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"Refugee-Host Community Conflict over Assimilation, Integration, and Identity Differentiation: the case of Rohingyas in Bangladesh"

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Statement of research problem

Violations of human rights, conflict, violence, and persecution have forced nearly 80 million people to leave their home countries; 26 million are refugees (UNHCR, 2019). Every year, the number of refugees worldwide grows, and this growing number of refugees—from Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar, Venezuela, and Somalia—impacts the demographic size, culture, and economy of developed and developing countries.

Not considered as citizens of Myanmar or an ethnic group, the Rohingya is the biggest dejure stateless community worldwide. They live in the cities of Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung in Rakhine, Myanmar (Akins, 2018; Leider, 2018). However, Buddhist nationalism was reinforced in the country during the colonial period (1885-1948) and by the military regime from 1962 onwards (Akins, 2018). The Rohingya Muslim religious minority has been increasingly persecuted under the growing power of Burmese Buddhist nationalism that has resulted in ethnoreligious divisions (Ullah and Chattoraj, 2018; Alam, 2018). The rise of Buddhist nationalism in independent Myanmar and military rule in 1962 led the state to institute policies that discriminated against the Rohingya, perform repressive actions, derecognize the Rohingya, and strip them of citizenship in 1982 (Farzana, 2016; Alam, 2018). The state began seizing land for military camps, restricting the Rohingya from registering marriages and births, obstructing religious practices, and displacing people forcibly; all these led many Rohingyas to flee to Bangladesh in 1978, 1991–1992, 2012, 2016, and 2017 (Ullah, 2011; Roy Chowdhury, 2019); they number a million now (Farzana, 2017; Alam, 2018).

The 'clearance operations' of the military, police, and local militias in Myanmar at the end of August 2017 forced over 700,000 Rohingya to flee to Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh (Miklian, 2019; Ullah and Chattoraj, 2023). According to the Inter-Sector Coordination Group [ISCG] (2022), about 923,000 Rohingya refugees are now living in Cox's district of Bangladesh. Additionally, 200,000–500,000 unregistered Rohingya live outside official camp areas (Mohajan, 2018), whereas the total local population in Cox's Bazar district was 22,89,990 (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2014), prior to the arrival of Rohingya in 2017. Currently, Rohingyas account for over 35% of Cox's Bazar's total population (Filipski *et al.*, 2019).

Bangladesh is a small, densely populated country that lacks the assets to accommodate a million refugees (Kipgen, 2019). Initially, in the light of the humanitarian crisis, the attitude of the government and local communities towards the Rohingya was

liberal. The government provided them with camp settlements and facilities in fringe regions, arranged for temporary safe houses, and offered help. Although the host government has consistently opposed refugees' formal assimilation and integration into Bangladeshi society, Rohingya refugees are informally assimilating into the host society due to similarities in language and religion. In Bangladesh, refugees are not formally allowed to assimilate and integrate into society by the government (Mohajan, 2018; Reuters, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2019; ISCG *et al.*, 2020; Sakib and Ananna, 2022) (I have continued with this argument later with relevant data, period, and evidence. Rohingya refugees were informally assimilated into the host society between 1978-2016 due to similarities in language and religion. However, things changed drastically from 2017 onwards). Bangladesh is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, so it is not obligated to recognize Rohingyas as refugees (Ahmed, 2010; Ullah, 2011). Rohingya fleeing since August 2017 are recognized as Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMNs) (Roy Chowdhury, 2020). Due to the Rohingyas outnumbering them; the locals are worried about their own community identity. In the beginning, similar religious beliefs and the idea of the Ummah (Muslim brotherhood) inspired many locals to host Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar (Ansar and Md Khaled, 2021). However, over the past five years, the circumstances of Cox's Bazar have changed. Local populations turned xenophobic over the uncertain repatriation of Rohingyas to Myanmar (UNDP, 2018; Sakib, 2023). Around 96.5% of local respondents perceived that there are possibilities of future risk (social mixing, security breach, economic, etc.) if the Rohingya stay for a long time in Bangladesh (Jerin and Mozumder, 2019). The host community's negative perception towards the Rohingya has increased, causing social tension (Sohel and Siddiqui, 2019). Initially, 72% of host communities had a positive attitude towards refugees, but this shifted dramatically in 2020, with negative views rising to 60% and positive views dropping to 18% (Ullah *et al.*, 2021). About 85% of Cox's Bazar survey respondents feel unsafe near the Rohingya community (Xchange, 2018). The host communities near the camps are discontent due to overcrowding, pollution, safety concerns, insecurity, and declining public services, lowering residential satisfaction to 30.17% (Biswas *et al*., 2021).

The host community now self-identifies as a group (citizens) that is different from the Rohingya refugees (non-citizens). The host community (68%) mostly sees the Rohingya's morals and values as incompatible, which can lead to 'othering' refugees (Jerin and Mozumder, 2019). A study claimed that 61% respondents never interact with refugees, while 20% meet Rohingya "somewhat often" or "occasionally." Only 18% meet them "very often." Around 66% are uncomfortable cooperating or being friends with Rohingya (Macdonald *et*

al., 2023). In addition, the refugee crisis brings multifaceted challenges on various fronts, including economy, society, housing, health, environment, education, and governance, exacerbating preexisting stress factors (UNDP, 2018). All of the above factors contributed to the host community's growing hostility and hatred toward the Rohingya refugees. A study conducted by Ansar and Md Khaled (2021) claimed that women in Ukhiya and Teknaf expressed concerns about livelihood challenges (46%), law and order uncertainties (28%), and demographic risks (18%) due to the presence of refugees in their area. The informal assimilations and integrations of Rohingya refugees into host society have an impact on scarce resources and services, which ultimately escalate conflict and tension between two communities (I have dealt with this issue in a conceptual analysis later in this text).

The services and opportunities in Cox's Bazar, which were limited even before the arrival of the Rohingya, are under additional stress now (Tay *et al.*, 2018). The local community resents the competition and the preferential access to resources and humanitarian aid given by the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to the Rohingya (Ansar and Md. Khaled, 2021). Nearly half the members of the local community resent the Rohingya's access to local facilities and services (Xchange, 2018), and social tension is rising (Grossenbacher *et al.*, 2020). The informal assimilation and integration of refugees and the unequal socio-economic opportunities and access to resources, cause a degree of "identity differentiation".

This study demonstrates that the assimilation of Rohingyas in Bangladesh has gradually transformed from a bottom-up process to a top-down and partial integration with the intervention of the state and international actors due to the significant influx of refugees, which has strained Cox's Bazar's demography and increased tensions among communities. This transformation has led to identity crises and differentiation among the host and refugee communities in Cox's Bazar, resulting in conflict over public services and environmental resources.

The stated research problem is that the presence of Rohingya refugees and their space and resource usage deteriorate the refugee-host community relationship and escalate tensions, competition, and conflict over scarce resources and services, leading to identity differentiation between the two communities. The local community is already poor and marginalized just as much as the Rohingya are. The presence of the Rohingya constrains the poor local community's already limited access to inadequate public services and scarce economic and environmental resources. In Bangladesh, contextual and structural factors such as existing poverty, a lack of resources, inadequate infrastructure, institutions, organizations,

and rules play the most significant roles in the breakdown of community relations and escalating conflicts. Additionally, demographic pressure exacerbated tension and competition over natural resources and unequal access to and distribution of resources and services, resulting in identity differentiation. Moreover, assimilation and integration issues for refugees in host countries are also different in the Global South than they are in the Global North. Refugees and immigrants' integration into host societies is discouraged in the Global South, particularly in post-colonial and recently liberated nations that are already experiencing political and economic instability. These are the issues that have been investigated in this study.

The results of this research were presented in several published and unpublished articles. In the first part, I have explored the challenges and transformation of the assimilation and integration of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh's host society. In the second section, I have examined how host communities differentiate their identity from the Rohingya based on civic and citizenship identities. In the third section, I have discussed how the issues of integration and assimilation of Rohingya refugees into the host society in Cox's Bazar exacerbated tensions and conflicts over public services and resources.

Literature review

Assimilation and integration

Assimilation and integration are widely utilized terms in various disciplines, aiming to comprehend their impact on the circumstances of both communities and nations. The process of assimilation and integration may affect refugees and immigrants either positively or negatively. In the Global North, immigrants and refugees assimilate and integrate into the host society through their ability to compete in the job market, their children's educational process, or their involvement in civic and social life. For example, refugees in the Netherlands experience improved economic integration through their education, Dutch language proficiency, and work experience. Establishing social connections with Dutch natives also contributes positively to their economic integration. Conversely, factors such as health issues, depression, and prolonged stays in refugee reception centers have a negative impact on employment and occupational status (de Vroome and van Tubergen, 2010; Bakker, Dagevos and Engbersen, 2014). Similarly, Syrian refugees face challenges when integrating into Turkish society, such as the divergence between legal and public perspectives on integration and the prevalence of Syrian refugees working in the informal sectors in Turkey.

The conflicting ideologies of the legal discourse emphasizing the rights of refugees and the public discourse promoting generosity and hospitality, viewing refugees as "guests," pose significant obstacles to the integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey (Goksel, 2018). Refugees in Germany undergo cultural and economic assimilation. Although refugees placed in hostile regions (where refugees feel local threat and hostility) adapt to the local culture at a faster pace, but their economic integration does not accelerate. The findings indicate that refugees make greater efforts to assimilate in response to local threats, but their integration is hindered in more hostile regions due to higher levels of discrimination (Jaschke, Sardoschau and Tabellini, 2022). Canada stands out from other countries due to its distinctive sponsorship programs, such as government sponsorship, private sponsorship, or a combination of both government and private efforts. Privately sponsored refugees experience significantly better employment outcomes and higher earnings compared to government-assisted refugees, and this advantage persists for up to 15 years after their arrival. This is particularly beneficial for refugees with limited educational backgrounds (Kaida, Hou and Stick, 2020). According to another studyconducted in the United States, refugees faced disadvantages in terms of employment and earnings when compared to other immigrants and native-born Americans. Certain refugee groups, particularly those who recently arrived, experienced even greater challenges regarding English language proficiency and education levels (Capps and Newland, 2015).

Most research on immigration has focused on the integration of labor immigrants and their descendants in developed countries. However, when it comes to refugees settling in developing regions, the complex interplay of racial, ethnic, social, cultural, and religious factors can significantly challenge traditional theories of assimilation and integration (Donato and Ferris, 2020; Çelik, 2021). Many Afghan refugees were settled for years in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) in Pakistan. Pashto, common in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Afghanistan, unites Pakistani natives and Afghan refugees in language, culture, and religion, thus making it easy for Afghan refugees to integrate into the host society (Ali, Sabir and Muhammad, 2019). Afghan Refugees in Pakistan face hardships due to vague laws without proper regulation. The refugee registration policy lacks stability, with Proof of Registration (POR) cards failing to secure stable employment, forcing refugees into informal businesses to survive (Tariq et al., 2024). Afghan refugee entrepreneurs in Pakistan rely on family networks established over generations, supporting them with social capital for starting businesses. This family support aids in their adaptation to local language and customs, enhancing their integration into the host community (Ali et al., 2021; Zehra and Usmani,

2021; Humayun et al., 2023). The government policy in Nepal requires refugees to stay in camps, but over 15,000 Bhutanese live outside without UNHCR aid. Nepali-speaking refugees blend in easily and sometimes work for locals outside the camps. In partnership with Ministry of Education Nepal, UNHCR, and CARITAS-Nepal, Bhutanese refugees in eastern Nepal are being integrated into the host society through an education program. They follow a mixed curriculum to prepare for potential return or settlement (Brown, 2001).

