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## **ROHINGYA REFUGEE EDUCATION, SOCIAL RELATIONS AND GOVERNMENTALITY IN BANGLADESH**

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### **Abstract:**

Sur la base de mon travail de terrain ethnographique mené dans les camps de réfugiés Rohingya enregistrés à Cox's Bazar, au Bangladesh en 2016, cet article examine comment les réfugiés rohingyas utilisent les réseaux sociaux avec les Bangladais pour accéder à l'enseignement général en dehors des camps de réfugiés. Il révèle de quelle manière le gouvernement a ne pas résoudre leur identité de réfugiés afin de poursuivre leurs études, en raison de la stigmatisation. J'utilise la notion de gouvernementalité de Foucault pour expliquer les ascendances de conduites du gouvernement en interdisant l'éducation des Rohingyas dans les institutions du Bangladesh.

In the last few years, scholars, media, and members of the international communities have expressed concern about Burmese Rohingyas, one of the most persecuted communities in the world. Their shattering experience of persecution in Burma have forced many to leave their country and take refuge in neighboring Bangladesh. Burma's refusal to recognize them as citizens and Bangladesh's unwillingness to accept them as residents turn Rohingyas into a stateless and unwanted population. Although the Bangladeshi government has officially banned Rohingyas from remaining in the country permanently, a few of them are registered as temporary residents and housed in two government-run makeshift camps in Cox's Bazar, the coastal district of the country located near the Bangladesh–Burma border. This article focuses on registered

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Rohingyas' efforts to attain education in Bangladeshi mainstream institutions.

Unlike Kilis and Nizip camps for Syrian refugees in Turkey<sup>1</sup> where comfort, cleanliness and impressive facilities have resulted in these camps being labeled “perfect,” significant concerns have been raised about the structural and functional aspects of government-run refugee camps in Bangladesh where lack of security, a minimum living standard, the risk of engaging into criminal activities and disease transmission are common. Because they are people without status—unidentified, undocumented and unrecognized by the state they are from—they are considered undeserving of education by the host country, and lack of education is one of the many contested issues registered Rohingyas are concerned about. While the Bangladeshi Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief on its website includes education as one of the “basic supports/services provided to the refugees,” it actually restricts Rohingyas' access to education in Bangladesh. Because the government of Bangladesh has made provisions for registered Rohingyas education up to grade 7 only, there is no answer of the question, ‘What’s next’? My research findings show that after grade 7, the refugees are neither allowed to seek admission to mainstream education institutions outside the camps nor utilize their grade 7 completion certificate in the job market in Bangladesh. This restriction confirms that Rohingya refugees are unable to access a fundamental right—the right to education. The Bangladeshi government, UNHCR, and the international community have remained silent on the woefully inadequate education being provided for the Rohingyas inside the camps. Such silence hints at the power of the apparatuses of the government—the governmentality—which are used through discriminatory policies. These strategies and techniques, in Foucault's word, keep a society or a community governable. According to Foucault, these “techniques of power” are essential “to observe, monitor, shape and control the behavior of individuals situated within a range of social and economic institutions such as the school, the factory and the prison”<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Mac McClelland, “How to Build a Perfect Refugee Camp,” *The New York Times Magazine* (Feb. 13, 2014): <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/magazine/how-to-build-a-perfect-refugee-camp.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon Colin, “Governmental Rationality: An Introduction” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 2.

For anyone, it is difficult to escape the apparatuses of the government in modern world. Because of their statelessness and vulnerability, it is even more difficult for Rohingyas to make their getaway. Yet many Rohingyas are desperate to pursue further education outside the camps and find their own way, but they must hide their refugee identity to accomplish this. This article reveals how Rohingya refugees establish networks with local Bangladeshi people and utilize these social relations to attain additional education beyond that what is available in refugee camps even while the Bangladeshi government is concerned about applying strategies and tactics to exclude Rohingyas from pursuing education in Bangladeshi institutions. It also addresses the question of how the stigmatization results in them not disclosing their identity as Rohingya refugees. Using a lens of governmentality, the article also addresses the Bangladesh government's position on banning Rohingya's education in mainstream institutions.

Rohingyas' ability to establish social relations with Bangladeshi people for the purpose of acquiring education for their children not only demonstrates their networking skills but also their perspective of life—a determination to pursue education so that they can leave a life associated with the stereotypes of “stateless,” “illegal,” and “unwanted” for a stable and secure life.

This article is divided into five sections: 1) the methodology of the study, 2) an overview of the history of Rohingyas, 3) a description of the existing situation of education in registered camps in Bangladesh, 4) a conceptual framework of Foucault's governmentality, and 5) a discussion of how Rohingya's social relations with Bangladeshi citizens make their education in Bangladeshi institutions possible.

