dualism.

Rohingya Refugee Representation in Media

The Rohingya refugees are widely represented as 'victims' of persecution or as a 'threat' to Myanmar and the host countries. The government of Myanmar has excluded the Rohingya population from their rights to citizenship making them stateless and a national threat to Myanmar (Brooten et al., 2017; Kipgen, 2019). Myanmar media heavily portrayed the Rohingyas as 'invaders', 'criminals', and 'terrorists', impacting national security. The media framed the Rohingyas as 'criminals' and often as 'Bengali settlers' attacking the neighboring

Rakhine community (Ahsan, 2016). They were associated with terrorist activities, engaging with ISIS and forming a local rebellion group Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) (Mallick, 2020). The local media had to follow the political narrative created by the Myanmar government, portraying the Rohingyas as ‘foreign’ savages (Brooten, 2015). Such a negative narrative fueled hatred against the Rohingyas, and the Myanmar army justified the brutality against them as ‘ethnic cleansing’ (Kipgen, 2019). The Rohingyas have fled to bordering countries for decades to save their lives.

The Rohingya refugees have fled Myanmar to the neighboring countries to escape the atrocities against them. The representation of the Rohingya refugees living in Myanmar back in 2013, right before fleeing to Thailand in 2015, revolved around ‘victims’ or ‘savages’ depending on who created the narrative (Brooten, 2015). The Rohingya refugees took the maritime route to Malaysia and Thailand from 2012 to 2015 (Ehmer & Kothari, 2021; Chatterjee, 2016). The Malaysian local news represented the Rohingyas as violent, illegal outsiders in Malaysia while highlighting the benevolence of the host community and the humanitarian agencies (Ehmer & Kothari, 2021). On the other hand, the Rohingya migrants fleeing to Thailand received a mix of positive and negative portrayals. The images of stranded refugees left in the ocean by their smugglers portrayed the humanitarian response and the resilience of Rohingya migrants (Yeung & Lenette, 2018). The Rohingya refugees stranded in the ocean in 2015 were compared with the Syrian refugees taking the maritime route in 2015 (Chatterjee, 2016). The Syrian refugees received more media and humanitarian responses than the Rohingya migrants, but the Rohingya migrants were portrayed as ‘resilient’ by the news media (Chatterjee, 2016). However, prominent aid agencies like UNHCR and WFP glorified their assistance to the Rohingyas in Thailand through their media messaging (Olivius, 2016). The sense of otherness is visible in the

study of Rohingya refugees in India where the refugees are shown as recipients of aid or threats to the locals (Mohanty, 2020). The Rohingya refugees who came to Bangladesh received similar treatment from the local news media.

The media carefully crafted the Rohingya representation in Bangladesh to highlight the refugees' otherness and the benevolence of the Bangladesh government. While Myanmar daily used a nationalist narrative to justify the atrocity against the Rohingyas, the Bangladeshi English daily covered the humanitarian aspect to highlight the immediate responses of the Bangladesh government and the humanitarian agencies (Tien Vu, 2020). News media can be biased based on their cultural and political influences and how the same news can be presented differently to serve the political purpose of different groups. Popular Bangladeshi newspapers 'Dainik Kaler Kantho', 'Dainik Ittefaq', 'Dainik Jugantor,' 'The Daily Star' and 'Dhaka Tribune' framed their narrative to highlight that Rohingyas are not "Bengali settlers" highlighting the historical evidence (Fatima & Torun, 2022). The most popular Bangladeshi English daily, "The Daily Star" framed the news stories emphasizing that the Rohingyas are Myanmar nationals, but historically excluded (Ubayasiri, 2019). The framing supported a 'nation-state thinking' to clarify that the Rohingyas are not Bengali, as the Myanmar government often labeled the Rohingyas as Bengali settlers (Ubayasiri, 2019). No studies have been done to analyze the humanitarian representation of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh. This thesis took the opportunity to explore Rohingya refugee representation by humanitarian agencies, as the construction of humanitarian selves and passive refugee representation forms a power-relations.

The Problem of Humanitarian Communication

Contrary to the name, humanitarian communication has been widely criticized for decades because of dehumanizing images (Chouliaraki, 2010; Chouliaraki & Stolic 2017; McPhail, 2009; Knudsen & Bajde, 2016; Ongenaert and Joye, 2019). The act of humanitarianism or the sense of ‘altruism’ goes back to the traits of missionaries or colonial regimes where one would try to ‘help’ another by uplifting the ‘vulnerable’ (Heron, 2007; P.33-36). After World War II, different actors from the expert community, politicians, academics, humanitarians, and development organizations followed the modernization theory in the name of development, which influenced social inequity and power imbalance (McPhail, 2009). The western hemisphere emphasized scientific and industrial investment in the global south to restore global peace and stability from the primitive modes of communication such as posters, letters, and pamphlets to the mass media like radio, press, and television in the modernization period communicated that the global south needed to be more civilized (McPhail, 2009). However, it is also essential to see how the widespread availability of information created more division and segregated the north and south.

The representation of the global south by the predominantly ‘white’ north has been problematic because modernization or technology used may not be a marker for development. Noble prize winner economist and philosopher Amartya Sen has argued that development is defined as the freedom to choose what one wants, providing more choices to people, other than imposing the idea of development (Jacobsen, 2016). In relation to the refugees, the imposition of ‘this is what the refugees want’ or ‘this is how you can help without taking the refugee communities’ opinion, is problematic because it silences the voices of the ‘vulnerable’ others (Chouliaraki, 2013). Giving the refugees the freedom to speak up for their rights would be one

way to empower them. Moreover, the humanitarian agencies working with the refugees are often criticized due to their act of helping the ‘vulnerable’ as it has been historically associated with colonial messaging of helping others (Chouliaraki, 2006). Understanding how the western hemisphere has been using the mass media to create a sense of otherness and abhorrence towards the people who are not ‘white enough’ helps the research to argue how the refugees have been sidelined in their story (Heron, 2007).

The humanitarian notion of being a good person and helping others already creates a sense of power imbalance and segregation (Riggs, 2004). Regarding refugee representation, humanitarian agencies are pointed fingers as their role is to protect the dignity of the refugees (Betts, 2012). Not only that, but they are also the ones often responsible for providing information to the media, news, press, or social media (d’Haenens et al. 2019). While the media distorts the reality and represents the migrants as showing little to no humanism following the political agenda and framing them as ‘threats’ (d’Haenens et al., 2019), the humanitarian communities have put the refugees and migrants in a limbo of ‘victim’ narrative. The sad images of the refugees create a sense of vulnerable others to western society and evoke guilt and sympathy to raise money (Chouliaraki, 2013). The humanitarian community objectifies the refugee or migrants and becomes a “charity communication” for fundraising (Knudsen & Bajde, 2016). However, humanitarian agencies are aware of the criticism, and their communication models have been redefined over the years.

To understand the complexity of humanitarian communication, Lillie Chouliaraki’s arguments and her framework of ‘post-humanitarianism’ has been an excellent resource for this research. Her dense theoretical and empirical exploration of humanitarian communication awakes our unconscious mind to realize that the ‘us’ vs ‘them’ continues to prevail, feeding

‘egoistic altruism’ (2008, 2010, 2012, 2017). Transitioning from the ‘emaciated child’ to ‘celebrity appeals,’ humanitarian communication has turned from ‘pity’ to ‘irony.’ Humanitarian communication has deviated from its initial agenda and follows ‘consumerism’ using grand narratives or celebrity appeals to raise funds. Chouliaraki argues that the aesthetic change in the thinking of humanitarian communication has made the western population an ‘ironic spectator’ of people suffering in the south, and the ‘feel-good’ or ‘narcissistic’ expression of charity fails to establish solidarity. Thus, an invisible unequal power division amongst the global south and north prevails. Chouliaraki’s conceptual framework and the empirical analysis of post-humanitarianism helped me to critically analyze why the Rohingya refugee representation shifted to an assertive direction. She compiled most of her major works in the book, *The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-Humanitarianism*, discussing how humanitarian communication fails to date, as it is still focusing on fundraising than social justice.

Chouliaraki’s ‘ironic spectators’ are complex and deeply embedded in our everyday lives, where we question “what to do” but not “why we should act” (2017, p15). The “self-expression” aspect dominates over morality, which is a byproduct of new media (2017). The shifted narrative from ‘someone is dying, feel guilty and help them to ‘someone just like you are dying, who deserves a life like you, very little has changed from the narcissistic benevolence. This thesis discusses that funding is required to continue supporting the displaced migrants but actions to bring them justice is also required. Asking someone to act for charity is not justice (Hyttén, 2011). Organizations use extremely appealing communication materials, whereas they should communicate in a way that drives “the idea of ‘justice’— justice is the driving force of most large advocacy campaigns—to avoid dehumanized representation (Smith & Yanacopulos, 2004). By justice, This is how humanitarian communication becomes ‘ironic’ as their audience

remains the 'ironic spectators' who work on short-term assistance but not towards justice. Chouliaraki argues that justice is an action toward ending the suffering of others. Solidarity movements should be about actions (Goodman, 2009). These concepts have helped this thesis to critically explore why a shifted narrative of positive representation may not suffice for the needs of the refugees. The problems of representation tie back to the importance of having refugee voices.

Inclusion of Refugee Voices

The communication around 'development' or humanitarian responses has been redesigned over time to fit the organizations' best interests. Instead of avoiding political representation of the refugees, the humanitarians technically silence the voices of displaced migrants (Malkki, 1996). Media mainly portrays the ideologies of the "rich and powerful" while the voices of the so-called "underprivileged" get unheard (Jacobson, 2016). The vulnerable representation creates a "political identity," which disempowers and politically excludes people from having authority (McPhail, 2009). 'Participatory communication' influences a bottom-up approach, which works better than the top-down approach of modernization (McPhail, 2009). In the early 2000s, the World Bank published a three-part book series to highlight why voices from the ground are required to help the people in 'reality' (2000, 2002). In the first book, the authors discussed case studies from different parts of the world to highlight why listening to people is vital for the development sector (World Bank, 2000). The book discusses the importance of getting the realities directly from the people to find out what they need and work on that. They empathized with the lack of power and voicelessness, which is the first gap in social change (2000, p.266). The second book highlights how people living in 'poverty' define welfare for themselves in their own voices. Resonating with Amartya Sen's argument discussed earlier, the

report suggests that people require the freedom to choose what they want. They need the tools to call for a change, not the changes imposed on them. The necessity to include voices from the ground helped the organizations to work better with their beneficiaries. Similarly, for the refugees, the UN refugee agencies have emphasized refugee voices.

As much as the humanitarian community has been criticized, they are also working on including refugee voices in their narratives. UNHCR is actively advocating that by 2030, all refugees and internally displaced populations must have access to the internet to achieve sustainable development goals (UNHCR, 2018). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, declared that refugees know what is best for them, and emphasized refugee participation in policy design and implementation (UNHCR, 2016). The NGOs are also opting for User Generated Contents (UGC), to include voices from the field (Cooper, 2019). In recent years, UGC has over news media and advocacy agencies through social media. Anyone with access to a smartphone and the internet can record any event and share it on social media, which can be available to millions of people (Cooper, 2019). Cooper (2019) shares some interesting aspects that further allow us to understand how aid agencies and media may control refugees through user-generated content. The user-generated content often lacks the aesthetic components or the finesse of storytelling, but it exposes reality on the ground (Cooper, 2019, p.37- 42). UGC are often quicker than those from aid agencies or journalists. The communication experts in humanitarian agencies often come from a journalism background, and they maintain good relationships with different media outlets for exposure (Cooper, 2019, pp. 56-63). The critical analysis of the popularity of user-generated content, their capacity to tell the truth, and how media and NGOs may try to control the content by including voices from the

ground is eye-opening and an excellent resource for this thesis. This helps us to understand further why refugee self-representation is needed to understand the problem of representation.

Usage of the Internet and Self-Representation of the Refugees

In recent years, it has been documented that forcibly displaced populations not only use the internet and connectivity to seek asylum but also for safe migration, integration into the community, and convey their demands to the humanitarian communities (Alencar, 2018; Dekker et al., 2018; Gillespie et al., 2016; Gillespie et al., 2018). Displaced migrants require connectivity and the internet to find a safe refuge (Gillespie et al., 2016, 2018)¹⁰. Social media has helped Syrian refugees migrate more safely to European countries (Dekker et al, 2018)¹¹. The Syrian migrants used social media to collect information on migration to the Netherlands and navigated their journey avoiding human traffickers or smugglers. Refugees also use social media in their host country to communicate, integrate, and live a regular life (Alencar, 2018). Alencar (2018) interviewed 18 refugees from Afghanistan, Eritrea, and Syria who migrated to the Netherlands. The refugees used social media to connect with their family members in their home country, familiarize themselves with the host country, and make themselves competent for their new

¹⁰ Marie Gillespie, whose interview on UNHCR blog post had been used, shared a holistic overview of migration incorporating migrant experiences in her research work. Gillespie in her broad research work “Mapping Refugee Media Journeys: Smart Phones and Social Media Networks” navigates the journey of migrants and the role of smartphones. In one of the condensed versions of the big project, “Syrian Refugees and the Digital Passage to Europe: Smartphone Infrastructures and Affordances”, she along with Souad Osseiran and Margie Cheesman, look into Syrian and Iraqi refugees coming to France and their digital footprints via smartphones. The research was conducted interviewing 53 Syrian and Iraqi refugees in France, within a September 2015 and April 2016 and considering the mobility many of the data from the refugees were collected through messaging service like WhatsApp. The refugees not only shared information with the researchers but also photos and videos from back home, during their journey, texts from the smugglers, which provided a broader understanding of the migrant’s life.

¹¹ They interviewed 54 Syrian migrants who moved to the Netherlands as refugees. They also shared statements of the refugees quoting how they could be trapped by the smugglers or human traffickers and how the navigated the journey to Europe (2018).

habitation (Alencar, 2018). Alencar (2018) highlights how refugees use connectivity for asylum-seeking and integration into the host community. The Rohingya refugees

The Rohingya refugees had no belongings with them, let alone a mobile phone, as they had to flee for their lives. The Rohingya refugees coming to Bangladesh were victims of unforeseen brutality, which forced them to come to the Myanmar-Bangladesh border for refuge (Messner et al., 2019). So, in their case, mobile devices or the internet did not work as a life-saving element in their asylum-seeking process. Vulnerable communities like the displaced migrants often do not have internet literacy (Emmer et al., 2020). Also, unregistered refugees are not being able to buy SIM cards because of their lack of identity documentation (Gillespie et al., 2018). The Rohingya refugees are ‘unregistered refugees’ and the Bangladesh government has been firm on not allowing the recent refugees access to connectivity (Al –Jazeera, 2019; The Guardian, 2019). However, pressure from local and international organizations forced the Bangladeshi authorities to lift the ban after a year, allowing the unregistered refugees to have SIM cards and internet (BenarNews, 2020; RFA, 2020; NewAge, 2020).

The existing literature on digital media and refugees has included both the positive and negative impacts of the internet on refugee lives. Refugees are often considered voiceless, but social media access can connect refugees all around the globe and resonate solidarity among themselves (Nikunen, 2019). The “once a refugee” campaign on social media highlights how refugees can play multiple roles, such as nurses, teachers, and advocates, other than the dominating images of victims (Nikunen, 2019). Access to the connectivity or internet to the refugee is crucial for self-representation, as it is beyond ‘victimization’ and associated with identity and recognition (d’Haenens et al., 2019; Ma. Y et al., 2018). The Rohingya activists living in Europe, who are different from the participants of this research, shared that they want to

be represented as regular humans who are equally capable of integrating into a community (Ma. Y et al., 2018). Refugees do not overlook that ‘realistic’ representation is needed while showing the ‘ugly truth’ but demand a balanced representation, portraying them as humans (d’Haenens et al., 2019)¹². Social media usage for digital storytelling is an excellent tool for understanding the reality of refugee lives (Lennette et al., 2018). Including images and videos is a great way of storytelling as it provides a humane portrayal of the refugees, compared to an imagined one. Lennette’s argument of digital storytelling reflects the empirical data of this research. The Rohingya refugees like Mayyu Ali have been using poetry, literature, and digital storytelling to share their lived experiences of the genocide (Bryne, 2019; Rajeev & K, 2021). Digital storytelling not only works as a documentation of their sufferings but also creates a sense of identity as a “Myanmar national,” which further leads to advocacy for their rights to citizenship (Farzana, 2017).

