

The Remaking of Rohingyas in the Host Communities of Cox's Bazar: The Intersectionality of Identity, Politics and Culture

In 2016-2018, more than 750,000 Rohingyas were forced to leave Myanmar and take shelter in Cox's Bazar, Teknaf, and Ukhiya of Bangladesh. The Rohingya influx from Myanmar is not new for Bangladesh. Bangladesh has been hosting Rohingyas since late 1970s. While Bangladeshi government and international community are much concerned about safety and security of Rohingya refugees, it has hardly been a matter of academic investigation—how have the relations between host communities and Rohingyas evolved in post-forced migration phases in Bangladesh? Popular media vary scantily reported some patterns of racial hatreds between Bengali and Rohingya people in Bangladesh since their first migration in late 1970s. However, it does not help scholars to comprehend the evolving relationship between host community and Rohingyas in Bangladesh over decades. This study, therefore, aims to examine avenues of 'intersectionality' of identity, culture and politics in the context of forced migration of Rohingyas and their relations with host communities in Bangladesh. The paper lies at the intersection of scholarly literature on forced migration and politics of identity construction. It discusses multiple forms of discrimination experienced by refugees and the views of local host community in Bangladesh about Rohingyas. In doing so, the paper applies a constructivist approach to understand construction processes of Rohingya identity in host communities—local administration and Bengali citizens—by using content analysis of primary documents, popular local and national media reports and in-depth interviews of locals and refugees. A semi-structured content analysis of popular media (local newspapers) will be conducted to examine the appearances of some specific expressions that indicate Rohingyas' identity/ies. The data will be analyzed to highlight some critical markers of identity at the post-forced migration stages. Furthermore, qualitative narratives from selected in-depth interviews of refugees and host community members will also offer some descriptions of identity construction processes, which will highlight how Rohingyas are consistently prompted with their refugee identity/ies. The study acknowledges that the qualitative research is not generalizable. Findings from media content analysis and in-depth interviews nevertheless provide important insights into how 'selfness' for Rohingya refugees is a construction of interactions between

Rohingyas and local host community. The study aims to argue that the notion of identity as a constructed narrative of 'locals' that reinforced 'othering' of forced migrants/refugees in the host country. This 'othering' processes is situated at the critical 'intersection' of identity, culture and political narratives constructed by powerful locals that may further lead to various forms of discrimination for Rohingyas—that is yet unaddressed by prevailing protection mechanisms in Bangladesh.