Locating Human Security In the City: The Case of Rohingya Refugees In New Delhi

Ashvina Patel
Southern Methodist University, ampatel@smu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.smu.edu/hum_sci_anthropology_etds

Part of the Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons

Recommended Citation
Patel, Ashvina, "Locating Human Security In the City: The Case of Rohingya Refugees In New Delhi" (2019). Anthropology Theses and Dissertations. DOI: https://doi.org/10.25172/td/14473584
https://scholar.smu.edu/hum_sci_anthropology_etds/10

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Anthropology at SMU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Anthropology Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of SMU Scholar. For more information, please visit http://digitalrepository.smu.edu.
LOCATING HUMAN SECURITY IN THE CITY:

THE CASE OF ROHINGYA REFUGEES IN NEW DELHI

Approved by:

___________________________________
Prof. Caroline Brettell

___________________________________
Prof. Kacy Hollenback

___________________________________
Prof. Neely Myers

___________________________________
Prof. Nicolas Sterndorff Cisterna

___________________________________
Dr. Elzbieta Gozdziak
LOCATING HUMAN SECURITY IN THE CITY: THE CASE OF ROHINGYA REFUGEES IN NEW DELHI

A Dissertation Presented to the Graduate Faculty of

Dedman College
Southern Methodist University

in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the
Doctor of Philosophy

with a
Major in Cultural Anthropology

by
Ashvina Patel
(M.A. Southern Methodist University)
(M.A. University of Hawai‘i, Manoa)
(B.A. University of California, Santa Barbara)

May 18, 2019
This research examines the subjective experience of human security by Rohingya urban refugees who fled to New Delhi, India, from Myanmar, in 2012. It uses bottom-up, top-down, and historical-to-present approaches to recognize the myriad factors that influence the path to security. The bottom-up approach frames the Rohingya present-day experience; the top-down approach delineates motivations embedded in the current India state and the international refugee regime; and the past-to-present approach explains the perspectives of each of these actors.

One urban refugee settlement was chosen as a primary field site to examine the challenges and varied everyday experiences of the city for migrants. Two other urban settlements were selected for supplementary participant observation and the collection of quantitative data. At my primary field site, Rohingya men and women were interviewed to assess their feeling of security (in Rohingya hefazat or in Hindi suraksha). The perceptions of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) employees, government officials, and community representative were also recorded.

Human security, defined as a person-centered security, was assessed on three dimensions: political, economic, and community. Analysis of the data compelled me to focus on what I call political human security. Anthropologists theorize the embeddedness of new immigrants and resettled refugees through acts of cultural citizenship, assimilation, and integration. This study, however, demonstrates that for urban refugees their primary need is basic security. This security
is inevitably political; Rohingya refugees are deemed “illegal” immigrants by the state, but are permitted to stay as protected wards of the UNHCR. They assume a refugee identity that both expose them to further exploitation, while also shielding them from starvation and disease. This politically formed identity must be negotiated in daily interaction in order to find security.

India is a first country of asylum for the Rohingya in this study. No South Asian country has signed the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, making India a good case study for how South Asia may respond to refugee influxes into urban spaces. India is unwilling to allow Muslim refugees to become naturalized citizens, pointing to religious and cultural factors that produce insecurity in the South Asia region. Furthermore, tensions rise when apolitical agencies like the UNHCR call upon India’s conservative administration to protect a population they define as undesirable. By focusing on urban refugees and their interactions with the state and supranational organizations, this research demonstrates the importance of statehood and citizenship as instruments of sovereignty that uphold human rights and protect against insecurity.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF FIGURES</th>
<th>ix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF MAPS</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAP OF INDIA</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAP OF MYANMAR</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1. Forced Migration and the Urban Refugee

2. Migrants and Refugees in New Delhi

3. The State, Statelessness, and the Refugee

4. Human In/Security

5. An Outline of Chapters

## 2. METHODS AND FIELD SITES

2.1 Field Sites

2.2 Sampling

2.3 Quantitative, Qualitative, and Archival Data Sets

2.4 Power, Positionality, & Ethics

## 3. SITUATING THE PRESENT IN THE PAST

3.1 Arakan and the Anglo-Burmese Wars
3.2 Independence, the Threat of Democracy, and the Making of Refugees 69
3.3 Bharatiya Janata Party’s Reaction to the Rohingya Issue 83

4. SEEKING REFUGE IN INDIA AND THE UNHCR 91

4.1 Partition and Subsequent Legal Precedents 93
4.2 Refugee Groups Assisted by the Indian State 98
4.3 Urban Refugee Policy and Practice 106
4.4 Implementing Partners In New Delhi 110

5. POLITICAL HUMAN IN/SECURITY 121

5.1 India’s Political Climate 123
5.2 Human Security Framework 125
5.3 Defining the Political 130
5.4 Experiencing Political Human Security 135

6. COMMUNITY HUMAN IN/SECURITY: LEADERSHIP, GENDER, AND EDUCATION 143

6.1 Claiming Space 145
6.2 Leaders They Fear, Leaders They Trust 149
6.3 Women, Girls, and the Imagined Wall 160
6.4 Rohingya Youth Organizations and Civic Engagement 170

7. POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE MIGRANT’S PLOT 178

7.1 Bonding Social Capital Maintains “Rohingya-ness” 180
7.2 Bridging Social Capital Into India 196
7.3 Linking Social Capital at A Global Settlement 204
LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Dirt Path to Migrant’s Plot</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Urban Decay, door to nowhere</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Kabadi collection of plastic bottles</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Kabadi collection of paper</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Myanmar Temporary Resident white identity card</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Number of Refugees Resettled from India 2014-2018</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Billboard in Jammu protesting Rohingya presence</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Protests in Delhi against Rohingya</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Age Range of Rohingya Refugees at the Migrant’s Plot</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Migrant’s Plot Residential Layout</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>An Exhibition Match</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Rohingya Youth Organizations in New Delhi</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Types of Labor and Number of Working Men</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Delhi’s Minimum Wage Rate 2017-2018</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Types of Labor and Number of Working Women</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Sample of Stitching Pattern &amp; Embroidery Work</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>Small Open-air Enterprises at the Migrant’s Plot</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF MAPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Map Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ix</td>
<td>Map of India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>Map of Myanmar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Arakan State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Regions Seized by the British 1824-1885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Origins of Mix Migrant Groups in New Delhi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Pages:
- ix
- x
- iv
- 63
- 66
- 198
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAP</td>
<td>Aam Aadmi Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCESS</td>
<td>ACCESS capitalizes the letter in their official name; it is not an acronym</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFPFL</td>
<td>Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARSA</td>
<td>Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIMSTEC</td>
<td>Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOSCO</td>
<td>Don Bosco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>Bharatiya Janata Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSPP</td>
<td>Burma Socialist Programme Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBI</td>
<td>Cash Based Intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHT</td>
<td>Chittagong Hill Tracts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CID</td>
<td>Criminal Investigation Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFD</td>
<td>Charitable Foundation of Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP</td>
<td>Implementing Partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JNU</td>
<td>Jawaharlal Nehru University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSD</td>
<td>Refugee Status Determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSS</td>
<td>Rāṣṭrīya Svayamsēvaka Saṅgha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAARCLAW</td>
<td>South Asian Association For Regional Co-operation in Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Stipend Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLIC</td>
<td>Socio Legal Information Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLORC</td>
<td>State Law and Order Restoration Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEO</td>
<td>Military Evacuation Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEFA</td>
<td>North Eastern Frontier Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLD</td>
<td>National League for Democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHR</td>
<td>United Nations Human Rights</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MAP OF INDIA

MAP OF MYANMAR

Source: US Gov [Public domain]
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There were many people who supported me throughout my research and as a graduate student. I am grateful to the Rohingya community in New Delhi, who began as research interlocutors, but soon became close friends and like family. They permitted me into the most vulnerable parts of their lives and for this I am indebted. I am especially humbled by my constant companion in Delhi, Ali Johar. His role as a ‘key cultural consultant’ was quickly replaced by good friend and fellow Rohingya activist.

In India, I would not have been as successful without the assistance and cooperation from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Zakat Foundation of India. At the University of Delhi Drs. Charu Sawhney and Abhijit Dasgupta were valuable resources. They opened doors to help an international graduate student to whom they were not under any obligation to assist. Additionally, Charu introduced me to the three gems of my field days, my research assistants: Guinea, Tarini Verma, and Dr. Jyoti Jyoti. These three women arrived everyday passionate and ready to work, undaunted by the challenging work environment. Their insights and social science backgrounds made them treasured work colleagues.

At SMU, I want to thank my dissertation committee. I am especially grateful for the unyielding support of my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Caroline Brettell, who sets an example of discipline, poise, and compassion that I hope to emulate in my future endeavors. Through Kacy Hollenback’s knowledge of disciplinary resources, she has helped me to make my work more
visible. Neely Myer’s has strengthened my methodological approach in the field and made me proficient in the tools I used for research analysis. Nicolas Sterndorff Cisterna has consistently provided practical advice. He has the unique ability to see thorough chaos, and provide excellent direction. I am honored to have had Dr. Elzbieta Gozdziak help guide my research. Her expertise in forced migration has made my work stronger. I am also thankful to have studied under late Dr. Victoria Lockwood, who greatly influenced the quantitative methods in my dissertation.

As a junior colleague and friend, I am grateful for the personal time that Drs. Rachel Ball and Travis DuBry have spent helping me study of qualifying exams, editing chapters and grants, and encouraging me, personally and professionally. Their empathy was the light at the end of my tunnel.

I am fortunate for having had passionate peers throughout this process, especially, Carrie Perkins, Josh Dorfman, Kerri Brown, Jordan Wondrack and Adam Birnbaum. A special thank you to Carrie Perkins with whom I entered and graduated the program. I cannot imagine having gone thorough this process without the laughter we have shared. And in India, at the end of a long day in the field there were no better companions to come home to then my flat mates, Marian Ingrams and Thalia Gigerenzer. Our shared experiences, their friendship and intellect were truly healing in a challenging city.

The Embrey Human Rights Program provided support for my first two months in India. Since my first semester at SMU both Drs. Rick Halperin and Bradley Klein have provided words of encouragement, letting me know they were there to help. The SMU Tower Center generously supported a research fellowship at the Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) at Oxford University. The mentorship I received at the RSC helped to strengthen my work. The Dean of Graduate Studies, Dissertation Writing Fellowship supported the final writing process.
And finally, to my parents, who as first generation immigrants have always valued education. Their support and pride makes me strive harder. And to my dear sister, Dipal Patel—I could not have been more loved and supported than by my older sister, a second-mom, and best friend. Last but not least, without the steadfast support and sacrifices of my husband, Pritesh Patel, none of this would have been possible. He believed in me every single day, even the tough ones.
They insisted on their nationality, the last sign of their former citizenship, as their only remaining and recognized tie with humanity. Their distrust of natural, their preference for national, rights comes precisely from the realization that natural rights are granted even to savages. ...because only savages have nothing more to fall back upon than the minimum fact of their human origin, people cling to their nationality all the more desperately when they have lost the rights and protection that such nationality once gave them. Only their past with its “entailed inheritance” seems to attest to the fact that they still belong to the civilized world.


Having citizenship means it’s your country. Bangladesh says you don’t belong to this place; Burma says you don’t belong here; India says you don’t belong here, if we go to some other country they will also say that you don’t belong here. Why don’t I belong anywhere? Everyone has a country; everyone has citizenship so we should also have it.

Taslima, Age 19
Hannah Arendt, a prominent public intellectual, is recognized as an influential political theorist on statelessness and totalitarianism. Stateless herself, she and her mother fled Germany in 1933 without papers. She understood all too well the insecurity of being without country and under threat of harm.

At the outset of each chapter (as I have done here), are quotes from Hannah Arendt on statelessness. Beside each are statements by stateless Rohingya\(^1\). The juxtaposition of her warnings from 60 years ago against the reality of modern-day statelessness is a reminder that the designs of our democracy, human rights policies, and security are in need of reexamination.

Throughout this dissertation, I draw upon various theoretical frameworks. However, I situate my study particularly within three larger anthropological frameworks: forced migration and the emergence of the urban refugee; the state and statelessness; and the subjective experiences of human security. Below, I discuss how anthropology has contributed to these three frameworks, where my work is situated within each, and the broader contribution of my work to the field.

1.1 Forced Migration and the Urban Refugee

Anthropologists began focusing on the study of migration in Africa in the 1940s and 1950s when villagers began moving to cities. Both migration studies and urban anthropology developed out of this research (Brettell 2003). Social scientists were first interested in rural to urban movements, but eventually the field expanded to return migration, diasporic communities, transnational movements, and the details of remittances, kinship ties, networks, gender dynamics, and most recently, to mobility and liquid migration. Not only were anthropologists

---

\(^1\) I use pseudonyms throughout this dissertation to protect the identities of research participants. The only interlocutor named is Ali Johar, at his insistence. He is a Rohingya human rights advocate and wants to be known.
interested in the complexities and coping mechanisms of adjusting to urban life (Graves and Graves 1974), but research increasingly showed, for example, how family structure was reorganized, communities and physical spaces around immigrant clusters changed the city, and citizenship and belonging were cultivated and constructed. Early on, Gonzalez (1961) outlined a typology of migration. This included seasonal migration, temporary, non-seasonal migration, recurrent migration, continuous migration, and permanent removal. She later added conflict migration acknowledging movement due to unrest in home countries, thus bringing the experience of refugees and asylum seekers into the analytical frame (Gonzales 1989).

Migration, especially when it occurs in clusters, also impacts destination communities. For example, resettled refugees in the United States often engage in secondary migration, moving from the cities where they were initially resettled by the resettlement agencies to those where they are able to reunite with distant family members, friends, or live among co-ethnics. Minnesota resettled 2,000 refugees in 2015-2016, but received 3,800 more in secondary migration altering the landscape of the Twin Cities with visible new grocery stores to makeshift cricket pitches in public parks (Shaw 2018).

The urban anthropology that emerged in the 1960s was concerned with issues regarding peasants in the city, extended kinship relations, network analysis, urban poverty, and ethnicity (Sanjek 1990:152; Foster and Kemper 2002). In the 1980s and 1990s theories of push-pull factors, women and gender, and connectedness of communities across space came to the foreground. Overall the study of cities in anthropology emphasized that urban context is a major variable in the lives of city dwellers (Eames and Good 1977). Because in this dissertation I consider urban refugees in New Delhi, I focus on the contributions of anthropology to forced migration generally, and to urban displacement more specifically. I ask: what is unique about the
city/New Delhi versus refugee camps? In what way does the city and its governance and institutions influence urban refugee security? How does the existence of urban refugees influence New Delhi and other migrant groups in the city?

Forced Migration

Anthropologists will be the first to admit that there is a fine line between voluntary migration and forced migration. Our methods and theories allow us to understand that “voluntary” and “forced” are subjective descriptors in the face of hardships due to repressive governments, natural hazards, development, or feelings of ontological insecurity. In fact, today, this distinction is so nebulous that recent debate in forced migration calls for no distinction in categories between migrants and refugees, claiming that all migrants should matter. After all, ‘mixed migrant’ flows are a growing phenomenon, each with “a jumble of different histories, resources, and entitlements” (Carling 2015 et al.). The study of forced migration developed in the 1980s in response to global mass migration trends, but arguably, in part, because the refugee regime2 is knowable; there are a finite amalgamation of institutions, governments, and humanitarian aid organizations that have emerged to specifically address this type of migration. This international regime helps to locate, house, and provide protection to refugee populations making them easier for researchers to contact. Almost all social scientists researching refugees utilize one of these organizations to establish contact with refugees themselves.

Although anthropologist arrived late to the table, they were part of the disciplinary conversation by the late 1970s- early 1980s. The study of forced migration and refugees quickly become an interdisciplinary field with contributions from legal scholars, social scientists,

---

2 The international “refugee regime” consists of international organization, transnational humanitarian aid agencies, as well as local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who respond to refugee needs from basic needs on-the-ground to refugee and human rights policies.
historians, and ultimately practitioners. Institutions such as the Refugee Studies Center (RSC) at the University of Oxford, the Refugee Studies Center at York University in Toronto, and Refugee Policy Group in Washington DC, all serve as examples of the widespread engagement of forced migration as an object of study. Anthropologist and founder of the RSC, Barbara Harrell-Bond (1986), was one of the key early contributors to the field with her book *Imposing Aid*, which called upon researchers to ensure that if they were going to impose themselves on communities experiencing such extreme human suffering, it had to be in hopes of improving their lives (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al. 2014:2). Of her discipline, she said:

> Anthropology has been undervalued and underutilized. The power of its methods to produce data to illuminate contemporary issues, however, speaks for itself… If refugees are not to be placed in double jeopardy, if they are not to become victims of aid as well as victims of disasters, our moral complacency must be punctured. None of them can afford the luxury of our vain posturing. At the same time and however serious were my efforts to explore a social process from the insiders’ point of view, I was always a spectator and as such I was limited by my own categories of thought in what I could see. The picture can never be totally complete. I was, and I remain, an outsider (Harrell-Bond 1986:25).

This was a call to action for anthropologists to use their skillset for the betterment of this new field of study.

> Anthropology can uniquely contribute to the field of refugee and forced migration by examining the lived experiences of forced migrants through ethnographic fieldwork, employing more critical methods of qualitative analysis than is the purpose of humanitarian NGOs. “Anthropology,” Chatty (2014: 7) observes, “has given the growing field of forced migration studies its core conceptual binaries such as: place and space; home and homeland; territoriality and liminality; belonging and identity; social networks and capital; ethnicity and nationalism; displacement and emplacement; eviction and return; camp-based and self-settled; integration and
assimilation.” One of the more notable studies is Peteet’s (1995 and 1996) research on refugee identity. Building upon what Malkki calls the “national order of things,” Peteet explores Palestinian national identity as defined by the host country and as internalized by the refugee. Another example is Shandy’s (2007) study of Nuer refugees in North America.

Here, because it is so central to my research, I review some of the literature that engages the “camp base and self-settled” binary. This binary framing has often revealed the complexities of the camp system itself. Noting how migration and humanitarian aid disbursement can change gender and power dynamics, Gale (2007) provides ethnographic data on Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinean camps who have “bulgur marriages,” an offensive term used to describe unions based on exchange of bulgur wheat provided by the United Nations World Food Program. Alluding to Sahlins’ (1963) work on “big” men in Melanesian societies, Gale refers to “big” women in the camp who negotiate the terms of wheat exchange in marriage unions, placing them in positions of uncharacteristic power. Equally focused on the power dynamics of refugee camp life, Thompson (2012) describes the influence of bureaucratic institutions involved in facilitating the process of resettlement from camps to a third country. Building on the work of Harrell-Bond (1986) and Yngvesson and Coutin (2006), she demonstrates how documenting and retelling stories of persecution “authenticate refugees as credible persons who deserve to be resettled” (Thompson 2012:197). Studies have shown that refugees teach one another how to “perform” for camp administrators to yield the best results. Camps essentially become enclosed spaces where power is situated with a variety of actors and institutions. They become small townships over time with elements of economy, politics, education, religion, and community engagement. Similarly, Malkki (1995) describes camps as a technology of power:
The refugee camp was a vital device of power: the spatial concentration and ordering of people that it enabled, as well as the administrative and bureaucratic processes it facilitated within its boundaries, had far-reaching consequences. The segregation of nationalities; the orderly organization of repatriation or third-country resettlement; medical and hygienic programs and quarantining; ‘perpetual screening’ and the accumulation of documentation on the inhabitants of the camps; the control of movement and black-marketing; law enforcement and public discipline; and schooling and rehabilitation were some of the operations that the spatial concentration and ordering of people enabled or facilitated. Through these processes, the modern, postwar refugee emerged as a knowable, nameable figure and as an object of social-scientific knowledge (498).

All these processes named by Malkki in refugee camps have also been topics for deeper study. Those who have theorized the camp itself, define it as suspended space and time, liminal space, transient space, or a warehouse for aid disbursement. Turner (2005), for example, describes camp Lukole for Burundian refugees in Tanzania as an expression of Agamben’s (1998 and 2000) “state of exception.” The refugee camp is both inside and outside the law. He augments this excluded state by arguing that within suspension, there are pockets of sovereignty with varying forms of power that serve as examples of agency. Camps have been widely criticized for stripping refugees of agency for indefinite periods of time. Forced migrants who learn of these protracted situations sometimes opt for self-settlement. This is not to say that self-settlement is always an option during flight, nor are refugee camps always an option. More recent studies engage the topic of refugees who circumvent the camp system to self-settle in urban areas, categorizing them as urban refugees.
Urban Refugees

According to UNHCR\(^3\) over 60 percent of the world’s 20.5 million refugees today live in cities, and yet research on urban refugees is fairly limited within the broader field of forced migration studies (examples of scholarship include Buscher 2013; Crea et al. 2016; Koizumi and Hoffstaedter ed. 2015; Landau 2014). Part of the difficulty in studying urban displacement is that urban spaces are dynamic and life circumstances change very quickly for refugees. Populations are not easy to find or access. They are unlike camp refugees who are easy to locate and access can be mitigated through aid agencies. Contrary to Jacobsen and Furst, (cited in Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014) who remark upon the challenge of “hunting down new arrivals;” in India, most refugees who are seeking protection and resources find the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR\(^4\)) by word of mouth. UNHCR India does not have the resources to seek out refugees in a city of millions.

UNHCR refugee protection came slowly to urban spaces partly because operating costs are high, but also because UNHCR struggled to define refugee protection in such spaces. In cities, it is less about providing food security and habitation, and more about providing a path to legal, safe employment, and access to resources typically reserved under a rights framework for citizens, such as health care, education, or state documentation. Thus far, UNHCR’s main function in urban spaces is registration and providing legal status. In New Delhi, they provide programming to ease urban refugees into the work force, build upon their skillset by finding more sustainable livelihoods, and negotiate access to education and healthcare.

\(^3\) unhcr.org/urban-refugees
\(^4\) I use “UNHCR” and “UNHCR India” interchangeably throughout the dissertation; both refer to the regional offices and administrators in New Delhi, India. When referring to the headquarters I will reference UNHCR Geneva.
Refugees choose urban spaces for a variety of reasons. They see it as better option to the alternative, which usually results in protracted living situations in a refugee camp or detention center. Bypassing formal institutions gives them agency to recreate their lives in a new place. Both Harrell-Bond (1986) and Malkki (1995) have noted how migrants who self-settle quickly adjust to the host country environments when compared to formal camps. The city allows for more organic integration into the host country, as opposed to the artificial environment of a camp.

Researchers observe that anonymity in the city can be both positive and negative. Anonymity allows refugee populations with similar phenotypes and linguistic backgrounds to the host population to transition with ease, charting a path for stable lives and livelihoods (Kibreab 1999; Malkki 1995). However, with full anonymity also comes lack of legal status which can lead to labor exploitation, human trafficking, mistreatment by landlords, and limited or no access to education and health care (Crisp et al. 2012; Jacobsen 2005). Kibreab (2007) notes that in most of Africa, governments do not like refugees in urban centers that are rapidly growing. In their contexts, absorbing massive flows of refugees exacerbates the urban condition of dwindling resources and increased crime. However, ambitious refugees who are opposed to living in camps that have no employment opportunities or freedom of movement ignore government policies and live undocumented in cities, at times sacrificing basic human rights (Kibreab 2007:28-9). In Sudan, the government claimed that Eritrean refugees posed a security threat to citizens. This justified confinement and spatial segregation of migrants. As Agier (2002) has noted, while some governments want to protect refugees, some want to protect themselves from refugees.

There are benefits to designated formal camps. In these contexts, refugees are provided food rations and health care. There may even be space for agricultural cultivation. They also
serve as secure spaces in case of opposition insurgencies from the country of flight (Fabos and Kiberab 2007:5). However, camps can also be mismanaged and lack basic resources (such were the conditions of the 1992 camps erected at the border of Myanmar and Bangladesh). Even in the best of circumstances, protracted camp situations, as most end up being, can become cruel and demoralizing places separated from the rest of the world.

Adding to the challenge of understanding urban refugees is the disparity in their experiences based on the spaces they inhabit in the city. There is more similarity of experience between a Nigerian asylum seeker and a Rohingya refugee living in Khajuri Khas (one such settlement cluster), than between two Rohingyas, one living in Khajuri Khas and the other in Vikas Puri (another settlement cluster). In such a vibrant city with great paradoxes from one borough to the next, space heavily informs the feeling of in/security, relationships with Indian locals, types of livelihood, access to education and healthcare, and access to UNHCR.

1.2 Migrants and Refugees in New Delhi

Contemporary studies of migration in India have primarily focused on out migration (Bhagat 2016), transnational migration (Gardner 2008; Vertovec 2009; Kurien 2001), or Indian diasporas in other countries (Brettell 2005; Vora 2013; Bhatia 2007). However, McDuie-Ra (2012) examines the impact of migration from the northeastern frontiers of India to New Delhi and how it affects notions of belonging, otherness, exclusivity, and place (45). From this study, we can glean the challenges of any migrant to the city and how that compares with the urban refugee experience.

Ethnic minorities from the far eastern parts of India (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, and Meghalaya) feel that they do not belong to the Indian
mainland. “There is a binary between the peoples of the Northeast and peoples in other parts of India. Rarely explicitly articulated in mainstream politics, this binary is constant in any interaction between the states of the Northeast and the central government” (McDui-Ra 2012:41). Chatterji (2007) too remarks upon a feeling of isolation and disconnection from the center by those living in the northeast. McDui-Ra (2012) argues that Northeastern migrants feel ethnically and culturally excluded from the mainland norms. However, their citizenship allows these migrants in New Delhi access to formal sector jobs and some of the top universities in the country. They are insiders. Comparatively, urban refugees are outsiders and hence lack access to formal sector jobs or higher education; this creates economic insecurity—a topic that I pick up in later chapters.

Delhi has seen 3,000 years of continuous urban migration (Jamil 2017). Migration to New Delhi is paradoxically a self-segregating process as well as a determinate one. Where one is able to live is based largely on socio-economics, class/caste identity, religion, and ethnic make-up. As an “ex-pat” I was expected to live in particular neighborhoods, which I did, for the same reasons that other migrants may choose their particular neighborhoods. In a city with so many distractions, finding a community that mirrors your sense of self can be comforting. Similarly, Jamil’s (2017) study explores how Muslim identities are created and articulated in New Delhi based both on discriminatory segregation and spaces of cultural expression. By the end of the 1980s, the city had been divided along Hindu-Muslim lines.

Referring to the Gujarat Riots of 2002, in which hundreds of Muslims and Hindus died, Jamil (2017) expresses how the violence devastated the Muslim community in Delhi. Since then,

---

5 This isolation is in part due to how Partition affected the inhabitants of the region, but also because the ethnic make up of the northeast is different from the Indian-norm. Ethno-nationalism is an important prerequisite to feeling a sense of belong to an otherwise fairly phenotypically homogenous nation. In addition, the central government’s policies do not always align with the cultural or administrative situation of frontier spaces. I would compare this to the United States’ federal government’s relationship to Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, or Guam. While the Indian northeast is contiguous, it operates in isolation under its own regionally applicable policies.
there has not been such violence along religious lines in India. “India too was gripped by global Islamophobia and all Muslims were conclusively branded as terrorists or potential in the public consciousness in the wake of the United States-led, so called ‘war against terror’” (8).

Islamophobia with regards to Muslims in Delhi is seen conclusively in the treatment of Rohingya refugees by the current central government administration. But why is the Indian state creating targeted legislation against the Rohingya Muslim specifically and not Afghan refugees or Indian Muslims? First, Indian Muslims are citizens protected by India’s constitution. And second, the Afghan urban refugee population is primarily Hindu and Sikh with historic ties to India. The Rohingya in Delhi are technically “illegal” Muslim migrants, and therefore easy scapegoats for a state determined to eradicate perceived Islamic-based security threats, legitimate or not. Most of the Rohingya who are part of this study fled Myanmar in 2012, went through Bangladesh, and then arrived in India. At the India-Bangladesh border there were no designated camps to receive refugees. Even though the influx in 2012 numbered in the thousands, it was a slow and gradual flow of people who dispersed to various cities throughout India. The Rohingya, however, remain together finding safety in community by forming small clusters in different urban spaces. In New Delhi, I located six such settlements, making three of them subjects of my study, and one my primary field site.

Most Rohingya have arrived from small townships, making the transition to the city either confounding or exciting. The community is generally very strict with their women, “protecting” them from outside harm and influence by not allowing them to work; they seldom leave the settlement. However, the city also provides primary educational opportunities for both

---

6 The six settlements are in Vikas Puri, Burela, Khajuri Khas, Okhla, Faridabad, and Shaheen Bagh; the three I focus on are Okhla, Faridabad, and Shaheen Bagh, and the Okhla site is my primary field site.
boys and girls. The city in general is attractive for many types of migrants including migrants from other states in India. The next section considers the role of the state, statelessness, citizenship, and the fault line inhabited by the urban Rohingya in Delhi.

1.3 The State, Statelessness, and the Refugee

Sharma and Gupta (2006) argue that anthropology of the state is theorized through everyday practices and representations of the state, symbolic and physical. Social sciences provide a lens through which to understand state formation, power, and action—through things like issuance of passports, welfare, or health care. By asking how the state is experienced in individuals’ everyday lives, anthropology brings culture to the foreground. This way of approaching the state ensures that the state is not simply viewed as a power above civil society, but one that works within and has an imprint on civil society. Observing everyday practices allows us to “study the operation of power in a disaggregated manner and to de-emphasize the state as the ultimate seat of power” (Sharma and Gupta 2006:9). This “disaggregation” occurs though state institutions and bureaucratic practices. The seemingly attenuated bureaucratic agencies leave an impression on individual’s social behavior.