Access to the internet also negatively impacts the refugees, who are exposed to hatred towards them (Luchs & Miller, 2016; O’ Mara and Harris, 2016; Ozduzen et al., 2020). In the case of the Syrian refugees in Turkey, they had to experience a lot of hostilities on social media based on their gender and race (Ozduzen et al., 2020). This further enhanced the trauma among the Syrian refugees, especially the women and youth. The young refugees often become victims of contested identity and negotiated space, which hampers their psychological development

¹² The book *Images of Immigrants and Refugees in Western Europe* has tried to address that as well by including the refugee voices. The authors by the end of the book explore refugee voices, asserting that refugee self-representation is beyond ‘victimization’, and associated with identity and recognition (177). Forty-four Afghan, Iraqi, and Syrian refugees who came after 2015 in Belgium were interviewed to analyze refugee experiences on representation. Refugees did not overlook that ‘realistic’ representation is needed while showing the ‘ugly truth’ but also emphasized on a ‘balanced’ representation (189). One of the refugees exclaimed that he would like to introduce himself as a university student of KU Leuven than a refugee because his identity is not confined just as a refugee (190). The refugee interviews highlighted that their visibility should be beyond ‘victimhood’ and they should be recognized as human (191). Refugees highlighted the importance of recognition, visibility and identity repeatedly through their interviews to show how the self-representation of refugees is beyond the dualism of victim or threat

(O'Mara & Harris, 2016). Social media can be a great learning tool, but it also exposes young refugees to hateful comments. Their displacement from their home country and unacceptance in the host community creates the problem of being 'here' and 'there' and belonging nowhere, creating much distress among them (Marlowe, 2019). Through social media exposure, the refugee youth are aware that they are shown as 'outsiders,' 'victims,' or 'burdens,' which shapes their thought process (Luchs & Miller, 2016). As most of the Rohingya refugee participants for this research are youth, the literature on negative impacts on young refugees through social media creates further scope to analyze their experiences. Despite being aware of the hatred towards them, the participants for this research showed evidence of retaliation towards any negative comments against them.

The existing literature has investigated how different political interests influence the creation of refugee representation. For the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, their representation differs from the 'victims' vs. 'threats' dichotomy. This thesis aims to see how the recent access to connectivity has impacted the self-representation aspect and compares it to its humanitarian counterparts. The existing literature on Rohingya representation has mainly discussed media representation. The existing literature presents valuable resources for this research, indicating the importance of researching the self-representation of recent Rohingya migrants in Bangladesh on social media. While providing a brief literature review on refugee representation and humanitarianism, it is evident that further comparative study on Rohingya representation on social media is needed. This research is a significant addition to the media, humanitarianism, and representation of forcibly displaced Rohingya migrant literature.

Chapter Four: **Research Methodology**

This chapter discusses the methodological stages of the thesis. The participatory research method is prevalent in the literature to study the self-representation of refugees. Vulnerable populations like refugees require careful attention for a participatory research design to avoid any risks to the participants. I provide a detailed understanding of how we can minimize the risks in participatory research with the refugees and why I chose the methodology for this thesis. I have used Gillian Rose's visual methodology for data collection and analysis for this research. The qualitative analysis of social media data and interviews with the refugees and the agencies presented significant patterns for the representation of Rohingya refugees. For the social media data analysis, Twitter posts by 10 Rohingya refugees living in Cox's Bazar and the four humanitarian agencies from September 1, 2020, to April 30, 2021, have been analyzed visually and textually. One Twitter post was selected randomly from each profile, each week, from 32 weeks (about eight months) of the timeline. A total of 442 Twitter posts have been analyzed, of which 136 are from the agencies and 306 are from the Rohingya refugees. The testimonials from 10 Rohingya refugees and five experts are also analyzed to support the social media analysis. The Twitter posts and the interviews were analyzed to find patterns and common themes of Rohingya refugee representation. The themes were then compared to analyze how both the agencies and the refugees explore victimhood and explore the further understanding of refugee representation concerning the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Using the visual methodology and critical discourse analysis, I further analyzed how representation is formed and the politics of representation.

Researching with the ‘Vulnerable’ Communities

In this research, while exploring how the Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals’ (FDMN) self-represent themselves on social media, the critical participant population is considered a “vulnerable” population (Jacobsen et al., 2003). While researching with refugees and asylum seekers, it is essential to remember that because of their residency status, this population is considered “vulnerable” due to the fear of threats or any other mistreatment against them (Halilovich, 2013). We need to be compassionate while involving refugees as participants. For harm reduction, it is imperative to avoid inducing trauma among them by asking any questions related to their experiences directly (Halilovich, 2013, p. 130). Researchers must be cautious considering the political context of the ‘traumatized’ and ‘vulnerable’ participants (Mackenzie et al., 2007). To avoid such risks, researchers must consider these ethical boundaries in participatory action research with vulnerable communities and try to be innovative in research design (Halilovich, 2013, p. 138). To go beyond the “do no harm” policies, researchers may instead consider the “beneficence, integrity, respect, autonomy and justice” for the displaced migrants (Mackenzie, 2007, p. 300). To avoid such complexity and minimize any potential risk, this research is designed in a way that is not entirely dependent on the interviews; instead used visual and textual data from public social media posts besides the structured and semi-structured interviews to avoid misinterpretation of the data and to ensure safety, agency, and dignity of the research participants in the research. It is important to be sensitive while including refugee communities in the research (Halilovich, 2013, p. 138). The research methodology has obtained approval to continue the study upon satisfying the Behavioural Research Ethics Board¹³.

¹³ The Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) of the University of British Columbia is responsible for reviewing behavioural or social sciences/humanities research, or research that may involve the study of vulnerable

Methodologies in the Existing Literature

In the existing literature, researchers heavily used qualitative data analysis via interviews and participatory research methods to examine how displaced migrants use digital media or how they self-represent. As one of the key objectives of such research is to include voices from the ground, the participatory research model has been prevalent in driving social change and inclusion (Chambers, 1994). One of the key works of literature to analyze the self-presentation of migrants is by Leen d’Haenens, Willem Joris, and François Heinderyckx, where the authors explore refugee voices, asserting that refugee self-representation is beyond ‘victimization,’ and associated with identity and recognition (2019, p. 177). They used semi-structured questions to interview 44 Afghan, Iraqi, and Syrian refugees who came to Belgium in 2015 (d’Haenens et al., 2019). Similarly, Ma Y et al. (2018) interviewed two Rohingya refugees living in Europe to analyze self-representation. The participants, Abul Kalam, Chairman of the Swedish Rohingya Association and Founder of the European Rohingya Council, and Ambia Perveen, Vice President of the European Rohingya Council, were interviewed through semi-structured questions with follow-up questions based on the information provided (Ma Y et al., 2018). To analyze refugee self-representations, the participatory research method is a great tool to include refugee voices. However, the participatory research methods can be challenging due to the involved community's mobility, security, and sensitivity of the research.

To analyze the self-representation of the refugees through social media posts, researchers have successfully used visual and textual analysis to conduct their research (Choualiaraki, 2017; Risam, 2018; Nikunen, 2019). Roopika Risam analyzed available visual and textual data online

communities. The research ethics board investigates the methodology which may involve interviews, observations, or the administration of questionnaires or test to approve that it is following the do no harm policies for the communities.

to analyze how refugees self-represent themselves while taking selfies (Risam, 2018). Risam took the example of refugees taking selfies with German Chancellor Angela Merkel to argue that such refugee self-representation on social media challenges the narrative of “terrorists,” and “threats,” (2018). Chouliaraki made a similar argument by arguing that refugee selfies are a great way to show that they are normal human beings, just like everyone else (Chouliaraki, 2017). Kaarina Nikunen derived her data from a virtual campaign on social media by the refugees named ‘Once a refugee’ to argue that refugee identity can be beyond victimhood (Nikunen, 2019). She also interviewed the refugees to emphasize that refugees want to create their own identity and that they can hold any role in a society like being a DJ or a doctor (Nikunen, 2019). Qualitative analysis of social media data through visual and textual analysis is highly convenient, considering the logistics of research which includes vulnerable participants like refugees.

In this thesis, I used both the social media data for textual and visual analysis, and the semi-structured interviews with the refugee participants and experts. My research took place during a global pandemic, where in-person interviews or focused group discussions would be challenging. The research methodology is designed to prioritize refugee protection, minimizing potential risks as much as possible. In addition to analyzing visual and textual materials, such as public posts of refugee participants on Twitter, I conducted semi-structured virtual interviews via direct phone calls and virtual meeting platforms, such as Zoom and WhatsApp.

Research Design

This research used the visual methodologies of Gillian Rose to analyze the social media data and further utilized critical discourse analysis to scrutinize the social media data and interviews. Gillian Rose did significant work explaining the importance of this methodology in

her Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials, which is highly cohesive to this research. Rose points out that the visual research methodology is evolving into a digital methodology to a point where the usage of social media data for visual and textual analysis is increasing (Rose, 2016). Social media data are mostly available to everyone digitally, reducing the ethical repercussions for a researcher (Rose, 2016; p. 302). Visual data analysis is as critical as textual analysis as a tool because of its representational ability, which reinforces critical discourse analysis (Rose, 2013). The visual research method has gained in popularity over the past few decades because of its versatility in covering multidimensional interpretation, discourse analysis, semiology, and, most importantly, considering the digital methodology's ethical factors (Rose, 2016).

This research utilized the critical visual methodology for collecting and analyzing social media data. Gillian Rose discussed four sites of critical visual methodology—site of production, site of image, site of circulation, and site of audiencing—which has helped us to design the research and operationalize a comparatively large social media dataset (2016, 25-62). I analyzed ‘who’ produced it, ‘when,’ ‘for whom,’ ‘why,’ and ‘how’ the content is produced while looking at the images and texts. For the image itself, attention was given to visual meanings, composition, and ‘visual effects’ as per the methodology discussed by Rose. I analyzed the circulation of contents by questioning who or what organized the content/image, why, and how the sites have changed from one to another as there are multiple sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. To understand who the audiences are, I specifically asked both the refugees and the agencies who are their targeted audiences. To understand why the audience is looking at a certain content in a certain way, it important to consider the ‘viewing positions,’ audience’s relation to the text, how the contents are being displayed and where.

Besides the four sites of visual methodology, I also investigated the modalities, such as technological and compositional aspect of the image and text. And for social modalities, I analyzed the social, economic factors, political relations, the associated institutions and the practices in a specific set up. Gillian Rose highlighted in her book that though Sigmund Freud's 'psychoanalysis' is a great tool for visual methodology, it may not pay enough attention to the 'social construction.' In contrast, critical discourse analysis pays attention to a particular image of the socio-political setting of that specific context (186-187). Gillian Rose's visual methodology book helped in the research design and methodology and each step of data collection and analysis. Following the visual methodology and critical discourse, I collected the data, selected the participants, and analyzed the data further for this research.

I employed Foucault's understanding of discourse and power to further analyze the empirical dataset. I used critical discourse analysis (CDA) in this thesis, which emphasizes on looking at language, texts, and images, as a normative practice, in a certain social context. It considers power relations in discourse, how it is constructed, and by whom and to serve whose purpose, construing reality (Fairclough, 2015; van Dijk, 2008; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). CDA examines the power relations of a specific context to understand how people are represented and why (Fairclough & Wodak, 2009, p. 258). To critically analyze the social media data and the interviews, I considered three dimensions: texts, discursive practices, and social practice (Fairclough, 1995). It is important to investigate the discursive practices at the micro and macro levels (van Dijk, 2008, Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 189–190). For the macro-level understanding of how discourse and power work in this thesis, I thoroughly studied the literature on post-humanitarianism besides a general overview of media, migration, and humanitarianism literature. The existing literature provides the knowledge to evaluate humanitarian actions, and how the

system provided limited agency to the refugees. I situated this understanding in the local context of Rohingya refugees to understand post-humanitarianism on a micro level. The empirical dataset, Twitter posts, and interviews helped me to pinpoint what is happening on a micro level. I critically analyzed my dataset at the macro and micro levels to determine how the Rohingya refugees and the humanitarian agencies are convergently creating an assertive portrayal to maintain their own power and achieve what they want. I used CDA to critically understand the formation of refugee representation but heavily depended on Rose's visual methodology for data collection.

Data Collection and Participant Selection

This thesis utilized both the social media data and the interviews for the analysis. I selected Twitter for social media data collection. I did not choose Facebook; Facebook posts are not visible to everyone if it is customized or only for friends. For the ethical consideration of this thesis, complying with the BREB guidelines, I could only choose public posts. I chose Twitter as it allows anyone to access public data shared on the platform and enables the researcher to filter information through the advanced search option. I searched for public profiles of the Rohingya refugees on Twitter. I used keywords like "Rohingya activist," "Cox's Bazar," "Rohingya poet" on Google to find profiles whose information is available to everyone. I found one Rohingya refugee participant through the WFP website, as WFP featured him for his storytelling skills. I also followed a Rohingya advocacy website "<https://rohingya-voice.com/>" run by a former German journalist, which featured photographs, poems, blogs, and different materials by the recent Rohingya refugees. I identified ten Twitter profiles following this methodology. For the interviews, I reached out to them through Twitter. After receiving 2-3 responses, I used the 'snowball' technique to contact others, especially a Rohingya woman with a Facebook profile

who runs a Rohingya women's group on social media. For this thesis, I collected social media data of 10 Rohingya refugees and interviewed eight refugees including one Rohingya woman, who does not have a Twitter account.

With respect to humanitarian agencies such as UNHCR Bangladesh, IOM Bangladesh, ISCG, and WFP, I could easily find their Twitter accounts. I also interviewed them to avoid misinterpretation of the data and to ensure their agency as participants (Rose, 215). I contacted their communications officers/ agency spokespersons working in Cox's Bazar for UNHCR, WFP, and ISCG for interviews. The IOM spokesperson could not participate due to unavailability at that time. For this research, I also interviewed the project manager of WFP storytellers, a citizen journalism project training the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. The South Asian spokesperson for Amnesty International was also interviewed because of their role in advocating access to the internet for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. The agency representatives are considered experts in the research methodology, so they conceive fewer probable threats to themselves than the refugee community (Mackenzie, 2007). I also interviewed them to avoid misinterpretation of the data and to ensure their agency as participants (Rose, 215).

To collect the data, Twitter's advanced search option was used. Participants' Twitter handle was entered in the "account" box, and the date range was chosen from 1st September 2020 to April 30, 2021, to gather the social media posts for further visual and textual analysis. The reason for choosing social media posts from September 1st, 2020, is that the displaced migrants received 'legal' access to connectivity at the end of August 2020. Some Twitter profiles were created after that time, and others may have used connectivity or the internet even before that. However, I did not include data from that period to reduce potential harm. To maintain the

consistency of data flow, the exact timeline was considered for the designated humanitarian agencies while collecting visual and textual data from their Twitter accounts. For the data sampling, image selection can be made in random, stratified, systematic ways or in clusters (Rose 2016; p.91). For this research, I randomly selected one post per week from each Twitter profile. The Twitter posts were selected manually ensuring the posts had images, so I had to rely on the ‘good eye’¹⁴ to select a post with an image. A total of 442 Twitter posts were randomly selected, of which 136 are from the agencies and 306 are from the Rohingya refugees.

Interview questions were designed to avoid any risk to the participants; however, the University of British Columbia’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board equally weighs a questionnaire and a set of interview questions for research with vulnerable communities, so interview questions were prepared instead of questionnaires. The interview questions for the FDMN participants were semi-structured and were customized based on their profiles to minimize potential harm. The interview questions for the agency representative were also semi-structured, with follow-up questions. For both groups, the interview questions were in English. Because the Rohingyas do not have a written language, they communicate in English or Burmese on social media. As I have worked with the community before, I understand the Rohingya language but cannot speak it fluently. To maintain the research’s integrity and not violate any restrictions, I did not consider Bengali to communicate with the refugees, as the Rohingya refugees are restricted from learning Bengali (WorldCrunch, 2019; The Guardian, 2020). I did not employ any translator for interviewing or transcribing the data, as using a translator can be ethically problematic (Mackenzie, 2007, p. 304). So, for this research, I only considered the

¹⁴ Gillian Rose discussed in the Visual Methodology book that we need to use our conscience or common sense while analyzing or selecting a photo (Rose, 2016; p-85)

participants who knew English. As I understand the Rohingya dialect, I allowed them to speak in Rohingya at times, but the communication mostly took place in English.