## **Methodology**

While the main objective of my research was to explore how Rohingyas construct their identity amid statelessness, one of the key focus of my study was to examine how registered Rohingyas establish and utilize their social relations and networks with local people for their children's access to Bangladeshi education institutions amid government restrictions. I undertook nine months of ethnographic fieldwork in two refugee camps in Bangladesh in 2016. These camps are located in Kutupalong at Ukhia and in Nayapara at Teknaf. Ukhia and Teknaf are sub-districts of Cox's Bazar district in Bangladesh. I conducted thirty individual interviews and four focus group discussions (FGD) with Rohingya refugees eighteen years old and older. Sixteen males and fourteen females participated in the

individual interviews. I conducted two FGDs with men and two with women with a total of eighteen participants, nine men and nine women. Altogether, I had direct in-depth discussions with forty-eight participants while many others were involved with my study indirectly.

Some ethnographic studies have focused on younger generations and their education effort among the refugee population. Such as Vietnamese and Cambodian immigrant and refugee students' understanding of their participation in a creative community service-learning experience, young refugees' capabilities to manage their precarious and uncertain living conditions in Nairobi<sup>3</sup>, navigation of resettled Somali young refugees in a new country in relation to their social identities within the realm of sport in Australia<sup>4</sup>, examining the results of literacy and social development approach undertaken for the African refugee high school students based on small group tutoring by the secondary teacher education students in after-school homework centers in Australia<sup>5</sup>, and how the high school refugee students in Vietnamese central highlands navigate their identities<sup>6</sup>. However, none of these works focuses on refugees who have been in camps for a long time. Doing ethnography with vulnerable populations always requires special attention. In order to pay special attention to my work, I employed participant observation, an important technique of ethnography that "seeks to uncover, make accessible, and reveal the meanings (realities) people use to make sense out of their daily lives"<sup>7</sup>. Besides individual interviews and FGDs, participant observation was helpful for me to accomplish three activities: making access to the field, unearthing realities grounded in the everyday life, and describing what occurs.

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<sup>3</sup> Simon Turner, "We Wait for Miracles: Ideas of Hope and Future Among Clandestine Burundian Refugees in Nairobi" in *Ethnographies of Uncertainty in Africa*, ed. Elizabeth Cooper and David Pratten (New York: Palgrave, 2015), 173-192.

<sup>4</sup> Ramon Spaaij, "Refugee Youth, Belonging and Community Sport", *Leisure Studies* 34, no. 3. (2015): 303-318.

<sup>5</sup> Loshini Naidoo, "Supporting African Refugees in Greater Western Sydney: A Critical Ethnography of After-school Homework Tutoring Centers", *Educational Research for Policy and Practice* 7 (2008): 139-150.

<sup>6</sup> Liv Thorstensson Davila, "Representing Refugee Youth in Qualitative Research: Questions of Ethics, Language and Authenticity", *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education* 8 (2014): 21-31.

<sup>7</sup> Danny L. Jorgensen, "The Methodology of Participant Observation" in *Participant observation: A methodology for human studies*, ed. Danny L. Jorgensen (California: SAGE Publications, 1989), 7-25.

## Who are Rohingyas?

Rohingyas have been historically excluded in their own country of Burma. Although there are controversies over the origin of Rohingya people, most scholars agree that Rohingyas are the descendants of Arab and Persian traders as well as the descendants of Indian and Bengali migrants who settled in the Arakan region (in present-day Burma) between the ninth and fifteenth centuries<sup>8</sup>. Today the use of the term “Rohingya” is offensive to the Burmese government. Both Burmese historians and politicians deny the existence of the term “Rohingya” ignoring multiple references of the wide spread use of the term long before they conquered Arakan. Available references suffice that the origin of the term “Rohingya” is rooted in Arakan. In fact, “Rohingya” is a phonological derivation of words like “Rakhanga<sup>9</sup>”; “Reng,” “Roung,” “Rossawn,” “Russawn,” “Rung<sup>10</sup>” and others. Today’s stateless Muslim Rohingyas have been living in Burma as a native of Rohang, or Arakan, or Burma. Following passage provides a historical overview of Rohingyas in Arakan from 1784 until 1962<sup>11</sup>.

The Muslim kingdom of Arakan was occupied by the Burmese during 1784–1785. The first exodus of two-thirds of Muslim Arakanese into

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<sup>8</sup> Imtiaz Ahmed, “Refugees and Security: The Experience of Bangladesh,” in *Refugees and Regional Security in South Asia*, ed. Sukh Deo Muni and Lok Raj Baral (Delhi: Konrak Publishers, 1996), 121–151; Ahsan Ullah, “Rohingya Refugees to Bangladesh: Historical Exclusions and Contemporary Marginalization,” *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*, no. 9 (2011): 139–161; Nehginpao Kipgen, “Addressing the Rohingya Problem,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* (2013): 1–14, <http://jas.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/10/17/0021909613505269.full.pdf+html>.

<sup>9</sup> Jacques P. Leider, “The Muslims in Rakhine and the political project of the Rohingyas: Historical background of an unresolved communal conflict in contemporary Myanmar,” Online Burma/Myanmar Library. Last modified October 18, 2012. [http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/Jacques-P-Leider-2012-The\\_Muslims\\_in\\_Rakhine\\_and\\_the\\_political\\_project\\_of\\_the\\_Rohingyas-en.pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/Jacques-P-Leider-2012-The_Muslims_in_Rakhine_and_the_political_project_of_the_Rohingyas-en.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Francis Buchanan, “An Account of a Journey Undertaken by Order of the Board of Trade Through the Provinces of Chittagong and Tiperah, in order to Look Out for the Places Most Proper for the Cultivation of Spices” in *Francis Buchanan in Southeast Bengal (1798): His Journey to Chittagong, The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Noakhali and Comilla*, ed. Willem Van Schendel (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1992), 1-209.