Bureaucratic participation is how the state becomes significant in people’s lives. It is through this extension of state power that citizens experience rights. An example is the act of acquiring a driver’s license in the United States. Refugees who cross borders into host countries experience the state through administrative process as well (Harrell-Bond et al. 1992; Cohn 1990; Cohn and Dirks 1988; Gupta 1995; Scott 1998; Thomson 2012). In Tanzania, at a Congolese refugee camp Thomson (2012) connects documenting harassment as a means to acquiring asylum. A Congolese woman in Tanzania delivered a letter from camp police

---

7 In contrast, Rohingya urban refugees in Malaysia are unable to access education.
explaining how her family had been targeted within the camp, a letter from security guards documenting verbal abuse, letters from the hospital documenting a poisoning attempt, copies of slanderous posters placed around the camp, and an official letter from the Tanzanian Ministry of Home Affairs recommending she be resettled to a third country (9). Documentation written and signed by state officials legitimizes the claim for asylum. Refugees’ ability to protect themselves relies on the bureaucratic tradition of documentation. Such practices have also become the foundation of theories on migrant “performance” and “deservingness” (Willen 2007; Holmes and Castaneda 2016; Chauvin and Garcés-Mascareñas 2014).

Gupta (2006) argues that in India it is through the mundane practices of filling out forms, dotting Is and crossing Ts, that the state inserts itself into people’s daily lives. In his ethnographic account of a lower-level state bureaucracy, the devotion to accurate paperwork at times supersedes logical reasoning (2006:12). Refugees in India who live in New Delhi are not unfamiliar with such practices. In spite of UNHCR India’s records that thoroughly document their experience of persecution, their biometric data, their names, dates of birth, and corresponding identification number, Rohingya refugees are subjected to additional state level bureaucracy. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) arrived unannounced on November 10, 2017 to a Rohingya settlement to document, by hand, each refugee living there. Until 3:30 am they sat at the settlement meticulously documenting full names, father’s name, village in Myanmar, religion, occupation, spouses, children, and dates of birth. The state in this case is represented by symbols such as documents, uniforms, official seals, as well an exertion of power that spread fear and uncertainty through the community. The community was told that this record would assist the government in sending them back home.
The power of the state is tested by globalization. Globalization has been understood to threaten nation states by challenging notions of territoriality and sovereignty. The state has authority over its territory by policing borders—permitting or denying entry. Its sovereignty is challenged by supranational organizations, like the World Trade Organization or United Nations. Sharma and Gupta (2006) note how non-state entities such as the World Food Program or the Red Cross that work in numerous nations not bound to any political body, but instead they operate to promote a particular mission like alleviating poverty. One way to understand transnational governance is to look at migration: why it is occurring, to where, and where from? These movements challenge notions about what constitutes a nation, its people, their citizenship, and their rights (Sharma and Gupta 2006). Sassen (1998: 439) argues that illegality exists as a byproduct of state laws that serve to create an inclusive subject that operates within the law. It is the very formation of statehood that creates notions of migrant “illegality.”

The state plays an important role in immigration policy. Significant to this role is the policy-making authority of supranational organizations—such as the European Union. There can be contestation between state legislation and international law. Sassen (1999) uses the example of how France and Germany attempted to limit family reunification; their own courts restricted this move because each nation would be breaking international agreements. Using developed countries in her examples, she argues that although the state has the ultimate authority over its immigration policy, factors of global cooperation affect immigration policy. She calls this a “displacement of governance” in which non-state entities govern immigration, decreasing the state’s ability to regulate the border and implement global processes.

The concept of “displaced governance” can be applied to the Indian context but only selectively. If we try to determine how global immigration policy affects Indian migration law,
we would be hard pressed to find consistency throughout India. For example, high courts in Tamil Nadu have reinforced the need for a humane due process of asylum seekers. Some Indian municipal courts have selected to abide by international treaty obligations in the absence of federal laws or guiding principles with regard to refugees (Sen 2003:402). However, there are examples of high courts in Assam deporting migrants without allowing them to seek UNHCR protection. The loose application of international codes in India’s own immigration policy is indicative of the central government’s struggle for power in remote states, such as in Assam where its high court deported seven Rohingya men in October of 2018. Elsewhere, in states like Jammu on the border of Pakistan, they have determined their own immigration laws as a response to the responsibility they shoulder in managing high volumes of refugees since Partition. In Europe, Sassen (1999) finds that border crossings have become a part of economic policy conversations, but in South Asia, multinational organizations like the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation in Law (SAARCLAW) have purposefully barred conversations about migration from their annual meetings because they impede the progress of economic alliances. In this manner, economic globalization in South Asia is more productive when migration is ignored.

However, regarding migration law, and urban refugee migration more specifically, the Indian state is aware of the existence of urban refugees within its borders, but does not acknowledge them as legal resident bodies. In many ways, they are regarded as “absent,” a status similar to the Salvadorian undocumented migrants in America discussed by Coutin (2005). Urban refugees in India are “present in, yet absent from, national spaces” (Coutin 2005: 196). Uniquely, urban refugees are not invisible in India, but their legal relationship is facilitated

---

8 They did acknowledge them for a short period from 2013-2016 when they issued five-year long-term visas from the Foreigner Regional Registration Offices (FRRO). The Modi administration ended this process and is not renewing any expired visa.
through an international organization (e.g. UNHCR). Essentially, they are hidden in plain sight; they have no legal relationship with the state, but the task of managing their existence in India has been handed to the UNHCR, thereby displacing their governance (Sassen 1999). Those who accept UNHCR identity come to embody both the “foreign” and the supranational West, occupying the mind of the typical Indian as being both a subject to distance oneself from and a subject of mystery. Simultaneously, they are viewed as “foreigners” who do not belong in mother India, and as curious objects of a Euro-centric UNHCR.

In addition to considering the everyday practice and representation of the modern state in migration, anthropologists have ethnographically presented ways in which various institutions carry out the task of surveillance (e.g. Martin 2018; Sharma & Gupta 2006; Ong 1995; Chavez 2008). In Foucault’s *Governmentality* (1978) he explains the evolution of the state from the 16\(^\text{th}\) to the 18\(^\text{th}\) century, suggesting that the purpose of the sovereign shifted from ruling by religious principles to judicial ones. The sovereign no longer ruled by, as Chinese philosophy would call it, the Mandate of Heaven, but instead the role was a functional one that ensures economy for its people, which includes everything from wealth to health. The final shift occurred with the Treaty of Wesphalia (1648) when the sovereign began to govern its population and territories through policing of borders and surveillance of the population.

Shifting to non-citizens, Coutin (2005) builds on Foucault’s (1978) argument of the panopticon, an invisible self-discipline created by the state, in which people govern one another and themselves through subtle forces. She illustrates this through ethnographic accounts of undocumented migrants who are forced into social invisibility. This invisibility manifests when they are unable to secure jobs or enroll in schools because they are asked for legal documentation. The fact that they have no legal status renders them invisible to the state.
Furthermore, the state denies their existence by extending and disaggregating their centralized power (Gupta 2006; Gonzales and Chavez 2012) through institutional mechanisms that monitor the “legality” of individuals. For example, undocumented Latinos who grew up in the United States desire to participate in social activities, drive a car, work or vote but are unable to do these things without producing state issued identification, like a driver’s license (Gonzales and Chavez 2012). In this example, even a nightclub becomes an institution of surveillance.

The following two sections consider statelessness and its opposite, citizenship. What is the state’s responsibility to its own citizens and to the citizens of another country? Is South Asia an exception to the Western construct of citizenship? How have anthropologists contributed to our understanding of citizenship?

**Statelessness**

Article one of the United Nation’s 1954 Statelessness Convention defines a stateless person as one “who is not considered a national by any State under the operation of its law.” International attention to statelessness came after World War II when millions were made refugees and stateless across Europe. Partly in response to this event, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights addresses statelessness in Article 15 stating “(1) Everyone has a nationality; (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor the right to change his nationality.” Thereby everyone belongs to a state, and has rights associated with statehood.

An additional Convention in 1961 created a framework to guide nations on how to avoid future statelessness, placing the responsibility of preventing statelessness on sovereign states. However, how citizenship is awarded by a sovereign state is not detailed. Every state determines the parameters of how nationality is defined; and statelessness is increasing globally due to
territorial disputes, coveting of natural resource, and issues of national identity. According to 2017 UNHCR statistical data there are more than 2.7 million stateless people in the world today.

When one is not a citizen of any state she cannot participate fully in society, nor is she able to reap the benefits of basic human rights that are extended through the virtue of belonging. The lack of statehood can often mean one cannot vote, own property, or access healthcare or education. One way in which populations become stateless is the act of nation building. Building a nation is the constructing of a cultural ethos that maintains a particular type of identity (e.g. American as the land of the free). Nations are socially constructed (Sharma and Gupta 2006; van Schendel 2002), offering citizenship to some while excluding others.

Historically, this act of nation building in South Asia has made de facto stateless groups. Examples include, refugees caught between Pakistan and India (1947); the Chakma ethnic group in the northeast Chittagong Hill Tracts (1964); and the Rohingya caught between Bangladesh and Myanmar (1947). In the process of post-colonial governance in South Asia, two types of statelessness emerged, one, the result of territorial reorganization and the other, when individual were denied citizenship by a particular state (Sammadar 2017). Discussed further in Chapter Three, statelessness in Myanmar is distinctly tied to pre- and post-colonial partitions. For the Rohingya, statelessness in Myanmar was not just about rights and political representation, it was also a security threat. They had no legal recourse, no police, army, or politician to call upon for help.

It is possible to be stateless and not a refugee. This was the case of the Rohingya who lived in Myanmar. One can also be both stateless and a refugee, like the Rohingya who live in

---

9 De facto statelessness essentially means they cannot rely on the state of which they are citizens for protection. De jure statelessness means one never had any nationality to speak of.

10 van Schendel (2002) documents another unique forms of statelessness that emerged during the partition between India and Bangladesh. At the Bangladesh-India border there are close to 200 enclaves in which stateless residents of either country live unadministered. An enclave is a portion of one state completely surrounded by the territory of another state.
Bangladesh, India, or Malaysia. Ironically, the Rohingya had to leave their homeland in order to access their unalienable rights to that homeland, by claiming a stateless-refugee status with the UNHCR. Only then were they able to claim rights within an international human rights framework. Thompson’s (2017) research on the stateless Somalis in South Africa demonstrates a similar conundrum. Somalis enter South Africa specifically to “assert their rights to protection as stateless persons under the South African government's international commitments, mobilizing an idea about their legal rights that they hope will become manifest in practice” (2017:90). Human rights activists in India also rely on Article 51(c) of the Indian Constitution, which states that India “shall endeavor to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations in the dealings of organized peoples with another” (India Const. 1950).

My study steps back from the language of citizenship, cultural or legal, and instead, engages with a discussion about security, and specifically with human security. But before I introduce the human security framework, it is instructive to review the selective ways in which anthropologists have considered cultural expressions of citizenship, insofar as it helps to explain the triangular relationship between urban refugees, the state, and the UNHCR in India. Because the Rohingya are stateless refugees in a host country without refugee laws, the refugee relationship is primarily with the UNHCR. In Chapter Five, I use a human security framework to emphasize how their identity as a “refugee” and relationship with a supranational organization articulates forms of insecurity located in the UNHCR’s own protection processes.

_Citizenship_

The absence of statelessness is citizenship; it is the link between an individual and a state. Anthropologists have gone beyond the legal definitions of citizenship and questioned how the
everyday manifestations of citizenship, like feelings of belonging or civic engagement, are expressed. While there is scant anthropological work on statelessness itself, the numerous citizenship frameworks are useful in understanding ways in which stateless refugees build belonging, social capital, and reorganize in spaces they have claimed.

Issues of unauthorized migration and security have been examined through psychological effects (Gomberg-Munoz 2012; Willen 2007) and disenfranchisement (Chavez and Gonzales 2012). Gomberg-Munoz writes about Mexican busboys in Chicago whose willingness to work hard for low-wage, low-status jobs is a selling point that benefits Mexican families financially but in turn essentializes Mexican labor. The stereotype of Mexicans as hard workers might aid in helping them find jobs, but due to their unauthorized existence, it leaves them with little agency to find work outside of migrant networks. In the United States, anti-immigration policies have not reduced the flow of migration “but, rather, have ‘illegalized’ it, legitimizing exploitation of immigrant workers by making access to political, economic, and social resources a right of citizenship” (Gomberg-Munoz 2012: 303). She challenges state policy by demonstrating that laws make busboys illegal, but if the state continues to look the other way when it comes to employment of illegal immigrants it sends the message that it is somehow acceptable to exploit Mexican laborers, thus leaving them and their families insecure in many ways. Similarly, urban refugees are exploited for their labor. They are able to work in informal sector jobs but prevented from career laddering into the formal sector due to a lack of legal documentation. The refugees’ liminal legal status traps them in a position of economic insecurity that is reinforced by wage exploitation by Indian employers.

The precarity, the state of insecurity or lack of predictability that comes with an undocumented identity is also explored in Willen’s (2007) study of transnational migrants in Tel
Aviv. Willen uses phenomenological methods to understand the embodied fear of the undocumented who are reduced to hiding behind bushes from cops, going to bed fully dressed in case immigration officers come in the middle of the night, or stuffing their hands in their pockets to hide the color of their skin. Employing these strategies to remain under the radar of suspicion fundamentally changes the lives and psyche of these migrants, even affecting their dreams and nightmares. The strategies employed by the undocumented in both these cases speak to the level of ontological insecurity in the lives of the undocumented (Giddens 1991; Hinton et al. 2009; Parson and Heckert 2014).

Anthropologists approach citizenship as a set of social processes shaped by culture, not simply as a political contract. Some use analytical frameworks that question how belonging in constructed through everyday experiences, such as cultural citizenship. Rosaldo (1994) defines cultural citizenship as “the right to be different (in terms of race, ethnicity, or native language) with respect to the norms of the dominant national community, without compromising one's right to belong, in the sense of participating in the nation-state's democratic processes” (57). For Latinos race, gender, and class are the sources of their subordination, making these constructions central to claims of full membership to the state, not as second-class citizens. As Rosaldo argues, sometimes “official citizenship is at odds with cultural citizenship” (2003:9). Cultural citizenship can also be articulated through civic engagement by claiming space, developing forms of media and then using it to construct new identities while maintaining a sense of community through ethnic ties (Brettell 2005). Civic engagement through protests is employed by Rohingya youth who have protested against Myanmar’s human rights violations in New Delhi. For a period of time they organize, claim space, and extend their network to include Indian citizens who align with them along moral lines, not ethnic or national one.
Cultural citizenship in Ong’s (1996) study is defined as “subject-making” and “being made” (737). She makes this argument through ethnographic research on Cambodian refugees who have been “made” in relation to nation-states and transnational processes. Ong argues that Rosaldo’s view of cultural citizenship is unilaterally constructed, and positioned such that immigrants have all the power in asserting belonging. For Cambodian Americans, cultural citizenship is a negotiation with the state and its hegemonic definitions of belonging. These definitions are imparted to immigrants through civic institutions and social groups in a fragmented power structure. She argues that hegemonic notions of race and culture are embedded in this process, thus making subjects that are now part of the classification.

Referencing both Ong’s work on Cambodian Americans and Rosaldo’s on Latinos, Siu (2007) calls for a deeper look at how cultural citizenship is transformed when diasporic citizens claim membership to a variety of political communities. She emphasizes the “politics of belonging for people who are affiliated with at least two cultures and places at once” (Siu 2007:3). In her formulation of the concept of flexible citizenship, Ong (1999) illustrates how Chinese migrants use blended strategies of migration to establish themselves as productive global citizens in more than one country, emphasizing their agency in occupying transnational identities and spaces for economic benefit.

Ong draws our attention to a “black and white” racial binary found in the United States that is reinforced through civic institutions and social groups. India too inculcates normative behaviors through institutions that are the extended and fragmented representation of the hegemonic state (Horton 2004; Ong 1995), producing an impression of Hindu-cultural superiority over Muslims-inferiority. Also, the Indian state, through the lack of refugee laws that extend basic human rights, suggests a value differential between Indian-citizens and refugee-
foreigners. For example, such sentiments were reinforced by state police when they met with Rohingya leaders warning them not to marry their (Indian) women, suggesting that entering into such a union would be a transgression that exceeds Indian hospitality.

In addition, for urban refugees in New Delhi there is a supranational authority operating within the city. The UNHCR insists that whether Muslim, Hindu, or Christian, all refugees who have fled persecution are deserving of protection and human rights. That cultural value is in direct contestation with the state administration’s mission to protect itself against foreigners, and Muslims specifically. For this reason, refugees who are identified as wards of an international organization wear a contested identity as they move in the city. Because India does not have national laws to protect refugees, urban refugees must assume the identity provided by UNHCR in order to gain rights and protection as persons fleeing persecution--the “refugee” identity. They wear this label and experience its subjectivity in their everyday lives, thus embodying an accompanying political identity with nearly every interaction. The motivations influencing the state’s mission will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three. The following section highlights ways in which human security has been problematized in anthropology and how human security is tied to urban refugees in New Delhi specifically.

1.4 Human In/Security

Security traditionally has been considered within the context of national security, nuclear security, or border security. It is conceived in relation to the state and how the state can protect its sovereignty and territory. The security of a nation and its subjects has historically justified various types of policies from immigration policies, such as America’s 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, prompted by anti-Chinese sentiments, to population security, like China’s 1980 One Child
Policy said to curb unsustainable population growth. It was not until the 1990s that the idea of a human-centered security grew in popularity due to the 1994 United Nations Development Program (UNDP) summit, which proposed a “plan to make nations more secure by making the people of the nation more secure using measures that were more human-centered. The world can never be at peace unless people have security in their daily lives” (UNDP 1994).

Academic disciplines, too, began using a human security paradigm to frame their work and even develop new ways to approach security through empirical research. Political scientists tend to be critical of UNDP’s human security model in that it does not go far enough in analyzing such things as the effects of environmental security on populations and the role of development policy in such matters (Elliott 2015). Many have connected climate change to issues of human security stating that anthropogenic climate change has and will continue to destroy livelihoods, making it a human rights violation (Gasper 2012; Adger et al. 2014), while others link climate change to violent conflict (Barnett and Adger 2007). Economists focus on climate change with regard to human security as well as development. Ajakaiye and Dercon (2008) suggest that more data needs to be collected in Africa regarding development plans and their long-term effects on human security such as the effects of droughts, flooding or health shocks. Economists criticize development strategies such as microfinance plans geared toward building economic security, stating that they have become more preoccupied with increasing profits than focusing on quality of life (Goldsworthy 2010; Jha and Singh 2015; Parvin et al. 2014).

The human security framework is seldom used by anthropologists (cf Jacobson 2002; Lukunka 2012; Adger et al. 2014), but is important to emphasize in refugee studies because refugee flight is primarily defined by insecurity. The very UN definition of a refugee is shrouded
in their insecurity: “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.” The human security framework is used by the United Nations to operationalize its mission of protection of forced migrants.

Anthropologist, Lukunka (2012: 131), argues that, “human security makes it possible to address issues traditionally not included in frameworks used in international relations, security studies, human rights studies, and development studies.” The human security framework allows researchers to look beyond the limitations of state-centric and rights-based frameworks to the nuances of individual well-being. She goes on to argue that the socio-psychological well-being of Burundian refugee women in Tanzania is a human security issue, which for her study was defined as “access to intangible and subjective resources such as a sense of belonging, self-worth, and acceptance in the community” (Lukunka 2012:131).

To use it as a framework in understanding urban refugee insecurity means to explore the parameters of the very term "human security" and define its expressions on the ground. The UN Human Security Handbook (2016) defined the following seven dimensions of insecurity as the root causes of displacement: economic (receipt of a basic income), food (physical and economic access to basic food), health (access to safe and affordable healthcare), environmental (healthy physical environment), personal (safe from physical violence), community (membership in a group), and political securities (living in a society that honors human rights). These insecurities are typically addressed within a formal refugee camp that provides food rations or medical attention. But how are we to understand the protection from these insecurities in an urban environment?
My research specifically examines the political form of human insecurity in an urban setting. The other six dimensions of security (economic, food, health, environment, personal, and community) are not necessarily facilitated by the state. One can approach an NGO, for example, for health or economic security, but political security distinctly involves a relationship with the state. Refugees must make themselves visible to the state in order to build a positive relationship with it. This positive relationship is often defined by legal documentation for residence in the host country thereby allowing access to other resources; this form of security cannot be extended to urban refugees by any other entity. Furthermore, I will demonstrate in subsequent chapters that economic and community securities can and should be viewed through the lens of political human security. It is their political identity, or lack thereof, that informs their feelings of human in/security.

A person-centered security is a noble ambition, but if the entities that are supposedly bringing this form of security to refugees have not defined what the political expression of human security is, only what it is not, then it needs defining. Of the seven dimensions delineated by the United Nations, political insecurity is often defined as “political repression, human rights violations, lack of rule of law and justice,” but this definition is typically used in relation to the home country they are fleeing, not in reference to the host country where they have sought shelter. What happens to notions of security in the host country? If the camp is a manufactured space that provides protections against insecurity, how do urban refugees living in cities access that same level of protection? Furthermore, refugee human in/security needs to be explored in relation to the citizens of the host country to better understand the sustainability of such a security.
Undocumented migrants and “illegal” migrants have been theorized in terms of their invisibility (Coutin 2005) and their abjectivity (Willen 2007; Chavez and Gonzalez 2012). Immigrant pathways to belonging have been framed in terms of building “cultural citizenship” and those who “belong” to more than one country have been considered as “flexible citizens” (Ong 1999), “diasporic citizens” (Siu 2007), or “transnationals” (Bernal 2006). But in the case of the Rohingya urban refugee, one’s relationship to the state is mitigated through a supranational power. One is both legal and illegal, recognized as a legal refugee by the UNHCR, tolerated by, yet undocumented by the state. While I am not writing against these theories, I would like to add the security framework as a way to understand migrants’ political relationships to the state and supranational power, and to specifically highlight how such insecurities are articulated in the urban refugee context.

This triangular relationship (among the Indian state, UNHCR, and urban refugees) places him in varying legal categories and could be situated within many theoretical categories. Instead, I step back to consider the security of the urban refugee. Security exists on a continuum with insecurity on one end and security on the other. It is a process that has cultural expressions, like protests and voting. The cultural expression is always the same but the circumstance may change exposing the immigrant to insecurity. For example, contesting insecurity through a protest may be a way in which you demonstrate belonging and rights (which worked for the Rohingya in 2012). Yet if the state responds by labeling protestors as illegal immigrants, (this happened with the Rohingya in 2017), then the act of protest has now exposed the community to insecurity. Protests are still a valid call to action in democratic India, but the political environment changed, limiting their ability to attain security.
In Chapter Five, I demonstrate ways in which political forms of human security are experienced and contested. I consider how Rohingya pivot their refugee identity to create security in the various areas of their lives. I ask: Do they use their status, or lack of status, to improve their political condition, economic position, or standing within the community?

1.5 An Outline of Chapters

In Chapter 2: Methods and The Field, I introduce the methodology used during 11 months in the field between 2015 and 2018. Three field sites are described with emphasis on their unique qualities and a justification for how I selected my primary field site. Chapter 3: Situating the Present in the Past provides a historical background of the Rohingya up to their present context in New Delhi, India. Chapter 4: Seeking Refuge in India and the UNHCR offers a historical perspective of the relationship between UNHCR and the state, the treatment of refugees in India, and how this informs the current Rohingya context. In Chapter 5: Political Human In/Security, I present my theory on how a political form of human security is articulated for Rohingya urban refugees in Delhi. Chapter 6: Community Human In/Security: Leadership, Gender, and Education proposes ways in which security is reconfigured in migration, maintained, and expressed within the Rohingya community itself. I also consider leadership, power and gender dynamics, volunteer organizations, and civic engagement in the city. Chapter 7: Social Capital and the Political Economy of the Migrant’s Plot considers ways, in which Rohingya at one particular settlement have built varying types of social capital, their livelihoods, and the mechanisms for sending and receiving of remittances. Chapter 8: Conclusions and Direction Insights includes a summary of results, contributions to the field, and offers insights on ways forward for Urban Refugee Policy.
In this dissertation I aim to contribute to the anthropology of migration by building upon conceptions of citizenship, and by interrogating the urban refugee, a relatively new type of migrant, as both a legal and illegal stateless subject. Competing legal statuses place Rohingya in the limelight of a conflicting set of interests pertaining to the state as well as to supranational entities. Moreover, I introduce “political human security” as a way to understand how this legal position manifests in their everyday lives. And finally, there is a dearth of knowledge about the Rohingya people; the entirety of this work contributes to knowing them through the limits of my own ability to bring voice to their experiences.
Chapter 2

METHODS AND FIELD SITES

There were individuals in Germany who from the very beginning of the regime and without ever wavering were opposed to Hitler; no one knows how many there were of them—perhaps a hundred thousand, perhaps many more, perhaps many fewer—for their voices were never heard. They could be found everywhere, in all strata of society, among the simple people as well as among the educated, in all parties, perhaps even in the ranks of the [Nazi Party].

Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*
1963, p.337

Our 100 voices are equivalent to your one voice so we really appreciate your work.

Faizal, age 28
My methodology is designed to systematically answer questions about the definition and nature of human security in order to understand how it is operationalized by the refugee regime and created by refugees themselves. Specifically, of the seven dimensions of human security, how are economic, community, and political forms created and maintained? How does the role of international actors, the state, Indian citizens, and refugees affect the process towards a person-centered securitization?

In this chapter I discuss the methods I used in the field. This ethnographic study was carried out in New Delhi, India among urban Rohingya refugees at three settlements. I will discuss the various field sites, sampling methods, my own power and positionality, and some of the ethical issues I confronted. Additionally, I provide an overview of my quantitative, qualitative, and archival data collection methods. I used 1) a questionnaire, 2) semi-structured interviews, and 3) participant observation as my primary methods. Field notes were taken daily. The nature of my research took me to varying parts of the city: refugee workshops, universities, soccer matches, hostels, health care centers, public protests, government offices, UNHCR offices, NGOs, etc. Most of my time, however, was spent at my primary field site with refugee interlocutors.

Additionally, somewhere in between semi-structured interviews and participant observation lies an anthropologist’s sweet spot. In this figurative and literal space, there are hushed conversations when participants want to share more. They want to answer questions that have never been asked. These conversations were neither a part of my interview, nor passive observations but became the foundation for understanding the nature of human insecurity in a space where so many are fighting for scarce resources defined by relative poverty and structural barrier that keep them in poverty.
2.1 Field Sites

The City

The field sites for this research were New Delhi, generally, three different urban refugee settlements, and WhatsApp, a messaging software application. The camps and their inhabitants must be situated within the larger context of the city to understand the complexities of their daily lives. Delhi is a National Capital Territory, bordered by the states of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. It is a city of nearly 20 million and full of dichotomies. On the streets, you may witness the extreme poverty of deformed beggars sitting at the gates of beautiful mansions. Roads are shared by ubiquitous white Maruti cars and buffalo pulled carts, alongside bright yellow Lamborghinis; transportation in the city includes affordable open air trains, air-conditioned metro stations, buses, cabs and Ubers adding to the connectivity of locals, migrants, businessmen, and tourists-- all operating in an organized chaos across the sprawling city.

Nearly every borough has its own market selling things unique to the area. Down the lanes of Nizamuddin, an area known for its Muslim immigrants from all over the country and refugees, you encounter rows of butcher shops with intermittent stalls of freshly cooked meats. Other markets, like in Lajpat Nagar, are much larger and frequented by women buying outfits, fabrics, jewelry, and shoes. In each borough, you find migrants either residing or working. The growing city attracts migrants from rural townships or poorer states, looking for steady employment. The capital city also attracts many international foreigners who are working, studying, or conducting research.

Most rural-to-urban migrants work in Indian’s informal sector.11 Educated Indians from varying states are also being summoned to New Delhi by the tech industry. McDuie-Ra

---

11 According to 2017 International Labour Organisation reports, 81 percent of all Indians work in the informal sector.
(2012) writes specifically about the migration from Northeastern India to Delhi. Recently graduated men and women from Eastern India are recruited to work in Delhi’s call centers because they lack the traditional Indian accent. Instead their English carries an American accent making them more desirable employment candidates. “Delhi provides the opportunities to work, to study, to learn the tools of the Indian bureaucracy, and to do all of these things at once” (McDuie-Ra 2012:63). Refugees living in the city also are witness to these opportunities. Not only is finding day labor more consistent than in other cities, they also develop a desire for higher education because they see the types of lifestyles it can afford.

As internationally protected refugees they immediately begin learning the boundaries of India’s bureaucratic system. But Rohingya refugees did not select New Delhi initially for the opportunities. When the Rohingya fled to Bangladesh, they learned that the UNHCR was not allowed to register them as internationally protected refugees. Since 1999 Bangladesh has not allowed UNHCR to register the Rohingya making them illegal residents of Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh. There, the struggle for resources between the Rohingya and Bangladeshis created an insecure living situation for Rohingya because the Rohingya were without legal status and international protection. Rohingya who had the resources to hire smugglers fled to Malaysia, Indonesia, and India. Those who fled to India in 2012 are the subjects of this dissertation.

There are many closer urban centers to Myanmar’s border than Delhi, Calcutta or Lucknow, for example. However, interviews revealed that many Rohingya had tried living in other cities, but ended up in Delhi for two major reasons. The first was chain migration; they had friends or family living in the city. Second, they came to register themselves with the UNHCR and ended up staying. Often the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process includes four interviews that span 4-6 months, making travel to-and-fro costly. This contributed to their
decision to stay. Refugees expressed that they felt safe in Delhi and they wanted to remain close to the UNHCR so they could be resettled\textsuperscript{12}. Despite the strained\textsuperscript{13} relationship between Rohingya refugees and the UNHCR, their proximity shields them from rash decisions by the Indian government because it is the capital city. In the capital, there is a reverse notion of surveillance (Foucault 1977) in that government actions are exposed to international agencies, the high court, a multitude of journalists, NGOs, and human rights activists. As we will see in Chapters Five and Six, refugees both benefit from being in the hub of India’s democracy, and are also exposed to acts of marginalization.