Data Analysis

This research used the visual methodology and critical discourse analysis to analyze the social media data set and interviews. For the visual methodology, people often rely on the ‘good eye’ to interpret and find patterns systematically (Rose, 2016, p. 85). Rose mentioned in her book that computational methods like Nvivo for qualitative analysis are also great tools (Rose, 2016). However, the manual process of coding and finding patterns allows the researcher to employ a theoretical understanding of the research topic (Rose 2016; p.86-87). I manually went through all 442 randomly selected Twitter posts to find patterns and themes. I investigated the images and texts, to find the messages they are producing, who is producing that and for whom, and what reality they are presenting. I carefully examined the texts and images, and how they are aligned, to comprehend the discursive formation of the message it is giving us. Photographic evidence is a great tool to understand the reality or the truth as it provides us a sense of what ‘really’ was there (Rose, 2016. p. 190) To understand the formation, we need to understand the power relations, as they influence our knowledge (Conxin, 2015). This process involved going back and forth between the macro-level data (existing literature) and the micro-level (primary data set, Twitter posts, and interviews) to analyze the images and texts (both written and verbal), their formation, their use in a particular context, and the purpose of such forms of knowledge/message. I investigated the concept of semiology, where I tried to analyze the signs. Signs are a combination of ‘signified’ (a concept or an object or simply a message through the signifier) and ‘signifier’ (an image, text, or content). The ‘signifier’ creates a relationship with the ‘signified’ to create meaning, often influenced by the existing knowledge the reader or the

audience has (Rose, 2016, pp. 107-113). Signs not only create meaning but also give an understanding of the ideology related to representation, legitimizing or explaining the social inequalities, and reflecting the interests of power or different groups. I investigated the representation of the bodies—age, gender, race—and the representation of manner (Rose, 2016). I scrutinized the expression, happy or sad, eye contact to analyze who is looking at whom and what, the poses of the subject in the image, and finally, the props and settings of the images¹⁵.

Gillian Rose discussed four sites of critical visual methodology—site of production, site of image, site of circulation, and site of audiencing—which has helped us to design the research and operationalize a comparatively large social media dataset (2016, 25-62). To understand ‘site of production’ I investigated ‘who’ produced it, ‘when,’ ‘for whom,’ ‘why,’ and ‘how’ the content is produced while looking at the images and texts. I explored the content/image, why, by asking it directly in the interview question. I also asked my participants questions to understand how to strategize their content, and how they circulate them in multiple sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. I designed the interview question to understand the targeted audiences for specific platforms and content. I also tried to analyze the images to understand for whom the contents are made, how the audience interprets them, and why. To understand why the audience is looking at a certain content in a certain way, it is important to consider the ‘viewing positions,’ the audience’s relation to the text, how the contents are being displayed, and where (Rose, 2016). Besides the four sites of visual methodology, I also used critical discourse analysis for this thesis.

¹⁵ Rose discussed three methods, ‘exhaustive,’ where all the aspects are covered by one category, ‘exclusive’ where no overlap is found amongst the themes; and ‘enlightening,’ as they were analytically exciting and coherent to the research background (Rose, 2016; p.92-96). I coded the data using the ‘enlightening’ method mostly, though some of the elements of this research were found through the ‘exclusive’ coding.

For critical discourse analysis and visual methodology, it is important to be familiarized with the subject matter (Rose, 2016; Conxin, 2015). As a former humanitarian communication officer, who has worked with the Rohingya refugees directly, I used an insider-outsider perspective in this thesis. My experience provided me with a strong understanding of the context besides my comprehensive literature review and background study. I understand how power relations invisibly act to serve our purpose when we create meaning through our messages. Critical discourse analysis enabled me to critically examine how the humanitarian shifted to a creative narrative to represent the refugees in a positive manner and why. I connected my empirical data to the concepts around power and knowledge to analyze how both refugees and the agencies are maintaining their power by creating an assertive representation of the refugees (Conxin, 2015). The agencies are following their ‘whatever works’ strategy for fundraising using the shifted refugee narrative (Johnson, 2011; Chouliaraki, 2013). The dataset of this thesis has highlighted how the Rohingya refugees are also projecting their voices to gain their right to citizenship. The critical discourse analysis helped me to understand how both the agencies and the refugees are creating a convergent portrayal of the refugees, and how their identity is constructed. I also examine and argue that the refugees are tangled in power relations and reflect the current ideas in the humanitarian discourse, post-humanitarianism. They are reflecting the post-humanitarian concepts of solidarity, social justice, and agonism (Chouliaraki, 2013). I analyze these traits and argue that refugees are still an object of the humanitarian discourse, and the convergence between the refugees and the humanitarian agencies has occurred due to this presently dominating set of ideas. In the next two chapters, I discuss the data and the analysis to illustrate how the refugee narrative has shifted and how the power relations work in a refugee context. However, critical discourse analysis can be biased (Rose, 2016). Therefore, it is

essential to consider reflexivity/ positionality as a researcher to maintain the integrity of this thesis.

Reflexivity and Positionality as a Researcher

The study uses the ‘Foucauldian’ conceptual framework and critical discourse analysis. In her book *Visual Methodology*, Gillian Rose highlighted that objectivity is not possible in critical discourse analysis; self-knowledge is impossible as subjectivity is not accessible to consciousness (2016, 180). Foucault (1972) states that ‘who’ I am depends on what I studied. So, it is important to declare the researcher’s position to explain how their social position affected their findings. While conducting this research, my school of thought is influenced by ‘post-modernism,’ where I question an existing system and try to analyze what may have influenced such social construction or production of knowledge. Previously my education included understanding cultural, development, and gender studies. Besides my academic background, it is essential to mention that in my past life, I worked as a communications professional/ humanitarian worker for one of the UN agencies, the World Food Programme, during the Rohingya refugee response. The UN agency I worked for is also part of this study, as it plays a significant role in the Rohingya refugee crisis. I have not worked with the interviewees directly, but I was in a similar role. My role with WFP involved interviewing the refugees directly for stories. As someone who has worked with the researched community directly in the field, I may have had some privilege as a researcher. Though I have not directly worked or communicated with any of my previous participants, whether refugees or agency spokespersons, the practical experience of working with the community has helped me as a researcher. I introduced myself as a researcher for this study and tried to be neutral. I tried my best not to pose any threat or impose power tactic on my participants.

Chapter Five:

Threats vs. Victims:

Challenging the Traditional Refugee Representation

In the existing literature, when it comes to representing the refugees, the ‘threats’ vs. ‘victims’ representation is prevalent (d’Haenens et al., 2019; Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017). A few works of literature have been published to explore the Rohingya representation (Ma. Y et al., 2018; Ubayasiri, 2020), but none have investigated how the Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar represent themselves in social media and its comparison to the agencies’ representation of the refugees. This chapter explores how the Rohingya refugees have been represented on the social media platform Twitter by the refugees and leading humanitarian agencies, ISCG, UNHCR, IOM, and WFP. The comparative analysis presents that both the refugees and the humanitarian agencies have shifted from the traditional ‘victim’ vs. ‘threats’ dichotomy and moved towards an assertive portrayal of the refugees. The chapter starts with a critical understanding of ‘victimhood’ and unfolds how the Rohingya refugees, and the humanitarian organizations are collaboratively portraying the refugees as resilient, active, and self-reliant. The analysis also shows how Rohingya refugees reflect ‘humanitarian’ traits disputing the threat perception, advocating for their rights and peace, and expressing solidarity as global citizens.

Victimhood: Understanding Vulnerability, Suffering, and Reality of Refugees

When posting on social media I identify myself as a Rohingya and a victim, because I am a victim in reality...Sometimes I post as a stateless person when I feel the lack of my country in my heart...And sometimes I also post as an activist when I see the suffering of the Rohingya siblings around me—*Ro I*

The humanitarian agencies have been criticized for decades for representing refugees as victims, who show helplessness, vulnerability, loss, and suffering (Chouliaraki, 2010; Chouliaraki & Tijana, 2017; McPhail, 2009; Knudsen & Bajde, 2016; Ongenaert & Joye, 2019). The analyses of the interviews and the social media data of the refugees and the humanitarian agencies highlight that both the refugees and the agencies share victimhood of the refugees, but such representation may not always be derogatory; they work as a tool for advocacy. In the theoretical framework, I presented Foucault's theory of power and agonism, where he argued that a public display of suffering to call for action is to reclaim one's power. The continued imagery of vulnerability induces apathy amongst the people or donors, resulting in lesser funding (Chouliaraki, 2016; Chouliaraki, 2018). Humanitarian communication may have transitioned from the 'dehumanized' representation to a more humane one, but they still fail to justify their action if its sole target is to raise funds. It is essential to create a sense of agonism, a public confrontation to call for justice than just fundraising (Chouliaraki, 2017). The social media data and the interviews with the refugees and the humanitarian agencies for this research highlighted that the refugees share their vulnerability, suffering, and weakness as a form of agonism, calling for action.

Victimhood may not mean a lack of agency if it leads to advocacy for human rights (Andreasen & Cecchini, 2016; Chouliaraki, 2016; Jeffrey & Candea, 2006; Leider, 2018).

Refugees are victims of atrocities that often get overlooked or forgotten over time. To evoke an

urgency for justice, a sense of ‘victimhood’ helps the refugees share their truth (Andreasen & Cecchini, 2016). The sheer problem of refugee representation of victimhood is not problematic if it leads to advocacy for their rights to speak for themselves and to provide them justice. Showing what is happening on the ground or how the refugees are suffering may not be problematic if it evokes agonism to act on the issue, rather than sympathy for continuing the act of spectatorship through just collecting funding. Amnesty International’s South Asia spokesperson shares,

We need to provide the audience with the sense of the violation...in the sense of the situation on the ground. That sense of despair that that can touch the audiences mind to really take action...Perhaps someone sitting in the United States or Canada will write to their government saying that this is not right and you're putting the money of my taxes to help these people and they're suffering...So maybe do something more to really change that...So the agony or anger is needed to act on the issue. I think the issue of sympathy and sympathy driven actions are quite debated now. —Amnesty International spokesperson

The UNHCR spokesperson also shares similar remarks on refugee representation, You see images of people...images that place refugees as victims...I mean refugees are victims. They were forced to flee their country. They were forced to flee persecution and violence. But they're not only a victim. —UNHCR spokesperson

Chouliaraki argues that the victimhood narrative created by the humanitarian agencies can be justified if they give a voice to the victims, that othering them in the narrative (2016). Also, she highlights that the proposition of the messaging is critical to justify that the refugee voices are being highlighted more than the agencies (Chouliaraki, 2016). The narrative around victimhood should involve compassion and a sense of dignity toward the refugees to provide a sense of agency to the refugees (Jeffrey & Candea, 2006). If the agencies do not portray the victimhood of the refugees in a dignified manner, they are abusing the narrative and disempowering the refugees (Jeffrey & Candea, 2006). Humanitarian agencies often fall into the trap of grabbing attention from the media or to do ‘anything’ to raise funds (Brooten et al., 2015; Klugman et al., 2014). Instead of choosing such desperate methods, humanitarian agencies should develop better narratives (Chouliaraki, 2013; Klugman et al., 2014).

Humanitarian agencies are often criticized when they show the vulnerability of the refugees, but vulnerability can be used as an advocacy measure. The data set for this research shows that the Rohingya refugees also share their vulnerabilities and sufferings more than the agencies. Refugees often share their narratives around victimhood as agents of truth and justice (Andreasen & Cecchini, 2016). The refugee participants for this research unanimously shared in the interviews that they identify themselves as victims of injustice, persecution, etc.

You will see on my social media I post a lot of photos, videos and poems. Through my poetry, I can express our suffering what we have faced in our country, now what we have been facing. You know that we have been oppressed in our country...The suffering, the persecution committed on us. To let people, know what we have suffered, what we're going through now... Through the photos and videos. I try to share what is happening in the camps, what is happening in our lives now... As I told you, I have a lot of people with whom I'm connected all around the globe. They can see how we are suffering; they can know about our sufferings—Ro 6

The emphasis on sharing the suffering and portraying themselves as a vulnerable community may pose a question about why one would want to themselves as vulnerable. The objective of showing the world how the Rohingya refugees have suffered in Myanmar and how they are still suffering in Cox's Bazar camps is an agonistic approach that asks people to act, whether for funding or justice.

It may indicate that the agencies have always become the scapegoat for negative connotations of victimhood. However, the refugees are also not wholly immune to criticism when they represent themselves as victims. The victimhood may not jeopardize the agency altogether, but such weak representation may hamper the scope of negotiation with the ones in power (Leider, 2018). However, we need to understand the criticality of the Rohingya people representing them as victims. The 'voiceless' victims who have little to no access to speak up for their demands may be criticized, but when 'victimhood' calls for justice, it becomes a powerful

advocacy tool (Leider, 2018). Building on this understanding of victimhood, this chapter illustrates how victimhood is not being used as a negative representation in the context of the Rohingya refugees. The interviews of the refugees and agencies highlighted that the refugees ‘reality is that they are in a vulnerable situation. However, the refugees are merely responsible for their condition. Their victimhood results from the injustice and oppression they have faced, and they are trying to highlight their suffering to call for action.

The images both the agencies and the refugees shared to show the living condition of the refugees, cramped tarpaulin or makeshift bamboo shelters, on the edges of the hills, signifies their vulnerability in such poor living conditions. The Rohingya crisis is recognized as one of the greatest emergencies in the humanitarian community due to its massive operation with more than a million refugees living in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh (UNHCR, 2019). The humanitarian agencies have been working around the clock since the beginning of this crisis to ensure that the Rohingya migrants receive the assistance they need (ISCG, 2019). Four years after the influx, one of the keyways to show their vulnerability is through their living condition. The unprecedented influx of more than 750,000 refugees at a time to the border of coastal Cox’s Bazar forced the Government of Bangladesh and humanitarian agencies to provide makeshift shelters in the hilly areas of Cox’s Bazar.

To accommodate such a large population, five times more than the local Cox’s Bazar population, more than 6,200 acres of forests were cut down to make a mega camp for more than 400,000 refugees (Reliefweb, 2017). The makeshift shelters made of plastic sheets and bamboo frames are approximately 20 square meters each, where more than a dozen people usually stay in the same household despite the international standard recommendation of 45 square meters per person living in a refugee camp (HRW, 2018). Poor living conditions lead to diseases and

protection issues, including domestic and sexual violence (HRW, 2018). Moreover, Bangladesh is a disaster-prone country; during monsoon, the shelters are damaged, leading to food insecurity, with risks of death due to landslides (United Nations, 2018; United Nations, 2019)¹⁶. However, very little can be done given the large population in an adverse geographical location with limited resources.

Bangladesh being a monsoon and disaster-prone country, such makeshift shelters pose questions about the living condition in the camps. The selected social media data timeline does not include Bangladesh's monsoon period. Thus, there is no post to represent the living condition in Bangladesh during monsoon. The vulnerability of the refugees comes to the surface and screams out louder during any disaster. One of the major disasters that happened during the selected timeline of data collection was fires in the camps.

Case Study on the Fire in the Camps

There have been incidents of fires in the camps from January 2021- April 2021, portrayed through the social media posts of the humanitarian agencies and the Rohingya refugees. One of the significant fire incidents occurred in the camps on March 23, 2021, which was one of the most significant disasters for the Rohingya refugees since the 2017 exodus. A great many social media posts related to the fire by the agencies and the refugees appeared in the randomly selected dataset. The images shared by the agencies and the refugees signify their vulnerability during a disaster due to poor living conditions. The massive fire burned several sites, including the food and non-food items distribution centers, leaving tens of thousands of people homeless and

¹⁶ The reports highlight that the damage of the shelter and rainwater during monsoon spoils the foods the refugees receive. The rainwater also makes the refugees unable to cook their foods, and often the floodwater washes their belongings. As the refugees live on the slopes of the hills, their shelters often collapse and are washed away by heavy rainfall.

injured, with several dead (BBC, 2021; New York Times, 2021; NPR, 2021; VOA, 2021; Guardian, 2021).

The agencies and refugees shared graphic content that instilled a visual experience of the destruction of the fire. UNHCR shared a photo of a burning camp, and smoke coming through the shelters made the sky dark. The blazing fire shows the intensity of the fire. The post shares the image with the information that the Fire services, Rohingya Refugee Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC)¹⁷, and Rescue and Response teams, including hundreds of Rohingya volunteers, are trying to control the fire from the ground. Most of the refugees posted photos and videos on Twitter to show the intensity of the fire; some went on live from other social media platforms to show everyone what was happening in the camps. However, everything burned to the ground, and only the pillars and ashes were left. A vast hilly camp turned into a desert. Before the rescue team could control the campfire, almost 15,000 shelters were burned to the ground, which IOM was mainly responsible for. WFP shared a video to show how everything has turned into ashes, including one of the food-distributing sites. The video shows smoke all around, embers, and ruins around the camp to explain to the outside world how massive the fire was. The refugees suffered further in their makeshift shelters. One of the refugee participants¹⁸, Ro Alom Bin Nur wrote on his Twitter,

it's blowing a strong wind in camp Ya Allah! save my people who are under plastic tents and also who were lost by fire incident yet. Let's go to the nearest safe spaces with children and old ppl if possible Feeling your rainy and windy suffer at nighttime!—BZ Alom Bin Nur, Twitter

¹⁷ Rohingya Refugee Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) is a government agency of Bangladesh responsible for providing relief and repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar.