<sup>11</sup> “Band,” A Short Historical Background of Arakan, accessed June 4, 2018. <http://www.thestateless.com/arakan>.

neighboring Chittagong area (one of the regions of Bangladesh) happened in 1796 as a result of mass killing by the Burmese. Later, the British incorporated Arakan into its empire in 1885 and many Arakanese returned from Chittagong. However, “the British Empire in Burma created identities based on people’s religions and ethnicities, as evident through the creation of the census in 1872”<sup>12</sup>. This census did not record people’s identity according to their birthplace, which created a greater division between local Burmese and other ethnicities in Burma. Another census conducted in 1891 by the British left the Arakanese outside of the count. During the Second World War, Japanese brutality, in collaboration with Rakhine Buddhists, Muslim massacre happened in Arakan in 1942. Burma’s independence in 1948 brought further suffering into the lives of Rohingyas as the Burmese government continued treating Rohingyas as illegal migrants denying them citizenship<sup>13</sup>. After military junta sized power in Burma in 1962, violence against Rohingyas increased.

Finally, in order to exclude the Rohingyas, the Burmese military registered all of its citizens prior to a national census in 1977<sup>14</sup>. This event caused extreme violence, widespread killings and rape, and 200,000 stateless Rohingyas were pushed to Bangladesh by the military authority of Burma in 1978<sup>15</sup>. Because of consistent persecution in Burma, another major wave of Rohingyas refugees fled Burma from December 1991 to March 1992 when between 210,000 and 250,000 Rohingya fled from Burma to neighboring Bangladesh<sup>16</sup>. Geographical proximity between the two countries has enabled Rohingyas’ easy access to Bangladesh. However, from the beginning, they were unwanted in Bangladesh.

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<sup>12</sup> Ananta Yusuf, “Human Rights: Betrayed, Denied, and Abandoned,” *The Daily Star*, last modified March 8, 2015, <http://www.thedailystar.net/betrayed-denied-and-abandoned-31430>.

<sup>13</sup> Eileen Pittaway, “The Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh: A Failure of the International Protection Regime,” in *Protracted Displacement in Asia: No Place to Call Home*, ed. Howard Adelman (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 83–106.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Gil Loescher and James Milner, “Burmese Refugees in South and Southeast Asia: A Comparative Regional Analysis,” in *Protracted Refugee Situations: Political, Human Rights and Security Implications*, ed. Gil Loescher, James Milner, Edward Newman and Gary Troeller (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2008), 305–355.

<sup>16</sup> “Bangladesh: Information on the Situation of Rohingya Refugees,” Refworld, United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, March 28, 2001, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3deccb113.html>.

There are debates on what served as the basis of a small number of Rohingya refugees being granted temporary residence, labelling them “registered,” while a large number of them remained unregistered. I shall clarify the definition of the terms “registered” and “unregistered”. Immediately after their arrival, “the Bangladesh government allowed the refugees to enter its territory and provided them shelter and relief”<sup>17</sup>. Since then, they have been known as registered refugees. However, a forced repatriation took place during 1992–1994<sup>18</sup>. But because of insurmountable violence against Rohingyas in Burma, a large number of them came back to Bangladesh despite the repatriation. These Rohingyas became and remain unregistered under the Bangladeshi government who formed their own camp beside the government-run registered camp in both locations. The registered camps receive support from the government, the UNHCR, and other national and international agencies. The unregistered camps receive nothing and yet manage to survive.

This article now moves on to discuss the existing education situation for registered Rohingyas in Bangladesh followed by a discussion of how they attain education in mainstream institutions.

### **Education for registered Rohingyas in Bangladesh**

There is no law explicitly denying Rohingyas access to Bangladeshi schools, but it is implied because lacking proof of identity, they are ineligible to study in Bangladeshi schools.

The government of Bangladesh claims that registered Rohingya refugees are being provided the support needed to fulfil their educational basic needs<sup>19</sup>. Education inside the camp is free, and is available up to grade 7. According to the government website, there are twenty-three schools in two camps, twenty-one elementary schools and two middle schools. I came up with similar findings in my research: eleven schools in Nayapara camp for 18,777 students and twelve schools in Kutupalong camp for 13,102

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<sup>17</sup> Chowdhury R. Abrar, “Repatriation of Rohingya Refugees” in Online Burma/Myanmar Library, last modified June 22, 2003. [http://www. Burmali brary.org /docs/Abrar-repatriation.htm](http://www.Burmalibrary.org/docs/Abrar-repatriation.htm).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> “Refugee Program,” *Refugee Cell, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh*, Aug. 28, 2017, <http://www.modmr.gov.bd/site/page/63b5195f-e729-4c26-acae-ec3a52d59af4/At-a-glance:-Refugee-Cell>.

students. The NGO Save the Children used to fund Rohingya's education in the past. Now CODEC, a Bangladeshi NGO, finances it. The education program in the camp expanded gradually from 1992 to 2000.