The following sections describe three urban refugee settlements. As opposed to a formal-UNHCR managed camps, where refugees are concentrated, urban refugee sites in New Delhi are varied and dispersed throughout the city. Each settlement has its own history, challenges, landlords, residential patterns, etc. For this reason, although I spent a majority of my time at one field site, it was helpful to spend time with Rohingya at the other two sites. These ancillary sites helped me understand the factors that influences general insecurity, including those that are location specific.

\textit{Primary Field Site}

My primary field site is a camp\textsuperscript{14} located in the far reaches of New Delhi, on the border of Uttar Pradesh. It exists alongside a poorly-paved road with large potholes of packed dirt. Many rickshaws refused to take me down this road for fear or ruining their autos. The walk is not long, but it can be muddy and slick after the rains. About a minute down the road there is a

\footnotesize{
\textsuperscript{12} Proximity to the UNHCR has no bearing on the resettlement process, but this is the Rohingya refugee perception.
\textsuperscript{13} The relationship between the UNHCR and Rohingya refugees is strained because the Rohingya feel they are not being treated fairly compared to other refugee populations. This is explained further in Chapter Four.
\textsuperscript{14} I call my field sites both ‘camps’ and ‘settlements’. Technically they are settlements, but refugees have adopted the nomenclature of the international refugee agencies that serve them by referring to them as ‘camps’. They are not built, facilitated, or secured by the UNHCR. Unfortunately, the urban refugee mandate in New Delhi does not include ensuring safe habitation for refugees.}
collection station where you turn right along a dirt path (Figure 2.1), less frequented by automobiles of any kind.

As you walk toward the camp, which is 300 meters from the main road, on either side is evidence of urban decay. Old metal and wood doorframes line the pathway (Figure 2.2).

![Figure 2.1: Dirt Path to Migrant’s Plot](image1)

![Figure 2.2: Urban Decay, door to nowhere](image2)

Behind them are no walls or structures of any kind. Economic migrants from other states have set up shanties behind these structures. At first, they would just stare at me, but eventually they grew used to seeing me and in time were open to talking about their lives compared to the “Burma-wala,” or people from Burma. I grew attached to one little Hindu boy who greeted me at the road every day with a handshake and a beautiful smile of gleaming white teeth. He was five and wise beyond his years. His family lived on the streets at the foot of the cremation grounds across the main road. He would tell me stories about the Burma-wala children and why he did

---

\(^{15}\) Kabadi work is typically translated in the West as “ragpicking”. In India, it is a $36B industry. On the lower scale of the informal work sector this type of work pays $2-$5 as day. Children, elderly, disabled, the unskilled, or completely disenfranchised usually take-up such work. Illegally organized networks will pay for collected recyclables; these can be anything from plastics and glass to half eaten roti, flat bread, and rags. Many refugees in India do this work, including refugee children.
not play with them. Every once in a while, Indian families would gather and sit at the ornate front door as if they were gateways separating public and private space. In pre-colonial times this is how homes were, open to the outdoors with a door and walls, with only a partial roof.

The refugee camp has walls made of cloth and roofs of tarpaulin. The camp is off to the left marked by a huge baby blue sign announcing to visitors that this strip of land belongs to an NGO called the Charitable Foundation of Delhi (CFD). Written in English is the name of the site (the Migrant’s Plot\textsuperscript{16}), with the NGO’s telephone number and website. Most of the populations living in and around the camp are illiterate, so who is the sign for?

This is the only Rohingya exclusive settlement in New Delhi proper. The plot of land is an 1100 square foot of space, about the size of two basketball courts. Shanties are thatched together in three rows, separated by two gullies, making 45-50\textsuperscript{17} individual homes. They house 225 Rohingya refugees. All share an impressive five water pumps that were donated by CFD. Facing out toward the dirt road are cottage industry convenience shops owned and operated by Rohingya families. They are typically an extension of their homes, an open-air dispensary of goods.

I spent a major of my time at the Migrant’s Plot. I was here four-five days a week. If I were away for more than two days, the women would begin to harass me upon return saying they thought I’d left for America. The time in between visits I would be at other camps, events, following leads on interviews. Most of my visits began around 9:30am-10:00am. If I arrived any earlier men would be publicly bathing and preparing for work, and my presence was awkward. I typically left before sunset, sometimes later. It was difficult to find transport late in the night, and the darkness that falls upon a neighborhood without electricity certainly did not feel safe. I was

\textsuperscript{16} Henceforth my primary filed site will be referred to as the Migrant’s Plot.

\textsuperscript{17} It’s difficult to capture exact number. From 2012-2017 families/household move in, move out, split due to marriage, or unite due to death.
acutely aware of my responsibility to keeping my assistants safe and the few instances where we
did not feel physically safe. There were days, however, when sitting and chatting in public
spaces into the night were productive; it was important for me to experience the different
activities that took place at the different times of day.

On typical days, the camp is fairly quiet until the kids come home from school around
2 pm. Then approximately 100 children run around in front of the camp and in the gullies
playing, snacking, fighting, and crying. The environment is unsanitary, making the kids
susceptible to skin rashes, lesions, and other illnesses. Directly in front of the camp is an open
plot of land that has served as a rubbish dumping ground for the refugees and their neighbors for
years. Unfortunately, sometimes the kids use it as their playground.

The camp has a distinct smell— it is the sweetness left over from the burning of wood
stoves and the Burmese spices women use to cook. But there are different smells on different
days. When the fish merchant has been by, the next day there will be small fish drying on
rooftops and strung between homes; they give off a pungent odor for days. Or when it has been
especially hot and the butcher has been busy, the metallic stench of blood hovers in the air. The
Rohingya seem complacent to the environmental insecurity they are subjected to. “We live in
jhuggis, [the slums] this is how it is,” (Field Notes, August 22, 2017), said a teenage girl whom I
reprimanded for throwing her leftover biscuit in the gully. During the summer, the camp bakes
with temperatures as high as 116° F; during the winter, the ground is hard and cold and the air
numbing; monsoon season brings floods, snakes, and mosquitos. Although the Rohingya are
grateful to live rent-free on this small plot of land, it is both a blessing and a curse. In spite of
their challenges in India, many find the city liberating. Rohingya have freedom of movement in
the city, freedom of speech, and the ability to practice their religion in peace. They had none of these basic human rights in Myanmar.

_Secoundary Field Site_

The secondary field site is only 1.2 kilometers away from the Migrant’s Plot. I visited this site 12 times and always during the day. The space is vast and has several owners. There are 625 families that live in this space: a mixed migrant group of Rohingya, Assamese, Bihari, Bengali, and people from Uttar Pradesh. Of these 625 families, 72 are Rohingya. Plots are divided by ethnic group. Here, shanties are bigger, built further apart, and some are erected with a bit of concrete. One day a Rohingya couple walked me through the campgrounds. I inquired about the materials they used to build their homes (bamboo, tarpaulin, particle boards) compared to the materials used by other ethnic groups (mud, brick, concrete, tin). The Rohingya woman looked at me and said: “We don’t use brick like the others. They are Indians so no one will kick them out, but we never know when we might have to leave” (paraphrased from Field Notes, July 13, 2017). For her, brick is a status symbol of Indian citizenship.

All tenants pay rent to a landowner who claims rights to the land. I was told many stories about the land. Landownership is in disputed. The land is government owned. The land is privately owned, and the owner’s sister, who is a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) supporter, is attempting to kick the Rohingya refugees off the land. All these stories demonstrate the instability of their living situation.

Generally, at this site I was a participant observer and collected quantitative data. Initially, this site was not part of my research, but after two months at the Migrant’s Plot, I

---

18 The BJP is one of the two major political parties in India. The current Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, represents this party.
visited the second site at the request of one of the residents whom I ran into at the Migrant’s Plot. Visiting the secondary site allowed me to see my primary site more clearly. The issues that plague the secondary location do not necessarily affect the primary, and vice versa. This particular swath of land is large enough for Rohingya refugees to live segregated from other populations. I am told everyone lives harmoniously with little interaction between groups. There have been no marriages or business unions among migrant groups. It was useful for me to see how spaciousness contributed to less disease among the children. The children at this site did not have nearly as many skin lesions and rashes. It was a quieter, more peaceful environment. It also allowed me learn about information flows to understand who knew about UNHCR statements, programs, and events.

_Tertiary Field Site_

The tertiary field site was not one I visited regularly (total of six visits), but important to include because it demonstrates the variation in urban refugee experience from camp to camp. This field site was comprised of approximately 200 individual Rohingya. It is located in Faridabad, one of Delhi’s Nation Capital Regions\(^\text{19}\) (NCR); the city is the largest in the state of Haryana, but the Rohingya live in an isolated rural area.

Over the course of a few visits I tried to understand how a population of Rohingya ended-up in the middle of crop fields, on the outskirts of a small district. I met with one of the landowners who presented himself in the best light; as a savior of the Rohingya refugees who needed his help at all hours of the day. He, as a devout Hindu, was just doing his duty. Overtime I began to understand the relationship between him and the refugees as one of indentured

---

\(^{19}\) The current sixteen NCR cities fall under the 1984 National Capital Region Planning Board Act; the board facilitates the planning of rural-urban growth in Delhi of these key-bordering cities.
servitude. He paid smugglers for their passage, provided them land to live on, electricity, and health services. In exchange, they collected *kabadi* for him (see Figures 2.3 and 2.4). For every kilogram that was turned in, a bit would be deducted from their debt and they would go home with the rest, which amounted to no more than 100 rupees ($0.65) a day. Men, women, elderly, and children all worked to collect and sort mounds of waste that was piled in the center of their camp.

![Figure 2.3 Kabadi collection of plastic bottles](image1)
![Figure 2.4: Kabadi collection of paper](image2)

This site is far enough from UNHCR offices that it does not receive the same level of attention as the settlements closer to the city center. Here, children do not go to school, because principals will not accept their UNHCR card as a form of identification. UNHCR, through local partners, work with civil servants to sensitize them to registered refugees, explaining their international status. In Faridabad, sensitization efforts have been slow to come. When school principals finally acquiesced, Indians began abusing children on their walk to school, so parents kept them at home.
to help with kabadi work instead. There are many cultural barriers to accessing government services that UNHCR’s Implementing Partners typically assists with, but in Faridabad such resources are scarce.

_WhatsApp_

WhatsApp, a pun on the colloquial greeting “what’s up,” is a free software application that began as an alternative to Short Message Service (SMS). SMS typically requires a paid service, which may limit the length and number of messages sent and received. WhatsApp is a free service that only requires Wi-Fi. It has expanded its platform to include group messaging, videos, photos, voice recordings, documents, and location status. All messages are encrypted: “end-to-end encryption ensures only you and the person you're communicating with can read what is sent, and nobody in between, not even WhatsApp” (WhatsApp 2018). With more than one billion subscribers over 180 countries this application has created a new form of global connectivity that is shaping how we look at communities in diaspora. Below, I consider the usefulness of thinking about WhatsApp as a virtual field site (as opposed to a tool), and discuss its limitations within my own work, and related ethical concerns.

I used WhatsApp daily to communicate with interlocutors in the field. We primarily communicated in English, if they were unable to text in English, they would use the audio feature and voice record a message to me in English or Hindi. At time Hindi is transliterated in the English alphabet for communication. Interlocutors would send images, video, and text based on what was being communicated. I continue to be in communication with Rohingya across India, and other countries that I met via WhatsApp.
I include WhatsApp as one of my field sites because it is incumbent upon anthropologists to question, and broaden modern definitions of the field. The discipline itself is set apart methodologically by the time, the understanding, and perspective developed by fieldwork. But, as Gupta and Ferguson (2010) argue, we do not often question “the field” itself. We have gone from researching small societies (e.g. Mead 1928, 1935; Malinowski 1915; Geertz 1973, Srivinas 1976, Leach 1954) to acknowledging the global through groups that migrate, “regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories,” and groups that “are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically self-conscious, or culturally homogeneous” (Appadurai 1996: 191-196). In the same way, virtual fields occupy no space and have global reach. Anthropology has embraced notions of interconnectedness, and rapidly shifting notions of culture, but few “reflect on how the idea of ‘the field’ has bounded and normalized the practice of anthropology” (Gupta and Ferguson 2010). Embracing new “fields” of connectivity like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, etc. informs the understanding of our interlocutors and the cultural spaces they occupy. Perhaps it is our self-critique of boundedness that has led to the study of digital anthropology (e.g. Spitulnik 1993; Horst and Miller eds. 2002; Wilson and Peterson 2002; Coleman 2010; Gershon 2011; Ellison and Boyd 2013)

Digital Anthropology is a relatively new field that encompasses techno anthropology, digital ethnography, cyber anthropology, and virtual anthropology. These forms of expression can help us to understand the migration experience through mediums that are more relatable to our interlocutors. For example, Dattatreyan (2011) uses Facebook selfies taken in New Delhi by African (Nigeria, Cameroon, Uganda, Sudan, and Somalia) asylum seekers who have been ‘subjects in waiting’ for over a decade. He uses visual methods to demonstrate what waiting looks like for migrants in the city.
There are limitations to this field site; regarding the Rohingya community WhatsApp is a highly-gendered space, reserved for males of a particular economic status. Only Rohingya refugees who own a mobile phone, have a pay-as-you-go plan, or ability to travel to free Wi-Fi zones are participants. Also, a certain degree of computer and English literacy is required. For my research this primarily meant I had access to Rohingya men and male youths. In addition to refugees I also connected with UNHCR representatives, government representative, NGO workers, journalists, and university researchers via WhatsApp. In New Delhi, emails and phone calls are things of the past. WhatsApp is used to make introductions, set meetings, initiate community activities, and pass information. The tone can be casual or formal depending on your audience. For example, directors and high-level officials of the UNHCR and government, respectively, are very careful with their words, whereas, regular employees are chatty and open about their work. Such interactions made me think about the ethical considerations of this virtual field. Interactions on the Internet raise serious ethical concerns for ethnographic fieldworkers.

WhatsApp straddles the fence of informal conversations and consented unstructured interviews. The AAA code of ethics (2009) states that consent is something that is not delivered just once, it is a process an anthropologist goes through with her interlocutors repeatedly. Most of the people I conversed with knew exactly who I was and what I was doing. They had spent enough time with me to consent repeatedly. With that said, is WhatsApp a “free zone,” an “off the record” space? Is trading information with a journalist via WhatsApp ethical? Is quoting from WhatsApp ethical? Are these considered informal conversations if I have an agenda? I have treated them thus far as informal conversations, from which I do not quote without consent.

Ethical considerations extend beyond my relationships within India. Via WhatsApp, I

---

20 Although I am also connected to the only female entrepreneur at my primary field site and to a teenage girl who’s family is better off financially than others.
was able to stay connected with refugees across camps that were not part of my three-field site. Rohingya would send me photos of environmental conditions, birthday celebrations, and articles on the Rohingya situation in Myanmar, videos of Trump and the Muslim ban, etc. Over time, my phone number was passed around in the community. On August 25, 2017, Rohingya rebels attacked a police outpost in Rakhine state sparking a retaliation that has caused nearly 750,000 refugees to flee Myanmar. Days, weeks, and months afterwards my WhatsApp was inundated with messages, pictures, and videos of the massacre. Pleas for help came firsthand from India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar in the form of videos and pictures; messages came from Rohingya settled in the U.S. and Malaysia. Although, it was not part of this research project, these messages hold a key to understanding the extended Rohingya diaspora network, its attributes, and its power. What is my ethical responsibility during such a crisis? What do I do with these messages? Is there a rulebook? Ultimately, for the strangers who contacted me, I sent my sympathies and told them I was forwarding information to my contacts with the international press.

One of the values of including WhatsApp as a field site is the ability to stay in the field with key informants over a long period of time. It can be a form of longitudinal field research, or at least a foot in the larger field. Gupta and Ferguson (2010) explore the notion of “home” versus the “field”. The “field” is where one collects data and “home” is where one reflects upon and analyzes the data. However, if the field is virtual, with no spatial limitations, there is no distinction between field and home; in fact, one occupies both spaces at once; she is engaged in the field, collecting data, and at home, analyzing interactions. A social science research project on the uses of WhatsApp out of University of Basel stated,
…we were able to communicate with informants through sending and receiving texts, pictures, videos, voice messages, phone numbers, addresses, greetings or invitations. Thus, the application allowed us researchers to be ‘present’ in several countries at the same time and to observe reactions on exchanged medias (Chappatte et al. 2016:33).

The field itself becomes a global network.

WhatsApp messaging between two people may wane for various reasons, but engagement in the field can continue indefinitely. For example, on the night of April 15, 2018, nearly four and a half months after my return “home,” I received a flurry of text messages, photos, videos and phones calls from the “field” when a fire set my primary field site ablaze. Is this level of presence in the field good for research or bad? The answer may be both. For a researcher wanting to conduct longitudinal work this is a great way to stay in the field from home. For a researcher moving onto other projects, it may make the research population feel neglected.

The use of WhatsApp, and other forms of messaging and social media, in ethnographic research needs to be discussed more openly so that we may share best ethical practices (e.g. Boellstorff 2012). In some cases, researches may use it simply as a tool; for others, it evolves into a space where real data can be collected.

2.2 Sampling

In 2015, a board member of the CFD introduced me to the three male leaders of the Migrant’s Plot. After listening to them speak about their situation in Myanmar and India, I explained my research. They agreed to allow me to spend time at their camp. They introduced me to a few people who would be willing to tell their stories. Thereafter, I was allowed to
approach families in the camp, but the leaders’ approval had no bearing on whether individuals spoke to me or not. Some felt very comfortable ignoring my requests.

During this preliminary research, I collected 39 interviews using a snowball and walk-up method: 14 semi-structure interviews with women, 19 with men, and six informal conversations with various humanitarian aid representatives. Initially, I was only going to interview the women because the scant Rohingya literature that existed had not captured their stories. I approached with the following IRB approved open-ended questions:

1. Tell me about your life when you were living in Myanmar.
2. Tell me about your journey to India.
3. Tell me about your day-to-day life in India.

I was curious about the decision-making process to flee, but sitting in their shanties in New Delhi made me more curious about the everyday lives of these individuals. Therefore, I focused on their day-to-day lives, learning rather quickly that they did not vary much from person to person, because women tended to be relegated to the domestic sphere.

I applied for an amendment with the IRB and began interviewing men to understand what they do when they leave the camp. I asked:

1. Tell me about the type of work you do outside the camp.
2. Do you find it difficult to find work? Why? Or why not?
3. How do you feel when you come back to the camp?
4. Any work places or experiences that stand out to you?

My time at the camp in 2015 helped solidify the direction of my research. Most importantly it helped me build trust within the community. Day-after-day they were surprised to see me. They said I was not like a typical reporter. When I told them I would return to India the following year for a longer period of time, I am certain no one believed me. They were used to
journalists parachuting in-and-out of their communities. When I returned in 2017 there was an immediate trust, familiarity, and foundation to build from.

I employed a network sampling method to obtain interviews with men and women in 2017. Those who remembered me from my preliminary fieldwork were happy to participate in follow-up interviews that specifically addressed issues of human security. Some would introduce me to family members or neighbors who wanted to participate. My initial weeks were filled with volunteer participants based on chain referrals. My primary field site has 49 families, 225 individuals.

In network sampling, members who are well known are more likely to be called upon for an interview, causing the researcher to overlook the experiences of the less known members (Bernard 2011:149). At all three camps, it was women who were in the shadows, usually from more religiously conservative and/or poorer families. Because the community was too small to employ a respondent-driven method I instead found a way to make them come to me. In the later months of my research I began holding women-only weekly English courses at the Migrant’s Plot. Girls and women I had never seen before attended these classes. Building a platform where I exchanged my knowledge for theirs became a way for me to gain access to this difficult to access population.

Male participants were easy to access. At times, I felt I was being recruited. Men tend to loiter in public spaces. If I interviewed one, others wanted to be interviewed too for status. It was important to be present on weekends and later in the day, when they were not at work. These interviews were all acquired by chain-referral.

Community representatives (n=6), those who were not Rohingya, but interacted with the community regularly, were recruited based upon 1) their presence and 2) if they were
mentioned in an interview by a Rohingya refugee. First, I would approach community members who visited the site with consistency. Since the camps are not fenced, many locals come by regularly to buy products from the corner shops or sell items, such as produce or fish.

Additionally, the camp was next to other settlements filled with economic migrants from rural spaces or poorer states. Some of the Muslim migrants would come to pray at the masjid built in the Rohingya camp. Second, if a particular person were mentioned repeatedly in an interview, I would ask for their contact information. For example, many of the young men who play in a Rohingya soccer league mentioned the white woman who coaches their league. Because she interacts with the members of the community, I reached out to her for an interview.

State representatives (n=5) included those who work with any of the ministries, public school official, public health care workers, UNHCR, or UNHCR Implementing Partners. I approached these representatives when they visited the camp for an interview at a later time and space where they would feel comfortable. I also went door-to-door, or by walking to the schools the children attended to interview the head masters or principals. Additionally, emails and WhatsApp messages were sent to the UNHCR and their Implementing Partners requesting interviews. I attended public events where I knew Implementing Partners would be to establish rapport and trust. Due to the precarious relationship between the UNHCR and the Indian state, which will be explain further in Chapter Four, it was difficult to obtain these interviews. Employees are often told not to speak to journalists and researchers like myself.

With both the community and state representatives I did not discriminate whom I interviewed. The policemen, the Hindi teacher, the fish merchant, the landlord, the journalist, the

---

21 Although the UNHCR does not represent the Indian state, they are categorized in this study under the state because of their formal governmental role. It is more about the power-dynamic between them and refugees. There are distinctions between their perspectives and role versus the state and I discussed these in detail throughout this dissertation.
lawyer – all had perspectives and these perceptions about the Rohingya community contributes
to a collective, localized understanding about the Rohingya community and their place in India.

2.3 Quantitative, Qualitative, and Archival Data Sets

I used a questionnaire with 39 questions using an offline Qualtrics application
downloaded onto an iPad (Appendix). The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect a broad baseline understanding of the Rohingya in New Delhi. More specifically, it targeted quantitative measures for economic human security. Each of the Rohingya refugees at my primary field site who participated in the semi-structured interviews also answered the questionnaire. In addition, I surveyed members at my secondary field site.

At the secondary site, I initially used a snowball method for recruitment based on my relationship with the leaders. After several visits, once I entered the community center/tent, people would automatically line-up to be interviewed. Once my presence was more familiar, I took to walking around the campgrounds in search of female participants who were relegated to their homes. Ultimately 36 percent of all Rohingya families from two field sites were surveyed. The limiting criteria of the questionnaire ensured interviewees were over 18, registered with the UNHCR, and self-identified as Rohingya. The questions were grouped in three categories: household composition, household economics, and migration patterns. I was not worried about whether I was interviewing men or women, because the purpose was to collect data on the entire household. Many of the individually oriented questions at the beginning of the survey were geared towards comforting the interviewees. Later questions allowed them to voice their concerns. Not all data are immediately relevant to my current analysis; therefore, I discuss the more pertinent findings below.
Qualitative data was collected via semi-structured interviews with Rohingya refugees, community representatives, and state representatives. In 2017, I interviewed 20 Rohingya men (43 percent of adult males) and 15 Rohingya women (29 percent of adult females). Men were quite open to being interviewed one-on-one, however women were not. Women were more willing to speak openly in a group setting. Therefore, at times they were interviewed in a collective fashion that resembled an open forum discussion.

As the prominent role of leaders became apparent, I had to rethink my questions after a couple of interviews to reassess how I was approaching understanding community security. I needed to understand individual relationships to the leaders to understand how one builds community human security or deflects insecurity. As discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven, the power dynamics at the camp limited my access for many months. It was not until I understood that I was only given access to the more prominent people within the camp that I created ways to move more discreetly about the camp to gain the information needed for fuller understanding.

Participant Observation & Informal Conversations

Participant observation was essential to understand various aspects of camp life from environmental insecurity, economic transactions, relationships with neighbors, relationships among the Rohingya, outside influencers, etc. I employed participant observation at all times at the three camps locations. It was also used during onsite English and Hindi lessons, various health and sanitation training sessions, interviews by journalists, researchers, weddings, and Eid celebrations. These observations were typed in daily field notes and are cited throughout this work.
There is a power to silent observation. Participant observation was my most powerful tool in the field. It allowed me to gain a holistic perspective, thereby asking better informed questions. Some days I had no choice but to quietly watch. These were days when no one wanted to be interviewed, avoiding eye contact. So, I would sit at one of the *dukaan*, or shops, and wait. From the perch of the shop, owners would initiate conversations about those who walked by, locals would gather, curious about my presence, and children would come to pose for pictures.

By means of participant observation, instead of seeking to discover, as researchers so often do, I was able to stand back and let events unfold (Malkki 1995). Practicing silence and allowing stories to unravel is also an important skillset. For example, one day there was stillness in the air as I approached the campgrounds; children were not playing, women were in their homes, and no one waved me over to sit. Something was very wrong. I selected a *dukaan*, sat, and exchanged pleasantries with the shopkeeper. We sat in silence. Even patrons would sit in silence, as if they were in mourning. I finally asked after one of the leaders and where he was. Everyone looked down. I asked if I should stop by his home. A lady waved towards his home as if challenging me to go. He did not answer his door. The gullies were eerily quiet.

As I was walked away, a young woman with whom I had become friendly pulled me into her home. She told me something bad had happened, but did not say anything more. Instead we talked about what she was preparing for lunch. Eventually, I asked what had occurred, and if I could help. She whispered the events of the previous evening: A young 14-year-old girl had been stabbed multiple times at the camp. Violence was not unfamiliar so I knew there was more to the story. Eventually, I learned the leader’s son tried to persuade this girl to marry him; when she refused he became violent. Other women must have seen me enter the woman’s home or heard her through the fabric-walls recounting the story, because before I could make it through the
gully, two other women decided to tell me their versions of the story. Never did I think that silence would be such a powerful tool. I hardly spoke that day, I did not need to and I did not want my questions to steer the direction of people’s accounts. This was a tragedy and people needed to express their fears, their speculations, and their anger in order to heal.

The story above illustrates another dynamic about participant observation; that is, the observation of the participant. I was being tested that day. People were gauging if they felt safe talking to me, how I would react, and what I would do. I think they were also testing my allegiance to the leaders. In such a small space, as compared to my secondary and tertiary sites, everyone was highly protective of one another. No one wanted me to think ill of the community because of what the leader’s own son had done. They watched me watch them and listened to my responses.

Lastly, the camp is a very small space with complex power dynamics. Being constantly present allowed me to understand and question allegiances. What was the role of women who occupied public spaces? Who were the women who did not? Why haven’t I seen the three male leaders ever talk to one another? Additionally, examining issues of insecurity entails looking at environmental insecurity too. Why do I smell marijuana? Where did the needles on the ground come from? Why are such young girls wearing make-up? Why is there so much waste in the gullies? Why are there so many flies and mosquitoes? These data points are based on observation, and explored later via targeted questions (Charmaz 2000).
Archival Data & Media Content Analysis

Library research was conducted at four locations for various purposes. At the University of Berkeley, South Asian Library and the British Museum Library I reviewed Round Table Conference hearings from the late 19th century to understand the decision-making process of the British Raj when creating the border between India and Burma. Parliamentary Papers and the Indian Census were also reviewed for decision-making narratives. Additionally, any documents, including travelogues, that indicate the presence of the Rohingya in Arakan state were valuable. The search time frame included years directly before the first and second Anglo-Burmese Wars (1824-1826), when Burma became a protectorate under the British as opposed to being subsumed under the British Raj. Additionally, Sapru House in New Delhi provided access to the historical evolution of refugee law in India. The Oxford Refugee Studies Centre Library provided access to grey literature and policy papers by United Nations and other international agencies.

I have collected online international, national, and local newspapers that mention the Rohingya in India from 2015 to 2018. In 2015 reporting was scarce, but as the Rohingya issue became more politicized in New Delhi, coverage grew. I focused on local papers from New Delhi, Jammu, and Mewar—all are cities with a large Rohingya population. I also, included major headline from Western news sources. Articles were scanned for voice, word usage, and data sources.
2.4 Power, Positionality, & Ethics

Lila Abu Luhgod describes a particular type of anthropologist called the *halfie*, “people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage” (Abu Luhgod 1991:466). She argues that the *halfie*-anthropologist’s experience does not follow the typical disciplinary distinction between “self” and “other.” Historically this distinction is between the westerner studying a non-western “other.” However, for the feminist and the *halfie*, she argues, positionality becomes an issue because the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ are not distinct. As a *halfie*, one identifies as both “self” and “other,” perhaps eschewing notions of objectivity and subjectivity. In this case, one must confront the politics and ethics of representation.

I consider myself a *halfie* because I am an India-American. My family immigrated to America when I was an infant, but I grew up hearing stories about India, participating in its cultural through my parents and extended family. They taught me to speak Gujarati, which definitely helped me to learn Hindi more easily. While the Rohingya were more forgiving, Uber drivers were not shy to tell me my Hindi sounded funny. Looking like my interlocutors and understanding cultural observances absolutely helped me as an anthropologist to understand their perspectives.

The *halfie* identity created a unique relational dynamic between my interlocutors and I, especially the women. There were cultural dynamics that I understood without explanation, like familial power rankings. My interlocutors did not have to explain basic cultural behaviors, so we could begin to get to know each other on a higher level. These understandings help to neutralize power dynamics rather than accentuate them. I might have been an American researcher, who spoke English, but for the women I was also an Indian woman, and to the men I
looked familiar. Although the Rohingya are not Indian, and I certainly do not want to conflate the two cultures, there are generalized South Asian cultural traits that carry from one tradition to the other.