¹⁸ I choose to only share the social media name for the social media posts instead of using the code names I used for the interviews, to protect the identity of the refugee.

Both the agencies and refugees have shown horrifying imagery of how massive the fire has been and how it had burned everything in camps, affecting the people who were already suffering to cope with the bare minimum. The refugees shared heart-wrenching photos of people with nothing, sitting in the middle of ruins. Ro Abdumonab shared a photo of a naked toddler, covered in ashes completely with a caption,

It is me who lost everything. Now even there is no clothes to wrap my body.
A very young child playing with a cover of the meal packet in his shelter.
#HelpRohingya #emergency #Fire #disaster –Ro Abdumonab, Twitter

Besides the visual representation of their vulnerability, the interviews of the refugees emphasize the usage of social media to show their suffering. The text not only shares textual imagery of how miserable the living condition is in the camps, sleeping under a plastic tent but also, he posted this after a massive fire broke out in the camp on March 23rd, 2021.

The living condition of the refugees has been precarious, despite the incidents of fire in the camps. As explained earlier, they live in makeshift shelters made of bamboo and tarpaulin. Several Twitter posts by the agencies highlighted what they were doing in camps as part of the monsoon preparedness. Bangladesh UNHCR, one of the key agencies for the site management in the camps, shared on their Twitter how they are working towards providing better materials for the shelters. Another agency responsible for site management and shelter is IOM. As there is limited access to electricity in the camps, the inside of the shelters is usually very dark and gloomy. IOM shared on January 31, 2021, that they have distributed more than 50,000+ solar lights in the camps, with a photo in the lower right where two children are studying in low light. The IOM photo may be dramatic to evoke a sense of guilt amongst the audience, but one of the photos from the refugees takes an unconventional approach to share his miseries. The refugee

shared his photo in his shelter, where he is sitting in front of a laptop pretending to work, with a caption,

“youthful springy work in Dark”—Ro Sawyedollah, Twitter

The Twitter post of the Rohingya youth shares a sense of irony to show how he is continuing to study or work in poor living conditions. The images for the empirical data analysis show that the refugees live in dire conditions, with a high risk of landslides and fire hazards. However, the Twitter posts by the refugees evoke an understanding of how they are using their vulnerability to seek help. The interviews of the refugees and the agencies share a clearer understanding of how victimhood can be a tool for advocacy.

Representation of Women and Children in the Camps

In post-humanitarianism literature, the representation of women and children is often criticized because of the dehumanized imagery (Chouliaraki, 2013). The vulnerable women and emaciated children are the familiar images used by the humanitarians, which have a negative connotation of ‘representing’ them as ‘victims. Such representation of women and children in crises has not only received criticism but also started to induce apathy amongst the audience, failing to appeal for donations (Chouliaraki, 2013). The data analyses through the agency and refugee Twitter accounts for the designated timeline had a diverse day-to-day representation of women and children. Through different signifiers, humanitarian agencies and the Rohingya migrants shared the ‘resilience’ of the women and children in the camp.

While the image shared by the ISCG shows nothing wrong and gives a ‘casual’ representation of a Rohingya woman in the camp, the textual element has made it a little problematic. According to the gender profile for the Rohingya refugee response, prepared by the

Inter Sector Coordination group, more than 52% of the current population were women and girls (ISCG, 2017). Therefore, the leading food assistance agency, the UN's World Food Programme, provides food assistance cards under the authority of the eldest woman in the household (WFP, 2019). Women are the primary receiver of assistance through general food distribution and the 'electronic voucher card'¹⁹. ISCG shared an image on Twitter on January 6, showing Rohingya women receiving their food, with the caption,

Humanitarian partners in Cox's Bazar are safely providing fresh locally produced food items for #Rohingya #refugees who were identified as highly vulnerable while simultaneously providing income for local E farmers through market linkages during the #COVID19 pandemic. —ISCG, Twitter

The image they used is a general representation of women receiving assistance. The language of the text made it problematic by using the term "highly vulnerable" as it poses further questions on why they are vulnerable and how. The terminology used in the content goes back to the 'typical' usage of vulnerability to signify the needs of the migrants.

The Twitter post by UNHCR shares an image of two Rohingya women in the camps wearing 'Niqab'. While some may consider covering the face as 'conservative,' from the cultural aspect, it is typical for Rohingya women. The post highlights that the women have raised their concerns about having stairs to walk the steep slopes in the camps. The post tried to show how women are raising their voices and participating in the decision-making process. However, the image also uses signifiers such as the water pot, indicating that women's camp life may evolve around household chores, which may not be entirely accurate. UNHCR features a Rohingya woman volunteer working in the camps to prevent Covid-19 on Twitter for International

¹⁹ E-voucher card works like credit card, where each family member gets a credit of USD 9 (BDT 770) per month to be able to avail foods from the WFP food outlet (WFP, 2020). As explained, the women are the primary holder of the card, they can assign a second receiver of the food assistance if they are unable to collect the food by themselves

Women's Day. Johura is a hygiene promotion volunteer trying to educate people in the camps to maintain a healthy environment. Such representation of Rohingya women in the camps signifies that they further participate in activities than regular household chores. The Rohingya women had a very different social life while in Myanmar as they are a conservative Muslim community (Farzana, 2017).

The humanitarian agencies have designed their programs in a way where women have more agency and also create scope for women to work as volunteers, which will provide them some access to cash (ISCG, 2019). Communication with the community sector is responsible to engage Rohingya women at a grassroots level regularly to take their constant feedback and support other sectors to improve their interventions (ISCG, 2019). There are women-led community centers creating a gender-inclusive environment so that women can engage with the community (Snowdon, 2019). The women-friendly spaces are also being used to provide livelihood training to the women where they are acquiring new skills. Rohingya women had little to no access to formal education in Myanmar (Mohsin, 2019). Women receive vocational training, which will help them to support themselves if needed (Snowdon, WFP, 2019).

The refugees have also highlighted how the women are contributing to their community. Ro Yassin Abdumonab's post on Twitter shows that women may work outside to contribute to the community and make a minimal income to sustain themselves. Abdumonab also indicates through the text that many Rohingya people want to work to make a living than depend on assistance. As discussed earlier, they cannot generate cash in the camps; only a limited number of volunteers work with the humanitarian agencies in the camps. Abdumonab's Twitter content signifies that the Rohingya women do not necessarily represent a 'domesticated' woman; they participate in community engagement initiatives as much as possible. Surpassing the dominant

representation of ‘vulnerable’ women, the agencies and the migrants highlight aspects of the ‘resilience’ of the Rohingya women in camps. However, I could not find any Rohingya women on Twitter to study the self-representation of the women in the camps.

One of the challenges of this research has been not being able to include female self-representation. I tried to find a female refugee on Twitter to analyze the self-representation of Rohingya women, but I could not. I used my connection in the camps to find a Rohingya female leader or activist. I communicated with the Executive Director of the Rohingya Women’s Empowerment and Advocacy Network (RWEAN), who shared her insights on why Rohingya women do not use social media much,

Rohingya women are unable to read and write English as they didn’t have higher education...Only few Rohingya women use internet... I don’t have Twitter...humanitarian agencies use photos of women without consent...they should ask—Executive Director of Rohingya Women’s Empowerment and Advocacy Network (RWEAN)

She further highlighted that due to cultural restriction, Rohingya women are not visible on social media platforms. The Rohingya people are Muslims and follow their religion accordingly. The women in the community prefer to stay undercover as it is an Islamic practice. However, she highlights that women actively participate after coming to Bangladesh as refugees. In Myanmar, women used to fear violence from the Myanmar Army. Now they can safely move around. A self-professed Rohingya motivational speaker shared that Rohingya women deserve to get an education to benefit the whole Rohingya community.

There are a lot of women in our community...who are uneducated... They need education because the development of women...will develop the whole community—Ro 5

The Rohingya women are more active as refugees than they were in their own country (Mohsin, 2019). They were systemically oppressed by the Myanmar government, being a part of

the Rohingya community, where they had limited mobility fearing gender-based violence (Mohsin, 2019).

Representation of Rohingya Children: Hope for the Future or Cry for Help?

According to an analysis by Save the Children, more than 100,000 Rohingya children were born inside the camps of Cox's Bazar in recent years (2020). The Rohingya people have faced immense trauma from the military attack while making the journey to Bangladesh, especially the children (Lewis, 2019). The children born inside the camps are growing up in a dire situation. As much as the migrants and the agency share a cry for help, they both indicate that these children are rays of hope and deserve to grow up with dignity.

WFP featured Tamana Bibi and shared her story through a video post on Twitter, she was born in the middle of a monsoon. Due to the heavy rainfall, their 'tarpaulin' shelter was damaged, and Tamana's mother gave birth to her in such a condition. Tamana's family was one of the many relocated to flatter land after losing their shelter. Tamana's mother hopes her children get access to education and a healthy life. WFP shared her story to "call on the international community to do more for building a #futureForRohingya." While this appeal is a 'cry for help, the visual representation of the child signifies that, like any other child, she deserves access to education and resources to enjoy her childhood.

One of the common issues that appeared in the Twitter posts of the migrants and agencies is education for the children. For the International Day of Education, UNHCR shared a post highlighting what they are doing in the camps to ensure education for the Rohingya children in Cox's Bazar. They mention that they have provided education to 64,612 children, recruited, trained, and deployed 1,338 teachers, and established 1,700 learning centers. The images show happy, playful children in the school, which somehow signifies that the children are happy to

access education. The use of numbers in the post signifies that the post is following a ‘result-based’ approach and conveying the message that how the resources are being utilized.

Mentioning these numbers is essential to keep the donors know what is happening with their money, and how it results in smiling children in the camps. On the same day, Rohingya refugee Ro Yassin Abdumonab shared a post to highlight what it is like to be a Rohingya child in the camp. Abdumonab writes with an image of the Rohingya children sitting in a group,

“Without Borders.... Without hope.... Without dreams.... #Rohingya children just spending their lives without any hope of future. Please help them brighten their future. #Rohingya #Children #UNICEF #UNHCR #Refugees #Education” – Ro Abdumonab, Twitter

Abdumonab mentioned the UNHCR and UNICEF in his Twitter posts, which are responsible for ensuring education for the Rohingya children. The image shows children sitting and looking at the camps in the hills. Combining the ‘verbal signs’ and the ‘visual representation,’ this image may signify that the children are looking at the far future, not knowing what will happen. Though there are schools in the camps for the children, they do not follow any official curriculum (Amnesty, 2021). Abdumonab’s Twitter post tagging UNHCR and UNICEF is a message to them for further advancement of education in Rohingya camps for the children. Abdumonab also shares a ‘video walk’ on Twitter sharing the smiling faces of the children playing in the dusky campground. The video symbolizes hope as they show smiling children with a caption saying “let’s smile with #Rohingya kids” to instill a positive mindset in fighting against the odd. In the day-to-day representation of the children, their innocence has surpassed the reality of miseries in the camp. Such positive representation can be analyzed further by analyzing the representation during a crisis. Both the refugees and the agencies are using hope-based messaging to portray the children in the camps.

Beyond Victimhood: Resilient, Active, and Self-reliant

The social media data and the interviews for this research highlight that the Rohingya refugees and the humanitarian agencies convergently create an agentic portrayal of the refugees. The visual data collected from both the Rohingya refugees' and the humanitarian agencies' Twitter profiles, the images showed perseverance and resilience to survive, unlike the familiar imagery of refugees. Furthermore, the testimonials of the agency spokespersons strongly emphasized the resilience of the Rohingya refugees.

UNHCR Cox's Bazar spokesperson explains that they fled persecution and came to Bangladesh to save their lives,

They were forced to flee. They had their whole lives disrupted. They have lost family members and friends, but at the same time, they continue...they are not only victim, they are not... I think it's really important and we try to do it here is to also highlight the resilience of refugees.—
UNHCR spokesperson

ISCG spokesperson also shares similar sentiments and highlights that the Rohingya refugees went through a traumatic event of atrocities against them, and they started their lives from the scratch. She added,

You know they're resilient. They've been persecuted, but they are resilient, and they are still trying to advocate for their rights. —ISCG spokesperson

Upon emphasizing that the media portrayed the Rohingya refugees as victims showing their vulnerability and need for assistance, I asked her directly what her thoughts on such a narrative are. She exclaimed,

I don't know why you are seeing them as victims, because for me I find them resilient, it's unfortunate that they're persecuted. It's really sad...they want to go back home... When you're highlighting the gaps, you highlight them in a positive way... We don't show any negative imagery, it's exploitative...rather we highlight that despite their miseries, they are actively working for their communities. —ISCG spokesperson

The WFP spokesperson further pointed out the self-reliance of the refugees and how they are actively working in the communities. She shared that most refugees now grow their food by

having small vegetable gardens. She also gave examples of the fires in the camps, where the refugees were the first responders. Even the refugees worked day and night to clean all the debris from the fire accident. She adds,

We communicate in a way that touches you on what they've been through. But more about their resilience and their self-reliance and the things they do to cope...it's never going to be a normal life. I won't even pretend to say that. They're not just sitting around... Many Rohingyas are leaders themselves... They are doing a lot of work within their own communities to volunteer...to help their neighbors, or to even help with humanitarian organizations and our assistance...And that is a very real part of their story. –WFP spokesperson

ISCG spokesperson further adds that it is essential to highlight how the Rohingya refugees are actively participating in the camps.

We have over 3000 volunteers who are now, working in the frontline during this pandemic. It is important that we highlight those. They should be the ones explaining the gaps so you could see that they're resilient and strong...that's how we try to balance the positive and still highlight the needs—ISCG Spokesperson

A UNHCR spokesperson strongly highlighted that it would be impossible to address the Covid- 19 crisis in the camps without refugee participation. She shares,

They're so active in their communities. They're so responsible for what's happening in the camps. I mean, we have networks of thousands of refugee volunteers and really you know if we didn't, we wouldn't be able to operate, especially with COVID-19. I mean refugees are out day and night. They are spreading awareness; community health worker volunteers are spreading information on COVID. They're referring people for testing. I mean, it would be impossible to operate without them, and I think that you know, although they are victims, you know they have been through atrocities...atrocities in in their home country that shouldn't always be the focus. We should also be focusing on their resilience and their capacities. You know, I also feel for donors, we should not always focus on the victim scenario, but also focus on, you know, you were able to give us this much, and this is how the refugees are coping with it.—UNHCR spokesperson

The Rohingya refugees are highly active in their community, and during the pandemic, as the humanitarian agencies movement was limited, the refugees have worked at the forefront. The Rohingya refugees are not only actively working on the ground during the pandemic, but they are also very active and vocal about their rights. ISCG spokesperson exclaims,

They're extremely active and vocal when it comes to their assistance, giving feedback on if the services are good or not...They are the ones who are like going household to household, identifying kids who need you know nutritional needs, they're supporting the disabled in their community, to make sure that they get the services that they need...It's like it's they're taking their own like destiny into their hands...It's not that they're just sitting there as victims...waiting for humanitarian aid, they're very active.—ISCG spokesperson

The social media posts of the refugees and the agencies show that the refugees are resilient. The refugees have shared strong images to show how their resilience surpasses their traumatic experience of suffering. All the refugees selected for this research, whose social media posts have been analyzed, are actively working in the community as volunteers. The social media posts have shown that refugees are actively using social media to advocate for their rights as refugees.

Case Studies on Refugee Advocacy

The Rohingya refugees are working with their community and actively sharing their concerns with the humanitarian agencies for better assistance. One of the Rohingya refugee participants share an image of the food assistance they receive with the caption,

“The #rations provided us not enough for 1 #month.

Per 1 #person,13.5 kg rice, 6 eggs,1-2 biscuits,1 piece garlic, 2-3 pieces tumeric,1 kg oil ,1/2 kg salt ,1/2 kg sugar ,1 kg lentils ,1kg potatoes,1/2 kg dried fish are not enough.

These are the rations of 7 members” –Ro Abdumonab, Twitter

The Rohingya refugee shared in the interview that the mentioned agency took action to respond to his needs after posting on Twitter.