Similarly, camp-based integration occurs, with Rohingya finding employment within and outside settlements, provided by NGOs or through small businesses connected to local Bengali enterprises. Women train in centers making masks, while men handle construction work to repair or build roads during the summer monsoon (Mahapatro and Gebauer, 2023). However, many locals in Cox's Bazar are frustrated by the ongoing refugee crisis and the impact on their community, particularly concerning social and economic integration. This has put a strain on livelihoods, especially for those reliant on the reserve forests designated for Rohingya camps (Kamruzzaman, Siddiqi and Ahmed, 2024). Rohingyas who relocated to Bangladesh 16 years ago work in the informal labor market and make around $120 per month on average. Additionally, they have acquired some education and are fluent in the local language (Ahmed *et al.*, 2020). Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh mainly assimilate through language learning and marriage (Idrish and Khatun, 2018). Despite the challenges in refugee camps, Rohingya women marry Bangladeshi men for citizenship and rights, despite the marriages being 'illegal'; they also involve in practices such as polygamy, child marriage, and abandonment. Local Bengali Muslims sympathize with the Rohingya refugees, seeing it as a moral and religious duty to assist the helpless, especially in marriage, to protect them from risks like sexual violence and trafficking. Both communities see benefits in cross-national marriages (Uddin, 2021). Rohingya women's conditions worsened after their arrivals; some local men married Rohingya women to access aid illegally, leaving these women vulnerable. Polygamy spread, causing tensions and Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) concerns among local and Rohingya women (Islam *et al.*, 2022). Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh face challenges in integrating through education due to restrictions in refugee policies, despite their strong desire for education as a means to self-respect and dignity. The government views education for refugees primarily as a relief rather than focused on development and integration (Rahman, Shindaini and Husain, 2022; Prodip, 2023). Rohingya children struggle to receive a high-quality education because of a number of issues, such as barriers to enrollment in public schools, parental opposition to enrolling their children in school, and unqualified educators at learning centers (Mohd Ali *et al.*, 2021). Bangladesh shows limited

interest in educating Rohingya refugees through its national curriculum due to assimilation fears. The GoB, backed by UNICEF, launched a pilot program offering formal education up to ninth grade based on Myanmar curriculum for 10,000 Rohingya children in camps (Ahmed and Das, 2022). Rohingya children faced social integration challenges in Bangladesh. They encountered bullying at a local school, leading to leaving school prematurely and receiving inadequate education (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2021). In Bangladesh, the refugee youth population is 306,413. Rohingya youth lack access to formal education, vocational training, and livelihood opportunities, being excluded from the UNICEF education program. Girls face stigma and child marriage barriers. In the last five years, security restrictions have impacted refugee youth in all aspects of community and civic life. Rohingya youth (18–24 years) are facing high levels of unemployment, frustration, and deprivation due to prolonged displacement and a lack of opportunities (Islam and Naing, 2023).

Challenging identities of the host community

The large number of refugees residing in the host society may affect the identities of the host community, leading to an identity crisis and eventually differentiation. The processes of adaptation, assimilation, and integration in the new nation have altered the identities of migrants and the host communities. The changes observed include shifts in mentality, thinking, self-esteem, values, culture, attitudes, behaviors, and sense of identity, place, and space for example studies on various refugee groups in Europe reflects interesting dimensions of identity differentiation (Cormoș, 2022). The refugee issues are within the wider context of economic, social, and cultural factors that shape European identity and construct the identity of the refugees as as a 'threat', 'backward' and culturally 'alien other'. It emphasizes the connection between the concept of "refugee" and the European sense of self, highlighting how the emerging particularistic identities in Europe contribute to the perception of refugees as incompatible (Junuzi, 2019; Fotou, 2021). The elimination of borders in Europe increased identification among Europeans living in the EU zone while also creating a stronger sense of exclusion towards those outside. The migrant emergency exposed the vulnerability of European identity and integration, which aim to embrace cultural diversity. The establishment of EU citizenship and identity further created a divided "us" versus "them" identity differentiation in relation to the immigrants (Makarychev, 2018; Caretta, 2021). Another study shows that the refugee flow during the 2015–2016 crises led to changes in Swedish refugee policy, reshaping Sweden's identity by categorizing refugees and Muslim minorities as "others". This new "self/other" dynamic differed from the situation before and

during the beginning of the crisis (Dharmaputra, Felayati and Suhito, 2019). Syrian refugee women in Jordan who reside outside refugee camps face significant challenges with assimilation and encounter an identity crisis. They feel a noticeable dissimilarity in language, customs, and traditions compared to their Jordanian peers, which leads to social isolation. Balancing daily concerns and longing for their homeland further hinders their sense of belonging to the host country's society (al-Shar and al-Tarawneh, 2019).

Conflict over public services and natural resources

However, the assimilation of refugees into the host communities does not necessarily lead to conflict and prejudice everywhere. It depends on the context. Sometimes, it can also lead to increasing trust and social cohesion. However, in the case of Bangladesh, it has led to conflict after a certain period of time due to the protracted nature of cohabitation with the refugees in the limited and confined space of the camps in Cox's Bazar. About 65.3% of the local community feel that the Rohingya create social problems, 69.8% feel they are responsible for the environmental imbalance, and 76.7% of the local community feel that the Rohingya add to the pressure and demand on the already scarce resources (Jerin and Mozumder, 2019). Here, I have discussed a series of examples of crises that ensued after the arrival of refugees in various other countries that are relevant to the Bangladesh context.

Conflict over public services and facilities
Health services

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Medical Corps (IMC) offer free medical care to Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Residents protested, and access was granted to them by the providers (Bizri, Dada, and Haschicho, 2019). However, many refugees are still unable to receive critical secondary and tertiary care due to a lack of resources and funding (Lyles *et al.*, 2018). Local people of Balochistan in Pakistan stated that health facilities were used by refugees, causing shortages of beds and other hospital amenities. Water scarcity and educational strain also occurred due to the refugee influx (Khan, Khan and Khan, 2021; Yaseen et al., 2021). Similarly, the lack of proper sewerage in the Sanishchare Camp where Bhutanese refugees are settled in Nepal leads to sewage overflow during the rainy season, causing diseases such as typhoid, diarrhea, and jaundice. Existing local health care centers in Pathari-Sanishchare are insufficient to handle such health crises effectively (Gandharba, 2018). The basic services of the host community in Cox's Bazar have worsened due to the influx of Rohingya, particularly in health care. This has left

the host communities lacking health professionals, caregivers, medicines, and vaccines, as attention is largely focused on Rohingya camps (Miah et al., 2023; Sultana, 2023).

Education facilities

The Congolese refugee children in Rwanda are integrated into the local school system as part of the government's community-integrated approach. This has led to increased investment in services, including education, in the areas surrounding the camps. However, the children's attendance overcrowds classrooms and occasionally causes minor tension and violence (Bilgili *et al.*, 2019). Many refugee children are able to attend public schools in Lebanon and Jordan. Only the children of refugees are educated by international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) in both countries; host community children, on the other hand, do not receive any education at all and perceive refugees as rivals for limited resources (Karam and Zellman, 2017). During the Rohingya influx, Bangladesh military used schools as camps, preventing children from attending. Parents kept kids home due to safety concerns, leading some students to drop out for work. Top teachers left for NGOs for better pay (Babu, 2020; Grossenbacher, 2020).

Food security, accommodation, and employment

The refugee influx into the local villages of western Tanzania affected the food security for both communities. It is stated that NGOs and donor agencies focused their attention on certain villages while overlooking other impacted host villages (Whitaker, 2002). The inflow of Syrian refugees has increased the cost of hospitality, food, and housing in the hosting regions in Turkey (Akgündüz, van den Berg and Hassink, 2015; Tumen, 2016). A study claims that the host population saw Syrian refugees as an economic burden and a threat, with 71% believing that the Turkish economy had suffered because of the refugees. Furthermore, 56% of participants claimed that Syrian refugees had taken their employment, and as a result, about half of those polled opposed issuing work permits to Syrians (Erdoğan, 2014). The government adopted a decree providing work permits for refugees in January 2016 (Esen and Oğuş Binatlı, 2017). The Syrian refugee crisis has increased in population and demand has raised the prices of basic goods, and housing rents have grown by up to 44% (Beaujouan and Rasheed, 2020). To combat intolerance and bridge the gap between refugees and host communities, NGOs developed several programmes, including "cash-for-work" and "multipurpose cash interventions" in Lebanon (Kheireddine, Soares, and Rodrigues, 2021). Similarly after Afghan refugees arrived in Pakistan, competition arose with locals over resources, leading to increased demands in education, energy, and employment. This created

resentment among residents of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. As cheap labor, refugees impact local workers, influencing market dynamics and contributing to inflation by raising demand for products (Anwar, Hassan, and Kakar, 2021). Food insecurity is high among Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. They heavily depend on aid, posing a challenge due to funding scarcity. Though some received agricultural training and support from UNHCR, efforts are limited. The refugee influx strained available resources and services (UNHCR, 2021a; Anwar et al., 2024). The refugee influx, NGOs' arrival, and funding shifts changed Cox's Bazar labor market, impacting Ukhiya and Teknaf locals unable to afford higher housing rent after the arrival of the Rohingyas and the NGOs (Sohel and Siddiqui, 2019).

Conflict over natural resources

A large influx of refugees might result in the depletion of natural resources (Barnett, House, and Common, 2003; Clark, 2008; World Bank, 2010). For example, the conflict between Kenyan citizens and Somalian immigrants was mostly caused by rivalry for grazing pasture and scarce water supplies for both humans and animals (Kumssa *et al.*, 2014). Similar confrontations arose between different groups in Southern Sudan as a result of cattle grazing. Conflict was reduced when the government stepped in to relocate the animals to a sparsely inhabited grazing region (Hoots, 2018). The host community's economy, heavily reliant on the environment, faces risks from refugees, donor agencies, environmental degradation, and depleting natural resources. About 1.67% of Cox's Bazar's forest area and 0.05% of the national forest area are affected, totaling over 3,000 hectares (Khatun and Kamruzzaman, 2018).

Deforestation and competition over household energy

The presence of Nigerian refugees at the Minawao camp in northern Cameroon contributes to increased deforestation. The UNHCR has launched a reforestation effort both inside and outside of the camps to encourage communities and refugees to utilize alternative energy cook stoves, but just 2.8% of refugees have access to alternate energy sources, so the success rate is relatively low (Groupe URD, 2017). In a similar vein, use of forest and charcoal products contributed to refugee-host community conflicts in Ghana, Ethiopia, and Zimbabwe (Johanne and Alex, 2017; Mekonen and Muluberhan, 2020; Agblorti and Grant, 2021). In Nakivale, Uganda, the refugees evict the locals and collect firewood and crop residues from their land to use as sources of household energy (Bjørkhaug, 2020; Ronald, 2020). However,

the land distribution in Nakivale is not sustainable; there are issues of corruption that affect both the host and refugee communities. In a similar vein, establishing refugee camps in Nepal has increased demand for forest resources and reduced forest cover by one-fifth. Deforestation around the camps in various Nepali regions due to firewood and settlement construction needs is a major concern for forestry authorities. Refugees' settlements without clear boundaries are continuously threatening forest resources (Subedi, 2012; Gandharba, 2018). For over three decades, Afghan refugees in Pakistan transformed camps into villages, increasing wood demand, and straining woodland resources. They brought 2 million livestock, causing overgrazing and soil erosion. Harming groundwater renewal, and gathering fodder and fuel pose significant environmental threats (Anwar, Hassan and Kakar, 2021). The deforestation linked to Rohingya refugee influx, affecting over 3,000 hectares, led to loss of forest-dependent livelihoods like fuelwood collection, livestock rearing, and agroforestry. This impact has hit marginalized host community members, notably in livestock rearing, agroforestry, and food insecurity, fostering group identity and relative deprivation, influencing long-term intra-community cohesion (Moslehuddin et al., 2018; Rahman, 2018; Ahmed et al., 2019; Ahmed and Sabastini, 2024).

Water scarcity

The refugee crisis has affected both locals and refugees in Lebanon (Jaafar et al., 2020), Jordan (Breulmann et al., 2021), and Western Tanzania (Berry, 2008). This has resulted in water scarcity, and as a result of rising demand for surface and groundwater, land and agricultural productivity have suffered. The Syrian refugee influx raised water demand by 40% in Jordan's northern areas, causing a severe water crisis and straining sewage networks and treatment plants (Breulmann et al., 2021). Groundwater contamination in Cox's Bazar is a pressing issue due to leakages, seepages, and overflow from numerous non-functional latrines and tube wells. Surface water, including ponds and streams, is also contaminated by the both communities' (host and Rohingyas) open defecation practices. The lack of a cohesive waste management system results in waste being discharged into surface water and land (Mohiuddin and Molderez, 2023; UNDP, 2018).

Safety and security issues

The presence of refugees is also a security crisis/threat (Nour and Abdul Rahman, 2017): smuggling, human trafficking, kidnapping, killing, looting, sexual harassment, assault, murder, and armed rebel activities usually increases (Jacobsen, 2002). Domestic and communal violence, sexual abuse, armed robberies death, and injuries happen every day in

and around the Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya and Lebanon (Crisp, 2000; Ali, Imana and Ocha, 2017; Saferworld and Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, 2018). In Nepal, social crimes such as suicide, prostitution, and drug abuse near refugee settlements have risen, severely impacting community security (Karki, 2016). Similarly, local citizens of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Baluchistan in Pakistan feel that refugees are one of the causes of instability in their provinces. The causes of demographic change contributed to ethnic clashes and an increased rate of crimes (Roehrs, 2015; Borthakur, 2017). Rohingya refugees remain in camps without repatriation, long-term frustration could lead to criminal and extremist activities, posing safety concerns for Bangladesh due to conflicts within the camps affecting security and peace for both locals and Rohingya (International Crisis Group, 2019; Minar, 2021).