For the Rohingya, I was not only a link to an exotic outside world, there was also something comforting about someone who looked like any one of their family members. Their willingness to talk to me did not, however, mean I received truthful information. There were many times I knew I was either being lied to, or received a skewed perspective. It took constant presence to build their confidence in me and me in them. A real passage to the truth did not come until the unofficial gatekeepers of the Migrant’s Plot showed themselves and slowly began to approve of me. Once they opened up, it gave others permission to do so as well. For example, one of the gatekeepers is the wife of a leader. Once she began to befriend me publicly, by hugging me or holding my hand, other women opened-up to me as well.

Being an American researcher gave me automatic status, not just with the refugees, but also with the state and community representatives. I was told by a Rohingya man, “your voice is worth 100 times more than one of ours, so thank you for coming to see us” (Field Notes, June 11, 2017). This remark was devastating in its honesty; and not because of the inherent value of my voice versus his, but in that the audience for my research will reach more people than his own pleas for his family. There is an assumption that everyone from the West has power, making consent challenging. I explain that I am a researcher from a university in the United States, but for a population who are illiterate because they only had access to primary and some secondary education, they can only imagine what a university is, what researchers do, and what good their experiences can create. I explained that my research was not going to change Indian policies, but that the world needed to know about what they’ve survived, and it was my job to ensure they did.
I committed to them that I would my best if they had specific needs. Over time I had arranged hospital visits, procedures, and funding; tried to get legitimate drivers licenses, and teach women and girls English. These small things affected their immediate environment bonding us in the here and now.

Working with a vulnerable population comes with ethical concerns such as ensuring no one feels coerced, that individuals are protected, their participation is anonymous, and that consent is requested repeatedly in different ways. The Rohingya population in Myanmar has been marginalized for generations. Education, health, and livelihood prospects have been methodically stripped away by the Myanmar government. Therefore, gaining consent in this population, as opposed to a well-educated population of refugees such as the Afghan or Syrian groups, is challenging. Based on their experience all interviewers are journalists. They would ask me when my article and their pictures are coming out. To which my response was to re-consent them, and try to explain my job as a researcher.

The Rohingya in New Delhi are somewhat protected by the UNHCR, but are technically considered illegal immigrants in India. Their precarious legal status could change their position of security overnight. For this reason, it was important for me to protect their identity and location. However, the Migrant’s Plot has received a lot of media attention. Media outlets disclose their exact location, their stories, their names, and their faces. Even some of the more objective international news outlets publish names of refugee interviewees without fully understanding that their quest for factual reporting may put refugees in danger. This danger is not always imminent, but the conservative political tide that is fueled by anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments could turn at any moment. I have witnessed reporters telling refugees that that there is freedom of press in India and they have every right to be at the camp taking picture
of the women and children. Working to not expose the population is tricky especially when I was not sure they understood the potential ramifications of exposure. The best I could do in this situation was to ensure that even if the community could be identified, individuals could not.

There were times when my actions or lack of action could have repercussion for the population, making my role in their lives far more embedded and, to be honest, more significant than I cared for it to be. “Do no harm” became too simple a statement in a space where there was a hierarchy to harm. Based on these experiences in the field, I think the discipline of anthropology needs to have more conversations at academic conferences and in methodology courses about how to define conflict zones and what best ethical practices look like in such spaces.

Based on my experience in 2015 I felt it would be safer if I did not go into my field site alone, especially not the secondary and tertiary sites. I had one female research assistant with me during my visits. The insight and assistance of the two women I hired was invaluable. They were both social scientists from the University of Delhi, one completing her masters and the other her doctoral degree. They were well versed in social science ethics and the consent process. They served as translators, an extra set of eyes, cultural liaisons, and as friends and colleagues.

None of us spoke or understood Rohingya. However, this was not a limitation. If there were someone who wanted or consented to be interviewed we would use someone they were comfortable with to translate into Hindi. Most Rohingya refugees spoke Hindi well enough to conduct interviews. I always had a research assistant with me who walked the interlocutors through consent. I was able to understand Hindi, but would use my research assistant help with interview questions because often times questions needed to be communicated repeatedly and differently for comprehension.
Interview-transcribers were hired by referral from University of Delhi’s Anthropology Department. I hired a total of three transcribers who were not a part of the everyday project. I never met them; they were consented, sent encrypted audio files via Dropbox, and returned encrypted transcriptions. Transcribers never knew the site locations, met any refugees, and were paid remotely, via Paytm, a money transfer software application similar to Paypal.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the major methods and approaches I used in the field with my interlocutors. Field notes, interviews with refugees, state representative, and community representative, and quantitative data sets will be used throughout the following chapters to support my arguments. The complexities of migration to New Delhi is deeply embedded in its colonial history and relationship with post-colonial international entities such as UNHCR and UN Security Council. The following chapters help to untangle some of the history bringing us to the present where we can begin to uncover the subjective experiences of the Rohingya.
I intended to emigrate anyhow. I thought immediately that Jews could not stay. I did not intend to run around Germany as a second-class citizen, so to speak, in whatever form. In addition, I thought that things would just get worse and worse. Nevertheless, in the end I did not leave in such a peaceful way... I was arrested, and had to leave the country illegally.

Hannah Arendt, "What Remains? The Language Remains,” 1964

The Buddhists kept coming to beat my husband. So we left.

Noor, age unknown
Information on the history of the Rohingya people is scarce but scholars agree that Rohingya roots date to at least the 17th century and perhaps earlier. There are a few European travelogues and letters between Burmese Kingdoms documented at the British Library and University of California Berkley’s South Asian Library that date back to the 17th century. Archival data mainly catalog interactions between Europeans and the Arakanese; if there were official correspondences between Burmese Kingdoms in English, I did not come across them in my research. Also, Islamic influence was strong in the frontier lands between British India and Burma. There has been mixing with Indian/Bengali groups up to present day, complicating historic lines. None of this confirms or denies the existence of the Rohingya in Northern Rakhine earlier than the 17th century, but it is simply difficult to trace without archaeological confirmation. Websites that advocate for Rohingya rights promote a Rohingya history in Rakhine that began as far back as the seventh century, whereas the Burmese government contends that the Rohingya is a misappropriated identity that does not exist.

Unlike the borders formed between West Pakistan and East Pakistan in 1947, ethnicity, culture, and religion were not considered when the border between India and Burma was created. In the 19th century after three wars, Burma was administratively an extension of British India. The British Empire in South Asia extended across modern day Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Burma. Arakanese Muslims have more in common culturally with their neighbors to the north, Bangladesh and India, than they do with the Bamar-majority in Burma. In fact, in 1937 when Burma was given authority as an independent province under the British Raj, South Asians were seen as puppets of the British and dismissed from government administration (Bunge 1983). Arakan state has been primarily a self-governed region falling under Burmese rule.

---

22 The Arakanese live in the state of Arakan, which borders Bangladesh. After Myanmar independence its name changed to Rakhine. Although the majority of residents are Buddhist-Arakanese, 90 percent of Myanmar’s Rohingya population resides in Northern Rakhine state.
in the 18th century and again under the annexation of the British Raj after the First Anglo Burmese War in 1824. It was remunerated to Burma after the Second Anglo Burmese War 1952-1953.

This historical background does not attempt to provide an exhaustive survey of Burma’s history. Instead, it is an exercise in locating the Rohingya people spatially, culturally, and linguistically by understanding the historical decision-making process of the British Raj, exploring notions of identity and nationhood, and understanding notion of self and security as defined by statehood. The legacy of the Partition has defined much of India’s present national identity (Daiya 2011; Kaul 2001), geo-politics (Bianchini et al. 2004; Smith 2009), governance (Chatterji 2007; Svensson 2013), and migration (Weiner 2015; Kaur 2007), but what of pre-partition borderlands and their role in defining the very region we call South Asia? How has the construction of borders during nation-building thrown the Rohingya into decades of precarity?

Understanding the history of the Rakhine state and its Muslim inhabitants sheds light on the institutionalized “othering” of the Rohingya people due to their colonial era allegiances and fight for autonomy. Their current-day insecurity is rooted in their historical relationship to British colonialists and the Myanmar state. It is important understand the past, in order to contextualize their present circumstance of statelessness.

3.1 Arakan and the Anglo-Burmese Wars

Before colonialism formally brought Burma together under a central government, it was dominated by various kingdoms with poorly defined borders (Bunge 1983; Abrar 1975). The Rohingya are from the Kingdom of Arakan, a territory along the Myanmar’s Western coastline facing the Bay of Bengal, today it is known as Rakhine state and one of twelve states in
Myanmar. In the north, the Naaf River helps to create a natural 176 miles of border with Bangladesh. Historically the bordering region between Myanmar and Bangladesh “has changed hands a good number of times between the feuding warlords and kings of adjoining regions of Bengal, Tripura and Arakan” (Abrar 1975:2-3). (Map 3.1 shows the spatial relationship of these frontier lands.) Northern Arakan was an independent kingdom until 1784 when it was annexed by King Bodawpaya to central Burma.

Map 3.1: Arakan state, modern day Rakhine state in Myanmar (Source: Modified version of media.juancole.com)

---

23 Bangladesh became an independent nation in 1971. For a period of time, 1947-1971, it was known as East Pakistan. Prior to this it was part of British India, 1858-1947.
Scholars presuppose that Arakan was populated by the turn of the millennia, and during the eighth and ninth centuries Tibeto-Burman tribes from the Himalayan Mountains mixed with indigenous populations (Seekins 2006; Nicolaus 1995; Abrar 1975). According to historian Donald Seekins (2006), the Rohingya are a mix of descendants of migrants from Bengal and Arakan who converted to Islam (310-11). The Rohingya dialect emerged as a result of heavy trade in the pre-colonial era from Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, northern India, and Arab countries. The Rohingya dialect is a mixing of Persian, Urdu, Pashtun, Arakanese, and Bengali (Nicolaus 1995; Abrar 1975). Among the scant literature on the Rohingya is the account of a Scottish physician by the name of Sir Francis Buchannan-Hamilton (1799) who traveled through Arakan noting people who spoke a language called “Rooinga.” Historical scholarship supports that Muslims communities flourished in Northern Arakan during the 16th and 17th centuries prior to British’s annexation of Upper Burma (Seekin 2006). In fact, Muslim merchants and craftsmen had their own quarters in the capital; they were allowed to build mosques, and some even held high offices under Burmese Buddhist Kings.

From the early millennia CE to 1784, Arakan state operated under relative independence from the major Bamar who occupied the central plains. The Arakanese had cultivated rice in Arakan along the west coast since the first century. They were likely from India, but since the eighth and ninth century with Tibeto-Burman immigration the area resembled a culture closer to the Bamar. The Rohingya are a darker skinned Muslim population who resemble their South Asian neighbors to the North, more so than the phenotype of the East Asian, Bamar people. They have always been agriculturalists growing rice, wheat, and other produce. Many families in my study spoke about subsistence plots they maintained near their homes. Currently, they live in small villages comprised of 40-100 families in homes made of wood and bamboo, with leaves or
tin sheet as roofing. The Rohingya are not the only Muslim minority in Burma; for example, the Panthay and Kamein ethnicities also are Muslim. According to the 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census the population of Myanmar is approximately 51.8 million; two percent are Muslim. Of that two percent, 80 percent live in Rakhine state. The Kayah, Chin, and Burman ethnicities also reside in Arakan.

In 1784, King Bodawpaya unified much of Upper Burma, including Arakan. A devoted Buddhist and advocate of public works, he is remembered as one of Burma’s most prominent kings. He allowed the East India Company into Yangon, and generally maintained a good relationship with the British. However, he was also known to be oppressive and arrogant. Under his ruthless rule, harsh policies forced Arakan Muslims to destroy mosques replacing them with Buddhist temples. Forced labor drove two-thirds of Arakanese Muslims into the British territory, modern day Bangladesh (Frontières 2002:9). Arakanese insurgents would occasionally raid the old capital in an attempt to win back territory and reestablish Arakan for themselves. In the 1800s when King Bodawpaya’s grandson, Bagyidaw, took the throne, his decision to expand beyond Arakan and into the British Indian territories of Manipur and Assam, instigated the First Anglo-Burmese War.

Lower Burma opened itself to the West with the arrival of Catholic missionaries accompanied by the Portuguese during the 16th and 17th centuries. Protestant missionaries arrived in the 19th century with the British. The West was well aware of resources Burma had to offer. In the early 17th century Burma’s stores of teak, precious stone, oil, and minerals attracted both Britain and France to the region. Incursions into India gave the British Raj (1858-1947) an opportunity to both protect and expand their territory. In the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826) the British defeated the Burmese, regained Manipur and Assam, both Indian states that
border Burma, and annexed Arakan and Tensserim, situated on coast of Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea, respectively. The Yandabo Treaty ended the first war by establishing commercial trade between Britain’s base in Calcutta, and 19th century Burmese capital of Ava. It is worth mentioning that the British, in all three wars, never entered Burma from their common border in the northeast, but by sea into Yangon (post-Independence, Rangoon). Over the next 60 years Britain slowly took over large swaths of Burma for produce cultivation and coastline access for trade routes (Frontières 2002:90; Bunge 1982, Phayre 1967; Aung 1967).

Map 3.2: Regions Seized by the British 1824-1885 (Source: modified version of https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Myanmar/media/400185/3397)
British contact with the Rohingya in Arakan and Bengal was for functional reasons. They did not make much distinction between South Asia populations (which included the Rohingya) when it came to labor. They needed manpower for rice cultivation, harvest, and mills. Under British rule, the Bengal Province extended its administration to Arakan to manage these functions. In the Report on The Settlement Operations in The Akyab District assessors made the following observation:

In the Kaladan township Bengali Mahomedans are very numerous. They differ from those found in the Naaf township inasmuch as they are to some extent Burmanized, wearing generally ordinary Arakanese clothes and living in houses of the Burman type. They have inhabited this township for many years and the township takes its name from them. They are said to be the descendants of the captives made by the Arkanese Kings in their frequent raid on Chittagong. They still speak the Bengali language among themselves, thought of course most of them, unlike the Bengali of the Naaf, can talk Burmese fluently (Adamson 1887:2-3).

Based on other regional accounts (Hamilton Buchannan 1799; Phayre 1841) presumably the reference to “Bengali Mahomedans” is at least in part comprised of Rohingya.

Modern-day refugee specialists often remark upon how similar the Rohingya dialect is to the Chittagong dialect spoken in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh. But if we look far back enough in history, before national borders were drawn, this region had such high cultural interaction that there was little distinction between the two. Areas of modern-day southeast Bangladesh occupy areas that were once a part of the Arakan Kingdom. The balance of power between Bengalis and Arakanese has gone back and forth over the centuries, increasing cultural interactions (trade, religion, language) between the two regions. This does not however preclude them from being two distinct ethnicities with their own unique traditions. Lieutenant General of the British Indian Army, Arthur P. Phayre, published an account of Arakan in which he states:
The Kolas, or Moosulmans, are of an entirely different race to the preceding, they being of Bengalee descent. The Arakan kings in former times had possessions all along the coast as far as Chittagong and Dacca… The Arakan Moosulmauns preserve the language of their ancestors for colloquial purposes, but always use the Burmese in writing; they have also adopted the dress of the country, with the exception of the goung-boung, or head dress (Phayre 1841: 681).

The “Kolas” refers to the modern colloquial usage “Kalar,” meaning people of South Asian origin with dark skin. It is also used as a derogatory term to refer to the Rohingya. It is also generally used to mean foreigner. “Kala phyu,” means white foreigner, referring to Europeans (Wong 2017).

The British Raj brought Muslims and Hindus from South Asia to work on railways, agricultural fields, and eventually administration. The Burmese resented Indians and Chinese because they were placed in positions of authority within the colonial administration (Bunge 1983). They also held many mid-level civilian positions within moneylending institutions. In the 20th century this deep seeded resentment would lead to post-colonial nationalist movements that stripped Indians and Chinese along with other ethnic minorities, like the Rohingya, of Burmese citizenship.

The Second Anglo-Burmese War (1852) was instigated by numerous infractions made by the Burmese against the Treaty of Yandabo. The Burmese’s refusal to accept penalties eventually led to the annexation of Lower Burma by the British24. After the second war only small landlocked territories remained under Burmese rule. Then ruling King Thibaw attempted to create a political alliance with France to strengthen his position. Britain, threatened by France’s trade route through Vietnam, instigated the Third Anglo-Burmese War in 1885. They invaded

---

24 There is very little documented about how and who decided to annex Lower Burma. One of the only accounts is found in The Origin of The Burmese War by Richard Cobden written in 1853. From what I can deduce, a fair bit of bruised egos were led to a game of power-politics over the position of Commissioner of Tenasserim.
the rest of Thibaw’s territories allowing all of Burma to fall to colonial rule from 1886-1942 (Bunge 1983:18-23).

The British employed their trusted colonial strategy of “divide and conquer” by raising the authority of minority groups while striping influence from the dominant group to consolidate power. They made ethnic minorities such as the Karen, Chin, Kayah, and Kachin, soldiers in their army (Bunge 1983); British missionaries converted ethnic minorities to Christianity; the dominant group, Bamar, were strategically stripped of political, religious, and military power (Aung 2017).

Indian labor was brought in for rice plantations, harvest season, manning rice mills, and dockyards. Indians held more than 50 percent of all government jobs in Lower Burma. The British encouraged migration from Bengal and Madras, both overpopulated and famine-prone areas in India (Bunge 1983:29). Hindus and Muslims migrated from these areas, but the Bamar made no distinction between Indian Muslims and the Rohingya. As far as they were concerned only Bamar Buddhists were truly loyal to Burma.

3.2 Independence, the Threat of Democracy, and the Making of Refugees

The Japanese Occupation of Burma lasted from 1942-1945. The Japanese trained Thirty Comrades who led the Burmese Independence Army. General Thakin Aung San (father to Aung San Suu Kyi), trained by the Japanese during World War II occupation, led Burma to independence. Aung San’s vision was to unify Burma politically and ethnically under a central government. However, he was assassinated six month before the country claimed independence in 1948.
After independence, U Nu became Myanmar’s first Prime Minister under the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) Party. He faced many obstacles to unification that were borne from various minority groups seeking their own sovereignty. The Karen, who are the largest of the ethnic minorities, sought to maintain control of their territories to live autonomously. Hope for the Rohingya dwindled. During the occupation, under the promise of an independent state, the Rohingya were loyal to the British. Subsequently, Nu was willing to negotiate autonomy for the Rohingya, but Ne Win’s coup derailed all negotiations (Bunge 1983: xxii-xxv; Frontières 2002:10). Ultimately, U Nu was able to defeat most insurgencies. However, he was unable to establish peace among ethnic groups for long, and in the 1950s the AFPFL too began falling apart. This led U Nu to create a new party that was designed to establish a democracy. Opposing U Nu’s vision was General Ne Win. In 1962, General Ne Win overthrew Nu’s government in what has been called a ‘bloodless coup’ to establish a military government under the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). This Party dismantled Nu’s cabinet imprisoning his supporters including Nu himself. Military officers took over the executive, legislative, and judicial powers of government.

Under the BSPP, Ne Win, isolated his country economically and socially from the rest of the world. Many of his policies stripped citizens of economic stability. He nationalized the economy, withdrew large denominations of kyat, prohibited new factories, and heavily taxed agriculture. His vision of socialism led to two and a half decades of autocratic, military rule that was detrimental and repressive to the entire population (worst for Rohingya).

As a Burmese nationalist Ne Win did not tolerate disloyalty to Myanmar. He consistently created policies that attempted to control minority ethnic groups who were resentful of a Burman-dominated central government. The Rohingya and Karen were the objects of a
particularly horrific military operation in 1978 called, Operation Naga Min (Dragon King). The operation was an attempt to rid Burma of “foreigners,” who were not “indigenous.” It began with the Rohingya in Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine State (formerly Northern Arakan). The violence carried out by the Tatmadaw (state military) resulted in rape, arbitrary arrests, desecration of mosques, destruction of villages, and land confiscations. Upon evicting Rohingya from their villages, Arakanese Buddhists were allowed to seize their land. Operation Naga Min sent 250,000-300,000 Rohingya fleeing to Bangladesh for safety (Abrar 1975; Bunge 1985; Seekin 2006).

As residents of a fairly new nation themselves, members of the Bangladesh government sought help from the international community. Eleven refugee camps were created along the Bangladesh border. Bangladesh was hospitable, but sought a quick repatriation. Ne Win claimed that the Rohingya were escaping an immigration check, proving that they were illegal immigrants. In spite of his position, by December 1979 in a bilateral agreement between Myanmar and Bangladesh, approximately 150,000 Rohingya were repatriated. This negotiation was reached partly because Ne Win’s regime feared backlash from foreign Islamic states (Abrar 1975; Seekins 2006:6-7).

In spite of return, Ne Win continued his mission to systematically degrade the position of the Rohingya in Myanmar. In 1982, he implemented a new discriminatory Citizenship Law. Under this Law full citizenship was awarded based on ethnicity; only a select 135 indigenous ethnicities were awarded citizenship. Those who were not “indigenous” had to prove they lived in Myanmar since before the British conquest of 1824. Even then, those who settled thereafter were not considered full citizens. Citizenship by birth or marriage was not applicable. Furthermore, there was a “good behavior clause” that allowed the government to take away
one’s citizenship status at will. Citizenship status was monitored through military police; all Burmese were required to carry identification cards that disclosed their ethnicity and religion at all times (Bunge 1983; Seekins 2006).

The categorization of ethnicity is problematic. “Because ethnic identification is not a ‘racial’ (genetic) phenomenon, but one dependent on self-definitions of culture, shared history, language, and social-political environment, defining Burma’s contemporary ethnic situation is difficult” (Seekins 2006: 7). However, it did make citizenship easier to deny to Indians, Chinese, and Rohingya. According to present-day Burmese Citizenship law there are three categories of citizenship with three distinct types of identity cards. There is the pink card that represents “full” citizenship, the green card that represents “naturalized” citizenship, and the blue card that represents “associate” citizenship (Smile 2017). The latter two categories are second-class citizens. Different types of citizenship accord and deny rights; the pink cardholders for example are the only ones who can own land; pink, green, and blue cardholders are passport holders, while white cardholders are not.

Today, the Rohingya hold white identity cards (see Figure 3.1), which is a reserved category for “temporary resident.” With the white card, Rohingya are not allowed the same rights as citizens. They are not allowed to vote, buy and sell property, borrow and lend money

Figure 3.1: Myanmar Temporary Resident white identity card
through legal channels, and the government can easily confiscate land. Those who want to travel beyond their own township have to obtain a letter from the local administration and pay a hefty tax. The white card essentially strips the Rohingya of citizenship, making them *de facto* stateless—a legal term meaning they claim to be citizens of a state that refuses to recognize them. Lack of statehood emboldened the military, local law enforcement, Rakhine Buddhists, and regular citizens to discriminate against the Rohingya.

*Operation Pyi Thaya*

In 1988, the Rohingya had hoped for democratic change when students led public protests against the government. The “8888 Uprising” (held on August 8, 1988) led to a democratically held election. The Rohingya voted in this election, but the SLORC refused to recognize their votes (Frontières 2002:11). Military presence in Rakhine state increased. In 1991, *Operation Pyi Thaya* (Operation Clean and Beautiful Nation) took aim at the Rohingya population once again. The Tatmadaw raided villages looking for “foreigners,” driving approximately a quarter million Rohingya into Bangladesh between 1991-1992 (Seekins 2006). Approximately 15,000 fled to Malaysia via boats (Cheng 2011).

This time 20 refugee camps were created along the border. At first, Bangladesh was hospitable, but as refugees continued to pour through the borders their resolve to be welcoming waned. By September of 1992, Bangladesh refused to let UNHCR process new arrivals. This led to refugees in formally recognized refugee camps living alongside unregistered Rohingya who were part of the same displacement. This disparate living situation remained until 2018 when UNHCR was permitted to register Rohingya refugees who fled during the 2018 Rohingya Crisis.
UNHCR is currently attempting to document those who were displaced in 1992 along with those displaced in 2018. The 1951 Refugee Convention outlines the process for providing refugee protection, including UNHCR oversight and administration. However, Bangladesh was not and still is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention making necessary UNHCR oversight challenging.

In a 1992 bilateral agreement between Bangladesh and the SLORC meant that once again repatriation efforts were undertaken. Bilateral agreements between states do not always represent the desires of the refugees themselves. If a third-party entity, like the UNHCR, is not present to negotiate protections like citizenship, freedom of movement, and property, then there are legitimate concerns for the welfare of those returning. This leads to what is called forced repatriation, a violation of the UNHR and 1951 Refugee Convention. In the 1992 case, forced repatriation resulted in an international outcry, forcing UNHCR to join the repatriation efforts. Initially, Myanmar and Bangladesh did not allow UNHCR to participate in repartition discussions, but to appease the international community in 1994 Myanmar allowed UNHCR to establish satellite offices in three major Rakhine townships (Buthidaung, Rathedaung, and Maungdaw) to ensure the safe return of refugees. The UNHCR’s movements were highly restricted by the Myanmar government. Even though the government reneged on providing citizenship rights to the Rohingya, in between 1993-1997 approximately 230,000 Rohingya were repatriated to Rakhine (Human Rights Watch 1996).

*Thein Sein’s Democracy*

President Thein Sein was elected in 2011. Since, Myanmar has transitioned from a military junta to a nascent democracy; this slow transition has seen the release of Aung San Suu
Kyi from house arrest, the release of hundreds of political prisoners, the adoption of a National Human Right Commission, the promise of a free press, a privatized banking system, and open trade with foreign countries (Kipgen 2013). The Rohingya had great hope that the April 2012 elections would bring a new era of peace with the election of Aung San Suu Kyi’s NLD party. Soon after NLD’s victory they were challenged by an outbreak of violence in Rakhine State. In May of 2012, Rohingya Muslims were accused in the rape and murder of a Rakhine Buddhist woman. Ten Muslim males were killed in retaliation, instigating riots. Homes, schools, mosques, and temples were burned; hundreds died. Tensions flared again in October. This time tens of thousands of Rohingya were displaced. My key cultural consultant, a 22-year-old Rohingya man in Delhi, was displaced in 2012. He recounted:

When I was a kid, my parents used to say… one day Aung San Suu Kyi will come into power. They were true. Now she is. They told me when she becomes the president of our country, she will solve all the problems, we have in our country. Not only for us, all the problems of all the minorities. There will be a secular country, people will be tolerant, and actions will be taken against the culprit. But they were wrong. Now she has a position more superior than the president. But she’s just proven, that she’s also an oppressor of minorities in Myanmar.

The 2012 Myanmar government underreported causalities, claiming their actions were impartial. The international community responded with great concern: “if the government was serious about the country’s democratic transition, the problem of human rights needed to be addressed,” said a UN Special Rapporteur on human rights (cited in Kipgen 2013:7). After violence subsided, the United Nations Human Rights Council sent a Fact-Finding Mission to Myanmar: “It concluded that the 2012 violence was not purely ‘inter-communal,’ as asserted by the authorities, but actively instigated, through concerted hate campaigns, with the involvement of the Tatmadaw, the Police, other State institutions and many figures of authority” (UNHR 2018). The
persecution of the Rohingya in 2012 was a coordinated attempt to continue to drive the Rohingya out of Myanmar.

During the riots, twelve aid workers, three of them UNHCR employees, were arrested for “stimulating” the riots. Then UN High Commissioner, António Guterres met with Thein Sein to request release of the aid workers. Sein asked Guterres to help resettle one million Rohingya to another country stating: “We will take responsibility for our ethnic people but it is impossible to accept the illegally entered Rohingya, who are not our ethnicity” (cited in Robinson 2012). Such a statement demonstrates that Myanmar’s definition of democracy does not include protection and equal rights for minorities within its borders, but rather a cleansing of those they deem do not belong.

Cox’s Bazar\(^\text{25}\) is not unfamiliar territory to the Rohingya. The 1978 refugee flight increased the number of Rohingya living in Cox’s Bazar, as did Operation Pyi Thaya in 1991. The refugee situation in Bangladesh is a protracted one in which approximately 30,000 Rohingya have been living in two UNHCR camps for more than twenty years. There are also 45,000 unregistered Rohingya living alongside official camps since UNHCR halted the registration process in 1992. Additionally, there are more than 150,000 residing in Cox’s Bazar area as illegal immigrants (UNHCR 2012).

In 2012, the conditions for the Rohingya in Bangladesh worsened due to economic stressors. Access to basic resources was poor, locals and the police harassed the Rohingya, and there were fewer ways of generating an income. The locals turned against them because Rohingya men were driving down the cost of labor. As a result, in 2012 many who fled

\(^{25}\) Cox’s Bazar is a port city along Bangladesh’s southeastern border. It is currently the site for 900,000 refugees from Myanmar. It is part of the Chittagong region that was under the rule of various Arakan kings. After independence, in 1947, it became a part of East Pakistan.
Myanmar, and some who were already living in Bangladesh, fled to India. Prominent Human Right lawyer Ravi Nair stated:

Bengalis have an established smuggling route originally used to get Bihari Muslims from the East to Pakistan. The Rohingya tried to use this route in 2011-2, but it didn’t work. They were not able to get through. So then via word of mouth they began coming to New Delhi to get registered. The poor Rohingya come to India. The ones who have any means, go to Malaysia because they find better work, and it’s a Muslim country so prospects are better. Resettlement happens from there because the state wants well for them; they are an Islamic country (May 23, 2017).

Although the Rohingya had selected India to register with UNHCR to access resources, they soon found out that resettlement out of India was not easy. There are no documents or memos that overtly state India’s desire not to settle refugees from India, but there is some evidence of a slowdown in resettlement, in spite of asylum claims rising. Below is a chart documenting the number of asylum seekers who have been resettled from India since 2014 (Figure 3.2).