As I have mentioned that social media has helped us to raise our concerns to many people. Like let's say once I posted about the WFP assistance we receive. I mentioned that the foods we receive is not enough for a big family like mine. I saw changes after that. They took initiatives based on my comment on social media. Like this people in my community is facing many problems, so I try to speak for my community.

WFP Cox's Bazar spokesperson also shared that as part of their jobs, they regularly monitor the social media posts of different Rohingya activists. She emphasized that refugees have contacted her directly so many times, and she tried to address their concerns accordingly.

She shared,

There are actually quite a few Rohingya leaders on Twitter and so we do try engaging with them a lot. They're doing a lot of their own advocacy work when it comes to the platform, in general their need, it is a mechanism for them to give us feedback... We definitely try to report that back and address it, we get in touch and make sure those people have an opportunity to report either a complaint or an issue... make sure that we're responding to any concerns we see online and we give people an opportunity to know... we'll make sure it gets addressed or I will. Or my team will report it up to the relevant. —WFP spokesperson

The access to connectivity and the internet is not only giving the refugees a voice for advocacy but also bridging the gap between the agencies and the refugees. The strong representation of the Rohingya refugees is not limited to showing their resilience but goes further by raising their voices. After the massive fire in March 2021, IOM shared on their Twitter that they had distributed 11,995 shelters and relief item kits and assisted 10,441 people. IOM earlier shared on their Twitter post that more than 45,000 people have suffered; this data shows that they have assisted less than one-third of the affected. Ro Alom Shah Ali shared a video of Rohingya refugees sharing their miseries with a caption,

What @IOMBangladesh has given us is not enough to build a shelter with. We #Rohingya fire victims are facing every kind of problem. We can't eat properly. Children are suffering from diarrhoea. We need support to rebuild our lives. —Ro Alom Shah Ali, Twitter

This approach extends beyond resilience; the migrants are projecting their voices. After the fire, both the Rohingya migrants and the agencies were busy building their lives back in the camp. It is yet to be known how this fire happened, and no news media or agencies have speculated about it. One of the Rohingya migrants posted on his Twitter account, He writes,

What is the propaganda behind the arson in Rohingya Camps?

A group of culprits is repeatedly attempting to set fire to different places of Rohingya shelters. All the Rohingya people in Camps are horror-struck. –Ro Alom Shah Ali, Twitter

However, there is no evidence of how this incident happened, and both agencies and migrants have been busy responding to the fire. Such speculation poses a lot of political queries and shows how Rohingya migrants also analyze each event critically to understand what agenda may be behind it.

The social media data and interviews present that the representation of the Rohingya refugees is beyond victimhood; they are represented as resilient, active, and self-reliant. Such representation of refugees is rare in the study of refugee representation. Despite the hardship, the Rohingya refugees show extreme perseverance and endurance, represented by both the agencies and the refugees.

Not a Threat, A Humanitarian

The Rohingya refugee has been considered a threat both for their home country Myanmar, and the host country Bangladesh. In contrast, they have been expressing solidarity with victims of crises, including the recent Myanmar army coup in 2021 through their social media posts. In August 2017, more than 700,000 Rohingya fled Myanmar to seek refuge in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Five years later, more than a million refugees live in the camps. The tension between the host community and refugees is growing as the Rohingya refugees are accused of crimes, drug dealing, and prostitution in the camps (Mallick, 2020). If the situation escalates, the Government of Bangladesh can push the Rohingya refugees to leave Bangladesh (Bari, 2020). In this situation, the Rohingya refugees must have a say in such a negative narrative around them. The media often represented them as violent, criminal, or a national security threat.

When asked one of the refugee's opinions, the Rohingya refugee became emotional and exclaimed,

A lot of times media frame as threat, I want to highlight that the media needs to be ethical...to respect others' identity. They cannot decide who is what, for example, in any event, media should highlight the reality of the event. Media cannot be the judge to say we are a threat...Who is the winner or loser? Their role is to help people know the reality. They are not the judge. Their job is not to judge anyone. Today media is not doing the right thing. They are breaking the code of conduct. They need to control their words when they write that refugees are threat to the host community, they need to think what kind of news it is. This is discriminatory, and they create conflict. Media should stop this nonsense. —Ro 2

There is a misconception that the Rohingya refugees want to stay in Bangladesh, whereas their goal is to return safely to their country, Myanmar.

We are in Bangladesh. But this is not our country. Our country is Myanmar. Getting justice is our right. We need to be able to get back to our country safely because that is our country. This is our right to raise our voice, to speak for ourselves, to let everyone know what happened to us was wrong. Internet is the only way and social media is the only tool to raise our voice.—Ro 4

The Rohingya refugees shared in the interview that they are grateful to the host community for accepting them. They all emphasized that they have no hatred towards the Bangladeshi people, nor do they intend to harm them. The Rohingya refugees want to return to Myanmar and be accepted as citizens of Myanmar.

The social media data and the interviews with the refugees shared a unique trait of identifying them as humanitarian actors. Essentially humanitarianism revolves around benevolence and a sense of empathy to express solidarity with the suffering of others (Chouliaraki, 2013). Two Rohingya refugees identified themselves as 'Rohingya humanitarians' upon asking how they identify themselves. The Myanmar Army brutally tortured the Rohingya refugees and was nationally justified in calling it 'ethnic cleansing' (Kipgen, 2019). The recent (2021) Myanmar military coup has caused unrest throughout the country (BBC, 2022). Myanmar's de facto leader, Aung San Suu Kii, has been jailed, and the Myanmar army is

torturing the Burmese who are trying to protest (BBC, 2022). When the Rohingya population was brutally killed for being ethnic minorities, the Myanmar nationals did not say anything but justified it (Mallick, 2020). However, now that Myanmar nationals are in a similar situation, the Rohingya refugees are expressing their solidarity with the people to call for an end to violence.

Solidarity with the people of Myanmar and an Expression of Empathy

The Rohingya population has been systemically excluded from Myanmar citizenship which caused further communal violence against them (Ahsan, 2018; Beyrer, 2017). The Rohingya refugees were excluded from the 1982 Myanmar citizenship law making them stateless (Mallick, 2020). They were labeled as ‘foreign’ Bengali invaders in Myanmar, whereas they have lived in Myanmar for centuries and were systemically excluded from their rights to citizenship (Ahsan, 2018; Kipgen, 2019). The Myanmar government justified the communal violence against them for national security (Brooten, 2015, 2017). They were seen as a ‘threat’ to Myanmar’s national security (Beyrer, 2017). Moreover, one major justification behind the atrocities against the Rohingya is their association with Islamic terrorist groups. There has been speculation that the Rohingya population has formed units of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) with support from ISIS and other Islamic terrorist groups. Right before the mass attack against them, the Rohingya had been blamed for causing violence against the Rakhine²⁰ Buddhist community, resulting in severe brutality, causing them to escape the country (Mallick, 2020). Theoretically, a community that has been tortured for decades and fallen victim to ethnic cleansing should hate that country’s people. On the contrary, when Myanmar went under a

²⁰ Rakhine is the name of Myanmar state, formerly known as Arakan, where the Rohingyas lived for centuries. The Rakhine community is the Buddhist locals, who are recognized as Myanmar citizens unlike the Rohingyas. The Rakhine people and Rohingyas lived in the same community, and often faced conflicts as the Rakhines are nationally recognized, and have more authority than the Rohingyas (Mallick, 2020).

military coup earlier in 2021, the Rohingya refugees expressed their solidarity with the people of Myanmar. One of the Rohingya refugees shared a video of Aung Sang Syu Kii justifying the act against the Rohingya refugees as ethnic cleansing, and wrote a caption saying,

“When we were being killed, even a Nobel Peace Prize winner denied speaking out. When you are being killed, we opted not to stay silent. That's us, #Rohingya. You know the difference if you know”—Ro Mehrooz, Twitter.

From February 2021 to April 2021, the data shows that the Rohingya refugee participants have mostly shared posts on the Myanmar crisis and supported the people of Myanmar during the crisis. The Rohingya refugees shared their images showing three fingers to express solidarity with the people of Myanmar. Rohingya men, women, and children of different age groups shared their images expressing solidarity on Twitter. Even when the massive fire broke out, people shared their images sitting on the ground, in the debris, raising three fingers to signify they were still with the people of Myanmar in this crisis. One of the refugees shared,

I use my Twitter a lot these days to show solidarity with the people of Myanmar. I make 2/3 Twitter posts on average, every day. —Ro 3.

The data derived from the social media posts and the interviews present some fresh point of view to further look into the traditional representation of Rohingya refugees. Both the agencies and the refugees share a similar argument that being a victim is not dehumanizing, the rationale behind presenting someone as a victim is important. For the Rohingya refugee, their victimhood is their strength to receive justice for the wrongdoings against them. However, their resilience, activism, and self-reliance transcended the victimhood narrative. Also debunking the threat vs victim dualism, they show themselves as humanitarian through their social media activism.

“I try to show my support for people all around the globe who are suffering.”—Ro 3

“I want to advocate for all the human rights issues, but as a Rohingya, the Rohingya people is my priority.”—Ro 4

The interviews with the refugees have shown that the refugees are sharing a sense of solidarity with the people all around the world, which is a humanitarian trait (Choualiaraki, 2013).

This chapter discusses the Rohingya refugee representation by the refugees and the humanitarian agencies. The analysis of the Twitter posts and the interviews of the refugees and the agencies have highlighted that the refugee representation has shifted from the traditional narrative. The dataset presents that the assertive portrayal of the refugees are challenging the dominant victims or threats dichotomy. The refugees are represented as ‘active’, ‘self-reliant’ and ‘resilient’ while showing humanitarian characteristics. In the next chapter, I investigate what influenced a such shift in the refugee narrative.

Chapter Six:

Beyond Victimhood and Threat: Politics of Representation

This chapter continues to discuss the objectives behind shifting the refugee representation from a 'victim' vs. 'threat' dualism to a 'positive' narrative. In the previous chapter, I explored how the Rohingya refugees are represented as 'self-reliant,' 'resilient,' and 'active' by both the humanitarian agencies and the refugees. This chapter critically examines why the humanitarian agencies and the refugees are convergently leaning towards creating such an assertive narrative. The chapter sheds light on how the humanitarian agencies were aware of the criticism against the 'dehumanized' refugee representation and changed their strategies accordingly. It discusses the criticisms against the negative representation of the refugees and why a positive narrative of the stories was much needed for continuous refugee assistance. The refugees and the agencies highlight the importance of funding, but the refugees strongly advocate for justice through their representation as 'Myanmar citizens'. Advocacies around funding or demanding justice emphasize the continuing dependence on western actors, and the chapter argues how the power relations continue. This chapter presents a critical understanding of representation and its politics of it.

The Shifting Narrative of Refugee Representation: Causes, Criticism and Consequences

Although media representation of the refugees remained confined within the ‘victims’ vs ‘threat’ dualism, humanitarian agencies have been significantly criticized when they created such representation as it contradicts their core values. Humanitarian agencies are intrinsically responsible for aiding and protecting vulnerable populations such as refugees or displaced migrants (Betts et al., 2012). The humanitarian agencies not only create agendas for public communication materials, news, interviews, and videos, for the media but also act as a medium to provide information related to refugees (Atkin & Rice, 2013; d’Haenens et al., 2019). Journalists and news channels often depend on humanitarian organizations and their communications teams to get the news from the field (Castells, 2008; Orgad, 2013). The information they provide to the media and public, directly and indirectly, impacts the public views towards the refugees (Chouliaraki, 2012). Therefore, if the ‘protecting’ humanitarian organizations create any messaging where the refugees are ‘stereotyped,’ ‘dehumanized’ as ‘victims’ or ‘threats,’ giving no voice or platform to the refugees to speak for themselves, it brings immense criticism to the humanitarian communications (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017).

The humanitarian agencies have been criticized widely for ‘dehumanized’ representation of the refugees for fundraising activities (Knudsen & Bajde, 2016; Ongenaert & Joye, 2019). From the ‘emaciated children to the ‘helpless women and mothers’ collected criticisms for snatching the dignity of the people. One of the participants of this research, human rights advocacy agency Amnesty International’s South Asia spokesperson shares how such representation of the refugee population makes them seem weaker,

Women and children are used to draw sympathy or to portray the victimization... This is an already Marginalized group with a lot being exploited out of them... This is just adding on to that... exploiting the situation... using them as an object—Amnesty International Spokesperson

The objectification of a vulnerable population like the refugees is highly problematic, especially when it comes from the humanitarian community responsible for protecting the refugee community's rights and dignity. The interviews from the agency spokesperson for this research showed that they are aware of such criticism and mentioned that they are working towards changing such narratives,

“I think traditional humanitarian aid communications in the 90s or the 80s... was always a problematic way of communicating, but I think we are transitioning.” – WFP Cox's Bazar Spokesperson.

“One of the main priorities is to generate empathy amongst people... through communication” – UNHCR Cox's Bazar Spokesperson

“When you're highlighting the gaps, you highlight it in a positive way.” – ISCG spokesperson.

The social media data derived from the Twitter profiles of the agencies also showed that there is limited usage of vulnerable images of the refugees. Given the timeline and quantity of the data for this research, the only time the refugees are shown as vulnerable is during the fire incident, discussed in the previous chapter. However, the criticism of refugee objectification may not be the only driving factor for humanitarian agencies.

In recent years, humanitarian communication has shifted its narratives from the criticized 'negative' representation to a more 'solidarity' based messaging (Chouliraraki, 2013). In this research, the data analysis has shown in the previous chapter how the Rohingya refugees are creating 'unconventional' representation as 'active,' 'resilient,' and 'self-reliant'. Other than the criticism the humanitarian agencies have received in the past years for negative refugee representation, compassion fatigue has hindered the fundraising process. The continuous usage

of ‘sad images’ of the refugees not only ‘dehumanizes’ them refugees but also creates ‘compassion fatigue’ amongst the public or donors and desensitizes them to take any further actions (Chouliaraki, 2013; Höijer, 2004; Tester, 2001). WFP Cox’s Bazar spokesperson shares,

I recognize that there is growing compassion fatigue amongst international audiences, so people who actually make decision about funding...there is definitely compassion fatigue...people are sick of seeing crises in the news...they're exhausted—WFP spokesperson

She highlights that agency may opt for selling ‘victimhood’ to the donors and international audiences to get attention, but people have grown apathetic towards such messaging and seek a change to the situation. She further adds that still agencies may feel this is the right approach to attract donors or international actors, but the donors now want to see changes. She emphasized,

On the other hand, I think as you get into some longer protracted crises, like the Rohingya refugee situation, I think there are agencies who can sort of fall into the trap of highlighting victimhood in order to appeal to donors because they're trying to get over that compassion fatigue...but if you were to pitch a journalist or a donor, they’re going to be a lot less engaged because it'll feel like we've heard this before. What's changed?—WFP spokesperson

Driven by the apathy amongst the donors, international communities, and journalists, humanitarian communication took a significant turn from ‘negative’ imagery to ‘positive’ images of smiling faces to signify the changes to the situation (Chouliaraki, 2013). The positive imagery may provide a ‘dignified’ portrayal of the refugees, but that surely does not guarantee any action from the stakeholders. As much as the continuous usage of negative images of people suffering can cause the public ‘compassion fatigue and apathy’; an empowered, happy, positive image may equally cause ‘compassion fatigue and apathy,’ making the ‘suffering’ of the people look invisible and question the credibility of a crisis (Chouliaraki, 2017, pp. 61-64). In the previous chapter, I analyzed why a sense of suffering is needed to challenge existing injustice

and reclaim one's agency. Chouliaraki argues that neither the negative imageries nor the 'happy' positive images of refugees serve the actual purpose of social justice (2017). Justice is to end someone's suffering (Chouliaraki, 2013). However, it is also evident how the narrative around refugee representation has taken a more positive turn by both the refugees and the humanitarian agencies. As we have discussed in the theoretical framework that representation is driven by the objective of the 'subject' and what motivated one to create such meaning to their identity (Foucault, 1970); this chapter further explores the objectives behind creating a more positive refugee representation by both the refugees and humanitarian agencies. To analyze why a message exists, we need to speculate who the targeted audience is and the objective behind such messaging (Rose, 2005). For this research, I directly asked the refugees and the agencies in the interviews what communication strategies they follow while posting on social media and who are their targeted audience. Analysis of their strategies and the diversity of their targeted audiences provides a clearer understanding of their objectives.

Strategies and Targeted Audiences: Who Wants What and from Whom?