In the past, most of the teachers were from among the registered Rohingyas but at present, as my research participants complained, the majority of the teachers are Bangladeshi. Many of my participants believe that this is due to the decision of the camp management which is strongly influenced by the decisions of local political leaders. Rohingyas are unhappy about having Bangladeshi teachers because it affects Rohingyas' employment inside the camp. Grade 7 is the highest level of education Rohingyas can acquire in the camps and their grade 7 completion certificate does not allow them to gain admission to mainstream schools in Bangladesh.

This tragic situation raises the question of what ways such a limited scope of education can fulfil one of the Rohingyas' basic needs: the right to education as claimed by the government of Bangladesh? The existing situation of education in the registered camp is, perhaps, one of the leading factors that forces Rohingyas to find alternative paths to acquiring education outside the camp. What shaped the strategies of the government to allow such limited scope of education for registered refugees? The following theoretical framework explains it.

### **Governmentality: Delegitimization and the denial of the Right to Education**

Rohingyas' access to Bangladeshi education institutions is a story of denial and delegitimization. The denial of Rohingya's right to education is guided by the perspective of the Bangladesh government of considering Rohingyas as temporary residents. I choose governmentality as my conceptual framework as it explains the "conducts of conduct" of the government in excluding Rohingyas from education. By "conducts of conduct", Foucault indicates "a form of activity aiming to shape, guide or affect the conduct of some person or persons"<sup>20</sup>. Governmentality includes various forms of means and techniques to exercise power over people. Based on Foucault's theory of power, governmentality is considered as the

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<sup>20</sup> Gordon Colin, "Governmental Rationality: An Introduction" in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 2.



dominant mode of power that asks how certain goals of the government can be achieved through certain ways.

For Foucault, power is neither a commodity nor a resource, rather it is “something that is exercised, not possessed”<sup>21</sup>. Depending on the broader historical context, different governments in different regimes use discourses and knowledge to hold and exercise power to control citizens in order to achieve the government’s specific goal. For instance, the government of Bangladesh recognizes equal rights of all children in its territory, however the legal instruments (such as its policies) of this state do not guarantee Rohingya children’s right to education. The Foucauldian model of power shows that the vulnerability of Rohingya children is usual, they deserve to be excluded from basic entitlements because they are not citizens, rather are stateless and temporary residents in Bangladesh. What goes unnoticed is they are made stateless and vulnerable by laws of Burma, not by the children themselves.

Foucault uses governmentality in both specific and general ways: “in a broader sense, governmentality is a heading for a project that examines the exercise of power in terms of the conduct of conducts”<sup>22</sup>. But Foucault is more concerned with the art and the practice of government rather than the government itself since governmentality applies a variety of apparatuses with a focus on power relations in different contexts. This is what Foucault calls techniques of government or arts of government. Since power and knowledge are the essential elements of the art of governance, people like Rohingya refugees are labelled as “powerless” and the dominance of governance determines these people’s fate. Foucault argues that power is cultivated through dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques and functioning, and thus policies are one of the powerful tactics in modern states.

Foucault uses “paradoxical phenomenon”<sup>23</sup> to refer to the governmentalization of the state. A state without any policies, laws or rule has no authority to exercise power. On the other hand, policies are used as tactics to recognize and/or deny people’s rights. The complex form of

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<sup>21</sup> M. Gallagher, Foucault, Power and Participation. *International Journal of Children’s Rights*, 16: 397.

<sup>22</sup> W. Walters, *Governmentality: Critical Encounters* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 11.

<sup>23</sup> M. Foucault, *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

power makes the governmentalization of the state paradoxical. Such paradoxical phenomenon is sometimes visible, sometimes hidden. The National Education Policy 2010 of Bangladesh is an example of this paradox. Its introduction says:

We cannot push the life of a learner into a path without a destination. We cannot allow any learner to drop out or get lost in the middle of her/his learning process until s/he has acquired the minimum level of skills or quality education<sup>24</sup>.

However, there are two kinds of “learners” in Bangladesh, which this statement does not acknowledge: a student in general and a student with Bangladeshi citizenship. The above statement uses the term to refer to the former but in actuality means the latter. This is demonstrated in the way Rohingya refugees are excluded from receiving “quality education” and not falling under the second category, that is, they are not Bangladeshi citizens. Drawing on Foucault’s governmentality, it is clear that Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are delegitimized and denied access to education in mainstream institutions. According to Foucault, a government formulates policies based on its own rationality and knowledge to govern others. Knowledge reinforces power and power produces knowledge. In this cyclical relationship, there is very little room for those who are governed to raise their voice and claim their access to fundamental human rights.