![Resettlement Statistics Query – Bar chart](image)

**Figure 3.2: Number of Refugees Resettled from India 2014-2018**
From these numbers, we can determine how many were from Myanmar originally, but there is no breakdown of ethnic backgrounds. They may be Rohingya, Chin, Karen, or another ethnicity. Overall, there has been a considerable decline since 2014. Nair explained: “the [Indian] state does not allow refugees in general to be resettled from India because it would then be an open season on refugees coming into India; those few who have been resettled were with family unification projects. But India has told the UNHCR--US, don’t you dare resettle anyone out of here.” While his statement seems anecdotal, his decade of experience with the state in matters of asylum and Nandita Hakshar’s (another prominent human rights lawyer) agreement with his assessment lends a perspective on how the Indian state views issues of resettlement.

The Rohingya community has been frustrated that no one from their community has been resettled and they actively blame UNHCR because they erroneously believe it was the UNHCR’s decision. Resettlement rumors float around the various camps. People told me about how they know someone, who knows someone who has been resettled. Rohingya tell me about how their relatives from Malaysia have been resettled to the U.S., or Canada. They ask me: “Why are the UNHCR against us, why won’t they resettle us?” I try and explain, but either my answer is too complex, they simply do not want to hear it, or they are privy to information that I am not, because they continue to resent UNHCR for their role.

**India Versus the Malaysia and Bangladesh Context**

Currently there are 17,500 Rohingya registered with the UNHCR in India, 88,880 Rohingya registered in Malaysia as of December 2018, and over a million under the protection of UNHCR in Bangladesh. Both Bangladesh and Malaysia as Muslim countries are more sympathetic to the Rohingya situation than India. However, all three countries lack domestic
legal frameworks of refugee protection. Each country relies on domestic policies that are in place for illegal migrants, but nothing that formally differentiates large populations of refugees. This allows refugees to be subjected to arrest and detention, exploitation in the labor force and by landlords, and they have limited access to education and healthcare. Lack of state identification documents is a major source of precarity for urban refugees. A crackdown in immigration policy in Malaysia in 2012 and one in India in 2018 resulted in deportations, making these countries fall short of their informal commitment to nonrefoulment.

Compared to India’s relatively recent flow of Rohingya that occurred in 2012, Cheng’s (2011) research of Rohingya in Malaysia’s urban centers documents Rohingya who arrived in Malaysia due to conflict in the 1990s. He finds a higher proportion of unmarried males. UNHCR- Bangladesh reports that 52 percent of Rohingya are female and my research also indicates a higher percentage of female refugees. Also, many of Rohingya have married Indonesian migrant women in Malaysia and they rarely marry locals. However, in Bangladesh, Rohingya men tend to marry Bangladeshi women as a way to secure their legal position with the state (Cheng 2011). In India, Rohingya marry endogamously. They arrange marriages across settlements in India, holding off on marital integration. One leader at the Migrant’s Plot said the police came by and told the Rohingya men that they would have no problems in India as long as they do not break any laws and stay away from “their women.”

There may be several things contributing to why Rohingya in India do not marry outside their culture-group. It may be that they have only been in India five years and integration takes longer. It may be related to threats from the local population. Or perhaps the Rohingya in India do not want to integrate in the hopes of returning home or being resettled to another country. Further research would be beneficial in understanding refugee urban migration and integration.
In the city, access to primary education in not difficult for Rohingya who live in New Delhi. For refugees who reside in rural areas it can be more challenging because they lack national identification document. The refugee ID card is not recognized outside the city. Interestingly, this gives refugees rights in the city, but does not extend to rights in the country. The further urban refugees move from the hub, defined by UNHCR presence, the more precarious lives they lead. In Bangladesh’s Cox’s Bazar, there are many NGOs who offer education to refugees, but in Malaysia, Rohingya children do not have access to education (Cheng 2011).

The challenges of security for Rohingya in all three countries stem from a lack of national refugee laws. But what’s more, UNHCR durable solutions do not address protracted urban refugee situations. In the case of India, the state does not allow UNHCR to resettle refugees for fear of increased refugee flows. Historically they have respected the customary law of nonrefoulment. The last durable solution of host country integration is being forced upon states as a default position. The UNHCR Urban Policy was written to foster local integration (Gozdziak & Walter 2012) and yet the state’s actions are in direction opposition to integration. Legal, economic, and social and cultural dimensions define integration under the UNHCR. The Indian state will not allow Rohingya refugees to have legal status, thus limiting their ability to work in the formal sector. The social and culture dimensions are also challenging in the India context.

The Rohingya Crisis

Violence broke out again in Rakhine state in 2017. A mass exodus, dubbed by the media as the “Rohingya Crisis,” began on August 25, 2017 following the attack of 30 Border Guard
Police posts in a coordinated attack by the Rohingya. Twelve officers were killed. The international community has castigated the Myanmar government for disproportionate retaliation. The atrocities included burning entire villages, mass killings, gang rapes, and the throwing of babies and children into rivers and live fires—these acts of ethnic cleansing were finally acknowledged as such by the United States in 2018. Since 2017, UNHCR reports estimate 724,920 Rohingya have fled Myanmar. Most survivors are between the ages of 18-59 (UNHCR 2018). The UN Human Rights Council’s Fact-Finding Mission reported that 392 villages were razed to the ground. Bulldozers set out to clear the area, stripping it of recognizable landmarks. New structures replaced the old, making refugee return impossible.

The initial police post attacks by the Rohingya were tagged by the government as “acts of terrorism” enacted by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). UN Human Rights Council and U Hau Do Suan, a Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations, stated in a security briefing that ARSA organized as early as 2013 as a response to the violence in 2012 (UNHR 2018a). They first emerged publicly on October 9, 2016 when a relatively small group of Rohingya coordinated attacks at three different police posts, killing nine officers with knifes and sticks.

Countries such as Myanmar and India have attempted to link ARSA with extremism to justify their own Islamaphobic policies. Yet third party NGOs, such as the International Crisis

---

26 The Yale Law School partnered with Fortify Rights to release a report in 2015 stating that acts of genocide were indeed occurring in Rakhine state. This was before the 2017 conflict. Post-2017’s mass exodus the Kofi Annan Foundation released a 63-page report after an investigation that allowed the Foundation team full access to Rakhine state. The report does not use the words “ethnic cleansing” or “acts of genocide.” In 2018 the United States, via Ambassador Sam Brownback, stated these acts were in fact aimed at ethnic cleansing. These terms bear weight in the legal community. If Annan’s international report has used these terms it would have enacted a series of legal repercussion for the state of Myanmar. The international community cautiously handles Myanmar for fear of it walking away from democracy and defaulting into a more familiar state of military rule. The balance the international community is attempting to strike however leaves the Rohingya community as the spoils of democracy. The Rohingya have been persecuted for decades and neither the international community nor the promise of democracy has been able to substantially improve their situation.
Group, have confirmed there are no links between ARSA and other jihadist groups. They receive no funding or arms from transnational terrorist groups; they are equipped with sticks, swords, and guns they seized from police post raids (Edroos 2017).

ARSA is commonly regarded as a poorly armed and poorly trained group, with a small number of partly trained members but principally relying on untrained villagers to conduct attacks with sticks and knives. In comparison with the long-standing and well-armed non-State armed groups active in northern Myanmar, ARSA’s level of organization and military capacity appears more limited (UNHR 2018c: 18).

Various international groups have been sympathetic toward ARSA stating that they are not a militant group with an extremist ideology, but instead they are borne out of generations of institutionalized discrimination and abuse. Maung Zarni, an advisor to the European Center for the Study of Extremism said: “ARSA's actions resemble Jewish inmates at Auschwitz who rose up against the Nazis in October 1944” (cited in Edroos 2017). Over decades Myanmar has denied Rohingya legal status and identity. It has restricted their freedom of movement, limited their access to food, stripped them of their livelihood, eliminated avenues to health and education; and employed arbitrary, extortionate taxes in matters of their private life such as marriage and birth. Ataullah Abu Amar Jununi is ARSA’s leader who says they are fighting on behalf of the Rohingya, so they may gain access basic human rights. He says ARSA has no desire to impose Islamic rule (Edroos 2017; UNHCR 2018).

Since the Rohingya Crisis my interlocutors have shared concerns for their families who are hiding from the Burmese army as well as from ARSA. ARSA does not represent a majority of the Rohingya community, who say they simply want to live in peace. ARSA may be fighting in the name the Rohingya, but a majority of Rohingya rightfully fear them. In addition to forced
conscription, ARSA stands accused of Human Rights abuses such as the burning of a camp, and the killing 100 Hindu men and women in Rakhine state. ARSA’s actions have had wide ranging repercussions on the entire Rohingya community (UNHR 2018b: UNHR 2018c).

3.3 Bharatiya Janata Party’s Reaction to the Rohingya Issue

The Rohingya living at the Migrant’s Plot in New Delhi are Sunni Muslims. They practice through daily prayer, annual commemorations, such as Ramadan, and other cultural traditions. Based on my observations the women pray at home or not at all. Men will pray at a shanty reserved for prayer, or at a nearby mosque, only two street blocks away. Almost everyone fasts during Ramadan, in spite of the trying environmental conditions. There is a grand Eid celebration after Ramadan, when they sacrifice goats and share the meat. At the Plot itself, there has never been any violence incited due to religious affiliations. Their Indian neighbors are Hindu and Sikh, but there is no religious tension to speak of.

It is the men who primarily leave the plot for work. When they leave the settlement they dress in regular trousers and shirts, shedding their Myanmar style sarong. This form of assimilation does not mask their religious identity, but rather their foreign identity. Men repeatedly told me that being Muslim was not a deterrent to finding employment in New Delhi. Religious tension, and insecurity, is catalyzed within political municipalities and the federal government.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) supports the current Myanmar government because it has strategic economic interest at the borders where Myanmar, Bangladesh and India meet. After decades of failed negotiations, in 2017, India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh are coming closer to agreement on a gas pipeline that would link Sittwe in Rakhine, Mizoram and Tripura in India,
and Chittagong in Bangladesh. This 7,000-kilometer gas pipeline would benefit all three nations. Myanmar discovered offshore reserves sparking an interest in reviving negotiations so they could diversify their oil and gas market, which currently is being monopolized by China. One year later, in March of 2018, Myanmar imports 100,000 barrels of diesel and gasoline a day from Singapore. They do not produce enough to sustain their own market growth, leading Myanmar to open talks with other countries like India and European nations to build refineries in the country. Additionally, India and Myanmar are cooperating in creating stronger border security between the two nations (Yhome 2018; Reuters 2018). Geopolitics, security, and economic concerns were at the center of India’s response to the Rohingya conflict, which regionally sweeps across the very areas that are under discussion regarding gas, electricity, and security.

In 2015, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia all turned away boats of Rohingya refugees leaving them at sea. The administration in Delhi was asked to intervene but refused to step in as a regional leader (Yhome 2018). The central government’s direct response to Rohingya immigration was made official by Kiren Rijiju’s proposal in August of 2017 to deport all Rohingya from India. Later that same year as the Rohingya Crisis unfolded, Narendra Modi in a visit to Myanmar condemned the terrorist’s attacks by ARSA. India nuanced their response to the Rohingya Crisis when Bangladesh asked for help in facilitating the influx of refugee from Myanmar. In September 2017, just one month after threatening to deport all Rohingya, India launched “Operation Insaniyat,” (Operation Humanity) to provide relief funds to Bangladesh. This was a political move in the interest of assisting Bangladesh, more so than the Rohingya (Yhome 2018).

Note these are all region with a high population of Rohingya Muslims.
28 Kiren Rijiju is a member of the BJP. He currently serves as the Minister of Home Affairs and has been a outspoken adversary of Rohingya Muslims in India.
India’s response to the Rohingya Crisis has repercussions for India’s position with many of its geopolitical associations: Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and SAARCLAW. Their formal international position has been the same as ASEAN: let sovereign nations handle their own internal conflicts. This ethos is made complex by the fact that there are thousands of Rohingya who have “illegally” crossed the border into India (Yhome 2018).

While the call for deportation of Rohingya refugees across India has reached the Supreme Court, local courts in Assam approved the deportation of seven Rohingya under the Foreigners Act in October of 2018. They had been living in Assam since 2012. Myanmar agreed to receive them. The Supreme Court says it will not interfere in an Assam Court ruling (Supreme 2018). This highly publicized event was actually India’s second return in three months. The UNHCR weighed in on another deportation from Assam on January 3, 2019, by asking India for clarification as to whether the returns were voluntary. However, there was no indication that the detainees had been through the RSD process, thus legally making them “illegal immigrants.” Had the court operated in line with their commitment to the UN Human Rights Council, they would have allowed the RSD process to take place prior to talks of deportation.

India’s relationship to Rohingya Muslims is a two-faced diplomacy. When with the Myanmar government it castigates ARSA as terrorists. But when with Bangladesh it displays its more humanitarian side. To the external world, India is protecting its regional geopolitical position. However, internally, they are pushing an anti-Islam, pro-Hindu, national agenda in preparation for Modi’s reelection in 2019. Deportation is justified by the administration as ridding the nation of illegal immigrants who supposedly have connections to Islamic terror groups. These media tropes of Muslims being tied to terror are used in the news, political blogs,
and social media to drive a socially conservative agenda at the dawn of India’s 2019 national elections.

*The Muslim Threat and The Role of Media*

Conservative news outlets have led many in India to believe that there is an imminent, substantive threat of extremism from the Rohingya. There has been no proof provided to the public, nor have there been any terror incidents since their arrival in 2012. News headlines and billboards such as the ones found in Figure 3.3 and 3.4 are example of the politicization of Rohingya in India. The image on the left is a billboard found in Jammu, a primarily Hindu populated state in northern India that borders Pakistan. The right-wing, National Panthers Party is running a campaign to rid Jammu of its Rohingya population of 5,500 because they are causing a demographic change in the area. On the right, protestors in September of 2017 march in support of the central government challenging the Supreme Court to deport Rohingya from India. One man holds a stating “Rohingya Muslims are jihadis not refugees” and another, “Rohingya Muslims dangerous for India.”

Figure (left) 3.3: Billboard in Jammu protesting Rohingya presence. Figure (right) 3.4: Protests in Delhi against Rohingya (photo credit: AFP Times Now News)
India’s political climate has a direct bearing on the life of an urban refugee, especially in the capital city. The current ruling party, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), is a right-wing Hindu nationalist political party represented by Prime Minister Narendra Modi since 2014. The BJP’s origins can be traced to the Rāṣṭrīya Svayamsēvaka Saṅgha (RSS), to whom they continue to have strong links. The RSS, founded in 1925, is a right-wing Hindu nationalist social group that professes a Hindutva ideology, which is essentially Hindu nationalism. Its centers across the nation train young men in paramilitary techniques as well as Hindu ideology. Historically, the RSS has promoted racial and religious hegemony by Hindus. During WWII, then RSS leader, M.S. Golwalkar commended Hitler’s view of racial purity. Gandhi, who was presumably assassinated by an RSS member, was critiqued by the RSS for his willingness to work with Muslims (Gregory et al. 2007). Throughout India’s history the RSS had been banned on four different occasions but is currently thriving in a BJP controlled India.

Prime Minister Modi began his RSS training at the young age of eight in Gujarat, India. In 2001, Modi became the Chief Minister of the state of Gujarat, a position he held until his election to Prime Minister in 2014. As Chief Minister, he drew international attention during the 2002 Gujarat Riots. The RSS was accused of premeditating the riots and the state government was said to be complicit in the killing of Muslims. During this five-day period of upheaval several journalists were attacked, television outlets were banned, and 250 women and girls were gang raped and burned to death. Official numbers state a total of 1044 deaths, other sources report higher numbers. The international community came down hard on Modi; for years, he was banned from the United Kingdom and the United States. The Bush Administration rejected his travel visa in 2005 because his inaction during the riots was perceived as a violation of human rights. He was eventually granted clemency from England and the United States as he became

The Hinduvata movement employs subtle changes such as ensuring all official communication is carried out in Hindi. Colloquial Hindi, and especially the Hindi spoken in urban centers comprised of migrant from all over the nation and aboard, can be a hodge-podge of phrases that are derived from Urdu or Sanskrit, even English. Official government communication attempts to eliminate Urdu derived words; Urdu is Persian language register of Hindi linked to Arabic script. The BJP began using more Sanskrit based terminology to further ingrain the Hindu-nation conservative ideology because it is the liturgical language of Hinduism.

Newspapers in Jammu, at the border of India and Pakistan, often use the word ghospati, or infiltrator— someone crossing a border with mal intention— when referring to the Rohingya population, as opposed to refugee. In April of 2018, the Migrant’s Plot suffered from a terrible fire that dominated the news for days to come. A staunch BJP student advocate took to Twitter claiming responsibility for the fire, escalating him to hero-status within the right-wing community. No one in the Rohingya community or aid community familiar with the situation believes this boy actually had anything to do with the fire, but interestingly his claim did not result in legal repercussion, only in fandom. These examples demonstrate the current conservative political landscape from the borders to the city.

In another example, specific to New Delhi, India Today on November 24, 2018 reported that BJP chief Manoj Tiwari demanded that illegal Bangladeshis and Rohingya living in the nation’s capital be evicted. He accused the local ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) of protecting them while trying to oust Tiwari from office. The proximity of Rohingya to the nation’s capital is both problematic politically for the Rohingya, but also provides the greatest amount of
resources and protection; they are both center and marginal. This report exemplifies how Rohingya refugees are being used as symbolic pawns in local and national party politics.

Conclusion

There are many contributing factors to Rohingya insecurity. Historically, the acquisition of coastal regions by the British Raj during the First Anglo-Burmese War stripped them of an autonomy to which they had been accustomed. With the promise of sovereignty, they supported the British in expanding agricultural trade. However, their allegiance to the British marked the Rohingya as sympathizers subjecting them to persecution by the Bamar ruling parties after independence. Stripped of citizenship in 1982, they now live as “foreigners” on their own land. Their diaspora members living in Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Saudi Arabia and many more countries outnumber the Rohingya living in Myanmar. Moving forward, Rohingya history will necessarily need to be written as Rohingya histories of integration into various host countries.

The Burmese government has denied the Rohingya an identity; they claim “Rohingya” is an invented term for Muslims residing in Myanmar who are actually Bengali. The Myanmar government insists that “Bengalis” should return to Bengal (i.e. Bangladesh) because they are not indigenous to Myanmar, which they have set as a precondition to citizenship. The Rohingya from historical-Arakan span across two modern-day nations: Bangladesh and Myanmar. The Rohingya have not moved from their townships; unfortunately, borders were created over them, making them unwanted by both nations and ultimately made stateless on their own land.

Making matters more complex, the Kamein (with Persian roots) and the Panthay (who are Chinese Muslim) are minority groups that hold full Burmese citizenship. This points to the
“othering” of the Rohingya based not just on religion, but also on racism, colorism, and a distinct historical past. Understanding the history of Rakhine state sheds light on the profound and institutionalized ‘othering’ of the Rohingya people across time and space. The next chapter will provide background on the UNHCR in India, where Rohingya refugees became subjects of state surveillance. They are subjects at the intersection of an already tenuous relationship between the Indian state and the UNHCR, making the Rohingya scapegoats in yet another battle for nationalism.
Chapter 4

SEEKING REFUGE IN INDIA AND THE UNHCR

The Rights of Man, supposedly inalienable, proved to be unenforceable— even in countries whose constitutions were based upon them— whenever people appeared who were no longer citizens of any sovereign state

Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism 1973, p. 293

Rohingya refugees want to go home; we see ourselves as asylum seekers, the UNHCR sees us as refugees, India sees us as illegal immigrants and the local population sees us as foreigners. We just need help to go home.

Ali Johar, Age 22
The largest mass movement of refugees in South Asia took place during the 1947 Partition of India, 75 million people moved across the newly formed Pakistan-Indian border. Violence and atrocities committed at this time left an indelible mark on the national memory of both countries. As such, communal memory plays a role in modern politics in India, including Narendra Modi’s rise to fame in the local politics of Gujarat, a bordering state between India and Pakistan. His right-wing Hindu-nationalist rhetoric during the 2014 national elections became the foundation from which his administration operates in the central government today. His conservatism resonates with the global trend towards nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiments. These politics have a direct effect upon the security of the Rohingya in New Delhi.

To better understand the current status of Rohingya refugees in New Delhi, in this chapter I use a political and policy lens to trace the historical treatment of refugee groups since Partition. There are two distinct groups I explore: those refugees who have been administratively managed by the Indian government and those refugees whose management has been delegated to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). By highlighting the historical treatment of those refugees managed by the Indian government, I demonstrate the arbitrary treatment from one refugee group to the next. The disparity of access to resources informs daily insecurity for some migrant groups. Ethnographic data based on interviews with state representatives and field notes help to highlight the Rohingya refugee group-experience in particular. Questions for consideration include: How did Partition create a foundation for refugee reception? What legal and cultural tensions evolved from Partition that has affected subsequent

---

29 Other examples include, America with the 2016 election of anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim Donald J. Trump, the 2016 passing of Brexit in England, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban’s Islamophobic taxes in 2018 on aid agencies assisting Muslim-refugees, and Poland’s 2018 refusal to accept refugees under the European Union migration policy.
refugee arrivals? How do Rohingya refugees’ relationship to the UNHCR form their sense of belonging and security?

4.1 Partition and Subsequent Legal Precedents

Many Rohingya recounted to me their stories of departure. They had to flee rape,kidnappings, beatings, threats, and general act of violence. Below are four accounts of why families fled their homes:

In Burma, Buddhists were kidnapping 9-10-year-old girls and boys. Those who even had an education could not get jobs. Local mosques were always locked and then the monks converted them into monasteries. The government was also kidnapping Rohingyas to work in the military. Every time they went to war with the Nepalis they took one Rohingya per soldier to carry all their equipment and then used them as shields. They were given food once a day. They fight constantly. My mama [mother’s brother] was kidnapped in this manner, they broke eight of his teeth and then he was sent home (INDHZF03 30 2015).

My husband died many years ago; he got sick and was swollen really big. I had land but the government took it away. I had two sons and no work. The Buddhists keep taking my sons to work as coolies [peons to soldiers], and so I had no food and no money. My youngest, who was 12, was taken away and beaten by Buddhists. My eldest son was 25 then. We went from Burma to Bangladesh by foot and boat—it took four days (INDHZF08 2015).

I was a carpenter in Burma and had a shop. I left because I had to work for free twice a week for the government and pay 50,000 [kyat] a month as a tax to the government. We were taxed for marriage, having children, moving from one village to another. There were mass killings of people who did not pay (INDHZF22 2015).

We were farming for others in Burma. I had four daughters and two sons, one son died as a coolie. So we decided to leave (INDHZF20 2015).

Interview codes are used for quotes from recorded interviews.
These are typical flight stories. Most left after the beating or death of a family member. Some fled in fear of such violence. Although they do not have a legal identity in India, and live in squalid conditions, many claim to be grateful for the peace of mind they have found in India. They do not fear family members will be kidnapped or killed. My field notes detail a day when I had interviewed several men at the Migrant’s Plot.

A few men said that regardless of their situation they were so much better off in India than in Burma or Bangladesh. They have found humanity here, (exact words from two people)—people can get educated, and people with any type of skill can get a job or open a business. Usman said, ‘I have money and I can marry freely.’ Faizul said, ‘only after coming to India we have seen what life is, what humanity (insaniyat)/love (pyaar) is.’ If the conditions here are peaceful, I cannot imagine how horrible they must have been in Burma. (Field Notes, September 22, 2017)

The Rohingya are more recent arrivals in a country that actually has a long record of receiving refugees. These stories have a deeper history than just the move to India—they are the stories of displacement that characterize generations of Rohingya.

In spite of India’s relatively humane response to refugees, it is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol. India’s post-independence lawmakers viewed refugee issues as a European issue and a Cold War instrument, not one that concerned South Asia. Ironically, South Asia is now host to millions of forced migrants. However, it still refuses to formalize any national law that governs the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers must rely on international legal precedents or older laws that governed movements during Partition. Refugees fall under the Foreign Rights Act of 1946 and
its amendments. These amendments address foreigners who enter India illegally. The Foreigners Order of 1948 allows the government to refuse anyone entering illegally (Bhattacharjee 2008).

There are, however, national precedents that commit India to the protection of refugees and asylum seekers. Article 14 of India’s Constitution states “The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India” (Indian Const. art. 14). And Article 21 states, “No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.” (Indian Const. art. 21). Human rights lawyers have repeatedly cited both to protect refugees in India. Although India has not signed the Refugee Convention, its treatment of asylum seekers is, in part, guided by the international customary law of nonrefoulment, (which requires protection for individuals fleeing their country from persecution), its membership within the UN Human Rights Commission, as well as its signature of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the 1966 International Conventions of Civil and Political Rights (Ravi Nair 2017; Dhavan 2004).

The High Courts of various Indian states have ruled in favor of UNHCR regulations. The High Court in Assam and Nagaland in the East, also known as the Gauhati High Court, has ruled several times to stay deportations until UNHCR status determinations are executed. Similarly, in Manipur in 1994 bail was granted to asylum seekers so they could approach the UNHCR for status determination in New Delhi. In 1992, the Chennai court denied forcible repatriation. And in the State of Arunachal Pradesh vs Khudiram Chakma case it was stressed that no one could be denied due process under detention (Ananthachari 2001).

It is for this reason that many governments do not understand India’s reluctance to sign the 1951 Convention. But historically the Indian administration has been vocal about their mistrust of the UNHCR, stating that UNHCR does not behave apolitically (i.e. Chimni
Until the early 1960s India kept UNHCR at arms length for fear of sending the wrong message to their geopolitical allies. However, in the face of overwhelming flows of Tibetan refugees from the North in 1959, India requested administrative assistance from the UNHCR. India did not want to risk its neutral position in the Cold War, so they refused to allow UNHCR to establish offices in India. Ten years after the initial influx of Tibetan refugees India finally agreed to allow UNHCR to establish offices in 1969 for the further coordination of Tibetan programming (Sen 2003:399).

The Indian government has been called upon by scholars and politicians alike to take a leading role in South Asia by creating a regional convention that addresses its unique needs and circumstance (Dhavan 2004). A five-member working group at the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation in Law (SAARCLAW) meeting proposed the Model Law in 1997. It was intended to help define a refugee, handle refugee determination, establish refugee rights, and offer suggestions on mass influxes and durable solutions in South Asia, specifically (Sagar and Ahmed 2005:76-7). Ultimately, India did not ratify this law. Migration through South Asia’s porous borders is such a contentious regional issue that it is now a banned topic at SAARCLAW meetings.

Eastern scholars have called the Refugee Convention Eurocentric, not only because it was convened after WWII to deal with Europe’s forced displaced, but because of the economic burden in would place on countries in the Global South and their inability to enforce political borders. Weiner (1993) summarized some of the main arguments offered by scholars and government officials as to why India does not ratify the Convention: 1) There are few natural borders (mountain ranges or rivers) separating India from its neighbors. The cost of monitoring them is not feasible; 2) Ethnic groups straddle the border linguistically, culturally, and in terms
of livelihoods. Thereby citizenship is a fluid notion in border states; 3) Countries in these regions do not monitor citizenship and have no birth registration system; and 4) refugees and migrants have found allies in longstanding local political relationships, thus preventing central government interference in enforcing repatriation efforts (1743). Thus, the geography of the borderlands, the culture of the people, and the limited reach of the central government play a significant role in India’s inability to protect, monitor, or manage forcibly displaced population into India.

Currently, the principal concern of Modi’s government is Muslim migrants. India’s largest minority are Muslims at one percent of the total population, making India the third largest Muslim nation. Anti-Islamic sentiments since Partition have never left and its proponents have become more emboldened due to Islamophobia across the globe. There are two specific policies that are under consideration at the Supreme Court, supported by Modi’s administration that has singled out Muslim refugees. The first was a bill introduced in 2017 to help all Sikh, Buddhist, Christian, and Hindu refugees become naturalized citizens, notably in time for the 2019 elections. And the second is an Act to deport all Rohingya-Muslim refugees because they stand accused of being radicalized by Pakistan, and thus reputedly posing a national security threat. There has been no verifiable evidence of such radicalization; the deportation case remains open before the Supreme Court.

Today’s courts have a plethora of legal precedents to lean on for refugee protection; however, the fact that Indian law does not specifically address their treatment and protection leaves a gaping hole that can be taken advantage of by less liberal politicians. In fact, India’s informal policy regarding refugees is to deal with each situation through bilateral negotiations with the refugee producing country, as opposed to an apolitical human rights process. But to
view and treat refugees as pawn in a larger political negotiation not only makes their lives insecure, it also strips them of inherent rights otherwise upheld, promoted, and idealized by India’s own constitution.

Historically, India, both judicially and by its willingness to accept UNHCR’s presence, has demonstrated confidence in UNHCR’s status determination process and basic tenets of human rights. In spite of having no national refugee laws the Indian state has assisted Tibetans, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans, and the stateless Chakmas. These groups benefit from governmental assistance and varying forms of protective residence status. In contrast, urban refugees and asylum seekers such as the Afghan, Burmese, Rohingya, and African populations are assisted by the UNHCR directly and are less stable in many ways including their legal ability to stay in India. The Indian state shows very little interest in the plight of these populations unless it interferes with issues of national security, perceived or real.

4.2 Refugee Groups Assisted by the Indian State

Scholars have noted that India’s position on refugees and the implementation of humanitarian aid exists in paradoxes (Dhavan 2004; Sen 2003; Kaur 2009). India’s independence linked to one of the largest mass migrations in history. In 1971, Bangladesh’s (formerly East Pakistan) independence movement produced around 10 million refugees flowing through India’s Eastern borders. In 1959, 75,000 Tibetans entered India via Nepal form the North, and in 1992 Sri Lankan Tamils began arriving from the South. The accommodation of these refugee groups speaks to India’s long-standing ethos of acceptance and hospitality, and also to its logistical ability to absorb massive flows of people.
There are four large refugee groups (Tibetans, Bangladeshis, Chakmas, and Sri Lankans) that India has helped directly via government aid programs and targeted legislation. It is important to review India’s historical position with these refugee groups to understand the type of hospitality the government is capable of, compared to what they currently display. Each of these four groups received humanitarian assistance directly from the Indian state. They benefited from federal legislation created to ensure they were cared for and had access to resources in the present and for future generations.