The research employed visual methodology and critical discourse analysis to examine the social media representation of the Rohingya refugees. Representation is not a mere 'resemblance' or 'reflection' of what we see, a process of creating meaning (Foucault, 1983). It is essential to understand how that meaning is created to understand the objectives behind certain ways of creating meaning or delivering a message. As the researcher analyzed both the visual and textual data and the interviews, the interviews from the agencies and refugees helped to understand the four sites of the critical visual methodology discussed in the methodology²¹. This

²¹ For the site of production, I critically analyzed the factors 'who' produced it, 'when' 'for whom', 'why' and 'how' the content is produced, while looking at the images and texts. For the image itself, attention was given to visual meanings, composition, and 'visual effects' as per the methodology discussed by Rose. The circulation of contents

process was a practical approach to understanding and analyzing the objectives behind the refugees' and agencies' social media posts.

Interviews with the refugees and representatives of the agencies revealed that they strategize their messaging and audiences with obvious objectives²². One of the Rohingya refugee participants who received training on journalism and storytelling under the WFP storytellers project shared,

When I post on social media, I ask why, where, what, who, when and how so that the audience can get the accurate information... I can speak up for myself through social media. I have the way... I have the tool. I should use the tools and the way to seek justice. – Ro 4

Most refugees shared that when they post on Twitter, their key objective is to demand justice for themselves. Although not everyone used the word justice explicitly like some participants, the implied message remains the same.

“When I post on social media. I mostly post about justice, human rights... contents to serve justice for my community” – Ro 3

“I share a lot of political opinions on leadership, human rights, and what is important and what is the meaning of these words” – Ro 2

“To fight for the human rights.” – Ro 6

I post for the peace and liberation of my community, so that my community can return to their homeland with full freedom soon, my target audience is the organizations and individuals around the world who are trying to solve our problems– Ro 1

was analyzed questioning, who or what organized the content/image, why, how the sites have changed from one to another as there are multiple sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc. and the preferences are changing with the trends and types of contents, and finally how the contents are being circulated. That led me to analyze the site of audiencing, looking at who are the audiences, for whom the contents are made, how they are being interpreted by the audience, and why. To understand why the audience is looking at a certain content in a certain way, it important to consider the ‘viewing positions,’ the audience’s relation to the text, and how and where the contents are being displayed.

²² The interview questions directly asked the refugees and the agencies what communication strategies they follow while posting on social media and who are their targeted audiences.

The research involved a small group of participants, amongst which most the refugees exclaimed that their primary objective was to seek justice for their community. Two participants mentioned that their key objective is to motivate Rohingya youth, and their target audience on social media is also the Rohingya community. One of the participants of this research identifies himself as a "Rohingya motivational speaker" who gives motivational speeches on YouTube and posts motivational quotes on Twitter to inspire Rohingya youth. He explained that the Rohingya population is becoming hopeless due to the continuous suffering they faced in Myanmar and now as refugees. He shares that the lack of mental health facilities in the camps has influenced him to make motivational videos for his community,

A lot of people... are in distress. They need psychological therapy, but they do not know anything about this... People get depressed here. People lose hope, they become hopeless...I try to motivate my own community to be hopeful. –Ro 5

He also highlights that the distress amongst the youth poses high risk of criminal activities in the camps. To avoid such situations or minimize risks, he tries to be away from any illegal activities and inspires them to do real jobs. Unlike most of the participants, whose targeted audiences are varied from Rohingya refugees, international communities, he shared that his target audience is only the Rohingya refugees in the camps, as he believes that,

Globally, a lot of influencers, motivational speakers... they target their own people, they make their contents in English, they connect with their own people... As refugee, I target my own community, making contents in Rohingya language, for them to understand—Ro 5

Though all the refugee participants shared that they include the Rohingya refugees in their targeted audiences, they may not be their primary target on Twitter. The interviews from the refugees and the agency spokespersons shared that they target a specific group of people on Twitter, compared to Facebook or other social media platforms. The refugees target various

people who may be involved in policy and advocacy for refugee or human rights. Some refugees shared it explicitly, and some referred to a similar group.

On Twitter, my target is the international community... I try to connect with the international community who are influential, who has the responsibility, who has the power to change... Most of these people working for the human rights are on Twitter, so I try to connect with them, and I target them for my Twitter posts. —Ro 8

“My target audience is the organizations and individuals around the world who are trying to solve our problems.”—Ro 1

“On Twitter... there are a lot of celebrities, journalists, human rights activist, humanitarian workers... On Twitter I try to share my stories with them”—Ro 7

They all shared that they primarily use Facebook or other social media platforms to communicate with their family members who were displaced and migrated globally. However, on Twitter, they specifically target the people who work for human rights advocacy. As explained in the previous chapter, they share their stories of how they have been excluded from their citizenship rights, which led to further torture against them as minorities. They know how they suffer as refugees in a developing country with limited resources. Through their suffering, they want policymakers and human rights advocates to act. They also engage with the journalists to share the news from the ground so that the refugee voices can be highlighted.

The humanitarian agencies also target the same group of people on Twitter besides the donors and policymakers. All the agency participants (except IOM, who I did not interview) mentioned that they target journalists and policymakers to share what they are doing on the ground to support the refugees in crisis. Like the Rohingya refugees, the agencies also have different target groups on Twitter than Facebook. The agencies are also targeting the community on Twitter who are influential in the refugee response,

“On Twitter we have a more international audience... And it's mainly donors and journalists... and other experts in the field of humanitarian and emergency work.” —ISCG Spokesperson

“Twitter is obviously overwhelmingly used by media... used by our donors, civil society... our stakeholders”—WFP Spokesperson

“We have got some Bangladeshi following... but we also have a lot of Rohingya refugees following us on Twitter... Also, a lot of donors...and a lot of media... so the audiences are quite different” – UNHCR Spokesperson

Both UNHCR and ISCG spokesperson mentioned that they use Facebook for the Bangladeshi community and Bangladesh government officials, as Facebook is the most popular social media platform in Bangladesh.

Strategized messages targeting the Bangladeshi community on social media is a great tool to minimize the risks of tension between the host-refugee community. The ‘us’ vs ‘them’ mentality leads to considering the refugees as a ‘threat’ to the local economy, security, and overall social development (d’Haenens et al., 2019). The host community often perceives the migrants as “criminals, cunning, immoral invaders” compared to lawful, hardworking, and innocent hosts” (Orgad, 2012). The host community of Cox’s Bazar was the first humanitarian responder when the influx of refugees occurred in 2017 (Lewis, 2019). However, the tension is growing as the host community observes the international assistance the refugees are receiving (Bari, 2020). The host community in Cox’s Bazar is one of the poorest communities in Bangladesh. There is growing resentment against the refugees, considering that the aid agencies support a refugee population five times larger than the host community. The tension was hiked further by the pandemic, as most of the host community struggled to get work during the lockdown and could not cope with the rising price of food and other supplies (TheNewHumanitarian, 2020). To avoid conflict, the humanitarian agencies are trying to accommodate the host community with limited funding from the refugee assistance pool. The

social media data showed that ISCG heavily highlights what they do for the host community.

The ISCG spokesperson shares that the communication strategy includes,

Rais[ing] awareness of the ongoing humanitarian needs of the Rohingya refugees as well as the host population who've been generously hosting them. —ISCG spokesperson

She shared that the Inter-Sector Coordination Group is not an agency but a coordination group highlighting what all the NGOs are doing for the Rohingya refugee response. On behalf of the agencies working with the host community development, ISCG highlights how the humanitarian agencies are also assisting the host community. Both social media data and the interviews showed that the humanitarian agencies share their development programs for the host community. The agencies are widely engaging the host community in training, skill-building, and income-generating activities, which circles back to the refugee response. ISCG highlighted in several Twitter posts that the host community is producing masks for refugees and locals, which have created a huge income opportunity for the local women in Cox's Bazar. The ISCG spokesperson responded shared that the Rohingya women made around 300,000 masks after the covid hit to highlight their active role in the community. She further added,

let's say for food, the host community people are helping...To support the food system and then the refugees are getting the food [produced by the host community] and it's also helping the local community. —ISCG spokesperson

WFP spokesperson shared that the food assistance provided to refugees is sourced from the local community. The organization has been training the local women to participate in income generating activities through growing fresh produces, and dry fishes. She adds that they try,

to make sure that the host government, the host nation is also benefiting...We're not messing with the local market, instead it's an investment in the local market...local farmers. Their fresh foods...fresh fruits and vegetables are sold at these [WFP food assistance] outlets...so, you have this very this circular effect that is sort of positive benefits for everyone involved...That is not a so-called drain on the system.

The agencies are trying to create a shared sense of empathy amongst the host community to avoid further tension between the host community and refugees. UNHCR spokesperson shares,

“Putting out accurate information, generating empathy with different communities is really at the heart of our strategy”—UNHCR spokesperson

The UNHCR highlights that through their communication materials, they try to highlight that the Rohingya refugees are as helpless as the Bangladeshi people in 1971. Bangladesh got independence, and the “Bangladeshi” (formerly considered Pakistani) people got recognized as a new nation in 1971. Many Bangladeshis were displaced during the liberation war and took refuge in India. Many on social media juxtaposed images of the Bangladeshi refugees and the Rohingya refugees to evoke shared empathy (Lewis, 2019). UNHCR spokesperson also highlights that and shares that they try to engage Bangladeshi people to understand what the Rohingya refugees are going through now as displaced migrants. To evoke a sense of empathy and to avoid any host community-refugee conflict, they share a lot of posts targeting the Bangladeshi audiences on social media. UNHCR shared a post for Bangladesh’s 49th Independence Day, featuring one of the most popular Bangladeshi singers on their Twitter on March 22, 2021,

Shaheen Samad, a Bangladeshi cultural activist shares her experience of working at the refugee camps in India in 1971. Music has always been an effective medium to regain self-esteem and restore hope. #BangladeshIndependence –UNHCR, Twitter

The agencies have included several Twitter posts conveying their gratitude towards the host community. The ISCG spokesperson also shared that they highlight what all the UN agencies and NGOs are doing for the host community to avoid tensions with that community.

Though the refugees have not mentioned that they target the Bangladeshi audience while posting on Twitter, a few of their posts have signified evidence of appreciation towards the host

community. The refugee participants for this research shared posts to commemorate the Victory Day of Bangladesh on 16th December²³. Through their post, they all have formed great respect to the Bangladeshi people for the 49th year of victory. The collected data has shown only this evidence where the refugees have posted on Twitter targeting the Bangladeshi community. None of the participants mentioned anything about Bangladesh or the host community in their interviews, except one who shared,

I don't like to post any [thing] related to [or] against Bangladesh and against the people. I always write for just our country...you know the [military] commit [ed] crimes on us...so we want justice –Ro 6

The social media data and the interviews from the refugees show that their targeted audience may not be the Bangladeshi people. However, they have not shared anything on Twitter that may create conflict between the host community and the refugees.

Both the refugees and the agencies have shared that they target different groups of people on Twitter who influence the Rohingya crisis. However, the primary target for the agencies remains the governments and the donors as they require continuous funding to support the refugees. The refugees' targeted audience group was comparatively vague as they mentioned several stakeholders. They merely said the word 'donor' but indicated 'whoever has any influence on their situation' to bring them justice. This further helps us to understand and speculate what advocacy is to the refugees and the humanitarian agencies.

²³ For this research, I collected the data from September 2020 to April 2021. The Victory Day posts on the refugee Twitter accounts were on 16th December 2020.

Advocacy for what? Social Justice vs Fundraising

“If you keep them with basic needs, they will forget about the freedom they lost.”—Ro Sawyedollah, Twitter

One of the Rohingya youth and participants of this research shared a thought-provoking image of an imprisoned person trying to reach a bread, with the text above, on his Twitter. The Rohingya refugee participants for this research highlighted multiple times that they share on Twitter or other social media platforms how they suffered in Myanmar and asked for justice. They share images of their precarious living condition in the makeshift camps of Cox’s Bazar, but they highlight that it is because they live here as refugees. The humanitarian agencies have moved from the sad, miserable imagery of the refugees and are turning towards solidarity-based messages to evoke empathy than sympathy (Chouliaraki, 2017). The UNHCR spokesperson repeatedly highlighted that the organization is trying to evoke empathy, not sympathy. However, their targeted audience is the donors, civil society, and Bangladeshi host community; they have not mentioned the Myanmar government as their target audience. One of the Rohingya refugees, a motivational speaker on social media, made an exciting video for the Rohingya refugees to show how empathy can help the Rohingya refugees to go back to their country. He distinguishes between sympathy and empathy through his video on social media,

I have made a video on sympathy and empathy...I tried to explain it through a story, a story of a father and the son where I explained that when the father and the son is fighting, some relatives will come and tell something to the father that your son is not good, or maybe to the son that your father is not right, but they will not solve the problem. This is sympathy. Sympathy is showing someone that we care but not solving the problem. In my story, I tried to use Myanmar as the father and the son is the Rohingya people. Instead of sympathy, we need empathy. Right now, we need people to solve our problem. We need our father, the country, to accept us...there should be empathy, not sympathy. We do not need sympathy from anyone for our current situation, we need empathy where Myanmar people or the Myanmar Government will accept us, and we will peacefully be recognized. –Ro 5

The Rohingya motivational speaker explains eloquently what sympathy is and what empathy is for them, and why victimhood is not the problem but the purpose of such narrative and the action it generates. His storytelling provides a fine example of what empathy is about: getting justice, not just charity or funding, as Chouliaraki (2017) states.

The agencies participating in the research shared that they are highlighting the resilience of the refugees to show that they are not just living on charity. However, they also repeatedly emphasized that the refugees require continuous funding. The Twitter posts and the interviews of the refugees indicate that their primary objective is to get justice for them, not just funding. They are doing it by strongly identifying themselves as Rohingya, Myanmar nationals, to counter accusations that they are Bangladeshi.

We have been kicked out from Myanmar and now we are in Bangladesh. But then this is not our country. Our country is Myanmar... Getting justice is our right. We need to be able to get back to our country safely... that is our country. It is our right to get justice for what happened in Myanmar... People need to know what happened to us, how they tortured us. This is our right to raise our voice, to speak for ourselves, to let everyone know what happened to us was wrong—
Ro 4

Most refugees shared that they identify as Rohingya, Myanmar nationals first and then further.

I identify myself as a Rohingya and a victim—Ro2

You will see that most of the Rohingya people on social media start their ID with Ro, which is short for Rohingya...I identify myself as a Rohingya youth, working for the Rohingya people—
Ro 3

I consider myself as a human being...a proud Rohingya born in a Rohingya family... Rohingya people are denied their rights in Myanmar for years... It is my right to speak up for the Rohingya people” – Ro 6

Refugees often identify themselves as victims, and in the previous chapter, I discussed how victimhood could be a tool for advocacy. The refugee participants for this research shared visual and textual data to reveal that they share the stories of their suffering and their vulnerability to justify what Myanmar did to them was wrong because they also deserve to be recognized as

Myanmar citizens. Twitter posts of the refugee participants shared on the January 4th, 2021, Independence Day of Myanmar highlight,

Happy Independence Day of Myanmar.

Rohingya people belong to the independence of Myanmar. a day for Rohingya to be celebrated But unfortunately, they were excluded.

#ItsFourYears –Ro Sawyedollah, Twitter

For me, being repatriated is like passing the exam of my life. Everyone in this world has their own goal, and that is repatriation for the Rohingya people— Ro Sawyedollah, the founder of @NetworkRsn told, @The_NewArab

Until the world ends up shattering, long live Myanmar!

We love our land because this is our real inheritance –Ro Mehrooz, Twitter

The existing literature on refugee representation has shown that refugees often get disturbed by the victimhood narrative around them. The refugees identify themselves as human, studying, working, and engaging in several professions (d’Haenens et al, 2019; Yeung and Lennette, 2018). It was also about being recognized as humans for the Rohingya refugees living in European countries (Ma. Y et el, 2018). The data set for this research argues that the Rohingya refugees want to be recognized as Myanmar citizens and return to their country. The agencies have also highlighted that they know this notion among the refugees.