The government of Bangladesh states that The Bangladesh’s National Children Policy of 2011 “shall be applicable to all children—the citizen of Bangladesh without any discrimination”<sup>25</sup>. Therefore, according to the National Children Policy, Burmese Rohingya children, by virtue of their displacement, cannot be considered citizens of Bangladesh. The Citizenship Act of 1951 (amended in 2009) lists ten categories of citizenship of Bangladesh: 1) citizenship at the date of commencement of this Act, 2) citizenship by birth, 3) citizenship by descent, 4) citizenship by migration, 5) citizenship for persons migrating from the territories of

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<sup>24</sup> Ministry of Education, National Education Policy 2010. The Government of Bangladesh, [http://old.moedu.gov.bd/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=338&Itemid=416](http://old.moedu.gov.bd/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=338&Itemid=416).

<sup>25</sup> “National Children Policy,” Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, The Government of Bangladesh, 2011, <http://www.mowca.gov.bd/wp-content/uploads/National-Child-Policy-2011.pdf>.

Bangladesh, 6) citizenship of certain persons resident abroad, 7) citizenship by naturalization, 8) citizenship of minors through registration, 9) citizenship by registration to begin on date of registration, and 10) citizenship by incorporation of territory<sup>26</sup>. None of them directly applies to Rohingya refugees because of their statelessness.

The power of government apparatuses is reflected in strategies and techniques. Interestingly while governments construct some strategies to control and/or govern a community or a society, sometimes they refrain themselves from signing certain conventions and treaties to remain in the safe position and continue governing the society. By being the non-signatories of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the status of refugees, both countries' efforts in ignoring responsibilities of the Rohingyas is noticeable. In Burma, this paved the way for exploitation and violation of the rights of Rohingyas, denying their existence for many hundred years, and ultimately ethnic cleansing. The 1982 Citizenship Act of Burma that excludes Rohingyas is a powerful apparatus. For Bangladesh, its non-signatory status has made it easier to deny Rohingyas' fundamental rights. According to Human Rights Watch, although Bangladesh is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, it is a party to other treaties and conventions related to human rights, including the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)<sup>27</sup>. Among them, Article 2 of the UNCRC establishes the obligation of states to ensure children's access to education regardless of their gender and ethnicity.

### **States parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present**

Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

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<sup>26</sup> "The Citizenship Act, 1951," [http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/print\\_sections\\_all.php?id=242](http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/print_sections_all.php?id=242).

<sup>27</sup> "Bangladesh: Letter to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Regarding Obligations Not to Reject Refugees," *Human Rights Watch*, last modified July 15, 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/06/15/bangladesh-letter-prime-minister-sheikh-hasina-regarding-obligations-not-reject-refu>.

Being a signatory of the UNCRC, Bangladesh is committed to protect the rights of all children within its territory. Despite living within its territory, Rohingyas children do not fall under the category of “deserving” due to their parents’ statelessness. De-legitimization is the art of government here. I argue that Burmese Rohingya children, especially those who were born and raised in Bangladesh, should be considered full members of their host country, at least temporarily if not permanently, in order to pursue education in Bangladesh. In addition, category 7 in the above list – citizenship by naturalization – offers an option for making Rohingya children citizens: “the government may register any minor as a citizen of Bangladesh” (11.2). This supports Article 8 (2), Article 27 (1–4), and Article 28 (1) of the UNCRC, since all these articles reinforce a child’s right to social citizenship as well as access to education. Yet Rohingya refugees’ access to education in Bangladeshi schools is denied to them by the apparatuses of governmentality. Surprisingly, Rohingyas’ social relations and network with local people often help them to get out of this trap, albeit partially. In the following sections, I highlight how they accomplish this.

### **How Rohingyas make possible the education of their children**

Establishing social relations and networks with Bangladeshi citizens is possible for Rohingyas because of three factors: similar physical appearances with Bangladeshis, similarities in dialect, and religious similarities. Rohingyas’ physical appearance and mannerisms are similar to that of local residents in Bangladesh, especially residents living in the south-eastern region. Similarities in appearance conveniently position Rohingyas to facilitate interaction with local people. Secondly, linguistic similarities play a key role in furthering the interaction established between Rohingyas and local Bangladeshi people. Except for the nuances of expression and tone and a few word-choice differences, it is difficult to distinguish dialectically between these two groups. Finally, religious similarity also advances social relations between Rohingyas and Bangladeshi. Both groups are Muslims, observe common rituals, and possess similar strong religious sentiments.

Despite the difficult circumstances in refugee camps, Rohingyas are informed about the necessity of education for their children. Because of the existing constraints of Rohingya’s education in Bangladeshi institutions, they engage local people for support and utilize their ability in forming social networks with local people to gain admission to Bangladeshi education institutions for their children. But how do they do it?

### **Parents' aspirations for their children's education**

Most Rohingya parents living in registered camps think that their children's situation will not be as bad as theirs if they (the children) are educated. Many of the Rohingyas I met during my fieldwork had little or no education. They were unaware that it is one of their fundamental human rights. Yet they were aware that it is an important element if they are to live with dignity. Their bitter experience in Burma has contributed in generating such awareness. Some of my participants informed me that the Burmese military shut down their schools, burned them, and destroyed books and education materials. This kind of action made it difficult, even impossible, for Rohingyas to enrol and continue their study in Burma even though they were interested in pursuing education.