The more recent group of urban refugees from across the globe, do not receive the same level of benevolence and access to rights. There is historically arbitrary treatment of refugees in India and this can be seen thorough the treatment delineated of the following four refugee groups.

*India’s Partition 1947*

Soon after independence, on August 17, 1947 violence ripped through the Punjab region of Northwest India as thousands fled their homes in a race to be on the right side of the national border. Seventy-years later the collective memory of the events of the Partition and its aftermath continues to inspire popular and scholarly work from art, poetry, fiction and nonfiction writing, short and long films, documentaries, and research from all disciplines (a partial list: Bhalla 1994; Butalia 1998; Chatterji 1999; Hazarika 2000; Pandey 2001; Samaddar 1997; Van Schendel 2005; Settar and Gupta 2002; Kudaisya and Yong 2004; Das 2007). In less than a week, Prime Ministers of both sides, Jawaharlal Nehru and Liaquat Ali Khan, created the Military Evacuation Organization (MEO) so that national troops could escort refugees across the border. Chatterji (2012) points out the irony in how this action created the national responsibility of retracting
one’s citizens from another country, rather than protecting minorities in one’s own nation. (Current legislation specifically protects Hindu and Sikh immigrants.) Envoys were sent by Khan to escort Muslims across the border. Ultimately, the MEO shifted 5 million people (Chatterji 2012: 1058-9), and of course millions died at the time in the violence that erupted.

Although the Partition created a homeland for Hindus and Muslims, both nations had to consider how they were going to address minorities, namely, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, and Zoroastrians whose faiths were outside Hinduism or Islam (Singh 2010; Chatterji 2012). The laws that derived from such considerations have a direct impact on refugees and migrants today. Those Hindus who moved to India from the Pakistani side relinquished their homes and businesses and questioned how they would be compensated. Many began squatting in previously Muslim owned spaces, claiming it as rightfully theirs. This happened on both the West Pakistan (Chatterji 2012) and the East Pakistan side (Chatteji 2011; Sanyal 2011). The state was made to address paths to citizenship, property rights, rights to protection under the state, and how to address informal acts of citizenship. ‘Acts of citizenship,’ such as squatting, changed the treatment of refugees and notions of citizenship during the nation building process, (Chatterjii 2012: 1061; Sanyal 2011) claiming space became a way of asserting a right to the nation and physically establishing belonging.

In 1950, India adopted a secular constitution that professed to embrace equality for all, extending commonly understood democratic rights such as liberty, justice, due process, and dignity for those who lived within its borders. Articles 25-28 provided freedom of religion, while Articles 29-30 expound upon minority rights.
India’s adherence to the customary international law of *non-refoulment* was first demonstrated in their treatment of Tibetan refugees. For nearly six decades now the Tibetan government in exile has found refuge in India. Currently there are an estimated 100,000-150,000 Tibetan refugees in India. The initial waves of Tibetan immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s were given agricultural land to support their livelihoods, while others sold handicrafts. India no longer provides land so most new arrivals live in Dharmasala where they find work within the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) (RIC 2003; Madhukar & Chandran 2017).

India has been remarkably supportive of the Dalia Lama in spite of the financial costs of maintaining policies geared toward Tibetans, providing land, and providing necessary military support. India has fully funded the Tibetan Schools Society under the Ministry of Education to develop and administer educational programming for Tibetan children (Chimni 1994). Also, Tibetan refugees have received support to maintain medical facilities funded by the United States (Swiss 2013).

Those who do not live in allocated Tibetan resettlement areas receive benefits from the CTA. Their livelihoods come from the sale of Tibetan crafts, food stands, or small shops. Additionally, the Indian state provides them with food ration cards that allow refugees to buy subsidized food staples. Tibetan refugees, unlike Sri Lanka refugees, have been awarded Residential Certificates, allowing for freedom of movement throughout India (RIC 2003; Swiss 2013). Also, unlike any other refugee groups, Tibetan refugees are permitted to travel internationally with a NORI (no objection to return to India) stamp provided by the Home Ministry (Chimni 1994 378-401; Choedon 2018; RIC 2003). Tibetan refugees are not only
eligible for Indian passports, but are also considered Indian citizens under the birth right section of the 1955 Citizenship Act\footnote{Prior to 1955 children born to refugees are permitted Indian citizenship if the state consents. For example, Tibetans are granted citizenship, but the Chamakas (addressed in the following section) are not. After 1955, India eliminated birth right citizenship, subjecting all irregular migrants and their children to the Foreigner’s Act.} (Mcleod 2017; Madhukar and Chandran 2017).

In a report written by the Country Analysis of the Federal Office of Migration it was determined that Tibetan refugees are in a far better position than other refugees in India (Swiss 2013). For example, while urban refugees are struggling to access education, a demographic survey conducted in 2009 shows a Tibetan literacy rate of 79.4%. Success, however, is relative measure. Citizenship, and more importantly, integration are fundamental to long-term success. Tibetan youths are grossly unemployed and underemployed. Many find it difficult to find jobs with their graduated degrees from Indian universities and abroad; youths are becoming addicted to drugs in lieu of employment (Choedon 2018). Additionally, there are no indications of possible repatriation of the government in exile.

Currently, the Indian government is unwilling to provide state documentation for urban refugees. Government official speak about urban refugees as illegal foreigners. Unlike the Tibetans, urban refugees have no path to legal residency, let alone citizenship.

**Stateless Chakmas 1964**

The Chakma people of South Asia are little known even to citizens of India. Their history of statelessness is tied to both nation building and post-colonial development. They are a Theravada Buddhist-ethnic minority who during the Partition fell to the side of East Pakistan. In 1961 a reservoir was constructed in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) causing 100,000 Chakmas to become development refugees when their lands were flooded. Forty-five thousand Chakma crossed into Arunachal Pradesh, India in 1964. There are currently over 100,000 in Arunachal
Pradesh being housed and managed by the North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA). For 60 years they have been fighting to be recognized as citizens of India with equal rights, as have many of Arunachal Pradesh residents. Since independence the fight for territory by China, India, Bangladesh, and Burma has pushed tribes off their lands, made them stateless, and/or stripped them of citizenship (Dasgupta 2000, Singh 2010, Chimni 1994).

The borderlands of Arunachal Pradesh have long been under dispute, both India and China claiming the land. Both countries make political postures to legitimize these claims. Both countries have offered the Arunachal a railway system, vying for legitimacy over the region (Singh 2010: 5-7). The Indian government has established refugee camps for the Chakmas, food rations, and access to doctors. As of 1996 the government of India was providing approximately 4200 rupees per family to 65,000 Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh (NHRC 1996). However, their camps are described as squalid, with little privacy, no attached latrine, and sexual assaults are a common occurrence.

Additionally, court cases have been filed attempting to establish Chakmas as Indian citizens under the Citizenship Act of 1955, claiming citizenship by birth. The courts have denied this claim. According to Singh (2010), who has written one of the only monographs on the stateless Chakmas in South Asia, states that they are not enumerated anywhere as refugees. Both the Indian state and UNHCR annual records do not account for Chakmas.

Because Chakmas reside on land that is in dispute, the Indian government is more willing to negotiate their security. Essentially, their allegiance is a bargaining chip to secure the land they live upon. Even though they live in dilapidated conditions, the government foots the bill for camps, doctors, and food rations. In contrast, today’s urban refugees are unable to access the various food rations schemes that are in place to serve India’s underprivileged.
Bangladesh 1972

During the partition of 1947, Bengal in the East was divided into West and East Bengal. East Bengal became East Pakistan, while West Bengal remained as a part of India. In 1972, East Bengal seceded from Pakistan and was renamed Bangladesh. This War of Independence ultimately produced 10 million refugees fleeing from East Pakistan into India. The migration of primarily Hindu refugees began in 1947 and continued through Bangladesh’s independence, increasing greatly during war. In spite of the government’s efforts to count the millions displaced over four decades, estimations are still not definitive. Refugees were found in squatter colonies, refugee camps, as well as living in spaces that were vacated by Muslims (Dasgupta 2000).

Hindu refugees fled East Pakistan pushing out Muslim populations that stayed or had fled due to violence. Hindu refugees were given citizenship from 1947-1951. There were different levels of refugees, those who were educated and earned white collar livings, and those who were not educated, poor, farmers, with no land to till (Chatterji 2011; Sanyal 2009; Weiner 1993). Refugees squatted in old military barracks, eventually creating large refugee colonies. A legal battle ensued between the government, landowners, and Bengali refugees. Ultimately, squatters were able to gain the right to being defined as refugees, which led to further strides in gaining rights and citizenship.

The history of such movements makes today’s landowners in New Delhi nervous to have refugees squatting on their land. In April of 2018 a landowner grew litigious when Rohingya refugees erected a tent clearly labeled as a masjid on his abandoned property; he claimed that the government is very strict about the removal of worship sites on abandoned property; therefore, he wanted to act swiftly. Refugees in over-crowded cities like New Delhi struggle just to find spaces to squat.
Sri Lanka’s Civil War 1983-2009

As a result of Sri Lanka’s 26-year civil war, Tamil refugees have been living in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu for nearly 30 years. There have been three major flows of refugees from Sri Lanka into Tamil Nadu. The first was in 1983 when nearly 30 thousand refugees were spread across 171 camps. In 1990, an additional 122,000 arrived accommodated in 243 camps. To this can be added those who came in a third wave in 2006. The relationship between the refugees and the state has changed overtime. Initially, the government and local citizens were sympathetic and refugees were integrated within the community (Valatheeswaran & Rajan 2011: 30-32).

After the 1991 assassination of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by a Liberation Tamil Tiger Eelam suicide bomber, attitudes towards Tamil refugees changed. Since then, Tamil refugees have been under police surveillance. The 243 camps in Tamil Nadu were reduced to 132, refugees were shifted around, camps were under tight 24-hour surveillance, and there was to be no interaction between camp communities. The speed of repatriation was increased. Much to India’s chagrin, the Sri Lankan Civil War kept producing more refugees up until its end in 2009 (Chimni 1994: 383-4; Valatheeswaran & Rajan 2011). In spite of changes in the national attitude towards Sri Lankans, the central Indian government continues to support them through programs, policy, and financial assistance.

Currently there are over 100,000 Sri Lanka refugees living in state supported camps. The UNHCR continues to support programming efforts from their Delhi offices. Refugees receive cash assistance and food rations from the government. Children are allowed to attend public school, are provided with school uniforms, textbook, and bus passes. Before the assassination,

---

32 The LTTE was a Sri Lankan based Tamil militant group founded in 1976 by Velupillai Prabhakaran. During the civil war their mission was to create a separate Tamil state in Northern Sri Lanka.
institutions of higher education had a seat quota available for Sri Lankan refugees (Valatheeswaran & Rajan 2011).

The treatment of Sri Lankan refugees, like the Chakmas, demonstrates the impact politics had on the refugee policy. A similar sentiment is being demonstrated by the modern state, in that they are using policy and geopolitics to argue for deportation of undesirable refugees, namely Muslim refugees.

4.3 Urban Refugee Policy and Practice

Recognizing the shift in refugee migration patterns, UNHCR released the UNHCR Comprehensive Policy on Urban Refugee on December 12, 1997. As mentioned in Chapter One, over 60 percent of the world’s 20.5 million refugees today live in cities. Some choose to circumvent the camp system, hoping instead to find work in the city and start anew with their families. Others like the Rohingya and Afghan populations of India did not have a choice but to shift to cities because there were no border camps to speak of. No South Asian country has signed the 1951 Refugee Convention; therefore, UNHCR operates in South Asia at the behest of individual governments, often with a limited mandate and physical boundaries of regions they are not permitted in. UNHCR’s primary mandate in New Delhi is to determine who qualifies as a refugee through the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process and to register them as internationally protected peoples.

UNHCR’s current role in New Delhi creates an interesting dichotomy of humanitarian and governmental assistance between the refugee groups who are directly assisted by the Indian government (i.e. Tibetans, Chakmas, Bangladeshis, and Sri Lankans) and those urban refugee populations who received assistance from UNHCR, an international body operating in India. The
treatment of these two groups differs greatly. There are state and federal initiatives that protect refugees who are directly assisted by the government (e.g. Foreigners from Uganda Order 1972, Indo-Sri Lankan Accord, 1992 Memorandum of Understanding), as opposed to urban refugees whose protection is fully dictated by the extent of UNHCR’s influence within India. Historically, this relationship has been a tenuous one.

UNHCR is not officially recognized by the Indian state; they operate under the UNDP. After six years of absence an UNHCR office was reestablished in New Delhi in 1981 to begin registering India’s first wave of urban refugees from Afghanistan. Afghans were fleeing due to Soviet presence in Afghanistan, and given India’s positive relationship with Gorbachev the Indian administration did not want to deal directly with the refugee influx. Therefore, UNHCR was given the authority to assume responsibility for this population. Afghan migration peaked in 1993 when approximately 26,000 Afghan asylum seekers were admitted. A high percent of this first wave were Hindu and Sikh refugees from Afghanistan who have historic links to India (Obi and Crisp 2000: 3-10).

In the mid-1990s New Delhi was singled out as one of six cities carrying a caseload in the thousands of urban refugees (UNHCR 1997:4) A UNHCR commissioned case study in 2000 of New Delhi’s urban policy calls the New Delhi program “particularly problematic” (Obi and Crisp 2000:1). Generally, the issues raised in 1990 are the same challenges that UNHCR India faces today, namely, UNHCR is made to carry out an integration agenda in a country that is attempting to rid itself of its refugee populations. This is especially problematic for Muslim and African refugee populations due to pervasive Islamaphobia and xenophobia.

33 In 1968 a Branch Office was established in New Delhi, but shut down in 1975 following a fallout between UNHCR and India with regard to China’s entry into the United Nations (Chimni 1994:397, UNHCR 2000).
34 Here I am using asylum seekers and refugees interchangeably because Afghans, like the Chin and Rohingya from Myanmar, fled as asylum seekers initially, but eventually were given refugee status due to the large scale of arrivals. The distinction matters because legal status determines access to international and domestic resources.
The Urban Refugee Policy was revised in 2009; and in 2013 UNHCR’s evaluation team returned to New Delhi to determine the effectiveness of the revised policy. Both the landscape of New Delhi and the populations under its mandate had undergone vast changes. In 2000 UNHCR India was primarily serving Afghan populations, but in 2013 they were engaged in registering refugees from Myanmar (mainly Chin and Rohingya), Somalia, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Eritrea, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Morand and Crisp 2013:2). The relationship between UNHCR India and the central government became increasingly important to refugee protection.

Speculation about the precarious relationship between the UNHCR and the Indian state can be dated as far back as World War II and the initial Convention in 1951. As already mentioned, post-World War II, India viewed refugees as a European problem and did not find purpose in signing the Convention. Over the decades politicians and scholar alike have argued that India should not sign the convention due to its highly Euro-centric outlook. These same politicians and scholars also argue that India should have its own national refugee policy in order to ensure groups are not arbitrarily treated, as they assuredly have been. Human Rights advocate and lawyer, Ravi Nair states that UNHCR is tolerated today because India is attempting to secure a position within the UN Security Council; thus, they attempt to maintain a positive relationship with the UNDP offices (Sen 2003: 401; INCR01 2017).

UNHCR India has also had a rather uneasy relationship with UNHCR headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. This stems from UNHCR Geneva’s desire to limit its global expenditure, while UNHCR India insists on its need for more financial support and resources for their growing urban refugee populations (Obi and Crisp 2000:5). Refugees continue to flow through India’s porous borders into large cities that are not geographically near New Delhi, thus
depleting UNHCR India’s resources and expanding their need to build local humanitarian partnerships across the nation. Implementing Partners\textsuperscript{35} (IP) are necessary appendages of the UNHCR body that implement projects focused on refugee protection, self-reliance, and integration.

UNHCR-India operates across the nation, partnering with various local governmental organization, non-government organizations, religious institutions, private sector groups, and refugee communities themselves. I will focus on the three that operate in New Delhi and work specifically with the Rohingya at my field sites. In a sprawling urban space like New Delhi local organizations act as cultural consultants helping to navigate the city and urban culture. UNHCR India accepts bids annually from organizations vying for a contract to actualize the Chief of Mission’s goals on the ground. In New Delhi, there are three-contracted IP. The relationships IP (as an organization and as individuals) forge with Rohingya refugee communities directly impacts refugees experience of human security.

All three organizations struggle to address refugee issues because within their scope of responsibility are many different populations that are geographically scattered, with varying levels of education, linguistic ability, and with unique historical relationships with the state. Additionally, their task is challenging because they are charged with operationalizing elements of the Urban Policy such as capacity building and greater access to livelihoods, and this is particularly difficult to do in the capital city where the government administration is actively attempting to take away refugee freedoms.

\textsuperscript{35} An Implementing Partner (IP) is a governmental, inter-governmental, or non-governmental entity with which UNHCR enters into a sub-agreement to implement a project for UNHCR beneficiaries and which in principle brings additional local knowledge of their own to meet needs which would otherwise have to be met by UNHCR. (http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/excom/standcom/3ae68d0628/implementing-partners.html)
4.4 Implementing Partners in New Delhi

One of the three IPs is ACCESS, an entity responsible for building sustainable livelihoods; Don Bosco (BOSCO) aids refugees in education and health care; Social-Legal Information Centre (SLIC) is responsible for legal matters. The IPs are essentially the frontline advocates for UNHCR; their role is to monitor the protection UNHCR negotiates. UNHCR contracts an IP to help navigate the geography, language, culture, and laws of the host country.

Along with cultural knowledge, however, also comes cultural bias. In the case of India there is a national history of anti-Islamic sentiments and a socio-economic classism that is especially acute in urban spaces (Akerlof 1984; Johdka 2002; Perry 2003). Thorat and Attewell’s (2007) research finds that caste favoritism and social exclusion of Dalits and Muslims pervades even the most modern sectors of the Indian economy thus, foiling career-laddering prospects (4144). In this section I turn my attention to examining the effects of budget limitations, the state’s relationship to urban refugees and UNHCR, and how cultural perspectives frame refugee identity and human in/security. I use data from interviews and field notes to demonstrate that the complex position of the IP vis-à-vis the UNHCR and refugees profoundly affects urban refugeehood.

I begin with the case of Segura who called on the services of one of the IPs to help her with a problem. Segura is the only unmarried female entrepreneur at the Migrant’s Plot; in spite of the daily tribulations she faces since her husband left her and her two daughters years ago, she always wears a warm smile and greets me with a firm handshake— it is her way. She takes care of the family, including a sister who has recently joined her from Burma. One afternoon Segura was not smiling, she was crouched on the ground in front of her shop looking quite devastated, a young man from the camp sat with her in companionship. I asked if she was okay. Tears welled-
up in her eyes as she continued to sit in silence. I crouched down and sat in silence with her. After some time, I looked at the young man and asked if there was anything I could do and he simple said, “What can anyone do?” As I rose to take leave, she spoke.

Her 14-year-old sister had been kidnapped in the night by a 17-year old boy from the camp. He dragged her to another Rohingya settlement and paid elders to marry them around 3:00am. Once the ceremony was completed, he brought her back to camp, but to his father’s home, because she was now his wife. So just a few shanties away was her kidnapped sister. Without the protection of a husband, or the voice of a brother, Segura called the Indian police for help. The police came, but decided that the camp leaders should handle such cultural issues and left. Unfortunately, for Segura, the kidnapper was the son of one of the leaders, thereby shielding him from any sort of community repercussions.

She then called UNHCR who informed SLIC. Legal aid has been contracted to SLIC since 2001. SLIC is responsible for registration of new arrivals, assigning social workers for family assessments, reviewing applications for naturalization\(^\text{36}\), crisis response, educating local authorities on refugee rights, and litigating cases of child custody, matrimony, deportation, and detention. They have a special Rohingya Refugee Initiative in recognition of the group’s need for basic survival and protection across many cities and states in India (HRLN 2007).

I interacted with SLIC personnel least. Their basement-level offices are brimming with refugees and immigrants cuing to receive legal advice. My interviewee with the organization was very guarded, as I expect any high-stakes lawyer to be. I received the party line in regards to many questions, but interestingly, he paused at one point to emphatically state that of all the refugee populations he has worked with over the years, the Rohingya have not been treated fairly.

\(^{36}\text{In recent history naturalization has only been accessible to Afghan Sikh and Hindu refugees, and Tibetan refugees who were born in India between 1950 and the 1986 Citizenship (Amendment) Act that bars citizenship by birth.}\)
and that they deserve more support than they have received (INSR03 2017). This is a sentiment that has been repeated by many of the IPs. IPs are often caught between the demands of the UNHCR and the pleas of refugees. It is an emotionally exhausting job. I observed that IPs were viewed by Rohingya refugees as either ‘against us’ or ‘for us.’ Those who were ‘for us’ openly criticized the UNHCR and the process of refuge protection. Those who were ‘against us’ were more standoffish, even with me. They were not the ones who took the time to sit down, have a conversation, and learn the names of the refugees they serve. They did not treat the Rohingya like individuals. These attitudes leave an imprint on the Rohingya experience of belonging and acceptance.

The day after the kidnapping, a SLIC worker walked by Segura’s shop. Segura yelled “…and what about my sister?” The SLIC employee, a good ten feet away, slowed but did not stop: “The paperwork says she is 18.” Segura yelled, “She was confused. We put the wrong date on the forms.” The employee kept walking. The Rohingya often do not know their date of birth. The state of Myanmar did not document births and deaths, and culturally it is not common practice to record birth dates. In order to be counted as a separate household with the UNHCR young men frequently claim to be older, or unaccompanied minors may say they are older so they are treated as individual adults. Girls are listed as older so they can legally marry. In Rakhine, Rohingya girls are married after they begin their menses, around the age of 14. One Rohingya father told me that girls drain family resources, so it is best to get them married as soon as possible. I suspect this is the case with Segura’s sister; the girl was being primed for marriage, but to someone else. Based on the SLIC employee’s reaction, SLIC felt they could not take legal action since the girl was technically old enough to marry. Others in the community
asked why SLIC did not help correct her date of birth, or consider that she did not want to marry this man.

Three weeks later I sat at one of the shops across from a young man from BOSCO. BOSCO has served as the New Delhi education and health arm of UNHCR’s mission since 2002. They have four centers in Delhi, many of them initially sprung up in spaces where refugee communities had self-settled. Now, since those communities have moved to other space, some centers are too remote for refugee groups, like the Rohingya, to reach easily. BOSCO does, however, attempt to visit individual communities to hold nutrition and health courses, teach basic sanitation, speak out against gender-based violence, or run elimination of child marriage campaigns. They also come to teach Hindi classes to women and girls who do not leave the camp to attend classes at a designated BOSCO center due to childcare and cultural issues associated with women staying in the domestic sphere. It is far more difficult for women to learn Hindi than it is for men who spend a significant part of their days in the public sector engaged in employment activities.

The man from BOSCO fell into the ‘for us’ category. He said he was at the camp to teach about basic hygiene (I would soon learn, he was lying to me). He was eager to talk as he waited for the rest of his team to arrive. In front of a Rohingya crowd that had gathered around us he said that the Rohingya are hard-working and not lazy, like the Somalis. Also, Afghan refugees had property and businesses, and received Stipend Assistance (SA) from the UNHCR. They received 3,800 rupees per month, but the Rohingya receive nothing, and he thought that was wrong. He had been working for BOSCO for 2.5 years and felt BOSCO knew more about the populations than did UNHCR or SLIC. As he was disparaging his work colleagues, Rohingya
were gathering to listen, affirmatively nodding. He eventually left to conduct his workshop out of a Rohingya woman’s home. I followed.

BOSCO had been solicited by SLIC to conduct training on child marriage; he was not there to teach hygiene. I stood outside the already overflowing shanty to listen. He asked the crowd of women what a child was, and emphasized that young girls’ bodies and minds are not ready for the responsibility of marriage. He asked them how old a girl had to be to get married in India, and all the women shouted in unison, “18!”; they were well aware of this law. He asked if any girls at the camp had been married younger than 18. Women began answering with “no, we know the law,” “they don’t even know how to make proper chapatis,” and “nothing like that happens here.” Segura, exasperated, raised her voice: “Don’t lie! It happened to my sister. You let it happen.” Silence fell upon the crowd. The workshop continued. The young BOSCO employee of 28 did not know how to handle the situation, nor did he address Segura’s distress after the workshop.

These sequences of events exemplify the complex relationships within the humanitarian world between UNHCR, IP, and refugees. They are frequently pitted against one another. Misinformation, attitudes, and opinions become embedded in the minds of refugees, especially when they highlight a disparity of treatment between the Rohingya and other groups. For example, from 2015 to 2017, I have heard countless times about the lack of SA distribution to Rohingya widows and disabled persons. In my interview with a Policy Associate at UNHCR-India, I learned that the Rohingya and IP are not wrong; the UNHCR had purposefully not given SA to the Rohingya.

Fifteen years ago, when UNHCR began tending to the urban refugee population in India, they employed what is referred to as a ‘care and maintenance’ model. In 1992, with the fall of
the Najibullah regime in Afghanistan, thousands of Afghan refugees fled to India. Currently, there are over 9,000 Afghan urban refugees in India, 90% of them with Hindu or Sikh origins. Under the UNHCR mandate, as an urban refugee, the principle applicant is given 2,225 rupees a month and 750 rupees for each dependent for up to six months with special dispensation for widows, the disabled, the elderly, and large families (HRLN). The Burmese Chin who began arriving in 1995 total 5000-6000 in India. They too received a similar monthly SA package. The ‘care and maintenance’ model can incur high costs when confronted with an intractable refugee situation.

In the last few years the Indian system has gone form a 100% SA system to a 2-5% SA system. Currently they only provide SA to widows with children, or those who are living alone with no family support. Even then, assistance lasts for 3-6 months; it is not long term. At a time when UNHCR was not only scaling back the SA program, but also looking for new ways of shifting to a self-reliance model, the Rohingya population began arriving. “They are so disempowered that giving 800 rupees would not help” (INSR01 2017). Since the SA program was going to be phased out soon, UNHCR offered different resources instead, including skills training from ACCESS, or language training from BOSCO.

UNHCR’s 2014 report on Cash-Based Interventions (CBI) states their commitment to expanding the systematic use of CBI’s as mandatory; however, in 2017, UNHCR-India was attempting to eliminate cash based assistance due to a shortfall in funding at a time when urban refugee needs were skyrocketing (UNHCR 2016: 2). A 2014 Center for Global Development report identified over 200 resources and studies that evaluate the effectiveness of cash assistance to elevate poverty. Additionally, the report found that cash transfers were cheaper for humanitarian aid organizations to deliver, allowing 18% more people who could be helped at no
cost if the focus was on cash assistance versus alternative programming. Resource programs offered by the UNHCR in India have been criticized not because they are not useful resources, but because they are not necessarily accessible to all refugee groups and they would be more useful alongside cash assistance. In addition, unfortunately, urban refugee need for CBIs has not subsided. Refugee numbers continue to increase, as does the cost of living in New Delhi, thus placing a strain on UNHCR resources.

Refugees value participating in the market economy by buying fish at the market, versus attending a class on child marriage that trains them on how to behave, and signals that their culture-norms are not acceptable in this foreign land. Intangible resources do not give refugees the dignity of choice to participate in the market economy, or to build positive relationships within the community— in Chapter Six I will demonstrate that all of these things stimulate the micro-economy of their neighborhoods. A 2003 case study on urban refugees in Delhi stated that UNHCR India is

...poised between a government and a refugee population which are placing very different pressures on the organization. To compound the situation, relations between the New Delhi office and UNHCR's Geneva headquarters have come under strain - the former seeking additional resources to assist the urban refugee population, and the latter trying to control expenditures so as to limit the organization's global funding shortfall (Obi & Crisp 2003: 4-5).

The situation is no different today. The lack of sufficient funding for urban refugees is causing the regional mission to look toward alternative ways of supporting urban populations that may not be as effective. Refugees who are not aware of such funding constraints end up feeling frustrated and trapped within a system they think should be protecting them from the insecurity of abject poverty. The sudden deviation from ‘care and maintenance’ to ‘self-sufficiency’ has led to mistrust and feelings of dejection within the Rohingya community. Instead of rolling out a
self-sufficiency model across all programs, UNHCR-India switched with a particular population, thus making treatment inequitable from one group to the next. Additionally, IPs who spend the most amount of time with refugees see the disparity and their hearts are swayed by the poorer position of the Rohingya versus other populations. Rightly or wrongly, when they voice the conflict within themselves, they end-up confusing refugees and teaching them to mistrust the system.

The state’s disparate relationship to the various refugee populations also creates a sense of arbitrariness from one urban refugee group to the next. The Chin who also fled Myanmar due to similar forms of repression by the government arrived earlier and in slower progression to the Rohingya. According to human rights lawyer, Nandita Hakshar, there are approximately 30,000 Chin in India. Initially many of them arrived in Mizoram, a bordering state to Myanmar, as economic migrants. “The Chins are in a very good position, you know? They have good jobs. They are learning English. The Christian organizations take care of them” (INCR02 2017). After a long battle between Hakshar and the state in 1991 she was the lawyer who first convinced the Ministry of External Affairs to accept the Burmese as refugees and not just economic migrants, thereby allowing them access to the RSD process, international protections, and the possibility of resettlement. Lawyers lean heavily on the precedents she set to argue due process for refugee rights in India. Many in the 1990s were resettled to other countries like the Netherlands and Canada. Currently, resettlement out of India is virtually non-existent. If only 1% is ever resettled, India would have to shoulder the responsibility of either absorbing or negotiating repatriation efforts for the rest. Therefore, activists postulate that the state is sending a message to dissuade refugees from using India as a port to another country.
The Afghan populations are said to have close ties to family resources in Afghanistan and use those resources to jumpstart legitimate businesses in India. Afghans who are Sikh and Hindu have the ability to apply for citizenship. As opposed to the Rohingya in Delhi who live in slum settlements, the Afghan live in rented accommodations. Their quality of life is better and their access to government resources has a more direct path compared to other urban refugee populations.