The critical literature review mentioned above explores topics such as assimilation, integration, identity crises, differentiation, and conflict. The issues discussed in existing literature do not provide a comprehensive understanding of the context for both the Rohingya and the host community living in Bangladesh. This research helps bridge the gap in the existing literature. I have briefly addressed the gaps in the literature. The current literature provides insights into the process of assimilation and integration of refugees and immigrants in Europe and other developed nations. However, these insights do not directly apply to less developed countries such as Bangladesh, particularly in the context of the Rohingya situation. In addition to this, the assimilation and integration of the Rohingya in Bangladesh have not been thoroughly explored in the existing literature, especially regarding its differences, changes, and challenges in the context of the global south, which is emphasized in this study. Moreover, the existing literature does not adequately address the identity crises and differentiation issues between Rohingyas and the local community in Bangladesh due to the involvement of government and non-governmental organizations, bringing a new dimension to the literature through this research. In existing literature, we have identified conflicts between refugees and the host community worldwide regarding public services and natural resources. However, the conflict between the Rohingya and the host community in Bangladesh introduces a unique dimension, emphasizing the local community's demands on civic or citizen rights in the context of conflict, identity crises, and differentiation. This introduces new forms of modern democratic demands, rights, and politics, which have not been previously addressed in the existing literature on conflicts between refugees and the host community.

Research questions

The central research question of the study is to investigate: How did the assimilation and integration process of Rohingya refugees in the host society of Cox's Bazar led to the differentiation of identities between the host community and the refugees from 2017 onwards and exteriorize conflict over public services and environmental resources? This research question can be subdivided into multiple thematic questions, which are given below:

- How has the assimilation and integration of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh's host society taken its shape, been challenged, and altered over time?
- Why and how did the host community differentiate their identity from the Rohingya after 2017?
- What are the factors or issues that led to social conflicts between the refugees and the host community in Cox's Bazar?

Aim and objectives of the research

The main aim of this study is to explore: the assimilation and integration processes of Rohingya refugees in the host society in Cox's Bazar, which eventually lead to disputes over access to public services and natural resources, differentiation of identity, and social conflict.

Specific objectives-

- To analyze the processes of transformation and challenges to the assimilation and integration of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh's host society;
- To explore how the host community differentiates their identity from the Rohingya after 2017.
- To identify the determinants those contribute to increase in social conflict over services and resources and affect the relationship between two communities.

Conjectural Statements/Assumptions:

- *The process of assimilation and integration of Rohingya refugees into Bangladeshi society has been exceedingly challenging, and from 1978 to 2017, it got slowly transformed due to government intervention.*
- *The inflow of refugees has strained Cox's Bazar's demography, heightened tensions and disputes over resources and services, including the host government's and*

humanitarian organizations' preferred access to refugees, and resulted in identity crisis and differentiation between the two communities in Cox's Bazar.

- *The accelerated pace of the Rohingya refugee influx since 2017 created greater pressure on existing resources and services, adversely affected the host community's relationships with refugees, and gave rise to social conflicts based on differentiated identities, particularly because the host community is poor and marginalized.*

I will focus on and analyze each of these statements in the context of the theoretical framework and provide further nuances and detailing of these statements therein.

Scope and limitation of research

The assimilation and integration of refugees, the identity differentiation of the host communities, and the nature of the conflict between refugees and the host community in post-colonial nation-states and newly independent countries in the Global South are not comparable to those in developed and Western nations in the Global North. Thus, the conceptual limitation is that the findings and sociological knowledge generated in this thesis will be specifically applicable and pertinent to the cases of post-colonial and newly formed nations of the Global South, where resource conflict and refugee problems are pronounced and are distinctly different from the refugee issues of the Global North, and therefore will not be applicable worldwide.

Theoretical discussion

Assimilation and Integration

Introduction

The terms assimilation and integration refer to two distinct processes. Integration enables refugees and immigrants to preserve their cultural identity through certain specific alignments, adjustments, and transformations, whereas assimilation results in the loss of such identity (Berry, 1992; Deaux, 2006). Moreover, from a transatlantic viewpoint, the concepts of assimilation that predominate in the US and integration commonly used in Europe can be different (Schneider and Crul, 2010; Laubenthal, 2023). Many academicians, particularly those outside of the US, prefer to refer to the successful incorporation of immigrant groups as "integration" (Spencer, 2022). Assimilation came to be associated with ethnocentrism, the repression of cultures, and frequently the use of action to force minorities into conformity

(Heckmann, 2006). The term "integration" emphasizes the structural aspects of societal inclusion more explicitly than "assimilation," particularly in relation to educational successes and access to the labor market, which aim towards ethnic minority groups to overcome inequalities (Schneider and Crul, 2010). Since democratic societies are characterized by a diversity of institutional structures, lifestyles, and processes that are constantly changing, there isn't a single culture or social order to assimilate to. Hence, the cultural conformity that assimilation implies is false (Rudiger and Spencer, 2003).

Assimilation

At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, assimilation theory emerged as an academic idea (Alba and Nee, 2014; Laubenthal, 2023). The theory was developed from immigrant experience in the US and was first applied to all ethno-racial settings (Alba and Nee, 2014). Many scholars consider the assimilation concept as a multigenerational (Alba & Nee 2003), unidirectional (Heckmann, 2006; Spencer, 2022), and a straight-line (Warner and Srole, 1945) or one-way process of incorporation into a culturally homogenous majority society (Kivisto and Faist, 2010; Spencer, 2022). Assimilation is a stage when individuals give up their own culture and traditions and fully become a part of a different society (Heckmann, 2006). It means that immigrants or refugees adhere to the dominant society's new values, norms, and practices rather than upholding their own cultural norms and beliefs. Education and practicing citizenship rights, in Mayo-Smith's (1894) opinion, are the two main factors contributing to assimilation. There are two components to assimilation, the first of which is an unintentional or unconscious social process that takes place when groups are in constant contact. The second is particularly related to "purposive assimilation" that is "directed by the state" in this regard (Simons, 1901–1902, p. 793).

Assimilation theory was first introduced by Park and Burgess (1921, p. 735) among Chicago School scholars defined as "a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life." This definition does not mandate that all indications of ethnic origin be eliminated. Instead, it connects assimilation with changes that integrate ethnic minorities into mainstream society (Alba and Nee, 2014). According to Park (1914), assimilation may be hindered by prejudice and racism in the dominant society.

Milton Gordon's book "*Assimilation in American Life*" (1964) has clarified the concept of assimilation in different ways. Gordon proposed seven dimensions to measure a community's or group's progress toward assimilation into the host society. He referred to these assimilation-related traits as both types and stages. Gordon believed that assimilation did not proceed in a straight and uniform manner, but rather that it occurred in a number of ways and at various speeds (Kivisto, 2015). His first two important dimensions are: cultural assimilation or acculturation (immigrant groups change their cultural traditions and integrate the host society's language, behaviors, and beliefs), and structural assimilation (the immigrant groups integrate fully into the sociocultural network of groups and institutions). According to Gordon (1964), when a minority group arrives at the host community, cultural assimilation or acculturation is likely to happen first; once structural assimilation has taken place, all other types of assimilation will naturally follow (Gordon, 2015). Gordon suggested five other assimilation processes, which are: (1) amalgamation (intermarrying with the majority); (2) identity assimilation (identify with the host society more than their ethnic identity); (3) attitude receptional assimilation (absence of a decline in prejudice toward a group); (4) behavioral receptional assimilation (no discrimination against a group); and finally, (5) civic assimilation (does not bring up any issues of value or power clash with the host society) (Gordon, 1964, p. 71). He further says that even if a group adopts the language, customs, and religious beliefs of the host country, it may still not have full access to the institutions, opportunities, and occupations available there. The complexity of the mainstream culture of his period, which varied greatly from one region to another, makes a one-way model of assimilation problematic for non-white immigrants and for various religious groups (Alba and Nee, 2014).

In the 1990s, a number of sociologists and historians criticized and rejected the classic assimilation theory. The "classical" view of assimilation was allegedly oversimplified and unhistorical (Kivisto and Faist, 2010). The classic concept of assimilation was elaborated by segmented assimilation, first formulated by Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou (1993) to study the children/second generation of contemporary immigrants in stratified and unequal American society. The concept of segmented assimilation applies to both immigrant children who were born in the host country and those who were born abroad but moved to the host country as young children (Stepick and Stepick, 2010). Portes and Zhou (1993) described three paths that lead to different social, economic, and cultural destinations: upward assimilation (acculturation into the white middle class); downward assimilation (acculturation into the urban underclass); and selective assimilation (preserving the culture and values of the

immigrant while also advancing their economic situation). Portes and Zhou (1993) provide a pluralist alternative to either "upward" (i.e., mainstream) or "downward" assimilation. The main mechanism is the desire of immigrants and subsequent generations to improve their social and material situations (Alba and Nee, 2014).

Richard Alba and Victor Nee (2003) have developed a revisionist theory of assimilation known as the "new assimilation theory" in contrast to segmented assimilation, which focuses on the relationship between assimilation and mobility. Their "new assimilation theory" challenges the idea of a single Anglo-American "mainstream" and emphasizes the importance of institutional changes and civil rights policies (Laubenthal, 2023). Boundaries, which are a key idea in the new assimilation theory and are frequently linked to Fredrik Barth's (1969) work in the field of ethnic studies, are used to define groups within a society. An effective typology of boundary-related changes was developed by Aristide Zolberg and Long Litt Woon (1999) and reveals several assimilation-related processes. In "Remaking the American Mainstream," (2003) Alba and Nee make a distinction between three boundary-related processes: boundary crossing (it involves a person moving from one group to another without really changing the boundary), boundary blurring (individuals may be perceived as simultaneously belonging to the groups on each side of the boundary, or they may alternately appear to belong to both groups at different times), and boundary shifting (includes moving a boundary so that populations that were previously on one side are now present on the other; as a result, outsiders become insiders). According to the instrumentalist perspective an ethnic group is *de fecto* an interest group. In pursuit of interests they develop "basic organizational functions: distinctiveness or boundaries; communication; authority structure; decision making procedure; ideology; and socialization" (Cohen 1974: xvi–xvii). Abner Cohen (1969, 1974) argues that ethnicity is instrumental, and maintains their identity for economic and political, not psychological, reasons. He defines an ethnic group as a collectivity of people. Cohen (1974) also argues that the formation of an ethnic group in town involves a dynamic rearrangement of relations and customs, rather than cultural conservatism and continuity. Cohen (1969) introduced the concept of 'political ethnicity' as the process where one ethnic group uses elements of its cultural tradition to form an informal political organization, leveraging customs, values, and symbols in a power struggle with another ethnic group within a formal political system. He (1969:3) further said that ethnic groups have an advantage due to the difficulty and costliness for a state to suppress their customs, which can be used for informal political organization. Cohen (1974: xv) said that "the earning of livelihood, the struggle for a larger share of income from the economic system, including the

struggle for housing, for higher education, and for other benefits, and similar issues constitute an important variable significantly related to ethnicity".

The constructivist shows how ethnic identities relate to political and economic competition. Ethnicity and ethnic categories are redefined by Kanchan Chandra's (2006) work, offering new ideas on identity change and sharpening the framework. Ethnic identity categories, Chandra (2006, 2012) proposes, are a subset of identity categories in which membership eligibility is determined by descent-based attributes. All ethnic identities require some descent-based attributes for membership (Chandra and Wilkinson, 2008). Attributes linked to descent involve genetic factors (skin color, gender, etc.), cultural and historical inheritance (name, language, etc.), and markers acquired during one's lifetime (last name, tribal markings). In ethnic identities, nominal ones are based on descent, while activated ones are those a person claims or is assigned. People have different nominal identities that can become activated (Chandra, 2012). Changing ethnic identity is limited by inherited attributes; dyeing hair, learning a new language, or moving regions aren't enough to switch categories. Ethnic identities evolve through various factors like violence, modernization, institutions, and hybridity. Kanchan Chandra suggests descent-based attributes like last names and birthplaces can be changed during relocation or migration to create new histories easier (Chandra, 2012).