Upon coming to Bangladesh, Rohingyas notice that the educational situation in Bangladesh is superior to that of Burma. Education is not interrupted, and schools are not destroyed by the military. Although education in Bangladesh is not interrupted as it is in Burma, how policies and regulations affect Rohingya's access to education remains invisible until they attempt to enrol their children in Bangladeshi schools. In other words, the effect of Foucault's governmentality is not always visible. At one point, they come up against the restrictions and obstacles in education. Knowing that they are in Bangladesh only temporarily, parents want to ensure their children have better options which is possible with adequate academic credentials. With such aspiration, enthusiastic Rohingya parents look for opportunities to utilize their social networks with Bangladeshi local people. The path is not easy but they are able to find the necessary connections.

In Bangladesh, a birth registration certificate, which is proof of national identity, is a prerequisite for school admission. This is a government issued document that certifies the name, date, and place of the birth of a child in Bangladesh. Because of the government's ban on Rohingya's stay, no Rohingya is eligible for a birth registration certificate even though most Rohingya youth were born in Bangladesh. Clearly, this is an example of government exercising power on a group of people to limit their access to services. According to Foucault, power can be so complex that it hardly allows people to question whether the legal apparatuses – the strategies and policies – legitimize or delegitimize the decision. In terms of the debate on whether Rohingya children born in Bangladesh can be called Bangladeshi by birth, the Bangladeshi government was undecided about issuing birth registration certificates to Rohingya children until another

wave of fresh Rohingya inflow in 2017. This, however, did not stop Rohingyas from searching for alternative routes for pursuing education in mainstream institutions.

### **Establishing social relations and using false identity**

One of the strategies Rohingya parents use is negotiating with influential people, such as local elites and Union Parishad members/chairmen, in order to acquire a birth registration certificate for their children born in Bangladesh. This is not only done unofficially between Rohingyas and local elites, but it is also a guarded matter as it violates government regulations regarding Rohingya's admission to Bangladeshi schools. However, negotiation works. All the participants who undertook such negotiation were successful in obtaining birth registration certificates and gaining admission to Bangladeshi education institutions for their children.

The negotiation between Rohingyas and local elites does not happen overnight. Rohingya parents are often referred by other Rohingyas to a particular local elite, a community leader, or a local businessman under whom the referrer has worked as a laborer. Such working relationships create trust and a positive attitude towards each other, which encourages Rohingyas to ask for a favor to enhance the possibility of their children being admitted to a local school. Both parties know that Rohingyas' status in Bangladesh does not allow them to obtain government issued ID in a legal way. Hence, the entire matter depends on the goodwill of the local elite. The elites may be local businessmen, religious leaders, even political leaders, and school teachers. Once Rohingya parents are able to convince such a person about the importance of their child's education, they apply their own strategies to find out a way assisting the Rohingya. For instance, M7, a resident youth from Kutupalong camp, applied for a Bangladeshi ID card with the help of his Bangladeshi friend. He was born in Bangladesh and lives with his parents and siblings in the camp. During this research, he was doing his undergraduate in a local university as well as working as a teacher in the camp school. Although he completed his education in the local Bangladeshi school successfully, things erupted at the end of his high school studies. His name, along with others, was published in the local newspaper accusing them of enrolling in the mainstream institution. Local villagers marched to the school, enquired about the identity of all suspected students, and finally accused M7 of committing an illegal act by enrolling in the local school. According to the villagers, this was illegal because he was a son of a Rohingya. He defended himself against the allegation and claimed a Bangladeshi

identity. A local individual who was known to his family and whom he used to call uncle came forward and stood beside him. The individual assured the agitated crowd that it was his nephew. Thus, he saved the day for M7.

Rohingyas also need to use a local address in the admission application to prove their identity as Bangladeshi. I asked M7 which address he used in his applications:

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

He is a resident of Kutupalong refugee camp which is almost thirty-five kilometres from Cox's Bazar, yet he used it as his current and permanent address. A camp address would never work for getting a Bangladeshi ID card, rather, it would jeopardize the entire process. Therefore, using a false name and address is the only option for Rohingyas to acquire a Bangladeshi ID needed to complete the admission application.

Clearly, social relations and networks override the implied restriction regarding Rohingyas' education in Bangladeshi institutions. It is interesting to see how local Bangladeshi people support Rohingya refugees in their pursuit of education. M11, another Rohingya youth, confirmed that using a false name and address was helpful in pursuing education in Bangladeshi institutions, and that it was possible when Rohingyas had good relations with local people. M11 is a thirty-five-year-old male living in Kutupalong registered camp. He was born in Burma and came to Bangladesh in 1992 as a child with his parents; his family left everything behind. The school authority in Burma had forced him to adopt a Burmese name as no one was allowed admission into a Burmese school with a Rohingya name. The overall situation of exploitation forced his family to move to Bangladesh soon after he completed grade 4.