The state’s relationship to the UNHCR also impacts livelihoods. During my time in India the livelihood process was contracted to an organization called ACCESS. From 2015-2017 their initiatives included vocational training, job readiness training, enterprise development training, business grant making, job placements, self-reliance advocacy for widows, and bank account assistance. Many Rohingya men spoke about an Electrician Training Workshop they attended in order to obtain a skill-set that would lead to a stable job with good pay. ACCESS began offering electrician training for which Rohingya refugees would receive a certificate and pay while training. Some Rohingya men said ACCESS offered 400 rupees a day while they trained, but they only ended up receiving 150 rupees a day (INDHZF18 2015). Another man said they were getting 250 rupees while training (INDHZF25 2015). Regardless of the training pay discrepancy, all Rohingya men I spoke with enjoyed learning a new skill. They were highly disappointed after training when they were not able to secure jobs. “They promised us jobs, but then nothing happened” (INDHZF18 2015). One man claimed that ACCESS said they would be employed 20 days out of the month and be earning 14,000 rupees a month. The Rohingya men have hung onto this “Electrician Training” narrative for two years. They were highly disappointed and deflated by learning a new skill and not being able to apply it for employment.

37 Since 2018 the Fair Trade Forum has been awarded the contract by UNHCR to implement a new livelihood development model.
At a workshop on Refugee [Self-] Support in New Delhi for Humanitarian actors I spoke informally with a high-level UNHCR manager who used to work for ACCESS when the electrician vocational program was rolled out. A private company in Gurgaon\(^\text{38}\) sponsored the program with intentions to hire refugees, but soon after learned placement was not possible without proper state documents. Formal sector companies required an Aadhaar Card (a resident ID card discussed further in Chapter Five) and a bank account. Urban refugees under the direct mandate of the UNHCR are unable to legally acquire either one of those, thus limiting their career advancement. The government looks the other way when refugees participate in the informal cash-economy, but shifting to the formal sector would require state recognition. The state is disinterested in creating ways for urban refugees to integrate. India views itself as a host country to refugees who should eventually return to their homeland.

Competing interests thwarted the genuine effort to bring economic security to Rohingya families by a private company in Gurgaon and by UNHCR. Even though UNHCR and IPs have moved onto other programs and issues, these types of failures have a lasting impact on refugee trust and participation in future programming. Humanitarian field employees subsequently view the lack of program participation by Rohingya refugees as them being ungrateful or lazy.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has identified refugee flows into India, the historical treatment of these groups, and the political responses that has laid a precedent for current urban refugees. In India, urban Rohingya refugee groups have no institutional autonomy under the UNHCR. The UNHCR’s mandate is severely restricted by the state and works in opposition to the UNHCR’s

\(^{38}\) Gurgaon is a city in Haryana state, not far from New Delhi. It has been dubbed the start-up capital of India with a bustling financial and industrial district that houses local offices for hundreds of Fortune 500 companies.
mission of refugee integration and protection. These fundamental differences cause a push-and-pull of rights and resources between the UNHCR and the state, leaving refugees confused about their own access to human rights and responsibilities as residents. Furthermore, India’s lack of interest in urban refugee populations, and heavy involvement with other historical movements, leads to arbitrary treatment pitting one population against another.

Urban refugee security in the Indian context is unique because of the historical relationship between India and the UNHCR. Also, India’s unique history with Islam and the conservatism of the current administration that wants to rid the nation of its non-Hindu immigrants, places Rohingya refugees, specifically, in a detrimental position. The historic treatment of refugee groups and urban refugees demonstrates that, if willing, the India government has the legislative power to be benevolent actors, but instead they are leaning towards a more hardline treatment of irregular migrants. Understanding the Rohingya predicament vis-à-vis other populations and organizations is important to this dissertation because it helps to frame the insecurity of Rohingya in the nation’s capital city.
Chapter 5

POLITICAL HUMAN IN/SECURITY

The calamity of the rightless is not that they are deprived of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, or of equality before the law and freedom of opinion-formulas which were designed to solve problems within given communities—but that they no longer belong to any community whatsoever. Their plight is not that they are not equal before the law but that no law exists for them; not that they are oppressed but that nobody wants even to oppress them.


I don’t even dream of better anymore, because I know it won’t come true. There are lots of things in people’s heart, but they are not educated and cannot even express it.

Rohingya Elder, age unknown
The concept of political human security (PHS) evolved from grounded theory (Charmaz 2000); the coding of interviews, participant observation, and field notes revealed a particular form of in/security that evolved from a legal identity prescribed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)—the refugee. In the context of refugee displacement, PHS is a person-centered political security created when migrants identify as refugees. The refugee identity not only makes each person a political body in relation to the state, but that relationship also informs his or her place within the larger international humanitarian framework, as well as interactions with local citizens. Legal identity becomes important in urban spaces when applying for jobs, sending children to school, or accessing health care. If a refugee lives in a camp, they have no need to produce an identity card that reveals one as a foreigner. Yet, in urban setting they are forced to show this form of identification repeatedly, making them a political body in the eye of those they interact with. It is a relational political identity that dictates the course of interactions in the city. For this reason, it is important to consider urban refugee displacement through a “political lens.” The social inclusion of refugees and management of refugee populations are political acts. Thus, even the simplest relationships (neighbor, friend, sales person) are guided by political nuance.

“Political” in this study is not simply defined as a relationship to the government. It is a more multifaceted because the Rohingya in New Delhi have a designated legal status as refugees. This identity allows them to exist, work, be educated, and, more generally, move throughout the city. This chapter demonstrates how the relationships refugees build in the city are tainted by their political identity and extend to all other relationships. For example, landlords evict Rohingya refugees in order to distance themselves from the political disharmony between the Indian government and Rohingya. These evictions were not informed by whether a Rohingya
is able to afford rent or be a good tenant. Rather, the landlord is fraught with fear of a meddlesome government due to a tenant’s legal status. Relationships with the Rohingya are generated, maintained, and influenced by such political factors. Additionally, geo-politics and concerns over national security have a direct bearing on the treatment of Rohingya refugees by the government and citizens. Through ethnographic data this chapter demonstrates that the Rohingya’s subjective experiences of a person-centered political security is relevant to understanding of what comprises this notion of PHI/S. Also, defining PHS more accurately will be useful to refugee protection agencies in identifying and responding to the elements of such insecurities.

5.1 India’s Political Climate

Despite international criticism, the Hindu conservatism of Modi and his administration has not declined since his election. In 2015, Jawaharlal Nehru University’s (JNU) leftist student group, the Democratic Student Union (DSU), organized an approved commemorative protest of the hanging of Afzal Guru and Maqbool Bhat for their Kashmiri separatist activities. The right-wing student group, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarshi Parishad (ABVP), successfully requested administrators block the protest. The DSU ignored the request citing citizens’ right to express Kashmir’s right to self-determination. JNU’s Student Union President, Kanhaiya Kumar, was arrested on sedition charges sending the entire city into protests. The BJP, and Modi directly, were criticized for bullying JNU. Students blamed the arrest on an intolerant Prime Minister. And professors spoke out accusing the BJP of imposing their conservative ideological views at an academic institution of higher learning (The Hindu 2016).
The May 2017 Beef Ban is another example of India’s renewed conservatism that engenders general feelings of insecurity for its Muslim citizens. Under this law, the sale and purchase of cattle for slaughter was banned across India. In June, three Muslim teenagers were attacked by a mob of twenty Hindu men claiming they were carrying beef. A 16-year-old Muslim boy died. Emboldened by Modi’s election to office, “Cow Protectors” have killed 10 people since 2015 and new cases are reported daily (BBC 2017; Safi 2018).

State discrimination of Muslims has permeated refugee treatment. In 2016, the BJP proposed a Citizenship Amendment Bill granting citizenship to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian refugees from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, thus increasing Hindu votership in Modi’s 2019 reelection (Kapur 2017). The BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) is not concerned about how such policies directly undermine India’s constitution, which upholds the democratic principles of human rights and secularism. If the bill becomes an act, Muslim refugees are left without protections that are afforded to members of non-threatening minority religions.

On October 3, 2017, the Indian Supreme Court heard a case that targets Rohingya refugees. Led by Home Affairs Minister, Kiran Rijuju, the case requested the deportation of all Rohingya from India due to national security concerns. Since, the Supreme Court has convened once a month for testimony from the state as well as from public interest activists and lawyer, Prashant Bhushan, represents two Rohingya leaders who filed for a stay of deportation (Aljazeera 2017). The Supreme Court is evaluating if deportation is in direct violation of Article 21 of India’s Constitution which states: “No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law” (India’s Constitution Article 21, 1950).

---

39 Such bans have been in place within particular districts or states, but never at the federal level until Modi’s administration came to power.
Additionally, deportation of peoples fleeing persecution is in violation of international customary law of nonrefoulement, which holds that states shall not return persons fleeing from persecution. If deportation is upheld, the international community, which has been silent in this matter, may weigh-in.

Political pundits, lawyers, and journalists whom I have spoken with have suggested the hearings are a way to create precarity for Rohingya refugees. It is a way to intimidate the Rohingya and create ill public opinion of them. Conservative newspapers and reporting certainly indicates that such tactics are working. Landlord began evicting Rohingya and day labor has been harder to come by.40

In personal informal communication, one reporter from Reuters said the government rhetoric in New Delhi feels much like the environment of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in New Delhi when approximately 3,000 Sikhs were killed in locally organized programs to protest the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards (North 2014). The Delhi Police were found to have colluded with the locals in this well documented massacre. The reporter’s point was to imply that the Rohingya are being taught a lesson, “they are being put in their place.” This suggests that even if they are not deported, their circumstance in India will be reduced.

5.2 Human Security Framework

The end of the Cold War led to a paradigm shift in the way international organizations, led by the West, viewed security (Acharya 2001; Paris 2001). It was a shift away from state and military constructs, such as a global arms race, to a person-centered form of human security that addressed the well-being of ordinary people. The concept of “human security” was popularized

40 In the capital city there is also a lot of local support from NGOs, outspoken university students, and general public of all faiths. An indication of such support can be seen in the unprecedented out-pouring of local support when an exclusively Rohingya refugee settlement completely burned down on April 15, 2018.
in 1994 with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report, which introduced it as a necessary policy framework. The report emphasized that human security “broadens the scope of security analysis and policy from territorial security to the security of people” (Gómez and Gasper 2013:2). The difference between human security and human development is that the latter is narrower in scope and does not include empowerment and security protections (Paris 2001). Human security is an umbrella concept that links different approaches such as development and human rights.

The UNDP utilized seven dimensions to ensure both “freedom from fear and freedom from want” (UNDP 1994:24). Chapter one presented the seven threats to security (1) economic insecurity, (2) food insecurity, (3) health insecurity, (4) environmental insecurity, (5) personal insecurity, (7) community insecurity, and (8) political insecurity (UNDP 1994: 25-33). This definition is framed by experiences prior to refugee flight, not what political insecurity looks like in a host country. My research examines political security of refugees in the host country. It isolates the political dimension specifically, using it as an overarching lens to understand the economic and community dimensions as well.

The human security concept has been widely criticized for its ambiguity. Ole Waever (2010) critically considers “security” as a concept. He observes, it is not useful to expand “the security realm endlessly, until it encompasses the whole social and political agenda” (Waever 2010:48). We should instead, transition to a people-centered security that focuses on social aspects such as economics, environment, cultural identity and rights. He also examines the very character of security. The traditional use of security, he argues, is a state security, and all other forms add to it. Security must be understood through the lens of national security because essentially, it is relational; the dynamics of individual and international security are in relation to
state security. “National security is fundamentally dependent on international dynamics” (Waever 2010:49). States protect their sovereignty in response to threat from other sovereign nations. So, we can speak of everyday security (i.e. economic or personal), but that is a semantic category. When we redefine security to address the everyday refugee experience, it must be done with the understanding that it is housed within a larger national security discourse. It is a political dialogue that necessitates the participation of international and national security regimes. A refugee’s human security cannot be separated from its political framing, thus making it a state security issue. They are within the protection space of the state; thus, their treatment, successes, and failures are the responsibility of the state. In India specifically, the international refugee regime’s presence holds the state accountable to basic levels of protection.

Waever (2010) asserts that security is not a thing; it is a process of securitization. I explore the character and process of political security, by examining a person-centered political security. How does individual refugee security relate to the state? As a refugee fleeing persecution, there is a giving of security by the state, and an acceptance of that security by the refugee. This “giving” in many host countries is viewed as a threat to the sovereignty of the nation. It was not a choice, but instead a responsibility, to take in thousands (in some cases millions) of migrants. This burden-sharing dynamic has created tension between the global north and south. Most refugees are hosted in the global south with financial support from the global north that falls short in the face of overwhelming population displacement. For the Rohingya in New Delhi, the giving and accepting of security is negotiated daily against a backdrop of a country increasingly becoming more conservative with immigration policies that is also discriminatory to its Muslim population.

In the 1990s, the UNHCR became more deeply involved in security politics,
demonstrated by the statement they were going to “bring safety to the people, not people to safety” (Hammerstad 2014:130). The current High Commissioner emphasizes *compacts*, or regional collaborations that share responsibilities. His speeches\(^{41}\) are littered with ways to manage refugee displacement via the Global Compact for Refugees that brings together state players and stakeholders to resolve host country issues more swiftly. As the global climate and leadership at the UNHCR changed, so too did the approach to refugee management. Geo-political factors affect whether a High Commissioner will focus her tenure on supporting refugees by zeroing in on their individual circumstance, such as the human security approach. Or if she will zoom out to support states and stakeholders to manage the refugee process, as Filippo Grandi has proposed with the concept of *compacts*. Each approach comes with its critics, challenges, and even successes.

Another major criticism of the human security framework has been the lack of specificity with regard to how it should be operationalized. The definition of human security is too ambiguous to be useful legally. Academics find the lack of a concrete definition equally frustrating. Paris (2001) demonstrates that some have embraced the ambiguity. State and intra-state level actors find it useful to create coalitions of liked minded powers. For example, Canada’s human security network views human security as something that should be used to eliminate physical violence, such as landmines. This is a different approach to what Acharya (2001) sees as a divide between the East and West. He suggests that in the East, there is an Asian-values centered approach that focuses on underdevelopment as a way to combat human insecurity.

Even though the UNHCR has steered away from the language of human security (the term does not appear in the Urban Refugee Policy documents), the UN family not only uses the

\(^{41}\) UNHCR’s website contains a searchable database comprised of all public addresses by High Commissioners since 1951.
concept, the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security established in 1999 is still active regionally. This fund has developed a guideline to measure the seven dimension of insecurity as an evaluation tool featured in The Human Security Handbook. In large part, these funds are used in developing areas of the Global South making it a relevant framework in conversations about South Asia (see Acharya 2001 and Farhan Navid Yousaf 2017).

In the early 1990s, and arguably still today, many Eastern governments viewed human security as a Western construct that promoted individualism, universal human rights, and liberal democracy (Acharya 2001; Chimni 1994). Some Asian governments believed that “the promotion of human rights should respect the communitarian ethos of Asian societies, founded upon an allegedly ‘society-before-the-self’ tradition” (Acharya 2001: 449). In opposition to the government view, Acharya (2001) argues that human security places a premium on dignity and that this does not have to go against protecting the existence of an entire social group. Furthermore, I would argue, governments in Asia are predominantly patriarchal in make-up and function. Thus, introducing a framework that promotes the dignity of women and children may, and should, disrupt hierarchical traditions of subornation.

Post-Cold War security demanded a more comprehensive security that was about the struggle for order, rather than the struggle for power. But for India, even after the Cold War, national security was important due to territorial issues at its borders. They were struggling to be a fully functioning nation-state. While other nations’ military expenditures fell after the Cold War, India’s continued to rise. Internally, India’s struggles include infant mortality, illiteracy, population growth, and gender discrimination. The UNDP proposed that human security was the goal to human development (Chari and Gupta 2003:3-13). India continues to invest in border security, development, and human security for their citizens.
It is important to examine how states and their refugees experience human security to understand its various expressions. Human security is no longer a buzzword for UNHCR; however, using the concept of a person-center security continues to allow researchers to bring the refugee’s daily experience into a useful light, as opposed to essentializing, or generalizing the refugee experience as homogeneous (Malkki 1995). This analysis is not categorized under the umbrella of political security; it must be within the realm of human security because it focuses on the individual person as opposed to international, national, or territorial concerns. It is a ground-up analysis that lends itself well to the methodology of anthropology. My deconstruction and reframing of the political in this case will be framed as *political human security* (PHS).

### 5.3 Defining the Political

*The Political City*

When considering a person-centered political security, what does such security look like? How does one measure an individual’s feeling of political security? What does it consist of? Things such as legal status, attitudes of state employees define the political, or access to democratically held tenants. I use Atlas TI, a qualitative software coding system, to identify patterns of what I came to categorize as PHS through lived experiences relayed to me by Rohingya refugees, interviews with state and community representatives, and field notes. I use three categorizes of experiences that demonstrate ways that we might estimate a person-centered political in/security. Through analysis of these general categories I was able to isolate political factors that serve as a catalyst to in/security. This study does not make any claims to define PHS in correlation to rights due to refugees. It simply brings to the foreground how political forms of insecurity and security are produced in an urban setting.
In a post-Westphalian world where everyone exists within a nation-state, an urban refugee is subject to the limits of a host country’s hospitality, be it manufactured by cultural traditions or laws. In the case of India, the Rohingya are subject to the limits of the central government and its reach. Nation-states can either view themselves as partial or impartial to their responsibilities to foreign populations in their territory. The partial view states that the primary responsibility of the state is to its own citizens; therefore, they should behave in a manner that puts citizens’ needs above and beyond those who do not have legal status. In the impartial point of view, states have a humanitarian responsibility to all, regardless of legal status (Gibney 2004: 19-59). India’s constitution (Article 4) extends a humanitarian impartial approach to all who are in its territory. The Modi’s administration, the military, and the state police, however, have been known to act against such policy with regard to Rohingya refugees, which represents partial treatment of foreigners. PHS can only be achieved to the extent that the state itself applies its own democratic principles on their land.

Because the Rohingya are protected by the UNHCR they have a special legal status, but they do not have residential status with the state itself. They are technically illegal immigrants. The lack of national refugee laws allows the state to arbitrarily carry out the wishes of the administration. For example, in 2017 Rohingya Muslim refugees were targeted for deportation while other groups such as the Chin or Afghan populations were unaffected. In such an environment, urban refugees are left to carve a space for themselves in a city.

Rohingya refugees have self-settled in organized groups at the edges of the city. According to the latest Economic Survey of Delhi their rural areas are slowly disappearing. The urban center contains 97 percent of its population. Here, Lefebvre’s (1964) work on “Rights to the City” is a valuable framework for understanding urban centers like Delhi that have a high
volume of migrants. Lefebvre argues that urban spaces are not simply for consumption and exchange but that they are places of “production and the relations of production,” and that a right to the city is “the right not to be excluded from centrality and its movement” (Lefebvre 2003: 47,150). He argues that there is a dichotomy in space production, the *concrete* and the *abstract*. The *concrete* is where one has a connection to customs, symbols, and memory. In urban areas this *concrete* space is exchanged for *abstract* space. *Abstract* space is a conferred space that is run by contractual law negotiated by the state. Individuals subscribe to an urban contract by merely existing in the space; therefore, the space urbanism creates is political (Lefebvre 2003:47-180). Urban refugees thereby are doubly politicized because they inhabit the city as abstract inhabitants and as internationally bodies, without a voice in regards to the “contract.” Furthermore, their exchange of their *concrete* space in Myanmar, for the *abstract*, in India, was forced upon them. In this manner the space urban refugees occupy is a politically negotiated space.

*The Political Body*

Refugees become politicized bodies due to both their political identity in the city and their treatment by the UNHCR. UNHCR approaches refugee aid apolitically, thus not dealing with the complex histories and dubious nature of what caused their flight. The UNHCR deems itself an apolitical organization in the business of refugee protection. Their goal, no matter one’s history, creed, ethnicity, etc. is to provide protection and safety to those fleeing persecution. Thus, Rohingya refugees, like most others, become an ahistorical people who are defined only by their refugeehood. Malkki calls this loss of history a “floating world” that is “beyond or above history” (Malkki 1995:518). In an attempt for equity, the refugee regime strips refugees of the
dignity to be individuals, and instead essentializes their experiences as a homogenous one. Their identity as refugees makes them highly managed politicized bodies within the refugee framework. They are defined by both the refugee identity attributed to them by the international refugee regime as well as their illegal immigrant status in India. Their histories and identities are unwittingly exchanged for protection.

Another way that apoliticalism has been conceptualized within the refugee context is by what Giorgio Agamben (1998) referred to as bare life. In Agamben’s concept he cites the treatment of Jewish refugees in camps as being stripped of bios, or their political life within society, thus left with only their animal life, zoe, making them easier to expel (Arendt 1958). Many scholars have utilized Agamben’s “figure of the refugee” as an attempt to understand refugeehood. While I do not think any of his whole concepts apply to the urban refugee experience, there are familiar aspects of his work that are useful to frame the Rohingya situation in New Delhi.

In my application, the Rohingya are not completely stripped of their political life. Instead, bios is redirected within society to produce refugees as lesser beings thus creating the conditions for bare life. In its most harmful form, bare life conditions manifest as an othering of the Rohingya to such an extent that they are made expendable by the state. An example of this are the recent deportation threats by the state of all Rohingya refugees, whereby the state alongside conservative media outlets created a national movement condemning Rohingya as a national security threat. This rhetoric changed the way regular citizens, employers, and landlords treated the Rohingya. They were no longer individuals, but instead they were a collective threat to the state.

---

42 For Agamben Homo sacer and bare life are not the same; Homo sacer is someone who has been forcibly reduced to bare life by sovereign powers, thus leaving the control and management of their bodies to the sovereign, which is the idea of the biopolitik.
Agamben (2005) calls the refugee camp a “state of exception” that is both internal and external to the law. The refugee does not benefit from the full rights extended by the law, but she is made to live within the laws of the host country. Scholars have argued for (Turner 2005, Diken 2004) and against (Owen 2009; Ramadan 2012) Agamben’s concept of refugee agency within camps. But how are we to understand the political body of urban refugees, who “are included in the legal order through their constitutive exclusion” (Owen 2009: 572)? The fact that they are excluded speaks to the precarity of their position within the state. Rohingya refugees in New Delhi have the right to work in the informal sector, to move around the city, and to reside in India as internationally recognized beings. They are protected by their international political identity, placing them in a supra-political order, somewhere above the state order of things. Because the state does not recognize them as legal immigrants, they are in a floating state of exception. This floating state does not necessarily strip them of political belonging rather it helps define it.

Refugees in New Delhi are not placed in a physical “state of exception” because they are not relegated to monitored camps. In the city, Rohingya live in refugee exclusive settlements, mixed migration settlements, and rented accommodations. They are interspersed among the Indian population. Because they are not separated from Indian nationals physically, they are not necessarily excluded from access to activities of regular citizens. The floating state of exception is a political identity the refugee wears as he moves about the city that sometimes protects, sometimes exposes, and one that he occasionally hides for his own benefit—it is not an identity that is shed easily. For example, when employers ask for a form of identification the Rohingya produces his refugee ID card. It is this political identity that facilitates the interaction. At health

---

43 Here Owen does not make a distinction between the camp and urban refugee, she is speaking more generally. However, I will go on to demonstrate how the political ordering of urban refugees in New Delhi is distinct from a border camp.
clinics, she shows her refugee ID cards thus reproducing refugeeness. The constant production of a refugee identity, even with simple transactional exchanges, is also the production of a precarious political identity. This political identity creates security and insecurity within the city as they live and work among regular citizens and interact with state representatives. Thus, their daily interactions produce a politically defined human in/security.

The difference between the bare life experienced in a highly-regulated camp versus the setting of urban refugees is that the inclusivity is based on their right to the city⁴⁴, a space they have carved out for themselves. And the exception is regulated by their lack of a state-level legal status. Instead, a refugee ID card guides their identity. The ID card is the cloak they wear in urban contexts. It provides rights and freedoms as well as boundaries that keep them separated from Indian nationals. There are exclusions to their privilege that create a barrier to full social integration. In addition to the refugee ID card, below I demonstrate how the lack of a state ID (Aadhaar card), and the limits to democratic principles also serve to produce PHI/S.

5.4 Experiencing Political Human Security

Below, I use semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and field notes to demonstrate how PHI/S is produced. The first demonstrates the use of the refugee ID card among Rohingya attempting to retain employment and education in the city. The second is an example of how the lack of a state-level ID produces insecurity. And the last example demonstrates the boundaries of PHI/S for the Rohingya.

⁴⁴ Lefverbe Rights to the City 1964
The Refugee ID Card

Once a refugee passes the Refugee Status Determination process she is given an identification card she must carry at all times in India. State actors, such as public school administrators, have been trained by the UNHCR to recognize this ID. Refugees share accounts of exploitation by employers when divulging this identity:

The salary I earned at the tobacco company was good, but the work made me sick. Here I like the work, but the salary is not good. For a while I did kabadi [scavenging] work and was promised 7,000 rupees, but they kept 2,000 rupees; I never got paid in full. They did this only to the refugee cardholders. They made us get used syringes, baby bottles, wash them and resell them to small shops. (INDHZF12 2015)

This Rohingya man recounts not only how the refugee identity subjected him to lesser pay, but it also gave the employer license to use his labor for the illegal work of reselling unsanitary and potentially hazardous items.

I worked for seven months at a Maruti car company making hardware. They were new so they needed a lot of labor, but then the Hindustanis came and the refugees were fired. I was supposed to make 12,000 rupees, but they gave me 6,700 and kept the rest because I am a refugee. (INDHZF18 2015)

“I’m sorry I’ve been busy the past 5 days; I’ve been doing Access [UNHCR Implementing Partner contracted to assist with refugee livelihoods] electrician training-- after 3 months I get a job-- they teach us then they find us a job, 20 days a month. Access gives certificates; 22,000 or more for the best, 14,000 for the not so good. But refugees only get 14,000. Indians get 22,000.” (INDHZF24 2015)

Pay disparity is a common theme in accounts given by refugee men in the New Delhi day labor force. Day laborers are part of the informal work sector. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), over 80% of employees in India work in the informal sector. This exposes
employees to arbitrary pay, exploitation, unsafe work conditions, gender bias, etc. For refugees, these exposures are more pronounced because they are viewed as exploitable foreigners who do not belong, thus adding an additional layer of precarity to refugees’ employment situation.

Perceived, or otherwise, there are many accounts of refugees being paid less than India nationals for the same labor. ILO reports also indicate the need for higher education to draw informal labor into the formal economy. “Those who have completed secondary and tertiary education are less likely to be in informal employment compared to workers who have either no education or completed primary education” (ILO 2018). In Myanmar, for decades Rohingya were systematically isolated from secondary and higher education, making madrasa instruction the main form of learning. Although refugees are granted permission to attend public schools in India, they face challenges due to either discrimination or ignorance of local administrators:

Researcher: So, does everybody here go to one school?
EIMAMW01: No, no… three-four schools.
R: And you have an arrangement with all the principals?
E: Not everyone is equal. Not everyone understands our perspectives. Some of them do. Some accept our cards since they believe that one shouldn’t destroy a child’s life but some say that our cards are from outside and why should they register us at all. (EIMAMW01 2017)

Some public-school administrators recognize their status as refugees while others do not. It all depends on the patience, ethics, and willingness of the person they stand before. In Delhi, as oppose to other cities it is a bit easier to negotiate this identity because the local community has been impacted but the UNHCR and refugees for thirty years.

These examples collectively demonstrate the insecurity that their international identity produces. Rohingya refugees find that using this ID card can produce an opportunity for employment exploitation. More difficult to manage is the fact that the UNHCR ID card produces
arbitrary treatment, thus the refugee never quite knows when to wear their *floating* refugee identity.

_The Aadhaar Card_

The Aadhaar program is the world’s largest digital identity program implemented by a national government. Launched in 2009 it is a twelve-digit random number tied to an individual’s fingerprint, iris scan, and photograph. Slowly, access to particular government regulated sectors requires an Aadhaar card, such as opening a bank account. Additionally, the Aadhaar system is now linked to the education system. School past the tenth standard requires an Aadhaar card. The Aadhaar system is reserved for inhabitants who reside in India for more than 182 days. It is not documentation of one’s citizenship— that is not the intent yet, many locals treat the Aadhaar system as being reserved for nationals (Abraham et al. 2017).

The purpose of the Aadhaar system is unclear. There are many uses of the card that are actively challenged in the Supreme Court, including linking it to private medical records. However, the government continues to promote its use pushing citizens and private companies to link Aadhaar to various services. It is not yet clear if refugees are allowed to have one. But clearly the Aadhaar system restricts their access to various programs and causes locals to treat them as foreigners. The following are examples from my field notes:

Meena with UNHCR worked with Access for two years. I asked about the electrician-training program and she said that was sponsored by a company in Gurgaon. But placement thereafter was not possible without proper documents. Many companies require an Aadhaar card or a bank account for direct deposit. Refugees are unable to acquire either one of these, thus limiting their access to the formal economy (Field Notes, May 30, 2017).
I learned today, from Noor, that 15 kids attend the government school between the ages of 6-14. The principle has allowed them to sit-in for six weeks until their Aadhaar cards comes in…which they never will (Field Notes, June 5, 2017).