According to Wimmer (2009), ethnic boundaries arise from struggles and negotiations among actors in a social field, their boundary-making strategies influenced by institutional order, power distribution, and political networks. Wimmer (2013) outlined four dimensions of ethnic boundary-making: political representation, social interaction, cultural distinctions, and stability, which vary among groups. The political dimension involves using ethnicity for representation and alliances. Social closure encompasses group isolation due to choice, exclusion, or discrimination. Wimmer (2013) attributes cultural differences to language, racial phenotypes, subjective traits that reinforce ethnic boundaries as 'natural' and enduring, not solely rooted in perceived differences and similarities, but also stable over time and generations.

Integration

As it relates to migration, the term "integration" is subject to a wide variety of definitions, many of which demonstrate notable differences depending on the national context. The levels of integration might vary significantly among different societal segments (Rudiger and Spencer, 2003). Integration is a more specific technical dimension and the initial stage of the

acculturation process when individuals are able to accept and adapt to the structures and institutions of a new society as well as maintain their own culture.

Several scholars define integration as a process through which both the host community and the newcomers change and change one another (Castles et al. 2002; Strang and Ager 2010). Intergovernmental organizations consider integration a two-way process—along-term process, and an interactive process among newcomers, the larger society, and its institutions (UNHCR 2013). According to Constantin (2004), for immigrants, integration involves language proficiency, education and job access, professional advancement, equal treatment under the law, cultural and religious freedom, and adherence to the host country's laws and traditions. At the same time, the host society must be tolerant, open, and accepting of migrants to achieve integration. This involves understanding the advantages and difficulties of multicultural societies, providing access to information about integration benefits, promoting intercultural dialogue, and respecting migrants' conditions, traditions, and rights.

Heckmann (2006) identifies four dimensions of integration: structural (as it relates to fundamental institutions like healthcare, housing, education, and employment); cultural (attitudinal and behavioral change); social (relationships); and "identificational," which relates to people's varied senses of identity and belonging. A conceptual model of integration (Ager and Strang 2008) uses markers and means, reflecting functional aspects of integration like housing, education, health, and employment; social connections, denoting diverse forms of social relationships like social bonds, social bridges, and social links; facilitators, representing language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability; and foundation, indicating rights and citizenship. Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx (2016:14) define integration as "the process of becoming an accepted part of society". They suggest that the process of assessing integration be approached by recognizing three dimensions (the legal-political, the socio-economic, and the cultural-religious); two parties (the immigrants and the receiving society); and three levels (individuals, organizations, and institutions). The legal-political dimension brings up the status and political rights of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers; the socio-economic dimension mentions access to work, education, health care, and accommodation; and the cultural-religious dimension presents the participation of newcomers in the culture and religion of the receiving society. **Most of the scholars emphasize the structural and social aspects of integration in the host society.** The concept of integration given by Bosswick and Heckmann (2007) is "the process of inclusion of immigrants in the institutions and relationships of the host society." It must be said here that this definition of integration is

more realistic in higher-developed countries, where the structural and institutional dimensions of resources and opportunities in work, health, and education are better than in poorer and less developed countries (Echterhoff et al. 2020).

Assimilation and integration difficulties for refugees in the Global South

These fundamental theories have enlarged and generated crucial conceptual tools for comprehending the assimilation and integration of immigrants in the Global North. However, there is hardly any discussion about refugees and their assimilation and integration in the Global South, but it turns out that by the end of 2022, low- and middle-income nations were hosting 76% of all refugees and other people worldwide (UNHCR, 2023). The assimilation and integration processes of refugees in a host country in the Global South are not the same as in rich and western liberal democratic countries (FitzGerald and Arar, 2018). The integration policies of countries in the Global North allow refugees' access to structural, cultural, and other types of integration into host society. In contrast to Global North contexts, the issues of assimilation and integration in the South require a distinct analysis. Since postcolonial and newly liberated nations in the Global South have very limited resources and institutional capability, as well as political and economic difficulties that impede the integration and assimilation of refugees and immigrants into host society. Although South-South migration is growing significantly, integration issues are frequently ignored by the host governments, causing an increase in socio-economic expenses for both the host community and the immigrants (Gagnon and Khoudour-Castéras, 2012). The local people in many emerging and developing nations already have limited access to social safety, good housing, formal employment, and natural resources; they are unprepared to welcome refugees since their territory has few shared resources. Integration of refugees into host societies may result in more inequality, higher competition, decreased productivity, and even criminality. Additionally, racism, xenophobia, and intolerance may naturally spread among local people as a result of migrants and refugees receiving additional services and support from the state and humanitarian organizations (Gagnon and Khoudour-Castéras, 2012; Oucho and Williams, 2019). For those reasons, state policies in the Global South usually prevent or restrict refugees' access to resources and legal employment, impede or limit their ability to get citizenship, and confine them to camps (Betts and Collier, 2017). In some cases, the state decides the degree of refugee assimilation into the host society (Simons, 1901–1902, p. 793). The residential integration that neo-assimilation studies emphasize is not practicable for

people who live in camps. Acculturated stateless refugees, who are raised in a host society without having obtained legal permission to do so, i.e. informal acculturation from below, have restricted mobility. Refugees are continuously protected, monitored, and controlled by host authorities in camps. They have access to social services provided by a number of international agencies, such as UNHCR, the World Health Organization (WHO), and UNICEF. Social and economic exclusion can be a root cause of crime amongst refugee populations, leading youth to engage in criminal activities including armed robberies, the spread of small guns and light weapons, and human trafficking (Oucho and Williams, 2019).

Except for national identities and sometimes religious and ethnic identities, refugees fleeing to neighboring countries in the Global South (such as in South Asia) do not significantly differ from the local host population in terms of culture and language; refugees can adopt the language and norms of the host country in as little as a generation; since the establishment of the camps, refugees, particularly those who are stateless, informally assimilate and intermarry with the citizens in an attempt to nationalize their legal status in the host society; but formal social, political, and economic integration of refugees into host societies in the Global South is discouraged by the host governments (FitzGerald and Arar, 2018). Despite formal restrictions from the host government, refugees are integrating informally on a social and economic level, which affects ties between the host community and refugees and eventually can generate conflict over resources and services when refugees come in large numbers.

The Bangladeshi people and government were initially not much concerned about the influx of Rohingyas into host society in 1978 because Bangladesh was a newly liberated country at the time and was going through political and economic instability. In such a situation, the Rohingyas effortlessly merged into Bangladeshi society through "bottom-up assimilation and integration" and gave up their own distinctive identity to merge into Bangladeshi society. When the Rohingya crisis became widespread in 2017 and beyond, the Bangladesh government managed the Rohingya problem through the office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) (established in 1992) and international organizations such as UNHCR and IOM. The Rohingyas were kept in the camp and moved to Bhasan Char Island, far away from the mainland and citizens, giving them the opportunity for limited integration, which we can call "top-down and partial integration" as opposed to complete integration and assimilation. I will explain this in detail later.

Identity: crisis and differentiation

Not only can refugees have identity crises within the host society, but the host community may also experience the same while they reside and co-locate with the refugees. The discussion of identity conflict and tussle between the host community and the refugees is crucial to this study. Although there are similarities in language, culture, and economic conditions between the host community and the Rohingya refugees, unequal access to and distribution of resources causes an identity crisis in the host community, which raises awareness of social, political, and economic rights and facilitates the community in distinguishing its own identity from that of the refugees.

'Identity' in social context refers to the distinctive characteristics that differentiate a person or group of people from others (Campbell, 1992; Gasu, 2020). Identity in sociology refers to how individuals define themselves and how their actions are influenced. There are three main types of identity recognized in sociology: social identity, personal identity, and ego identity (Côté, 1996; Kehily, 2009). The term "social identity" refers to a person's place(s) in a social structure, while "personal identity" refers to the clearer aspects of a person's experience associated with interactions; ego identity, on the other hand, refers to the deep sense of continuity that defines a person's personality (Côté, 1996; Timotijevic and Breakwell, 2000). Identity is simply viewed as a process of "being" and "becoming" (Hall and Rutherford, 1990; Jenkins, 2014). Identity as being (self-subjectivity), which creates a sense of unity and commonality in terms of "one people"; "becoming" refers to the process of constantly building an identity. Identity is formed via social interactions in which individuals construct, alter, and associate their own identities with others (Hall and Rutherford, 1990; Jenkins, 2014; Ricarte, 2023).

In social identity theory, a person's sense of belonging to a social category or group constitutes their social identity. Social identities provide insight into how people, as group members (the in-group) place themselves in their social environments in comparison with others (the out-group), as well as how they draw meaning and value from these positions (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Stets and Burke, 2000). Social identity theory, in Tajfel and Turner's view (1979), began as primarily a theory of conflict and collaboration between groups. The local population is concerned that newcomers with distinctive values, norms, and beliefs pose a danger to the host nation's cultural identity. When a group realizes that the continuation of its valued and distinctive social identity is at danger, they frequently respond defensively (Hogg, Abrams and Brewer, 2017). Symbolic threats emphasize the cohesiveness

and unity of the native community as a group, or as a "nation," which clearly differentiates it from other ethnic groups (Pichler, 2010).

British sociologist Anthony Smith (1991, p.75) claimed that identity is considered as sameness. Smith additionally observed that the complex and very abstract concept of national identity; he in his essay "National Identity and the Idea of European Unity" (1992, p.14), defines a nation as: "a named human population sharing a historical territory, common memories and myths of origin, a mass, standardized public culture, a common economy, territorial mobility, and common legal rights and duties for all members of the collectivity". However, national identity is determined from both inside, i.e., by the characteristics that fellow citizens share in common, and from outside, i.e., by differentiating the nation from other nations or ethnic groups. The national bond separates people into "us," or fellow citizens, and "others," or outsiders, into "our" community (Triandafyllidou, 1998).

A "crisis of identities" in late modernity has been investigated by Hall, Held, Hubert, and Thompson in their book Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies (1996). They argue that, "aspects of our identities arise from our "belonging" to distinctive ethnic, racial, linguistic, and religious and, above all, national cultures" (p.594). They discuss how modern societies are "de-centered," that is, dispersed or divided. A distinct type of structural transformation that is changing these societies in the late 20th century is resulting in a loss of contemporary identities. They contend that these changes are affecting people's perception of who they are as distinct individuals and weakening their sense of themselves as whole beings. The term "the dislocation or de-centering" of people, has been frequently used to describe this loss of a constant "sense of self." This process of "double displacements-de-centering" separates people from their position in the social and cultural environment as well as from themselves, leading to a "crisis of identity" for the individual (p.594-595).

Intergroup distinctiveness is the perceived difference between the in-group and the out-group. High distinctiveness (or low intergroup similarity) is linked to intergroup differentiation, which includes stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. On the other hand, low distinctiveness (or high intergroup similarity) can either increase or decrease differentiation (Jetten, Postmes and McAuliffe, 2002; Jetten, Spears and Postmes, 2004). Jetten & Spears (2003) posit two types of distinctiveness—one reactive, based on social identity theory, and one reflective, based on social categories—that have varying impacts on intergroup relations. In-group members differentiate their group from out-groups to maintain a distinct sense of self and protect the in-group's integrity. Two types of reflective

distinctiveness were identified: differentiation, which reflects genuine differences between groups, and differentiation resulting from power disparities or unequal access to valuable and limited resources. Marilynn B. Brewer (1991) introduced optimal distinctiveness theory (ODT), suggesting that individuals can meet the simultaneous needs for belonging (assimilation) and distinctiveness (differentiation) through identification with social groups and comparisons between one's own groups and others. Within a group, individuals fulfill their need for assimilation, while intergroup comparisons meet their need for differentiation by emphasizing the distinctiveness of the group. ODT implies that small, distinctive groups or social categories are most effective in fostering in-group loyalty, depersonalized trust, and cooperation. However, negative behaviors and attitudes are shown towards out-groups, leading to dehumanization, mistrust, skepticism towards arguments, and antagonism. It is argued that it motivate group members under particular conditions to show favoritism towards their own group in pursuit of different goals and hostility toward out-groups (Abrams and Hogg, 2006). Individuals who seek assimilation show in-group favoritism to foster a feeling of belonging and inclusion, while those who seek differentiation exhibit in-group favoritism to emphasize their group's distinctiveness. As Brewer (1991) writes, social groups with unequal access to resources and power experience varying benefits from in-group favoritism, resulting in significant disparities in outcomes between the groups as a whole. This inequality can lead to or exacerbate conflicts. It also suggested that when groups have too much similarity, it can undermine their sense of distinctiveness and lead to favoritism towards their own group in order to establish that distinctiveness (Pickett and Leonardelli, 2006). Sumner (1906) coined the term "ethnocentrism" to describe the tendency of social groups to differentiate between in-group and out-group. In this concept, in-group members maintain a peaceful and organized relationship with each other while viewing outsiders with hostility and seeking to exploit them. Ethnocentrism encompasses both negative attitudes towards out-groups and positive sentiments towards the in-group (pp. 12-13). Therefore, Sumner's (1906) definition of "ethnocentrism" focused on four principles: social categorization, in-group positivity, intergroup comparison, and out-group hostility. When resources are limited and groups are in competition for the same resources, the survival of one group is directly tied to the destruction of the other group (Ashmore, Jussim and Wilder, 2001). Resources are limited, and groups tend to view this situation as a fixed-pie assumption, where one group's gain is seen as the other group's loss. This leads to competitive strategies that frustrate the other group's goals. Intergroup conflict, as understood in the social sciences, is not solely due to misunderstandings but is rooted in actual differences between groups in terms of power, resources, values, or other incompatibilities

(Fisher, 2006). Groups interact based on social identification rather than individuality, as they prioritize their group's social identity. It is expected that intergroup conflicts and struggles for resources lead to the formation of in-groups' identities. Identity is deeply connected to social relationships and the natural environment (resources, for example, land). The cultural or political significance of resources to identity groups can make them inseparable, and imposing restrictions on their use or ownership could jeopardize the group's identity. Disputes often arise between individuals claiming ownership rights to natural resources, specifically the locals or members of the ethnic group living above the resource, and the nationals of the resource-hosting country (Collier, 2017). Material resources like lands play a crucial role in the functioning of local communities and in shaping individuals' sense of identity and personhood (Banks, 2008), especially in the agrarian-rural context of Bangladesh, where the population living here is mainly engaged in farming as their primary occupation.