Most of the refugees when we talk to them, they tell us that they want to go back to Myanmar, but that they only...want to do that when they have... a clear pathway to citizenship. When they have guarantees that they're able to have freedom of movement, access to basic human rights... this is something that we you know we try to, you know, amplify that message that refugees do want to go back—UNHCR Spokesperson

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees, one of the key agencies for the Rohingya refugee response, has shared that they are working towards the safe repatriation of the refugees. They have been negotiating with different actors with the help of the Bangladesh

government and other agencies, but the unrest in Myanmar jeopardized the progress²⁴. The UNHCR spokesperson shares,

They [the refugees] came in 2017, hoping they would be able to repatriate more quickly voluntarily. But obviously now the situation in Myanmar has become very complicated and... I mean we have we have yeah operations going on in Rakhine State with UNDP with the Government of Myanmar... But then there's still a lot of work that needs to be done for refugees to be able to return and safely and voluntarily. –UNHCR spokesperson

She highlighted growing resentment and hopelessness amongst the refugees, and some crimes have been evident in the camps. So, the agencies are also working towards the safe repatriation of the refugees,

Resettlement is a possible solution for particular people with specific needs and at the moment it's not happening in Bangladesh, but we're still discussing with the government whether that might be possible... or other pathways to solutions. –UNHCR spokesperson

The interviews of the agencies highlight that they are working towards repatriation, the justice refugees want, but they emphasize meanwhile the refugee population need to survive. Therefore, they advocate for continuous support from the donors highlighting the resilience of the refugees.

The Ongoing Disparity and Power Imbalance

The Twitter posts and interviews of the refugees and the agencies are primarily targeted toward the donor governments and civil society in the western hemisphere. It is more evident for the agencies as the humanitarian organizations depend on bilateral funding from different donor countries. They have explicitly highlighted that they include the donors in their interviews in

²⁴ The data collection process, both the Twitter posts and the interviews, included the timeline of military coup in Myanmar. For more information, please read, <https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/southeast-asia/what-happening-myanmar-aung-san-su-kyi-b1968328.html> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/asia-and-the-pacific/south-east-asia-and-the-pacific/myanmar/report-myanmar/>

messaging. Additionally, a significant portion of the randomly selected Twitter posts from the UNHCR and the ISCG accounts were images of donors visiting the camps. From January to April 2021, amongst forty-three randomly selected Twitter posts of the UNHCR, six were related to donor visits, with one celebrity appeal from Angelina Jolie in February 2021. The images of ‘white’ representatives roaming in the ‘not so livable’ place is the ultimate imagery of white saviors. The donor images included the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in Australia, the Department for International Development (DFID), and the governments of the USA, Japan and Sweden. ISCG, as a coordination body, shares overall responses from all the agencies working in the camps. They have also shared some of the UNHCR’s donor visit images and a few from other agencies, including Korea, DFAT, DFID, and The European Commission, through its Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO). When asked about the donor visibility, and the ISCG spokesperson acknowledged an emphasis on “adding donor visibility to our content”:

I think donors themselves want to show their taxpayers their constituents, how their money is being used, how their tax dollars are being used to benefit people because, again, trying to combat that perception that it's [humanitarian aid] just a drain... It's a money pit, and so donors themselves very much used Twitter to communicate that, and so we try to make sure we recognize the donor support that has made our program successful or made it possible up until this point. And they're [the donors] much more likely to share the content. —ISCG spokesperson

Her explanation explained why agencies include donor visibility and convey gratitude toward the donors. Her explanation indicated a sense of accountability amongst the donor and the humanitarians. Therefore, they try to show images of donors visiting the campsites for transparency.

One of the posts from UNHCR included Angelina Jolie’s appeal. Celebrity appeals, especially those from Angelina Jolie, have been criticized for their narcissistic nature. The humanitarian agencies try to share an ‘egoistic,’ ‘narcissistic’ storyline of how the celebrities

cannot sleep at night thinking about the people suffering in the camps (Chouliaraki, 2017).

Angelina Jolie's story, posted on February 7, 2021, by UNHCR, was no different: she reflected on how devoted she is to refugee women and girls in Cox's Bazar. The celebrity appeals are not problematic because they ask people to donate but because the concept of mere donation from the west is an 'irony' to the misery of the refugees, as outlined by Chouliaraki (2017). As the literature review explains, charity creates an invisible power imbalance between the sufferer and the donating 'spectators'. Rather than this act of charity, an agonistic approach to the problem and bringing justice to the sufferers would be an actual action (Smith and Yanacopulos, 2017).

The refugees also shared interesting evidence where they signified that they depend on the western powers. Though they have not tagged any donors or government officials from any country, their interviews signified that they target diverse international actors who may influence policymaking and social justice. One significant element that was evident, was the refugees celebrating the victory of the Democrats in the 2020 USA election. It was interesting to see how refugees were excited by the event. Many congratulated the 46th USA president Joe Biden and the Vice-president Kamala Harris.

Congratulations President @JoeBiden and Vice President @KamalaHarris! So excited for the next 4 years. #Inauguration2021–Ro Sawyedollah, Twitter
Congratulations President @JoeBiden
A Rohingya youth wishes you all the best of luck ahead #bidenharris2020” – Ro Mehrooz, Twitter²⁵

One of the refugees shared an image of posters of Kamala Harris in the Rohingya camps of Kutupalong, Cox's Bazar. The refugees did not directly indicate why they were excited about the USA election in their Twitter post. When asked, they avoided the question during the

²⁵ Ro Mehrooz shared several posts related to the USA election, while 5 posts appeared from the randomly selected data.

interview. One participant said he liked the Biden and Harris duo and supported them. However, some of their Twitter posts and USA's role in international relations, provide some indications²⁶.

Biden orders sanctions against #Myanmar after military coup
#WhatsHappeningInMyanmar
#Myanmarcoup—Ro Sawyedollah, Twitter

The Biden Administration has taken a strong initial response to the military coup against the democratically elected government of Burma. Now we must take further action to protect the hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people and preserve Burma's fragile democratic transition. —Ro Yassin Abdumonab, Twitter

Us President Joe Biden Stands with Myanmar Democracy.
#WhatsHappeningInMyanmar @nslwin @POTUS @YasminJullah @waiwainu—Ro Mehrooz, Twitter

The USA has taken significant stands against Myanmar during the military coup and issued several sanctions against the leaders of the coup²⁷. However, the refugees celebrating the Democratic party's win may have other indications due to the policies, structures, and core values Democrats believe in. Establishing democracy and protecting civil rights are some of the core values of the Democrats, and the Rohingya refugee's support for the Democratic Party in the USA shows that they hope to see changes in Myanmar politics. However, the involvement of the USA in the Myanmar conflict extends beyond the establishment of democracy. The Rohingya refugees fled from the Rakhine area, which is a developing hub for businesses from China (Mallick, 2020). The local politicians have approved several projects by India and China in Rakhine (Miklian, 2019). The Rakhine land from where the Rohingya refugees were displaced is being prepared for construction plants invested by China. There are debates that China's

²⁶ For privacy and security purposes, the names are not mentioned, however their posts are public on Twitter.

²⁷ Please read,

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-56015749>

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/17/politics/us-myanmar-designations/index.html>

political and economic interests led to the displacement of the Rohingyas from the Rakhine area (Mallick, 2020). The cold conflict between two rising powers, the USA and China, is not unknown (Callahan, 2018). The analyses led to an understanding that the Rohingya refugees' interest in the US election and their excitement towards the winning of the Democratic Party is not random but has an ulterior motive. This research had limited scope to do so, but it has identified that the problem of depending on western 'saviors' is still evident amongst the refugees.

This chapter explains why the Rohingya refugee representation has shifted from the 'victims' vs. 'threat' dualism. The previous chapter highlighted how the Rohingya refugees challenge the predominant refugee narrative. The agencies and the refugees have shown that the Rohingya refugees are active, resilient, and self-reliant. Through critical discourse analysis, this chapter further explored why such a shift may have occurred. This chapter has argued that refugee self-representation is influenced by advocacy for social justice. However, the agencies construe the refugee representation keeping the donors in mind for fundraising. This chapter highlights why refugee representation cannot come to its most accurate understanding without refugee voices from the ground. While the agency signified that they had been improving the lives of the Rohingya people making the Rohingya migrants the object, Rohingya migrants have projected their voice to become the subject. The analysis also helps us to look beyond the 'victims' and understand that despite all the sufferings, the Rohingya migrants represent them as resilient, raising their voices for their rights. The analysis of the contents under the same category has signified that representation and self-representation can be different, having similar elements. It is possible to create a different meaning through analogous components. In the concluding chapter, I argue that access to connectivity is vital for refugee representation.

Chapter Seven:

Reflection, Recommendation, and Concluding Remarks

I'm aware that a lot of times we are framed as threat or victim. I am a refugee and I don't feel bad about that. You know why? Because we are surviving here... There is so much going on in our lives in the camps, we are suffering every day... I try to be on the right side through social media through my posts... I try to show people the reality of our lives in the camps. –Ro 3

This research explores how Rohingya refugees are represented on social media. Refugees have been stuck in the limbo of the victims vs. threat narrative. Such representation is heavily created by political groups, media, and humanitarian agencies for political purposes (d'Haenens et al., 2019; Yeung & Lennette, 2018). Regarding self-representation, the refugees wanted to be recognized and identified and have a 'dignified' portrayal (d'Haenens et al., 2019; Ma. Y et al., 2018). This research analyzed how the Rohingya refugees represent themselves on Twitter compared to the humanitarian agencies. This thesis is a significant addition to the literature as such comparative analysis for refugee representation has not been conducted for the Rohingya refugees. The data analysis of this thesis shares a phenomenon of the refugee representation process where the refugees and the humanitarian agencies are more collaborative than contrasting. Twitter posts and interviews of the Rohingya refugees and the humanitarian agencies have shown that the Rohingya refugees create a more robust representation contrary to the dominant 'dehumanized' refugee representation. Both the refugees and the humanitarian agencies convergently share an agentic portrayal of the refugees, unlike the dominant victim vs. threats dichotomy. The empirical data analysis has shown that the Rohingya refugees are represented as resilient, active, and self-reliant by both the agencies and the refugee participants. This chapter further discusses the contribution of this research, its limitations, the future scope of research, recurring issues to address in the field, and policy recommendations.

The thesis provides a critical understanding of victimhood and shares how the refugees and humanitarian agencies have moved away from a derogatory refugee narrative to an agentic one. The data analysis has shared that victimhood may not mean a lack of agency if it leads to advocacy and justice, including the refugee voices, and positions them in a dignified manner (Andreasen & Cecchini, 2016). Moreover, the social media data and the interviews have presented a powerful portrayal of the refugees. The humanitarian agencies and the refugees have presented refugees as active agents in their communities, highlighting their resilience and self-reliance. This phenomenon of refugee representation is novel in the study of comparative analysis of refugee representation. However, the thesis also presented the politics of such a shift in the narrative and why this shift has occurred in the humanitarian discourse.

This research highlights the convergence of refugee representation between refugees and humanitarian agencies. However, in the theoretical framework, I discuss that representation is a political phenomenon driven by power relations. In the analysis, I argue that this convergence of agentic portrayal was motivated by the existing humanitarian discourse. Humanitarian agencies needed to develop communication strategies for their audiences to act (Chouliaraki, 2013). Usage of poignant images of refugees to evoke sympathy started to induce apathy and compassion fatigue among the audiences (Chouliaraki, 2013). The interviews of the humanitarian experts show that they were aware of the criticism and needed to change their strategy to communicate with their audiences. On the other hand, I investigate how the refugees reflect the humanitarian entities for self-representation. I critically analyzed such an approach to self-representation and related it to Foucault's argument of how one can become an object of knowledge by imitating what one knows (Foucault, 1982). I argued in the analysis that the refugees reflect the existing knowledge of humanitarian discourse. This critical understanding

presents a new lens to evaluate the self-representation of refugees. This research addresses the criticality of refugee representation and opens the further scope of research in the media, migration, and humanitarianism literature.

Rohingya Refugee Identity and Their Future

The construction of refugee identity has always been motivated by political intentions. In the literature review, I discussed how the concepts of ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ have excluded the refugees and created a sense of otherness (d’Haenens et al., 2019; Orgad, 2012). The notion of seeing ‘others’ as a threat to national interests creates a negative framing of the refugees (Hogg, 2016; Jacobs et al., 2017). On the other hand, the humanitarian discourse has portrayed the refugees as the ‘vulnerable’ others to validate the need for protection (Malkki, 1996; Rajaram, 2002). The Rohingya refugee representation in the existing literature was no different from the ‘victims’ vs. ‘threat’ dualism (Chakraborty, 2018; Mohanty, 2020). They were seen as a national threat to Myanmar due to not being recognized as Myanmar citizens (Mallick, 2020). To escape the atrocity when the Rohingya population escaped to Malaysia, Thailand, India, and Bangladesh, at different times, they were equally viewed as a threat by the receiving countries (Chakraborty, 2018; Ehmer & Kothari, 2001; Mohanty, 2020). The humanitarian responses included gruesome images and narratives of the refugees to provoke immediate reactions from the media and donors (Brooten et al., 2015). The passive representation of the Rohingya refugees by different actors posed problems for recognition. This thesis has highlighted how the refugees and the humanitarian agencies are trying to mediate conflict. Besides, the thesis challenges the dehumanized humanitarian narrative of the victimhood of the refugees to evoke sympathy.

Exclusion of identity and not having a scope of self-representation push the Rohingya refugees to future crises. The 1948 citizenship acts by Myanmar included the Rohingya refugees

as ethnic minorities in Myanmar and later excluded them from the 1982 citizenship act, making them stateless in their own country (Mallick, 2020). The Rohingya refugees are not recognized as citizens of Myanmar constitutionally. However, for the repatriation of the refugees, the refugees need to have a dignified identification and be recognized as Myanmar citizens (Ansar, 2020; Roy, 2020). If the Rohingya refugees go back to Myanmar without any citizenship, they will continue to be a displaced population and stay in Myanmar as internally displaced (Mallick, 2020). The analysis of this research emphasized that the refugees want to be repatriated as citizens of Myanmar. However, negotiations between Myanmar and Bangladesh have not produced any indication that the Rohingyas will be accepted as ‘real Myanmar citizens’ under the 1982 citizenship law (Kipgen, 2019). The Myanmar military coup in early 2021 further hampered the negotiation process, as Myanmar’s national security continues to be disordered (BBC, 2022). The analysis of this research presents that the repatriation of Rohingya refugees and their recognition is delayed due to the unrest in Myanmar. However, the Rohingya refugees must be safely and quickly repatriated to avoid conflict within Bangladesh.

The uncertainty towards repatriation puts the Rohingya refugees in a critical situation in Bangladesh. The government of Bangladesh has provided shelter and protection to more than a million Rohingyas since 2017 on humanitarian grounds despite their declaration in 2015 that they will not allow any Rohingyas (Lewis, 2019). Following the 1951 Refugee Convention, Bangladesh does not recognize the Rohingyas as refugees, and refuses to allow them to stay in Bangladesh (Mallick, 2020). Five years on, the tension between the host community and the Rohingya refugees is growing as the Rohingya refugees are accused of being involved in criminal activities, such as drug dealing and prostitution (Mallick, 2020). The tension can further challenge the protection of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh (Bari, 2020). As highlighted in

the analysis of this thesis, the Rohingya refugees can try to ameliorate the hatred towards them through a positive self-representation.

Access to the internet and digital media usage has been an excellent tool for self-representations amongst refugees. For the last few decades, social media has been used as a platform to advocate for human rights (Dekker et al., 2018). Social media access has helped refugees to participate in a dialogue to alter their representation (Kutscher & Krebs, 2016). The refugees are creating a dignified portrayal of themselves on social media and advocating for their rights. For the Rohingya refugees, social media usage has helped them identify themselves and share their opinions globally (Nachrin, 2020). For the refugees, access to the internet seems as essential as food, as they can express themselves through social media presence (Kutscher & Krebs, 2016). This thesis has highlighted how access to connectivity has made this study on refugee self-representation possible.

Access to the Internet for the Refugees

Humanitarian agencies have emphasized the importance of the internet for refugees as a human rights concern. The UNHCR claimed in their “social innovation” report published in 2016 that access to mobile phones and internet connection is as important as basic needs — food, water, and shelter—to the refugees.

“I do not care that much if I don’t eat for a day... but I can’t afford to stay without Internet for a day” (UNHCR, 2016)

The report highlighted that internet connectivity is essential for the displaced community to connect with their loved ones and for the humanitarian agencies for smooth operation. The result was drawn from research conducted in forty-four countries across four continents²⁸. The

²⁸ The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi mentioned,

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, declared in a collaborative prepared by UN agencies in 2018, “Fast-forward progress: Leveraging tech to achieve the global goals” that by the sustainable development goal, by 2030, all refugees and internally displaced population will have access to the internet.

In the context of Rohingya refugees amidst a pandemic, access to the internet was vital for information sharing. As highlighted in the introduction, all access to connectivity was banned in the camps. The refugees in an isolated camp area were further isolated as the humanitarian agencies had limited mobility due to the pandemic lockdown. The Rohingya refugee participants for this research shared that they were concerned about the Covid 19 infections in the camps as they did not have any information about it. The refugees could only rely on the outside world for information, as they have limited mobility as refugees in Cox’s Bazar and are not allowed to go outside the camp areas.