After coming from Burma, he got admitted to a local school in Bangladesh because there was no school in the camp at that time. His admission was possible with the help of local school teachers but in a secret manner. Initially, I had assumed that he had the required proof of Bangladeshi citizenship by that time. He explained:

M11: No, no, no, I used fake information. I did not use my actual name and address of this camp, because you know they won't accept it. So I used a different name, different address like a village address.

Author: And you got your SSC [Secondary School Certificate] with your fake name?

M11: Yes, and continued to HSC [Higher Secondary Certificate] with the same fake name, I passed from Chittagong College.

Information provided to the school regarding his identity was false. He was not able to use his actual name and address because the school would not officially accept them. Therefore, he used a different name and a different local village address, completed his education at school. Following this, he was admitted into HSC in Chittagong. He used a false name throughout his academic career in Bangladesh. However, once his HSC was done he had to come back to the camp because at that time the camp authority imposed strict rules, forcing the residents to stay within the camp. He was also informed that a group of local villagers, camp residents, and a few staff of local NGOs working with refugees were working together to identify Rohingyas who lived outside the camp. This situation forced him to discontinue his studies and return to living inside the camp. In the meantime, he had taken preparation for a TOEFL exam as he planned to go abroad.

In Bangladesh, both SSC (high school final exam) and HSC (college final exam) are nationwide exams that take place once a year. Students sitting for these exams have to register with the government education board, submitting many pieces of ID including proof of a permanent address and nationality. As the information printed on one's SSC or HSC certificate is unchangeable, M11 had to go through this process with false documents knowing that he would not be able to change his false name in the future. He was fortunate to enrol in Chittagong College, which is one of Bangladesh's most renowned education institutions, established in 1869. It is located in the city of Chittagong, approximately two hundred kilometres away from M11's camp, and offers secondary education, bachelor's degrees, and master's degrees. M11's story indicates that registered Rohingya refugees are capable of being admitted to even reputed institutions using the strength of their networks with local Bangladeshi people.



### Bribing: A helpful way

Along with social networks, bribing is often necessary to complete admission procedures in mainstream schools. Rohingya parents bribe local political leaders, school authorities, or local elites, which not only helps them to acquire a Bangladeshi ID for their children but also guarantees their admission to a local school, albeit with a false name. However, there is a risk for the institutions of being caught by law enforcement agency as the ID is false, therefore it is preserved with the institutions instead of the client as was the experience of F8, a young lady from one of the two camps. She was born in the camp, had completed her Dakhil (a degree that is considered equivalent to a high school final. It is the most important public examination of Madrasa Education Board in Bangladesh), and was now aiming to pursue her Alim (equivalent to college level education in Bangladesh that prepares one for the grade 12 level public examination of the Madrasa Education Board). She told me how she managed to acquire a birth registration certificate for her admission to a local madrasa, a religious education institution. But, the madrasa authority kept it. I asked whether she was aware of the amount her father had to pay for this. She said, “I...I don’t know, it was between the teacher and my father.”

F8’s cousins and some other students from another block of the same camp have had similar experiences—obtaining a birth registration certificate, gaining admission into local institutions, and leaving the certificate with the institution. Although bribing is considered “elderly people’s business” and is kept hidden from the younger ones, there are instances when such information is known to them. A similar experience was shared by M13, a Nayapara registered camp refugee who was born and brought up in the camp like many others. His narrative also indicates that negotiation sometimes requires the intervention of local middlemen with whom Rohingya parents have established a social network. In his words:

M13: My father had a good friend in the village, so he [the father] told him [the friend] about this, and the friend agreed to help my father. My father had to pay for it.

Author: Do you know how much was it?

M13: Um...my father...it was I think 2,000 taka<sup>28</sup> or something like that.

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<sup>28</sup> Approximately \$30–35 CDN. However, this event took place six years ago, when the exchange rate was different than it is today.

Social networks among Rohingya and local people open the door to bribing, which can be vital in ensuring the enrolment of Rohingya youth in mainstream institutions in Bangladesh. Besides networking between parents and local people as well as between parents and local teachers, bribing also plays a role in making Rohingya children's education possible in mainstream institutions. Since the camp school provides a completion certificate, I was curious to know how this document was used and whether it helped get Rohingya children admitted to mainstream schools without bribing. I asked M11, a camp school teacher, whether such certificates were useful for Rohingya students' admission into the mainstream institutions. He disclosed the secret:

Um...not really, but bribing [the education institutions] may help....If an amount of 2,000 taka [approx. CAD \$30–35] or something like that is paid [to the school], my students are allowed to enrol in the school

One should not naïvely assume that the camp administration is unaware of the strategies Rohingyas adopt to pursue education in Bangladeshi institutions. It is an open secret. The camp administration works under the direction and supervision of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), which is a wing of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief. My research design did not allow me to dig into why, despite knowing that this bribing is taking place, the camp administration and the RRRC office remain silent. I was interested instead to know in what ways parents managed to not disclose their identity as refugees to overcome stigmatization.

### **It is all about disguising oneself and keeping safe**

It is undoubtedly a big challenge for Rohingyas to balance friendships with local Bangladeshis and keeping their identity concealed. However, their experience of statelessness—in the paradox “of rights and right lessness, of inclusion and exclusion<sup>29</sup>” —has taught them how to deal with this challenge and conceal own identity.