In a developing country, undergoing political turmoil when a crisis emerges due to the large number of stateless or refugees coming in can create a social, political, and economic crisis. In this situation, when global and local civil societies intervene in association with the state, it can cause inequalities in the distribution of resources. In these kinds of situations, identity differentiation might emerge even when the host community and refugees have the same or similar identities. Prior to 2017, they somewhat felt identical to each other; however, this drastically changed following that year. As we can see now, the host communities in Cox's Bazar clearly differentiate their identity from the Rohingya based on civic and citizenship identity, and the Rohingyas are simply considered as a refugee, which ultimately leads to the claim of a national identity among the citizens. Local people assert that as citizens of this country, they have more access rights to land, natural resources, and public services. Such claims deteriorated the relationship between two communities and created social conflicts.

Social conflict

"Social" conflict refers to conflict in which the parties are an aggregate of individuals, such as groups, organizations, communities, and crowds, rather than single individuals, as in role conflict (Oberschall, 1978; Wagner-Pacifici and Hall, 2012). Marxist conflict theory focuses on the economic class conflict between the proletarian working class, or the poor, and the bourgeois ruling class, or the owners of means and wealth. So, direct application of Marxist theory is not possible here, as I am not talking about the mode of production or class conflict

here. In any case, the host community is primarily composed of peasant producers who are either landholders or landless, and wage earners and can be referred to as the rural proletariat, whereas the refugees, regardless of which class they previously belonged to, have been rendered stateless, dispossessed, and proletarianized by state and military-led counterinsurgency operations. So they are in somewhat similar positions in the economic class hierarchy. The refugees are slowly developing a kind of political consciousness about their social position. However, that cannot be understood through the lens of class consciousness or class position. It is a kind of group consciousness where identity and religion play a primary role, and politics (not economics) mediates the primary mode of interaction between the refugees and host communities.

Analyzing modern "industrial" societies, Dahrendorf (1959) criticizes Marx's viewpoint of early capitalism because his explanation of class formation and conflict is not relevant to a modern industrial society, dominated as it is by corporate forms of capitalism. In societies with a corporate structure, control over power is more important than ownership; those who control power control society (Dahrendorf, 1959). Though the notion of power and legitimacy gives a pertinent direction for analysing the issue here, Dahrendorf's (1959) explanation of the conflict between dominant and subordinate classes in modern industrial societies looks in that direction.

Coser, a conflict theorist (1956), analyzed conflict from a functionalist perspective and named it conflict-functionalism, as he sees functionality in conflict in the face of scarce resources. Conflict plays a key role in maintaining social systems in equilibrium and increasing group solidarity (Coser, 1957). Coser (1956) focuses on the positive function of conflict and proposes that conflict may be internal (within a group) or external (between groups). Internal conflict is considered less violent and more common than external conflict. External conflicts may strengthen group solidarity and facilitate social integration, but they may also create group distinctions— 'us' and 'them' (Coser 1956).

A conflict between groups may stimulate new regulations and norms, including institutions (Coser, 1957). The Bangladesh government has enacted new laws and regulations on marriage restrictions between the two groups in Cox's Bazar in 2014, on the Rohingya's freedom of movement, and the registration of their children's births, and it has enforced these laws and regulations. The government established the office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) to manage the settlement and services for the refugees and the host community.

According to Max Weber, the economy is not the main cause of conflict. Weber identifies three main resources—class, status, and power—that contribute to social inequality and set up the conditions for conflict. Following Weber, Collins analyses conflict from a micro-structural perspective and considers it one of the types of interaction between inter-related individuals or peoples (Collins 1975): "The unequal distribution of each scarce resource produces potential conflict between those who control it and those who do not" (Dahrendorf et al., 2006).

The explanation provided by Dahrendorf, Coser, and Collins regarding social conflict can help in understanding the conflicts among refugee-host communities in Bangladesh:

a) According to Dahrendorf's viewpoints, both the local community and the Rohingya in Cox's Bazar are subordinate groups that have very limited power. But the conflict emerges here due to the presence of a numerically preponderant and 'dominant' group with access to citizens' rights (the host community of Cox's Bazar), who are relatively more powerful (legally, demographically, and politically, but not economically) than the refugees and are mobilizing discrimination to deny and control scarce resources due to differences in citizenship and migrant/refugee positioning vis-a-vis the state.

b) Following Coser's classification, the conflict between the local community and the Rohingya can be described as 'external conflict'. External conflicts strengthen group solidarity within the host communities, as in Cox's bazar. The host community in Cox's Bazar self-identifies as a group (the in-group) distinct from the refugees (the out-group), despite cultural, language, and religious similarities; trust, trustworthiness, altruism, social preference, and favouritism are higher among the members of the in-group.

c) Based on Collin's perspective, the local community in Cox's Bazar is very poor and deprived of the economic opportunities they need. Resources and services, already limited, have been constrained further by the presence of more than a million Rohingya. The aid and development programs of humanitarian agencies give the Rohingya preferential access. Consequently, anti-refugee sentiment has grown, and the local community considers the Rohingya as rivals.

In summarizing the conceptual framework, these are the most relevant concepts and theories that I have deployed in my thesis to explain my case:

- Used Milton Gordon's (1964) concept of assimilation, the segmented assimilation theory by Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou (1993), and Ager and Strang's (2008) integration conceptual model which provided deeper insights into the assimilation and integration of Rohingyas in Bangladesh.

- In the case of identity differentiation, the optimal distinctiveness theory (ODT) by Marilynn B. Brewer (1991) and Sumner's (1906) concept of ethnocentrism are particularly applicable for understanding the identity differentiation between the Rohingyas and the host community in Bangladesh.

- In the case of conflict, the social conflict theories of Lewis A. Coser and Randall Collins that I have deployed are highly relevant for understanding the conflict between Rohingyas and the host community in Bangladesh.

Methodology

Qualitative research is a distinct field of investigation that spans various disciplines and subjects (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). According to Creswell (2013, p. 44), "qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem." The qualitative method is a useful approach to obtain and analyze additional information in the social sciences (Perri 6 and Bellamy, 2011). This study is qualitative research that starts with an analysis of the processes of assimilation and integration of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh host societies, continues with an analysis of identity differentiation among the host communities, and finally concludes with a comprehensive analysis of social conflicts that occur between the host community and refugees.

I have undertaken this primary research in Ukhiya and Teknaf sub-districts of Cox's Bazar district, where the government of Bangladesh has established 34 temporary camps. This study was carried out in Ukhiya sub-district's Kutupalong and Balukhali villages and Teknaf sub-district's Unchiprang and Leda villages, which are heavily affected by refugee-host community disputes. Most of the Rohingya live in extremely congested camps near these four villages. The study areas were selected through purposive sampling.

I used snowball and purposive sampling for interviews, allowing me to locate potential interviewees through referrals from previous interviewees. I also wanted to make sure that the respondents reflected a range of backgrounds, including those of the affected

citizens of the host communities. I undertook the fieldwork there in two phases: from August 2020 to January 2021, and from June to October 2021. I conducted 40 in-depth interviews, 10 FGDs, and 10 case studies, including direct observation, as the main data collection techniques. The aims of the interviews combined with observation are to attempt to gain insights into how Rohingya refugees are informally assimilating and integrating into the host society, how the host community is different from refugees, and to explore the conflict of the host community with refugees over natural resources, including public services. I used the interview guide as a research tool. Several interviews were conducted over the phone and via Skype due to the Covid-19 restrictions. The interviews were carried out in Bengali to reduce any potential bias in the responses. The duration of each interview varied between 15 and 20 minutes. Prior to conducting each interview, the interviewer provided a clear explanation of its objective and the importance of maintaining confidentiality. The respondents gave their verbal consent. Detailed interviews were recorded using digital media. Any digital audio files and text transcripts that contain identifiable information will be deleted once the paper is published and the thesis defense is completed.

Data collection techniques	Category of respondents	Total number	Total respondents	Total hours of interview
In-depth interview	Rohingya refugees, people of the host community, government officials, UN personnel, INGOs and local NGOs officials, local political, religious, and community leaders, journalists, and businesspeople.	40	40	20 hours 16 minutes (from this source 10 hours of recorded data has been used in writing the thesis summary)
FGD	Rohingya refugees, people of the host community, community leaders, journalists, and businesspeople.	10	60	10 hours 24 minutes (from this source 3.5 hours of recorded data has been used in writing the thesis summary)

Case studies	Rohingya refugees and people of the host community	10	10	5 hours 31 minutes (from this sources 2.5 hours of recorded data has been used in writing the thesis summary

In addition, during my fieldwork, I visited four Rohingya refugee camps as well as the host community's villages adjacent to them. I found several host community houses inside the camps. I observed the informal integration of Rohingya refugees both within and outside of the camps firsthand. I closely observed refugees' participation in the local economic sector, their effect on natural resources, and their presence in public service organizations and facilities. I also observed the activities of INGOs, national, and local NGOs serving refugees and the host community.

Additionally, secondary data was collected and gathered by reviewing existing documents like various surveys, books, plans, official recorders, census records, project reports, maps, journalistic articles, research papers, etc.

Validity and reliability are crucial for researchers (Perri 6 and Bellamy, 2011). Validity refers to the accuracy of research results from the perspective of the interviewer and interviewees (Creswell, 2013, 2014). To ensure validity, I employed various research methods, reviewing and comparing records with the research questions to assess the certainty of findings obtained from interviews. Reliability ensures consistent research methods and materials, enabling researchers to achieve similar outcomes as previous studies (Creswell, 2013). I conducted a study where I thoroughly documented the process, audio-recorded interviews, and transcribed them in both the original language and English. I ensured transparency by clearly describing and operationalizing all research methods and data collection procedures.

The method of analysis that I used was an inductive thematic analysis approach, with the goal of identifying common themes across different interviews and maintaining thematic coherence throughout the interview data. Before delving into the coding process, I made sure

to thoroughly acquaint myself with the data by reading through interviews. Subsequently, I proceeded to identify codes within the data by carefully examining and applying them to relevant sections that conveyed similar meanings. Common themes, along with their sub-themes, were then derived by analyzing the codes. Additionally, I diligently reviewed and refined the themes multiple times. To streamline the analysis, I consolidated various codes into cohesive themes before concluding by providing a comprehensive description and analysis of the data based on these themes.

The code of ethics for this research was conducted in compliance with ethical norms and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of HSE University. Names and other identifiers of interviewees are changed or made anonymous in publications and thesis.