We depend on the outside world to survive our lives. We have to communicate with different organizations, individuals and different countries so that we can solve our internal and national problems. In addition, we need to rely on the Internet for our daily needs. Because we are refugees and due to pandemic, our communication is completely cut off. So the internet is very necessary for us.” –Ro 1

UNHCR spokesperson in Cox’s Bazar shared that the Rohingya refugees could not receive accurate information about Covid 19 at the beginning of the breakout²⁹ and emphasized

“In the world we live in today, internet connectivity and smart phones can become a lifeline for refugees, providing an essential means for them to give and receive vital information, communicate with separated family members, gain access to essential services, and reconnect to the local, national and global communities around them... Most importantly, connectivity can help broaden the opportunities for refugees to improve their own lives and pursue a vision of a future that would otherwise be denied to them.” (UNHCR, 2016)

²⁹ As written in the Introduction, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Cox's Bazar spokesperson Louise Donovan shared,

When the Internet was suspended, UNHCR was advocating vocally with the government that it should be reinstated so that, especially during COVID-19, refugees could be in contact with their families...but also that they could use social media and the Internet as a mean of spreading accurate information... On COVID-19 there were a lot of rumors, misinformation, and fear in the camps, not only in Bangladesh but globally, and so we needed to share accurate information with the refugees.

how different agencies collaboratively advocated for access to the Internet in the camps. She highlighted that one of the critical concerns of UNHCR in Cox's Bazar is providing adequate internet access for the Rohingya refugees. She shares,

We've really been trying to work on this within UNHCR... to provide a platform to refugees themselves so that their voices are heard...not UNHCR in the place of refugees or any other agency in the place and sharing a message on behalf of a refugee but refugees identifying their own key message is the things that are most important to them –UNHCR Spokesperson

The Rohingya refugee participants in this research regularly highlighted how important the internet is for them.

“I always use the Internet. Whenever I can. During the day. Wherever I stay. I'm in a place where we rely on the Internet.” –Ro 2

The Rohingya refugees use the internet and social media to advocate for their rights. As highlighted in the findings, the Rohingya refugees are trying to mediate the negative framings around them, challenging the traditional victims vs. threats dichotomy.

Internet access is very important for displaced migrants so they can know various kinds of news about them...Displaced people need internet in many more cases” –Ro 3

I'm talking to you right now through Internet, right? So you can see how important it is for us to be able to communicate with people outside of the camps. This is very important for communication, but also to receive information.” –Ro 5

I emphasized in this thesis that the study of Rohingya refugee self-representation on social media has been only possible because the Rohingya refugees had access to the internet.

Access to the Internet and Digital Advocacy of the Rohingya Refugees

The thesis has highlighted in the findings and analysis how the Rohingya refugees use social media to advocate for their rights. The humanitarian agencies have been highlighting and

advocating for refugees to have access to the internet for better policymaking³⁰. The agencies designed innovative projects to maximize social media literacy among the refugees. United Nations World Food Programme has started a project where refugees become capable of sharing stories of their communities. Storytellers is a “citizen journalism project” under the WFP innovation, which “gives young refugees the knowledge and tools that they need to share their stories” (WFP website). It all started from a message sent to WFP social media page by a beneficiary (assistance receiver) who shared their concerns. The idea evolved into a project as WFP believed; the young generation of ‘storytellers’ will “have a key role in advocating and achieving Zero Hunger.” The project has trained 140 refugees from Syria, Jordan, Chad, and Uganda and recently conducted training in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh. World Food Programme has a specific tab, “storytellers,” for the trained refugees to share their insights on the WFP website. Besides the WFP Cox’s Bazar Spokesperson, I interviewed the “WFP storytellers” project manager based in Rome. He highlighted that this project includes direct voices of the refugees advocating for their rights.

We always try to bring the storytellers to high-level events... Some of our storytellers spoke about the hunger and conflict relationship at the World Economic Forum and we took some strong, powerful stories around climate change around refugee crisis... One of the refugees spoke at the recent [2021] United Nations General Assembly—WFP storytellers project manager

He further emphasized that this project has been so effective that now they are training NGOs to replicate such projects for the refugees. He shared that through such projects, humanitarian agencies and NGOs can break the stereotype of ‘nicely suited, white people in a policy meeting’ and include refugee voices. One of the Rohingya refugee participants of this

³⁰ In the Year in review 2016, among many other initiatives for future consideration, UNHCR includes “refugee engagement” where they assert, “Refugees are better at knowing what works for them and what doesn’t. They are great innovators and full of their own ideas. Ask refugees for their feedback throughout the process – but explore opportunities to empower them as innovators themselves.” (UNHCR, 2016)

thesis, Sawyeddollah, is a ‘storyteller’ who received training on social media literacy and storytelling for advocacy. The refugees also received tools like digital cameras and smartphones to tell the stories of the Rohingya refugees in the camps. Sawyedollah shared in the interview for this thesis that the Rohingya refugees actively advocate for their rights to justice against the brutality they faced in Myanmar.

Rohingya people filed a case in ICJ, International Court of Justice. They are prosecuting the case...so consulting the Rohingyas is very important because the cases [are] for the Rohingyas... but the Rohingyas are not able to go to the ICJ, the only way is the Internet... people can go to the ICJ and Raise their voices...Through the Internet. Rohingya people from the camps can talk to the prosecutor of the ICJ, the lawyers of the ICJ, and they can have their own voices there. Internet is definitely important for the everyday use, but also to raise our voices to share information and to fight for our rights. –Sawyedollah ³¹

This research highlighted the problem of refugee representation when refugee voices are omitted from the narrative. In the thesis analysis, I have highlighted how the Rohingya refugees actively participate in the conversation through social media. The empirical data analysis in this thesis has shown that the Rohingya refugees are communicating their needs to the humanitarian agencies, and the humanitarian agencies are positively responding to those demands. Also, access to the internet is vital for creating a sense of identity and recognition so refugees can share their narratives. Therefore, in this thesis, as a policy recommendation, I emphasize access to the internet for the Rohingya refugees, which is still a concern for the Rohingya refugees.

The Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar still lack adequate access to connectivity in the camps. As described earlier in the introduction and chapter five, the Rohingya refugees live in a hilly area of Cox’s Bazar, isolated from the locality. Mobile networks are rarely available in the camp areas, as they used to be reserved forests. The government-owned telecommunication

³¹ I intentionally used his name here instead of code name to avoid revealing his identity for the interview quotes

service, Teletalk expanded the network coverage after the Rohingya influx in 2017 (Hussain et al., 2020). However, the network service has been inferior and inadequate in remote areas of the camps. One of the experts for this thesis, an Amnesty International South Asia Spokesperson, explained that the Rohingya refugee managed to survive with minimum access to connectivity with their Myanmar SIM cards³² and through illegal Bangladeshi SIM cards till the government shut down all access to connectivity in the camps, for everyone including the humanitarian workers³³. The government has lifted the ban on mobile networks in the camps, but the infrastructure for connectivity remained the same. One of the Rohingya refugee participants for this research shared in May 2021,

In my area, the connection is very poor. I think it is around 12 or 13 kilobytes per second. I have heard from some people they get good Internet speed, but in my area, it's very low –Ro 3

For this thesis, all the interviews were conducted remotely and required a stable mobile network. However, for the refugee participants, it was challenging.

“I am talking to you, from on top of the hill... otherwise there is no signal”–Ro 4

I must highlight that the lack of mobile network services posed many challenges to me as a researcher. The refugees could not communicate as per our agreed time for an interview, as they did not have any mobile network. Also, the internet quality was terrible, so the conversation was constantly interrupted, and the voice became distorted. The interviews took longer than

³² As the camps are very close to the Myanmar border, the SIM cards from Myanmar received network connection at times.

³³ The original interview excerpt,

“So, in case of Rohingya refugees now, before I go to the refugees in case of Bangladesh there are a lot of legal people even with the registration process or for mobile phone connectivity. So, it's not really too difficult to get a mobile phone connection in Bangladesh, even though you have the biometrics requirements. Even though you have to fill out forms to register and get a phone connection, but that can always be done by other individuals as well. So I'm not saying that Rohingya refugees are doing it. I'm just giving you a background of what is possible in Bangladesh...The network connectivity was not really as efficient in that area...A lot of refugees are able to communicate with their Myanmar numbers...Mind you, it's so close to the border with...so they're able to use both services.”

expected and were harder to conduct. The refugee participants were helpless in this situation as they had to commute to a place where they could receive a mobile network. To address this issue, UNHCR Cox's Bazar spokesperson shared that they are aware of the scarce network services and working towards addressing them,

The internet was actually suspended in September of 2019, and we got it after a year...but it's still very challenging for you know in different parts of the camps...when the internet was suspended, UNHCR was advocating, and we are still working for better access to the internet.—
UNHCR spokesperson

The problem of inconsistent mobile networks in the camps was one of the key challenges of this research. In addition to that, I further discuss the challenges in conducting the research and the possible scope of research for the future.

Limitations and Further Scopes of Research

The comparative analysis of refugee representation on social media has been challenging, considering its criticality and the logistics of a participatory research method. As discussed in the methodology, this research has been designed to avoid harm to the refugee community. For this purpose, the selection of the participants was carefully made, and the considered factors in maintaining the ethical boundaries limited the scope of the research. The social media presence of the refugees was carefully examined. I chose the Rohingya refugees who were very active on social media, especially Twitter. I must address that Twitter is very popular for political communications, as it is full of journalists, politicians, and civil society (Pal, 2017). The refugees have shared in the interview that they carefully tailor their messages for the audiences on Twitter, whereas they use Facebook to share random things. This is worth mentioning that the politics of representation may be motivated by the nature of the platform I investigated for the research. It is worth exploring if the study of refugee representation on social media would

present different datasets and analyses if other platforms were considered. For this research, I did not look into any platform other than Twitter, as the public dataset posed minimum risks to the community. In future studies, platforms like Facebook can be considered, which the Rohingya refugees heavily use.

The methodology of this thesis was designed to minimize the risks which posed challenges like time difference and language barrier. This participatory research has been conducted remotely, as explained in the methodology. The time difference impacted the data collection process as it was difficult to schedule a convenient time, given the 11 hours' time difference. This is a minor challenge that can be overcome through in-person interviews. Also, as the interviews were remotely conducted, I could not include any focused group discussion, which can be considered for future research. The language barrier further limited the sample of participants. To maintain the integrity of research ethics, I worked with Rohingya refugees who post on social media in English and can communicate in English. As discussed in the methodology, Rohingya refugees speak the Rohingya language, which is a spoken language and does not have any written format. Many Rohingyas post in the Burmese language on social media, which I do not know. As I did not employ any translator for this research; I only selected the Rohingyas who know English to avoid miscommunication. This sampling method narrowed down the scope of participant selection. However, as I discussed in the methodology, this was the best approach to maintain the ethics of this research. These are some minor considerations for future research methodology. This thesis presents a comparative analysis of Rohingya refugees' representation in the humanitarian context, expanding the scope of future research.

This thesis explored the Rohingya refugee representation compared to the leading humanitarian agencies. The agencies I selected for the thesis are different United Nations

agencies and a governing body heavily run by the UN staff. The agencies have shown how they challenge the common criticisms against the development of humanitarian organizations by an assertive refugee representation. I argued in the analysis that one of the critical reasons for any shift in communication is to justify the funding. Different agencies and NGOs can be included in future research projects to understand Rohingya refugee representation in the humanitarian discourse.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are very different from the United Nations agencies in organizational structure. The United Nations agencies receive direct funding from the United Nations Secretariat, members of state nations, and some private donors. WFP spokesperson shared that their funding model has changed a lot. They used to rely on traditional modes of communication to evoke sympathy and get money from private donors. However, things have changed in the last few decades, and now WFP is reputed enough to receive the funding to continue their humanitarian assistance to people. She shared that,

Very much through the testament to how we have evolved in the communication strategies that we are trying to reach a wider audience... We're trying to do a lot more advocacy communications around who was affected by hunger. Why are they affected by hunger? What are the solutions for that versus just sort of very traditional closed-door meetings with donors which you know was very much a part of the normal communication strategy in the past.

Unlike the UN agencies, the NGOs still heavily depend on private donors' funding (Yanacopulos, 2015). The organizational structure, funding sources, and urge to satisfy the donors have challenged them to break the traditional modes of communication (Yanacopulos, 2015). Moreover, many NGOs depend on UN funding or act as the UN's implementing partners, which leaves them in a bureaucratic system to design a creative communication model (Reimann, 2006). However, NGOs like Oxfam, Save the Children, Christian Aid, and CARE has been applauded for their innovative ways of including refugee voices (Cooper, 2019). To

understand the politics of refugee representation, further research can be done to see how the NGOs represent Rohingya refugees.

This thesis aimed to compare the self-representation of refugees with the humanitarian representation. The exclusion of refugee voices, and the inability of refugees to express themselves due to not having access to any medium, motivated the research questions. I wanted to explore how self-representation differs from the humanitarian narrative, as the humanitarian agencies have been heavily criticized. This data analysis of this thesis helps to understand how such ideas have been altered as the refugees, and the agencies are more aligned than in opposition, compared to the existing media, migration, and humanitarianism literature. However, upon critical discourse analysis, I investigate the alteration of dominant refugee representation discourse and present the political aspects of refugee representation. The theoretical and empirical understanding of this research presents nuances of refugee representation to understand that politics of power is deeply embedded in the refugee narrative. Identity creation is motivated by the politics of power, whether by the refugees or the humanitarian agencies. This research addresses the criticality of refugee representation and opens a path for further research in the media, migration, and humanitarianism literatures.

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Appendices

List of Twitter Profiles for Social Media Data

Twitter Profiles of Rohingya Migrants

- 1) https://twitter.com/Ro_Sawyeddollah
- 2) https://twitter.com/md_yasiein
- 3) <https://twitter.com/RoKhinMaung4>
- 4) <https://twitter.com/romehrooz>
- 5) <https://twitter.com/alomshah15>
- 6) <https://twitter.com/RSawyedullah>
- 7) <https://twitter.com/AliMayyu>
- 8) <https://twitter.com/Korimullah123>
- 9) <https://twitter.com/SyedulMostafa1>
- 10) https://twitter.com/alom_bz

Twitter profiles of the agencies

- 1) <https://twitter.com/IOMBangladesh>
- 2) https://twitter.com/UNHCR_BGD
- 3) https://twitter.com/Rohingya_ISCG
- 4) <https://twitter.com/WFP>

List of Interviewees

Rohingya Refugees:

<u>Participant No.</u>	<u>Code</u>	<u>Identification</u>	<u>Age Group</u>
1	Ro 1	Rohingya Victim	18-20
2	Ro 2	Rohingya, Citizen Journalist	18-20
3	Ro 3	Rohingya Activist/ Humanitarian	30-35
4	Ro 4	Rohingya educator	30-35
5	Ro 5	Rohingya Motivational Speaker/ Humanitarian	20-25
6	Ro 6	Rohingya Youth / Humanitarian	18-20
7	Ro 7	Rohingya Artist	25-30
8	N/A	Rohingya woman	30-35

Humanitarian Experts:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Agency</u>
Louise Donovan	Former UNHCR Cox's Bazar Spokesperson	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Brook duBois	Former WFP Cox's Bazar Spokesperson	World Food Programme
Bahia Egeh	ISCG Communications Officer	Inter Sector Coordination Group
Saad Hammadi	Former Amnesty International South Asia Spokesperson	Amnesty International
Gioacchino Gargano	"Storytellers" Project Manager	World Food Programme

Interview Questions (For the displaced Rohingya migrants in Cox's Bazar):

1. How often do you use internet? What do you mostly do while using internet?
2. Why do you think access to connectivity or internet is important for the displaced migrants?
3. Which social media platform do you prefer and why? What do you post on social media and who are your targeted audiences?
4. What factors do you consider while making any post on social media and do you think your social media posts shape your “identity” somehow and how do you identify yourself (In simple language, what is your identity, Rohingya/ Rohingya man/ Stateless/ Activist/ Global citizen/ Victims?)
5. Do you think, or how do you think your social media posts, help people to understand your ‘situation’ better?

Interview questions for the agencies:

1. How would you describe overall agency communication strategy?
2. How do you plan the social media posts, with respect to Rohingya migrants? What about the Twitter?
3. Who are your key audiences on twitter generally and with respect to the Rohingya migrants?
4. What is your view on Rohingya migrants being framed as victims?
5. Do you think or how do you think it is your role to advocate for their rights? What rights do you think they are?