As it turns out, everyone among the local community knows the actual identity of the Rohingya children, yet these children have to falsify their identity in the education system in order to legalize their status on paper.

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<sup>29</sup> Kelly Staples, *Retheorizing Statelessness: A Background Theory of Membership in World Politics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 15.

This is not a choice for Rohingya. Rather, they are compelled to do so in order to advance their education. The participants who were successful in gaining admission to mainstream institutions were careful about their false identities. F8 admitted that to her teachers and Bangladeshi friends, she is identified as a Bangladeshi because if she discloses her real identity, they will not let her study in the school.

When establishing networks with local people, Rohingya parents use their true identity. But the younger generation, particularly those who attend Bangladeshi education institutions, maintain friendship with their Bangladeshi peers using a false identity. Within his Bangladeshi friend circle, M7 is known as a Bangladeshi and a resident from Coat Bazar<sup>30</sup>. He has good relationship with his Bangladeshi friends, even with their families. He often visits friends' houses but never brings them to his house. How did he feel when he visited his Bangladeshi friends' house? His honest response:

I enjoyed it, they used to tell that they would come to my place someday, and I replied that okay, I would take you all someday. But I never brought them.

M7 believes that he is welcomed at his Bangladeshi friend's house because he passes himself off as a Bangladeshi. This double identity is why, as a Rohingya youth, he is cautious in maintaining a line to protect himself to avoid social stigma. He therefore never invites Bangladeshi friends to his camp. Rohingyas disclose their true identity to establish social relations with Bangladeshi people in order to benefit themselves, and they know when to hide it to serve a particular interest.

It is undeniable that despite the apparent similarities between local Bangladeshi and Rohingyas, the latter are sometimes treated by the former as illegal people, as they are stateless and have no proof of identity. Local villagers often accuse unregistered Rohingyas of occupying land and destroying the resources of Bangladesh. Such allegations are directed at registered Rohingya, too even though they are recognized and supported by the Bangladeshi government and UNHCR. On the one hand, Rohingyas are capable of maintaining social relations with Bangladeshi people because of linguistic, religious, and outward similarities between themselves and local Bangladeshi. On the other hand,

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<sup>30</sup> Coat Bazar (Court Bazar) is one of the 139 villages in Ukhia upazila that takes more than an hour to get to by bus from Kutupalong camp.

the allegations instil a fear within Rohingyas of being stigmatized or even abused. This fear exists among the Rohingyas in spite of their having social ties with local people and makes them cautious about whether or not to disclose their true identity. Instead of protesting the discrimination they experience, they accept and cope with the situation they find themselves in. These are the lessons they have learned from their experience of statelessness, delegitimization, and persecution. Rohingyas parents pass this concern to the next generation so that they also learn not to challenge the existing system but to cope with it.

Are Rohingyas always able to maintain their double identity? And if not, what happens when their “disguise” is revealed? Being bullied or attacked by Bangladeshi children is more or less common for Rohingya students who attend local schools. But they prefer not to engage in arguments or fights with local youth even if they (Rohingyas) win the competition in the playground or excel in school. Protesting this kind of situation would invite a negative response, hence, keeping quiet or protecting oneself seems the best tactic. M7, when asked whether he was afraid that his Bangladeshi friends might not accept him if his actual identity was revealed, said:

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

M13 expressed similar sentiments regarding hiding his identity. Both M7 and M13 indicated that ensuring their safety was the most important. Being safe is preferable over winning an argument. Similarly, M13 believes in passivity as he never protests when Bangladeshi youths of his age attack him and engage in disputes or fight with him. His response to my question whether he fought back was immediate:

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

In order to avoid stigmatization or being kicked out of the institution, Rohingyas resort to passivity. Social networks help Rohingyas gain

admission to Bangladeshi education institutions but their educational success is threatened when their Rohingya identity is revealed.

## **Conclusion**

Using both a sociological and anthropological perspective, this article has demonstrated that stateless people may not know that they, as human beings, are eligible to claim and fulfil their basic rights. However, they are concerned about their well-being, and such concerns enable them to pursue ways to better their lives in spite of the discriminatory policies they are subjected to by the state that leave them with an unclear identity and uncertain legal status. States create uncertainty around one's legal status and states exercise power to monitor, regulate and control people's behaviour within the state as part of government rationality. The government apparatuses are useful tools of exercising power to delegitimize people's right to education. Bangladesh considers it an illegal act for Rohingyas to acquire false identity documents in order to enrol in Bangladeshi education institutions. However, from a human rights perspective, it is clear that Rohingyas have the capacity to determine their own strategy in their pursuit of fulfilling their fundamental right to education by establishing relations with Bangladeshi people and negotiating with them for a false identity that allows them to obtain education in the face of their vulnerabilities and government restrictions. Rohingyas pursuing education in mainstream institutions in Bangladesh may not overthrow the apparatuses of the government, yet by using social networks they have learned how to navigate the strategies and techniques of governmentality and raise hopes in the midst of their statelessness.