The researcher must contend with some restrictions or limitations when conducting field research, particularly social science research. Obtaining approval to access Rohingya camps was the first restriction. While entering camps, there are considerable restrictions and regulations set by the government of Bangladesh. The camps are only accessible to implementing organizations and their enrolled officials and staff. Nonetheless, the researcher was assisted by personnels from local NGOs. The language barrier made it somewhat difficult for the researcher to collect data from participants during this study. Local dialects differ from the formal Bengali language. While interviewing respondents, the researcher received support from local volunteers speaking the Chittagonian dialect (of Bengali language). However, the COVID-19 pandemic and the time constraints made it extremely difficult to collect data from the relevant respondents. In partnership with the UN and aid groups, government authorities imposed restrictions in camps to curb COVID-19. Only essential services like health, nutrition, and sanitation activities are allowed to operate during COVID period (Khan, 2020; ReliefWeb, 2020). While the COVID-19 situation restricted access to the field, several interviews were conducted over the phone and via Skype. However, from June to October 2021, the COVID-19 restrictions inside the camps were slightly less. At that time, aid agencies started implementing their project activities, which were temporarily paused earlier during the COVID-19 period. I got an opportunity to enter the camp with the help of a local NGO (ACLAB). I had to maintain sufficient distance from respondents and wear a mask during the interviews.

Scientific contribution of research and statements to be defended

Scientific contribution:

- It reflects on the refugee influx situation in postcolonial Global South countries, which are normatively liberal in accepting refugees but, due to a lack of resources and political emergencies, turn to illiberal approaches to population governance. The conceptual contribution of the thesis is that it demonstrates how spontaneous "bottom-up assimilation and integration" of refugees eventually turns into "top-down and partial integration" due to the contingently created structural-cultural duress that affected a society of developing and less developing countries. However, in the context of Bangladesh, it shows how, over time, demographic pressure on land and natural resources in an agrarian society and resultant socio-political pressure led to changes in state integration policy towards Rohingya refugees.

- It closely studies the causes, dynamics, and effects of refugee-host community interaction. It demonstrates how a seemingly accommodative relationship transforms into identity differentiation over time (even in the case of a very similar identity) and gives rise to social conflict under demographic duress and associated socio-political effects in the context of the Global South. In the context of Bangladesh, interestingly, it gives rise to a demand for 'secular' and civic citizenship and national identity among the large number of poor citizens, who usually express themselves through religious affiliations and identities. So a refugee situation has actually made the poor citizens partially modern' and more 'democratic' with their emerging 'secular' sense of rights and demands.

- In the postcolonial global south, however, such a situation can give rise to protests, unrest, social movements, and counter-movements as we see in Bangladesh, between the refugees and the poor citizens. This apparently is a surge of 'democratic demands' but can generate considerable violence in the society, and severe problems of social and political governance.

- The research findings and approaches facilitate the ability to design future strategies and initiatives for lessening conflict between two communities in the Global South and fostering peace and cohesiveness therein.

Statements to be defended:

- The study addressed the formal and informal ways in which Rohingya refugees integrate and assimilate into the host society of Bangladesh. It also highlights the

formal and structural measures taken by the Bangladeshi government and CSOs to integrate the Rohingya refugee community into the host societies.

- The study explored how the identity differentiation of the host community from the Rohingya is primarily based on the host community's civic and citizenship identities. This distinction ultimately results from demographic pressures, tensions, and competition over land and natural resources, including public services, and consequently contributes to their claim to Bangladeshi national identity. Interestingly, it happened in a nation where citizens were starting to move towards a global and pan-ethnic Islamic identity under the influence of various Islamic groups. However, due to a refugee crisis, they are increasingly coming back into the national fold.

- The study demonstrated the emerging Rohingya-host community social conflict over various issues such as access to land, environmental and natural resources, public services, and the local economy, including the emerging problem of safety and security that they are facing.

The dissertation results were presented in the following published articles:

(Article A) Habib, M. R. And Uldanov, A. (2023). **Negotiating an 'Inclusive' Space in an 'Emergency' Situation: Non-formal Education for Rohingya Refugee Children in Bangladesh.** The Journal of Social Policy Studies, 21(2), 347-360. https://doi.org/10.17323/727-0634-2023-21-2-347-360

(Article B) Habib, M.R., Roy Chowdhury, A., Uldanov, A. (2023). **Creating Pathways to Opportunity: Non-formal Educational 'Inclusion' for Rohingya Refugee Children in Bangladesh**, Journal of South Asian Development, 8:3, 263-273, DOI: 10.1177/09731741231202872

(Article C) Habib, M. R. (2022)**. A conceptual analysis of the Rohingya–host community conflict over scarce resources in Bangladesh**, Social Identities, 28:5, 576-594, DOI: 10.1080/13504630.2022.2139235

(Article D) Habib, M. R. (2023). **The right to ecology: Rohingya refugees and citizens contest over natural resources in Bangladesh.** Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, 24:2, 311-328. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2023.2182943

Summary of the main results

The summary of the key findings can be explored below on the basis of three thematic issues concentrating on the issues around Rohingya assimilation and integration; host community's identity differentiation, and social conflicts between host community and refugees.

Issues around Rohingya Assimilation and Integration

The assimilation and integration of stateless Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are not similar to those in western countries. About half a million Rohingya have entered Bangladesh between 1978 and 2016, although the majority of them have returned to Myanmar. However, the rest of the Rohingya started living with the locals outside the camps. During the first Rohingya influx in 1978, nearly 10,000 Rohingya stayed in Bangladesh while 10,000 died in camps. By 1979, around 180,000 were sent back to Myanmar, while others sought refuge in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan (Abrar, 1995; MSF, 2002; Akins, 2018; Leider, 2018). Rohingyas arriving in Bangladesh after 1992 are called "undocumented Myanmar nationals" or "unregistered refugees," living in camps or with host communities, considered illegal by Bangladesh (UNHCR, 2007; Bashar, 2012). Approximately 200,000–500,000 Rohingyas resided in informal settlements and with host communities (UNHCR, 2007; Cheung, 2012; Imran and Mian, 2014; Farzana, 2015; Mohajan, 2018; Rashid, 2020). As Bangladesh was a newly independent country and was experiencing political and economic instability, it was challenging for the government to control the entry of Rohingyas and their integration into Bangladeshi society (Rahman, 2010; Cheung, 2012; Imran and Mian, 2014). Additionally, *the Bangladeshi people and government were initially not much concerned about the Rohingyas' assimilation and integration into the host society. In such a situation, the Rohingyas effortlessly merged into Bangladeshi society due to linguistic, religious, and phenotypic similarities.*[1] The percentages of Rohingya males and females are 49% and 51%, respectively, while in the host community, males are 49% and females are 51% (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2014; UNHCR, 2024). Despite that, the family size and composition between the Rohingya and the Bangladeshi host community of Cox's Bazar are similar. The average household size is similar in both the camps and host community, at around 5.8 and 5.9 respectively, and Rohingyas have education levels lower than the Bangladeshi average. For instance, 75% of adult Rohingya women and 40% of host community women are illiterate, along with 61% of Rohingya men and 35% of host community men (IPA and UNICEF, 2018). Child and intercommunity marriages persist in both communities, mainly polygamous, involving Rohingya women marrying host community men (Olney, Badiuzzaman and Hoque, 2019; Melnikas et al., 2020); Around 68% of Rohingyas claim that polygamy is increasing in the camps (Olney and Hoque, 2021). This type of assimilation of Rohingyas into host society can be called "bottom-up assimilation and integration", where they gave up their own distinctive identity and became citizens of Bangladesh illegally by

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[1]A resident interviewed at Teknaf on 14 July 2021.

obtaining passports or living without them, getting married to locals, and gradually learning Bengali. During this period, an unspecified number of Rohingyas have assimilated into Bangladeshi society informally (Bikash, 2008; Rahman, 2010; Cheung, 2012; Azad and Jasmin, 2013; Parnini, Othman and Ghazali, 2013; Farzana, 2015). *A Rohingya (Pseudonym-Rohomotullah, age- 35), who first entered Bangladesh in 1996 with his parents and brothers and took refuge in Kutupalong, Ukhia Upazila, Cox's Bazar district in Bangladesh. Later, the Law Enforcement Agency sent back them to Myanmar, after 4 years, he re-entered Bangladesh illegally, and took refuge in his uncle house (who entered Bangladesh long ago and has Bangladeshi citizenship). Later, he started living in Unisiprang village of Teknaf, engaged in the fish business, and married a local Bengali girl. In his family (wife and children) all have Bangladeshi citizenship, but he does not have Bangladeshi citizenship. Besides, even though his brothers married Bangladeshi girls, they have no citizenship in this country. According to him, there are about 80–90 families in this village, many of whom are not citizens of Bangladesh. Before 2017, many Rohingyas showed little interest in taking up Bangladeshi citizenship, even after having developed good relations with the local community people by marrying local girls. Besides, he bought the land from a local citizen, and he said that at that time there were not so many checks on the land documents. According to him, even though many Rohingyas in this village have Bangladeshi documents, they do not go to vote during any elections so that the local people does not find out that they are Rohingyas carrying Bangladeshi documents*[2].

Rohingyas who resided outside of camps worked for small firms at a lower wage than the local community. Refugees who were unable to find employment sometimes started small businesses selling groceries and other items on the street, as well as working as rickshaw pullers, day laborers, fishermen, and domestic workers, and in dry fish processing, or got involved in illegal activity like drug smuggling.[3] Many Rohingya students, according to the locals, study at different schools, private colleges, and universities (Cheung, 2012). However, *A Rohingya mentioned that they control their own decisions, lives, and livelihoods and receive no material support from the government or refugee assistance from organizations during this phase.*[4] *Sometimes self-settled refugees faced difficulties in obtaining health, housing, and educational services in the host society*[5]. These informal assimilations and

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[2] Rohingya interviewed at Teknaf on 19 August, 2021
[3] Field notes, Teknaf and Ukhiya, 20 and 25 August, 2021.
[4] Rohingya interviewed at Ukhiya on 15 August, 2021.
[5] Rohingya interviewed at Teknaf on 20 August, 2021.

integrations of Rohingya refugees into host societies have an impact on socio-economic and political systems and resources.

However, when an enormous number of Rohingyas moved to Bangladesh in 2017, the informal "bottom-up assimilation and integration" practice was interrupted. In view of potential threats to national security, Bangladesh shifted from a liberal policy to a realist policy on Rohingya people (Yesmin, 2016; Roy Chowdhury, 2021). The host government officially opposed the formal assimilation and long-term integration of Rohingyas into Bangladeshi society and limited their access to identity, civil rights, public services, and local opportunities (International Rescue Committee, 2019), since the country is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol relating to the status of refugees (Ahmed, 2010). This nation is not obligated to improve living conditions for more Rohingya refugees (Babu, 2020; Bremner, 2020). Offering citizenship to over one million Rohingyas may trigger a backlash in Bangladesh, fueling nationalist sentiments and influencing domestic politics (Rashid, 2020). The country, however, lacks a law for managing refugee affairs; based on experience, the government has created a short-term, ad hoc internal policy advisory and refugee management system for protecting the Rohingya refugees (Roy Chowdhury, 2019; Rashid, 2020). In January 2018, Bangladesh and Myanmar agreed to complete repatriation within two years with a signed "Physical Arrangement" document. The initiative stalled due to Myanmar's non-cooperation and Rohingya citizenship rights disputes (Kipgen, 2019; Rashid, 2020). Bangladesh currently allows Rohingya refugees to stay temporarily, creating an ongoing need for care and maintenance (Rashid, 2020). In collaboration with international agencies such as UNHCR and IOM, and the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission (RRRC) established by Bangladesh authorities, under the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR), started to manage the refugee crisis with full-fledged vigor.[6] The government's 2013 National Strategy on Myanmar Refugees and Undocumented Myanmar Nationals set the foundation for the National Task Force's response to the Rohingya arrivals (Lewis, 2020). From 2017 onward, the host government integrates them inside the camps and in a new living environment—Bhasan Char Island, far from the main land and its residents—instead of encouraging full assimilation. We can refer to this as a "top-down and partial integration" process. The host government's policies severely restrict Rohingya from freely working or moving, limiting their involvement in support activities. Rohingya are mainly allowed to volunteer at basic levels and are excluded from government-

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[6]Habib, M. R. (2021). The "**stateless" Rohingya in Bangladesh: Crisis management and policy responses**, Asian Politics & Policy. Volume 13, Issue 4, October 2021, Pages 577-596; https://doi.org/10.1111/aspp.12611

led coordination spaces. The government pressures humanitarian agencies to hire more host community volunteers and reduce Rohingya recruitment. A 2021 directive weakly enforced by RRRC mandates that refugees take up menial roles like cleaners and guards (Bremner, 2020; Lough *et al.*, 2021). *A Camp-in-Charge (camp-24) said that Rohingyas are not allowed to marry Bangladeshi nationals, get citizenship, or work legally. They are also not allowed to attend public schools.*[7] The Bangladesh government made a law in 2014 prohibiting marriages between Bangladeshi citizens and Rohingya; Bangladeshi marrying a Rohingya can face up to seven years in prison (BBC, 2018). The majority of marriages between locals and Rohingya are not registered via official government registration processes due to the restrictions in place. Rohingya children are only allowed to attend temporary learning centres run by INGOs (see detailed discussion in article-1[8] and article-2[9]). The government considers the Rohingya children as Myanmar nationals even though they were born in Bangladesh (Xchange, 2018). According to the regulations and restrictions, they are not allowed to get admission to secondary or higher secondary schools or any public institutions.

My first argument in this thesis is that the Rohingya people in Bangladesh have undergone a process of informal and "bottom-up assimilation and integration" between 1978 and 2016. But due to the large influx of Rohingya in 2017, the "bottom-up assimilation and integration" process has been transformed into a "top-down and partial integration" process, whereby assimilation has been formally and actively discouraged. **In articles A and B**, educational assimilation and integration in the context of Rohingya children are discussed as an example. The initial process involved the bottom-up assimilation of Rohingya children into the educational system through madrasah (religious institution) and religious education that aligned with their beliefs. However, after 2017, there has been a shift to a top-down and partial approach to integrating them into state- and civil society-managed education systems and temporary schools. In Bangladesh, the Rohingya community consists of more women and children than men. Rather than focusing on integrating adult Rohingya refugees, the Bangladesh government and civil society are prioritizing the partial integration of Rohingya children through education. This transformation of the assimilation and integration process of

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[7]Camp-in-charge (Camp 24) interviewed at Teknaf on 10 September, 2021.
[8]Habib, M. R. And Uldanov, A.(2023). **Negotiating an 'Inclusive' Space in an 'Emergency' Situation: Non-formal Education for Rohingya Refugee Children in Bangladesh.** The Journal of Social Policy Studies. DOI: 10.17323/727-0634-2023-21-2-347-360.
[9]Habib, M.R., Roy Chowdhury, A., Uldanov, A. (2023). **Creating Pathways to Opportunity: Non-formal Educational 'Inclusion' for Rohingya Refugee Children in Bangladesh**, Journal of South Asian Development DOI: 10.1177/09731741231202872

Rohingya children into Bangladeshi society has significantly filled the gaps identified in the existing literature.

Host Community's Identity Crisis and Differentiation

The majority of the literature focuses either on immigrants' or refugees' identity crises in their host nations. However, the presence of numerous refugees in the host community may have an impact on host communities' identities and result in an identity crisis and resultant differentiation, which has received little attention from academics. In the case of Bangladesh, difficulties with the host community's identity may arise from the resettlement of Rohingya refugees and their residing outside refugee camps. There are substantially more Rohingya refugees compared to the number of host communities. *The locals claim to be the minority in their own land and experience challenges in their daily life.*[10]

Therefore, it created demographic pressure at the local level and simultaneously created pressure and competition over limited lands and natural resources, including public services. The informal incorporation and integration of Rohingya refugees in the socio-cultural, economic, and political spheres is causing the host population to experience an increasing sense of identity crisis. Since 2017, the rapid influx of a significant Rohingya community into Bangladesh has intensified the refugee crisis. Bangladesh is an agrarian and rural society experiencing loss of lands and degradation of natural resources, and the preferential access to resources and humanitarian aid from state, UN Agenicies (UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF), INGOs and NGOs given to the Rohingya (as perceived by the locals) has led to the emergence of anti-refugee sentiment (Ansar and Md. Khaled 2021). The host community (73.6%) feels that too much attention is given to the Rohingya, with over 50% thinking they receive excessive support beyond what they need; additionally, the majority (82.7%) believes the Rohingya don't deserve the level of assistance they are getting (Jerin and Mozumder, 2019). Unfortunately, over time, the relations between the refugees and the host communities have deteriorated. *The local community feels that they have suffered due to the Rohingya presence. The host community thinks that aid agencies should assist them and the Rohingya in equal measure and that they have lost confidence in their government and aid agencies.*[11] The conflict over resources and services has strengthened the local community's identities and ties and emphasized the distinctions and differentiations between them and the Rohingya.

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[10]A resident interviewed at Ukhiya on 20 October 2021.
[11]An NGO official interviewed at Cox's Bazar on 15 October 2021.

We can see that Rohingyas and rural Bangladeshis share core features of identity, such as language, religion, class, and ethnicity (Parnini, Othman and Ghazali, 2013). Based on religion and language, it might be challenging to differentiate host communities from refugees. Both communities are Sunni Muslims, and they both speak a language that is quite similar to the Chittagongian (region in Bangladesh) dialect of Bangla. Hence, from 2017 onwards, the issue of religious identity, which was earlier profound, has become less important; instead, *the local population is more concerned with issues of civic identity and citizenship identity (as opposed to religious or community identity, which is somewhat identical with the Rohingya), through which they can lay claim justifiably on the local resources that are rightfully theirs and clearly differentiate them from the Rohingya refugee.*[12] However, It is found that the local citizens of Cox's Bazar have formed various committees to protect their rights as citizens and prevent Rohingya integration in the host society, such as Cox's Bazar Rohingya Resistance Committee, Teknaf Rohingya Resistance Committee, Rohingya Struggle Prevention Committee, Rohingya Birth Registration, Voter and Passport Prevention Committee, Cox's Bazar Environment Conservation Forum, Rights Implementation Committee, and so on (The Daily Star, 2017; Dhaka Tribune, 2019; UCANEWS, 2019; bdnews24, 2020; 1news, 2021). By forming such committees, citizens become more aware of their rights and demand for them. Their notable demands are to create more opportunities for local citizens in government and non-government sectors related to crisis management of Rohingya, to protect natural resources, and to give citizens more access to resources and use them (Dhaka Tribune, 2019; Haque and Rahman, 2020). They present these demands in civic language, where they are not talking about any religious rights. They hold their claims to the host government and international organizations as citizens of this country. Civil rights demands are not only seen in Cox's Bazar, citizens in different parts of the country demand to fulfill their rights on various issues, but in those movements more importance is given to civil rights than religious rights. Therefore, locals distinguish them from Rohingya on the basis of their national identity or citizenship, which does not apply to stateless Rohingya refugees.

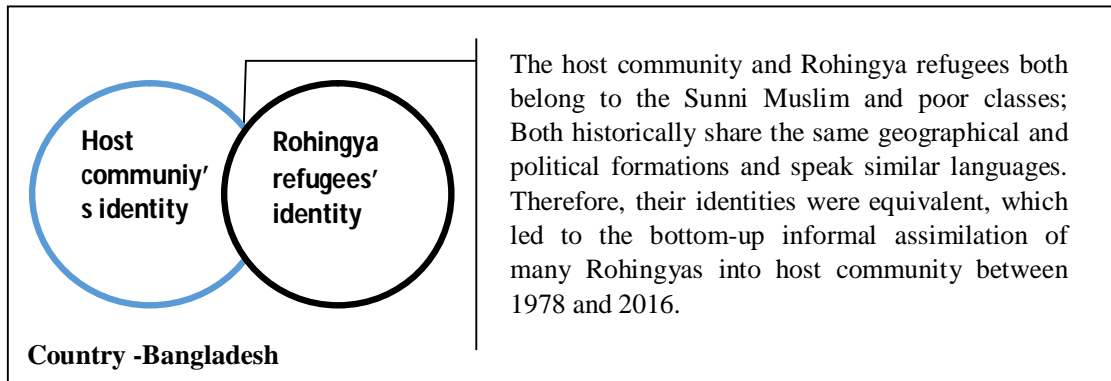[12]A resident interviewed at Teknaf on 15October 2021.

Diagram-1

The host community and Rohingya refugees both belong to the Sunni Muslim and poor classes; Both historically share the same geographical and political formations and speak similar languages. Therefore, their identities were equivalent, which led to the bottom-up informal assimilation of many Rohingyas into host community between 1978 and 2016.

Host communiy's identity

Rohingya refugees' identity

Country -Bangladesh

Diagram-2

After the crisis in 2017, the host country, Bangladesh, was initially trying to manage the refugees, but due to a lack of capacity and resources, they allowed the interventions of UN agencies, INGOs, and local NGOs among the refugees, which eventually created inequalities in resource access and distribution and an identity segregation in Cox's Bazar.

Host communiy's identity

Rohingya refugees' identity

Interventions

State   UN, and INGOs   NGOs

Country -Bangladesh

Diagram-3

In the eyes of the poor host community, the attention of the government and civil society and the unequal distribution of local, national, and international resources made the Rohingyas economically, politically, and socially higher in status and more powerful than the local citizens in Cox's Bazar, which created a demand for identity differentiation and higher social status as citizens among the host community in Cox's Bazar.

Demanding differentiation of identity and higher status from the refugees

Rohingya refugees' identity

Host communiy's identity

Interventions

State   UN and INGOs   NGOs

Country -Bangladesh

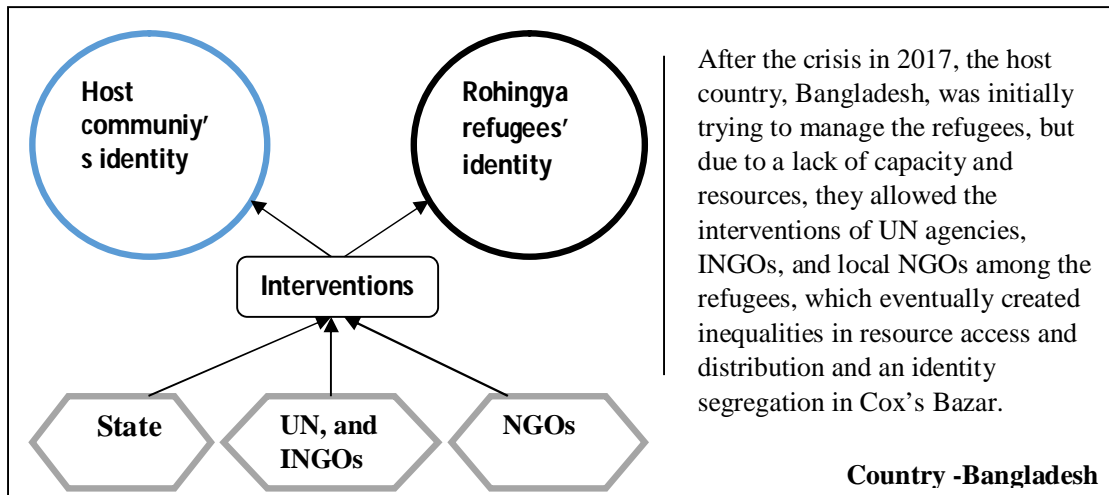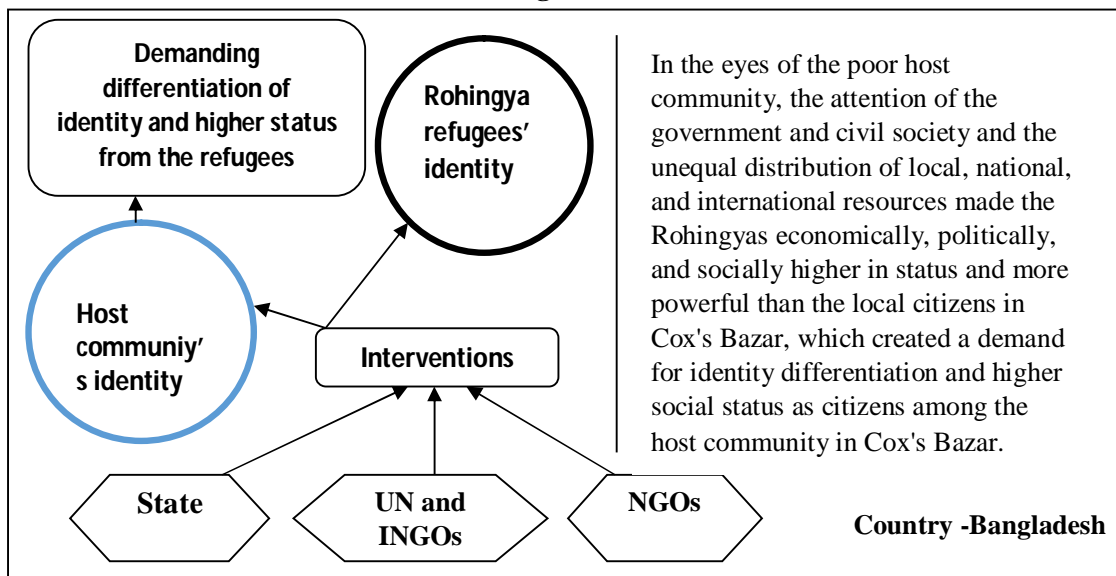**My second argument in this thesis is** that the arrival of a large number of Rohingyas in Bangladesh in 2017 has changed the mode of interaction between the local population (who are mostly rural agricultural classes) and the Rohingyas. The influx of refugees has put strain on Cox's bazar's demographics, exacerbated tension and conflict over land and natural resources, which are the central means of production in a largely agrarian society, and eventually led to identity differentiation between the two communities, which is apparent in many ways. Primarily the sudden arrival of the Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar in 2017 created a heightened sense of alarm and awareness among the host community in Cox's Bazar. Simultaneously the state of Bangladesh started a top-down integration process for the Rohingyas, and the Rohingyas started staking claim on various resources in Cox's Bazar, the host community realized and became conscious of their losing access to various kinds of rights and resources. Refugee-host community conflicts started emerging simultaneously with identity differentiation in coeval manner. Therefore, these processes are involved together through a feedback loop, and making a clear distinction between cause and effect here would be a little difficult. **In articles C and D,** my main focus was on highlighting how the unequal access to resources and opportunities provided by the state and civil society worsens the conflict between Rohingyas and the host community over public services and natural resources. While I did mention the othering of identity between the Rohingyas and the host community in this paper, the main emphasis is on the conflict itself.

Host community–refugee conflicts

The local communities like the Rohingya are marginalized and poor, and the presence of the Rohingya constrains the poor local community's already limited access to inadequate public services and scarce economic and environmental resources. While most refugee studies literature tends to focus on resettlement to Europe, the US, and Australia, I focus here on the south-to-south migration of refugees fleeing violent conflict, which gives a new perspective on refugee-host community relations. **In the third**[13]**, and fourth**[14] **articles**, it has been discussed how the integration and assimilation of Rohingya refugees into the host society in Cox's Bazar exacerbated tensions over public services and resources. I analyze the conflicts over public service provisioning (including health and education issues), economic, environmental resources, and safety and security issues to present a field-based perspective.

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[13]Habib, M. R. (2022). A conceptual analysis of the Rohingya–host community conflict over scarce resources in Bangladesh, Social Identities, 28 (5). DOI:10.1080/13504630.2022.2139235.

[14]Habib, M. R. (2023). **The right to ecology: Rohingya refugees and citizens contest over natural resources in Bangladesh.** Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, 24 (2). https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2023.2182943

The findings show that members of the local community in Cox's Bazar used to receive free medical treatment from the government and aid organizations. The health sector partners run over 150 healthcare facilities – primary healthcare centres, health posts, special facilities, and field hospitals – in and around the camps in Cox's Bazar (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). During COVID-19 period, the humanitarian community set up 14 isolation and treatment centres within the camps and surrounding host communities in Cox's Bazar, totaling over 1,200 beds (UNHCR, 2021b). The Rohingya now receive preferential access to primary healthcare services. Aid organizations favored the Rohingya over residents during the pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the locals accused the Rohingyas of carrying and spreading the virus and alleged that aid agencies prioritized the refugees for treatment (Anas, 2020). The difference in the delivery of healthcare services is a particularly sore point; *a health officer claimed that due to the proximity of the camp, we are still unable to provide adequate medicine and other services to the locals. Because the Rohingyas are still coming, the allocation for the local community is being spent on the Rohingyas.*[15] Many local teachers left local schools in search of more pay and joined camp schools, depriving local children of qualified teachers. In addition, some school and college students dropped out to work for NGOs or in income-generating activities to help their families financially. Utilizing more vehicles to deliver food and essential supplies to the Rohingya is clogging the narrow, winding roads, causing pollution, traffic jams, and accidents[16].

The Rohingya's presence has also pushed up food and housing prices, cut the minimum wage, and increased demand in local job markets. Conflict arises because of economic hardship and struggles for scarce resources. *A resident said that due to the arrival of many NGOs, house rent has increased from 2,000 Bangladeshi Taka or USD 22 to Bangladeshi Taka 6,000 or USD 65 now. Low-wage people are not able to rent a house at a higher price.*[17] Even though Rohingyas and local youth work in NGO projects, local youth formed *Odhikar Bastabayan Committee(organization* for realizations of rights), a rights-based organization to raise their voices against inequality in the distribution of resources and job recruitment. In response to this demand, the local administration has proposed that Rohingyas and locals should be provided equal opportunities in project recruitment.

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[15] A health officer interviewed at Palangkhali Family Planning Complex, Ukhiya on 8 August 2021.
[16] A Journalist interviewed at Teknaf 24 September 2021
[17] A resident interviewed at Ukhiya on 14 July 2021.

Clearing and destroying vegetation, trees, and other natural resources for firewood collection and new settlements are common causes of conflict between refugees and host populations in Cox's Bazar; a *forest officer said that since the arrival of the refugees, the forest classification has changed, and the water level has also dropped a lot, and the canals have been filled to make way for new houses. Rohingya cattle are damaging local gardens, causing locals to quarrel with them.*[18] The Bangladesh government and aid agencies are supplying LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) to refugees to reduce their dependency on firewood and other natural resources, but this is not enough. The residents, especially those living near the camps, cannot cultivate their agricultural lands. *An inhabitant claimed that we gave our land to the Rohingya, but they cut down our trees. Additionally, we can't now cultivate these lands. Earlier we could raise cattle; now we can't. If we keep our cattle for grazing, they are stolen.*[19]*A Rohingya said that since we had no land to live on after we came from Burma (now Myanmar), we had to cut trees and hills to build our houses, for which the locals now blame us.*[20]

Freshwater sources are limited, and the local community and refugees are often in conflict over access. The drainage and solid waste facilities are insufficient, resulting in pollution of the air and contamination of the surface water resources on which the local population is dependent. *A community leader claimed that the water levels in our Teknaf and Ukhiya upazilas have significantly decreased. Water from tube wells is no longer available. Water from surrounding canals is also no longer drinkable and has been polluted owing to camp waste.*[21] *A local environmental activist said that the environment in Ukhiya and Teknaf has been disrupted by excrement, rubbish, and various types of waste from the Rohingya camp. Many canals have been filled. There is no solution to this situation, even after informing the local administration many times. If Rohingya camp waste is not properly managed now, more than half of the land in this area will become uncultivable.*[22]

Security-related issues, such as murders, robberies, smuggling, trafficking, kidnapping, and armed conflict, affect both refugees and members of the host society. Not only are the Rohingyas involved in criminal activity, but some powerful local people are also involved in illicit trade with the Rohingyas in the locality. *A Councillor said that in 2017, the Rohingya started taking shelter around our homes. They gradually started stealing fruits*

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[18] A forest officer interviewed at Teknaf on 12 September 2021
[19] An inhabitant interviewd at Ukhiya on August 15, 2021
[20]A Rohingya interviewed at camp 17, block-A on 13 August 2021
[21] A community leader interviewed at Teknaf on September 10, 2021.
[22]A local environmental activist interviewed at Ukhiya on 15 October, 2021.

from our gardens, and we were suffering from a kind of insecurity. They were always in conflict with the local community for theft and robbery. They are also involved in smuggling yaba from Myanmar, and local youths are addicted to drugs and involved in drug smuggling.[23] Different Rohingya groups are in conflict with one another in an attempt to preserve their dominance in the camps. The conflict between them ruins security and peace for both the local community and the Rohingya, making them feel unsafe. The crisis has exacerbated tensions between the two communities over time, and undermined people' confidence in the capacity of the government and humanitarian organizations to deal the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar district.

My third argument in this thesis is that **a**fter 2017, the influx of enormous Rohingya refugees led to population pressure and increased competition for land, forests, and other natural resources in a poverty-ridden rural-agrarian society, where land is the central means of production. It exacerbated the strain on these resources, leading to identity differentiation and the emergence of social conflicts between the poor local citizens and the refugees. **In articles C and D,** I demonstrated the conflicts over public services and natural resources between Rohingyas and the host community. However, these papers partially focused on the identity crisis, politics, and othering, which ultimately create a dynamic of identity differentiation. In these papers, I have not exclusively focused on the dynamics of identity differentiation, which I will publish in another journal paper (or in my book) in the future.

In my thesis, I have illustrated that from 1978 to 2016, the Rohingyas assimilated into Bangladeshi society, but this assimilation was disrupted after a massive influx of nearly one million Rohingyas into Bangladesh in 2017. Following this, the integration process shifted to a top-down approach with significant involvement from the Bangladesh government and national and international civil society organizations. This shift involved the recognition of the rights and access to resources and services for both the local population and the refugees, resulting in a certain level of access for the refugees. The disparity in access to rights, services, and resources caused conflict between the refugees and the host community, resulting in an identity crisis and differentiation between the two communities.

Conclusion

Bangladesh has gained worldwide reputation as a Rohingya refugee haven in South and Southeast Asia. Bangladesh is a poor country, but it has given the Rohingya shelter and

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[23] A Councillor interviewed at Ukhiya on 13 July 2021.

emergency support on humanitarian grounds. However, Rohingya refugees struggle to integrate into the Bangladeshi host society. Refugee integration and assimilation processes in the Global South differ from those in the Global North. Global North integration policies facilitate refugees' access to structural, cultural, and other types of integration with host societies. Policies of Global North countries toward refugees have evolved over time, with differences in objectives. Initially, the USA and Canada favored refugees staying, unlike Western Europe which had strict restrictions until the late 20th century. However, attitudes have shifted in Western Europe due to economic changes. Refugees in the region now contribute to the workforce (Brunarska and Denisenko, 2021). Attitudes toward refugees may vary among countries in the South. For example, Bangladesh, which was previously part of Pakistan and before that a part of colonial India, has been a refugee-producing country; therefore, Bangladesh citizens were initially sympathetic towards Rohingyas, and the Bangladesh government neglected their arrival in Bangladeshi society and the process of bottom-up assimilation. However, from 2017 onwards, the attitude of the host community drastically changed, which ultimately affected state politics, government policy, and programs as well.

Like the countries of the Global North, Bangladesh does not allow refugees formal assimilation and integration into the host society. The country has been struggling with massive demographic pressure, limited resources, inadequate administrative and institutional facilities, and political and economic instability as a newly liberated and post-colonial country in the Global South. From 1978 to 2016, Rohingyas assimilated bottom-up in Bangladesh in terms of language, religion, and other cultural similarities. However, further forced migration and government interventions since 2017 hindered their integration. Bangladesh, as the host country, does not recognize Rohingya as refugees, instead identifies them as "Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMNs), because Bangladesh is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Also, the country has no formal integration policies for refugee people but adopted a top-down and partial integration policy. Rohingya refugees are now confined to camps or relocated to another place such as distant island. The government of Bangladesh prioritizes Rohingya refugee children over adults due to their larger population, leading to the implementation of a top-down and partial integration approach that focuses on providing education to refugee children in temporary education centers within the camps. Refugee children are given education by the government and civil society in English, Math, Social Science, and the Myanmar language, using a curriculum that is similar to the Myanmar curriculum. The purpose of offering such a curriculum to refugee children is to make sure

they are not readily integrated into Bangladeshi society and that they receive acknowledgment for their education when they return home. However there is anger from host community towards the government and local and global civil society because they feel that refugee children are getting more privileges in their schools than their children **(Articles A and B).**

However, despite restrictions, Rohingya refugees are still informally integrating into the host community. The presence of the Rohingya has had profound effects on the social, economic, political, and cultural life of the local community and has led to conflict over resources and services. With the arrival of the refugees, there was undoubtedly a disruption in the delivery of public services in sectors such as health, education, and access to land and natural resources. This was mostly because of the inadequate governance system for effective access and distribution policies, including the fund-driven nature of NGOs and INGOs. However, the distrust that locals have in the government and relief organizations is attributed in large part to the informal integration of refugees, the unequal distribution of resources and services, the deprivation of those who are truly in need, poor surveillance, and competition over scarce resources. The poor host community perceived the Rohingyas as more powerful and of higher social, political, and economic status than the locals of Cox's Bazar because of the government's and civil society's attention. Local people believe they are becoming a minority in their native land. The increase in population, conflicts, and rivalry for scarce resources and public services has resulted in anti-refugee sentiment and a host community struggling with their sense of identity. Consequently, locals prioritize their civic and citizenship identities to assert their rights to local resources and to differentiate themselves from the Rohingya refugees (Articles C and D).

The government and NGOs need to manage the relationship by designing and implementing projects and programmes that take a comprehensive, multi-sectoral, and regional approach to alleviate the social and economic effects on local communities and enable them to coexist peacefully with the Rohingya. If these problems are not addressed properly, these camps may pose additional burdens for local communities and the national economy.

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