Daily access to employment and education is becoming challenging, as Aadhaar cards increasingly determine access to various services. Aadhaar cards are not supposed to be used to demonstrate citizenship yet; they are being used to create political exclusion. Refugees are not certain if they are legally allowed to possess one, but obtaining one is not difficult. Some refugees fear obtaining will endanger them.

They [Rohingya community] had a meeting last night at midnight. The community decided to destroy any Aadhaar cards in the camp for fear of how it would be perceived if found. They are technically not even allowed to have SIM cards, let alone Aadhaar cards. Mohammed said they want to get rid of anything perceived as negative (Field Notes, September 22, 2017).

Researcher: So, the job you have now is only because of the Aadhaar card you think?
EIMADH03: [Yes,] because of the Aadhaar card. I am afraid. I am living in fear, like I did in Burma. Some days the police will come and ask, ‘why did you make an Aadhaar card?’ They will catch me and take me, that is my fear. R: Hmm, and it seems that a lot of people here have Aadhaar cards? Did you have one made as well?
E: I got it made. I got it made only for the job. No one has job here. I got it made. One man came here, like ‘Bhaiya [brother] will you get an Aadhaar card made? It'll cost 500 rupees.’ So, I gave 500 rupees and got it made… I am educating my girl in Bhogal, I am educating three children-- there is a lot of expenditure. On top of that mummy, no one is letting mummy-papa move, they are not being able to eat, for them I have to send money. What do I do? I got it made. No one has it, you are seeing, coming every day. No one, only Usman has it, Usman and I have it. From this job I am running my family. (EIMADH03 2017)

Both these accounts demonstrate the fear Rohingya refugees have of carrying an Aadhaar card. They understand that it opens opportunities for their families, but are not certain about the legality of possession. UNHCR India has attempted to join the conversation about Aadhaar to make refugees an eligible class within the system, but the government could also use this system
to further exclude them from state services. The Aadhaar card, whether intentionally or not, has become a form of membership in India. This particular form of PHIS is produced by the state’s lack of consideration of refugees’ functionality in the city.

**Democracy**

PHS can also be applied to more abstract principles, such as democracy, narrowly defined. Without engaging in the long-standing debates of whether India is a liberal democracy or not, it does have a liberal constitution and a judicial system that abide by basic democratic principles. So, do Rohingya refugees in New Delhi have access to the basic tenants of democracy like, freedom of speech, freedom of movement, access to education, access to the judicial system, access to health care, and to livelihoods? The answer is yes, but within certain limits. Since 2012 Rohingya refugees have organized many protests. My interlocutors could not tell me exactly how many because the community is not united in such efforts. Some examples include a 2012 protest/sit-in outside UNHCR offices demanding a space to live and better resources, 2013 and 2017 protests outside the Myanmar Embassy demanding human rights for the Rohingya living in Rakhine, and a 2017 protest demanding stay of deportation.

Access to education, the judicial system, freedom of movement, health care, and livelihoods are all principles that the UNHCR advocates for in the city. In New Delhi, these freedoms exist to a certain extent for Rohingya refugee; however, if they move to rural areas, or spaces where UNHCR is not a familiar agency, their ID cards do not serve refugees well. And even in the city they contend with conservative government officials who attempt to thwart their voices. Below are accounts of how democracy is experienced by two Rohingya men:

---

45 The regular Indian citizen also has access to such right within limits. There seems to be a pecking order for rights in India. Hindu Indian men of a higher socio-economic class enjoy full rights, Hindu women less so, Muslims and Christians less than the above, and migrant, refugees, lower castes even less so.
Researcher: Okay, so here in India, do you have any Indian community members that help you?
EIMADH03: In India it is, we people, it is like I feel like here it is heaven on Earth. Why so? Wherever you want you are able to go, there is no one to ask, the police is also not so dangerous. Like, I am earning peacefully. I am living in a slum, there is no problem, at least with my wife and children I can live with ease, with dignity [aaraam se, iijat se reh paarahaa huu]. That is what I like. There is no one to disturb. There are no bad people.
R: And how about the police, do they harass you, or do they help you? How do they react to you?
E: If I fight with someone they will harm me! If I stay peacefully, I am not fighting, I am not getting involved in anything bad then the police will not say anything. There is no complaint about the police, but the Indian law is also good ma'am, as in, the government thinks a lot about the public, a lot. Like, for us, there is no help from the government that's not an issue, help is not even required, we work hard and are able to spend life with my wife and children. That is what I like. (EIMADH03, June 11, 2017)

Here, he is talking about the welfare services that the government provides its citizens. This system is not accessible to refugees but he does not mind. Many Rohingya speak about the peace they feel living in India, as opposed to Myanmar. While they may not have full access to the human rights due to them, as inhabitants in a democratic nation most are happy to settle for a temporary shelter with physical peace that they are not accustomed to.

EIFEDH18: Here, it’s good. Police do not arrest when we go out on road but in Burma, if we go like this, Police would capture, take us to the police station and beat. (EIFEDH18 2017)

Here one Rohingya woman commends India for providing safety from physical harm from the state police, as opposed to what she experienced in Burma.
Conclusion

In conclusion, for refugees in the city PHI/S can be informed by an international identity, the lack of a state identity, and by how inclusive governmental tenets are in including refugees. Other examples in later chapters include refugee economies and social networks. However, these three examples serve to demonstrate how the interaction between politicized refugee identities and regular Indian citizens can produce PHI/S. The Rohingya’s subjective experience of political security is developed through such interactions. The following chapter will highlight how their political identity as refugees also informs their sense of community security. Their legal status provides refugees access to political security, but does it give them a sense of belonging? Community security specifically addresses ways in which the Rohingya build a sense of belonging. They either embed themselves more deeply within their Rohingya identity, or they reach beyond their Rohingya community to access resources in a cosmopolitan city that allows them to grow through education and by building social capital.
Chapter 6
COMMUNITY HUMAN IN/SECURITY: LEADERSHIP, GENDER, AND EDUCATION

The first loss which the rightless suffered was the loss of their homes, and this meant the loss of the entire social texture into which they were born and in which they established for themselves a distinct place in the world. This calamity is far from unprecedented; in the long memory of history, forced migrations of individuals or whole groups of people for political or economic reasons look like everyday occurrences. What is unprecedented is not the loss of a home but the impossibility of finding a new one. Suddenly, there was no place on earth where migrants could go without the severest restrictions, no country where they would be assimilated, no territory where they could found a new community of their own.


I don’t do much work here. I used to take care of kids and cooked. My husband does outside work. I only stay at home. I could roam around the camp the whole day, but I don’t go out there. It’s troublesome because of the heat and sun.

We don’t easily get vegetables here. We get some, but we have to pay money. It was available there in the grassland but we have to buy it here. God knows what will happen. Our lives are like this. Only god knows what will happen to our kid’s lives.

What will happen to our lives? I don’t know. You tell me, for how many years we have to stay here? There’s no peace. We have nothing of our own here, own house, own land, own anything.

Mariam, age unknown
This chapter introduces various forms of community in/security informed by urban refugee displacement. These in/securities are formed within the context of displacement and adjustment into a host country where refugees have a precarious legal status. Community security is defined by UNDP as “addressing protection against the breakdown of communities” (UNDP 2009:13), but this definition is limited. Amit (2002) discusses how social science has theorized “community” over several decades. She argues that the use of the word community was not as common in the 1930s and 1940s (vis-à-vis the works of E.E. Evans-Pritchard or Margaret Mead), and only gained greater usage once anthropologists began examining populations that had shifted to cities, essentially sub-units of populations within a wider cultural context (Amit 2002:2-21). Community was no longer tied to a locality, but “could be extended to virtually any form of collective cultural consciousness” (Amit 2002:6). The complexity of the city and symbolic boundedness brings complexity to the idea of refugee displacement and deterritorialization (Appadurai 1996). If we are to examine the security of community, what is it that is being secured? The following sections of this chapter demonstrate how the Rohingya claim space, protect their leadership structure, and stay connected with Rohingya groups across New Delhi to secure and define a sense of community.

In displacement, the traditional structure of a community is disrupted and re-organized to resemble the traditions of the homeland. It may contain elements of the home country, like language and religious traditions, but the process of re-organizing also restructures notions of identity and future ambition. Displacement has changed Rohingya social organization in terms of leadership, family planning, education, and civic engagement. These changes do not make them any less of a “Rohingya community,” but instead point to how securing one’s survival pushes the boundaries of a collective cultural consciousness. How do displaced populations secure cultural
traditions and build a sense of community in a culturally diverse urban setting? This is the primary question driving this chapter.

6.1 Claiming Space

Place, space, and physical settlement function to provide a sense of community security. Agencies like the UNHCR bring safety to displaced populations by creating safe zones, like the refugee camp. These camps have been theorized by scholars as “spaces of exception” within the state, protecting non-citizens who have crossed international borders (originally Agamben 2003; also considered by Malkki 1995; Tuastad 2016; Turner 2015). It is a bounded space where bodies are treated by international regimes to provide humanitarian and legal aid. Corbet (2015) asks: what is the refugee’s subjective experience of the aid they receive and the space they live? This question is especially important when considering self-settled refugees in the city. Rohingya refugees at the Migrant’s Plot live in a self-described “camp;” however, it falls outside of the legal prevue of the UNHCR because it is not a “formal” or “regulated” camp managed or maintained by the UNHCR (Corbet 2015:167).

Refugee camps are segregated spaces, sometimes physically and at other times symbolically. They are built at the borders of countries, and other times near cities. At “open camps,” refugees may come and go. In “closed camps” inhabitants cannot leave without permission from camp authorities. Occasionally, camps are fenced as a way of protecting inhabitant, and at times the host country required they be closed as a way to regulate refugee-integration. Camps were initially created after WWII as a transitory space, but camp be occupied for decades. Refugees await one of UNHCR’s three durable solutions to take effect: integration into the host country, repatriation back home, or resettlement to a third country.
Unfortunately, in most cases, camps have become protracted refugee settlements, embedded into the landscape of towns and cities. Some spaces like Dadaab and Kakuma camps in Kenya have turn into mini-cities housing over 85,000 refugees (de Montclos and Kagwanja 2011; Kibreab 1993) or camp Mae La in Thailand which houses nearly 37,000 refugees according to the Thai/Burma Border Consortium. Refugees are thought of as apolitical recipients of aid, but their existence in a defined space hosted by the state, and managed by an international agency (UNHCR), makes their spaces deeply political, or as Turner calls it a hyper-politicized space (Lecadet 2016; Turner 2015).

Scholars have also challenged the morality of camps. It has been argued that camps are morally problematic because they inhibit people from participating in the regular world (Parekh 2014; Verdirame and Harrell-Bond, 2005). The pragmatism of encampment to protect and delivery aid becomes overshadowed by the length of time refugees are essentially confined to liminality. In some cases, refugees have organized to protest UNHCR’s decision-making processes to simply ensure they have a voice in determining their future. Issues of movement, politics, and morality are also present in unregulated camps, or self-settled communities of refugees.

Urban refugees⁴⁶ who arrive in cities through clandestine means must find their own shelter. The 1997 Urban Refugee Policy (and its subsequent revisions in 2003 and 2009) does not take responsibility for finding refugees housing. The extent of their participation is to educate landowners about refugee legal status so landlords feel more comfortable renting to refugees. They do not financially support rental agreements.

---

⁴⁶ It is important to note that an urban refugee within refugee studies and international refugee regime is not simply a refugee living in an urban space. For clarity, in this dissertation urban refugee refers exclusively to those who fall under the mandate of UNHCR’s Urban Refugee Policy. Resettled refugees who live in cities like Dallas or Los Angeles are not urban refugees because they have been resettled by legal means and are part of a durable solution. Refugees living in urban camps are regarded in the literature as “urban refugees” but they do not fall under the Urban Refugee Policy under UNHCR.
Urban refugees create community security by finding a way to emplace themselves with regard to physical space, and also temporally. Over time, the Rohingya at the Migrant’s Plot added value to their space and improved their shanties, becoming even more embedded in the physical settlement. Below I discuss how the Rohingya came to the Migrant’s Plot, and how they have, over the span of five years, engaged in building both community security and insecurity through their social structure. This structure affects gender roles, children’s education, and marriage practices.

Claiming space in the city is difficult. Burgeoning urban spaces need migrant-laborer to sustain growth, but at the same time they push migrants to live on the outskirts of its design. The displaced are “affected by and engaged in the process of urbanization” (Crisp et al. 2012: S23). Livelihood prospects attract rural migrants and refugees to the city, but land is usually at a premium in cities. As a result migrants find themselves sleeping in insecure locations (under bridges), in other public spaces, or pushed to peri-urban areas along the edges of the city. Peri-urban spaces are often uninhabitable land along highways, on steep slopes, or flood plains with little access to electricity, water, and other resources for dignified living (Crisp et al. 2012). In the literature they have also be conceptualized as “rurbanization” districts (Corbert 2015) where cities that were unable to welcome migrants push them to slums just outside the city center.

The Rohingya were pushed to the outskirts of the city. Thousands arrived en masse to New Delhi in 2012-2013. After some months of living under bridges, unfamiliar with the city and its language, 3,000-3,500 Rohingya protested in April of 2012 outside of UNHCR offices in Vasant Vihar. Vasant Vihar is a rather affluent neighborhood. The residents were not happy with 3,000 refugees loitering on their pristine streets for 15 days. Large trucks were hired by the
UNHCR to move the protestors to Vasant Kunj, approximately five kilometers south of the
UNHCR offices. There they continued to protest for another 30 days.

The Rohingya demanded a status change from “asylum seeker” to “refugee,” which
affords them more benefits, like access to education and healthcare. One leader, Hasan, said they
noticed that other groups “like Buddhists [Burmese Chin], Somalis, and Afghans have refugee
status.” According to Hasan:

We got a lot of media attention. Students from JNU [Jawaharlal Nehru
University] also came to raise their voices in support of us, saying, ‘why aren’t
these people given the rights they should be given?’ People from the Indian
community came to help us. Also the [Charitable Foundation of Delhi (CFD)]
came there to visit us so I had their phone number.

Some people [Rohingya] had come from Jaipur, some from Mewar, some from
Hyderabad, some from Jammu, Aligarh, Saharanpur, and other places. We were
around 3000-3500 people. So, when all the people were taken away in vehicles
[from Vasant Vihar], they left us in different locations. Then, I called the
[Charitable Foundation] and they said ‘we have a vacant plot of about 1100 gaz
which can accommodate 50 families so you can go there.’ So we came here.
People who live here [at the Migrant’s Plot] are not from one, but from different
villages. When I came, I called 50 families via phone. So now we are living here
since 2012.

Rest of the Rohingyas went to different locations. Some went to Jammu, those
who came from Hyderabad went back to Hyderabad, those who came from
Saharanpur went back to Saharanpur, like this, so people went back to their
respective places.

After a day or two they began to build attached jhuggies, or shanties, at what came to be
called the Migrant’s Plot. The camp is a settlement of exclusively Rohingya refugees. It is a
stone’s throw away from other individually constructed jhuggies that house mixed migrant
populations. The Migrant’s Plot is donated by CFD. CFD also provided materials (tarpaulin,
bamboo, and scrap boards) and dug five hand pumps for fresh water. In addition to living space,
prayer room, and community center, in 2017 a CFD office was constructed in a space of 1,100
gaz (100 square yards). Over time the number of families living on the Plot has fluctuated from
45-50. Some families move out, others move in, others establish neolocal residence after
marriage. How residents are determined will be discussed in the following section on leadership.

Acquiring the Migrant’s Plot was the first step in establishing community security. It was
a Rohingya exclusive space where they were free to practice their traditions and religion. This
space is not regulated by CFD or UNHCR; however, they self-identify their space using the
English words “refugee camp.” This gives the Rohingya a certain level of visibility in the
domestic and international humanitarian sector. It quickly became a quasi-autonomous space
mirroring the attributes of democracy found in India. Pettet (2015:211) argues that the role of the
host country should not be discounted in understanding the political life of camps. In Benin,
Togolese refugees desired representation and participation with the state and UNHCR leading
them to elect a president by majority vote at the camp. “According to the refugees… the camp
was to become a utopian realization of the democracy that they had been refused in Togo”
(Lecadet 2016:189). I believe it is this same desire for democracy that compelled the Rohingya
to hold elections at the Migrant’s Plot. It is this dimension of creating further structure in the
informal “camp” that I discuss in the next section, a section that explores issues of leadership,
education, gender, and youth organizations—all of which contribute to community in/security.

6.2 Leaders They Fear, Leaders They Trust

There are three official leaders at the Migrant’s Plot. They became leaders through an
election process of raising hands in 2013. Since, there have been no re-elections. In fact, all the
settlements in New Delhi have three male leaders. The community itself, Implementing Partners
(IP), and even CFD, all take credit for having introduced this democratic system of voting for an odd number of leaders to settle disputes through majority rule. It is difficult to know the system’s origins and while the initial election may have been democratic, there are no term limits to office. This makes the unchallenged leaders very influential over time. When asked about the responsibilities of camp leaders, two men stated the following:

So, they [the leaders] are the ones who distribute anything which we receive [donated items], they are the ones who represent us if they have to go for any meetings [with the UNHCR] or anything like that, but there is no division of labor amongst them. (EIMADH05 2017)

Suppose there’s some fight in the camp, they need to handle it; they have to talk to the police if they come here; they have to talk to people who come from UNHCR; to talk to people who come from outside to ask something- these are the jobs of a leader. (EIFEDH23 2017)

Electing leaders who are the spokesmen for the community absolves the rest of the inhabitants of such responsibility. This is an advantage for newly arrived refugees who are not familiar with India culture, law, or language. Leaders shield the rest of the community from the outside world. Distributing donations, and being the spokesmen for the community are the official roles of leaders. They assume unofficial responsibilities as well.

Leaders allocate space at the camp and determine household membership. The decisions leaders make can have drastic consequences for individuals. One widow was open about being bullied by leaders. She implicated all three. She said the leaders are jealous of widows due to the attention and donations they receive. The leaders merged her household with her mother so now they receive less. The mom wants to be considered as a head of her own household so that she can receive her own portion of donated goods. She feels she is in a precarious position because
culturally elders live with their sons, not their daughters. If her daughter marries, she will be cast out of the home and she wants to nestle away savings for the future. The leaders refuse to allow her a shanty of her own.

Space is a commodity at the Migrant’s Plot for two reasons. First, they live on donated land rent-free in one of the most expensive cities in the world. Many Rohingya from other settlements are envious of those living at the Migrant’s Plot because they do not carry the burden of paying monthly rent. Second, the street-facing spaces are prime locations for business to capture customers walking by. An older woman who owns an outward-facing shop with her husband pulled me over in tears one day to tell me that Sahid (one of the leaders) wanted her family’s space to expand his business and they were being forced to move. I asked her if she spoke with the other leaders to dissuade Sahid from taking over her home. She repeated what I have heard many times: one leader does not get involved in another’s decisions.

Physical abuse by leaders or members of their families is also an issue. A BOSCO employee recalls a woman coming to the UNHCR after having been hit by a community leader who knocked out her tooth. She kept the tooth in her wallet to show the UNHCR. When a BOSCO employee confronted the leader, the entire community descended upon her saying that she abuses the refugee community with such accusations.

The moment they hear that somebody has said anything against the community leadership structure [they come out]. And some of them also feel that they are at the mercy of these community leaders. They feel: he has kept us here. Frankly, speaking [CFD] has not given the land to any community leader. They have given the land or space to say 40 Rohingya families. It could be any 40 Rohingya families. It’s not dependent on who the leader is. But that’s how this whole thing is projected [by the leaders] (INSR02 2017).
This BOSCO employee expressed her frustration with the leadership dynamics at the Migrant’s Plot. She understood the abuse of the power structure, but as urban refugees, UNHCR and their IP, have little control over how groups choose to organize. They could suggest, cajole, and withhold services, but they must be careful not to put anyone at risk. For example, if they stopped providing services as a punitive measure, it could do more harm than good.

Enduring these forms of abuse lends perspective on the overwhelming advantages of living at the Migrant’s Plot. Those Rohingya who are new and unfamiliar with Hindi or the layout of the city find comfort in staying with their own community, even if they have to relinquish some agency. Ultimately, widows are taken care of in one-way or another. Even if they are not given money or donations directly, no one at this Plot will be made to starve. The community takes care of its own. Leaders use their power and position to both protect and exploit.

The three leaders are not the traditional Rohingya elders as one might expect. How did they earn the right to lead? How do they gain the respect of the community? How do they maintain their power and influence? The next section addresses each leader’s unique rise to power.

The Powerful Three

Politics is all about power: about how political agents create, compete for, and use power to attain public goals that, at least on the surface, are presumed to be for the common good of a political community. Yet just as often and more covertly, political power is used to attain private goals for the good of the agents involved. Without power, political agents, especially political leaders, are ineffective and probably ephemeral (Kurtz 2001:21).
The Migrant’s Plot leaders are Sahid, Kabir, and Hassan. Sahid is in his late 20s, Kabir in his late 30s, and Hassan in his mid-40s. These are the ages they claim on their UNHCR ID cards, but I suspect Kabir is older. None are elders. UNHCR data reports that 8.5 percent of displaced persons are elderly. This percentage I slow due to a variety of factors that include mobility issues resulting in the inability to make the arduous journey across borders, reluctance to leave home, and families who are unable to afford fleeing with all members of the household. Comparatively, over 50% of displaced persons are children under the age of 18 (Figure 6.1).

The largest adult age group at the Migrant’s Plot ranges from 18-25 with the oldest population few in number.

Initially at the Migrant’s Plot there was no sense of community. There were families who were related, some from the same village, but the hierarchies found within consanguine relationships were broken in displacement. Although they were ethnically alike, they were not a true community. A sense of community evolved over time, under leaders who made sacrifices and acquired status among those they served.
Leaders are made differently in displacement. It is through individual heroic actions that leaders earn positions of power. With the passage of time, relations, consanguine or affine, again began to matter resulting in struggles to maintain power.

The three leaders bring a unique set of leadership qualities that provide insight into how they obtained and maintain their power. One relies on physical prowess and intimidation, another charm and the ability to create social capital. The third uses family influence and deep connections to the Rohingya community. Hasan confirms that there is not a sense of fraternity among them, but each respects the other’s form of leadership by not contradicting their decisions. Interestingly, I never witnessed one leader speaking to another, not once.

Below, as we meet each leader, aspects of Sahlins’ (1963) study of the big man are evoked. “The attainment of big-man status is rather the outcome of a series of acts which elevate a person above the common herd and attract about him a coterie of loyal, lesser men” (Sahlins 1963:289). At the Migrant’s Plot each leader has what Sahlins referred to as human dimension, or personality, that factors into the way he obtained power and a position of authority.

*Sahid [Age 29, married with 2 children, has been living in India for 5 years. Initially worked as a day laborer, now he’s a shop owner]*

Sahid became a leader through his vision. He witnessed Rohingya coming and going from the camp, neighbors not really knowing one another. He said this created precarity for women and children. He wanted to build latrines, so women would not have to defecate in the jungle and wider gullies and so at least two people could walk side-by-side. “If you really want to do something…. Only leaders can implement. I don’t need power for myself. But if you want to do something you need power and money, then only it will happen. I was neither a leader nor did I have money. And I could not do anything.” Then opportunity came. An NGO donated
money to build pit latrines in the back of camp. Because that land is government owned, the NGO had to first acquire permission. Then Sahid began to build the latrines. One day, amidst construction the *patwari* (land record officer) came with men carrying long buffalo-herding bamboo sticks. The Rohingya men were told to stop building, which they did. Indian men then began to strike the Rohingya. The Rohingya women came to form a blockade. They were also struck. Everyone ran away except Sahid.

Sahid’s father was working inside the pit of the latrine and was trapped. As Sahid attempted to pull his father out, Sahid was struck several times. Once his father was free, the Indian men began beating the father. This sent Sahid into a rage. He fought back, emboldening other Rohingya men to fight too. This “loo story,” as it is called in the camp, is one of the constitutive events that brought the Migrant’s Plot community together, and Sahid a leader through display of strength and loyalty.

Sahid has maintained his position by force. His extended family is large in number and physical size. All seven men are above six feet tall. Most are heavily built. Sheer size intimidates, but his silence is most daunting. He says that being a leader is difficult because no one wants to take responsibility for the group.

He has to make difficult decisions at times that affect the whole community (another example of the stress of leadership within a refugee setting is offered by Michel 2002). In fact, it is Sahid who has teamed with a Human Rights Lawyer to plead a stay of deportation with the Supreme Court for all Rohingya in India. But he rules with a heavy hand. At times it is not he who coerces the community, but his father. By most accounts the community implicates Sahid’s father as delivering beatings when anyone speaks against his son or family.
Each of Sahid’s brothers has unique ambitions. The older three are more traditional in dress and personality. Sahid feels his sister who is nineteen is well past marrying age and should follow Rohingya tradition. The younger brothers protect her from marriage and tell their elders to let her get the education she desires. The younger brothers view education as the way forward for the community, while the older ones fight to preserve the Rohingya community through more traditional means, even coercion.

Kabir [Age 37, married with 5 children, has been living in India for 7 years. Initially worked as a translator, now he’s a shop owner]

Kabir’s Hindi is fluent. He worked for a while as an interpreter for BOSCO. He is chatty and befriends everyone. I once watched him walk up to a group of police officers to ask the whereabouts of a Rohingya man who had been arrested. Kabir inquired about when the man would be released. The police officers told him to let the man sit for a few days then come get him. This type of informal exchange signals a familiar relationship between Kabir and the officers. Most Rohingya men who interact with Indian authorities speak sheepishly with their eyes averted, but not Kabir.

Kabir is a bit of an enigmatic personality. He assumes that I am Christian because I am from America. He likes to sit and tell me about Jesus and the Bible. He learned about Christianity in Myanmar and likes the religion very much. He was beaten for talking about Jesus in Myanmar. His father was beaten to death because of Kabir’s flirtation with Christianity. Since, he claims to be Muslim, wears the appropriate clothing, and follows the proper holidays. But in me, he found a foreigner in whom he could confide. If he was not Muslim he could not stay at the Migrant’s Plot or lead his community. Denying his religious desires allows him to maintain power. With his Hindi proficiency and social capital, he has been known to charge exorbitant
fees for translation when Rohingya have fallen ill. He has also been implicated in partnering with health clinics in insurance fraud. Based on accounts by his peers and my own observations, he often appeared to use his skills and influence to get ahead by whatever means necessary.

Hasan [age 48, married with 6 children, has been living in India for 19 years. He’s a shop owner]

I once asked Hasan why he had such a big home compared to others who lived in smaller spaces. He said, “I have the biggest house because I was the first one to come to India. I am the leader. Everyone wants me to be comfortable.” Hasan made the initial arrangements for 50 families to move into shanties at the Migrant’s Plot, making him a “man of renown” (Sahlins 1963). He brought together an unrelated group of Rohingya to live in a space where inhabitants now feel obligated to him. They treat him like a hero. Additionally, people continue to speak of his sacrifices for the community as heroic. The “loo” incident led to three arrests. Even though Hasan was not at the camp during the incident, he was detained as the initial leader he was jailed for one year.

Hasan is the type of person who leads quietly. He has slowly brought his family out of Myanmar to New Delhi. At the camp, he has the most influence. He is related to 30 percent of all inhabitants and (50 percent of those who are related to any leader). He has a shop that faces outward, but he rarely conducts business from his storefront. He and his wife sell vegetables and fruit from their home situated inside the gullies.

To understand how community security operates at the camp, I had to understand the power dynamics between the leaders and the community they guide. During interviews I asked: “Who are the leaders? What do they do? Who do you go to when there is a problem? Why? Are

---

47 Hasan, Sahid’s older brother, and his Sahid’s father were arrested. Hasan was able to get out of jail three months prior to the other two because he had the financial means to post bail. Sahid ran away to a different city until tensions cooled.
you related to any of them?” Most inhabitants go to whom they are related for help. Those who are not related to any leader approach whom they feel most comfortable with. For example, the woman below has no relation to any leader, but fears Kabir:

Researcher: You said you would go to [Hasan] or [Sahid], how come not [Kabir]?
EIFEDH15: If there is a fight, I will go to [Hasan] or [Sahid], I will ask what is to be done.
R: Are you able to share your problems well with them?
E: I will first ask [Hasan] and [Sahid], then will ask him [Kabir]. If I ask him, he threatens. Because [Hasan] and [Sahid] are bade [meaning anything from elder, senior, influential, powerful, strong], I go to them. They have more relatives here, that is why they are bade. (EIFEDH15 2017).

The very layout of the Migrant’s Plot is a manifestation of power (Figure 6.2). The most powerful families live closest to the road. There the outside world is accessible to them (e.g. donors and customers). You must walk deep into the gullies to speak with the most repressed. And even then, they are reluctant to speak.

When I spoke with the three leaders individually, each pointed to another leader as the one with the largest number of co-resident kin. Inhabitants told me that family matters at the Plot. Money lending is usually carried out between family members. If there is a vote, usually members align
based on the leader they are loyal to. For example, a woman named Fatima told me that early on there was a man who beat his wife and four children for no reason. The community voted 40 to nine to evict him from the Plot. His family did not want him kicked out, so they kept the wife and the kids. It is a powerful organization that can determine the separation of a family unit.

I was close to all of the leaders. They treated me well, welcomed me into their homes, and made me part of their families. Their children called me auntie; both Hasan and Kabir asked me to adopt one of their children. It is difficult for me to criticize them, but in order to give voice to those Rohingya men and women who felt intimidated by their leaders, it is important for me to relay their stories as well. I fully expect my interlocutors to read this. My uncovering of the power dynamics is not to point blame or reveal anything that those who are closest to them do not already know. Instead, I wish to explore how in/security evolves in urban displacement. There is precarity at all levels in displacement. The roles that people take are often survival strategies that serve to bring stability to their own families. My role is not to excuse exploitation or abuse, it is only to tell the stories of what I learned and make sense of it in the larger story of displacement. The leaders who have evolved within these communities create both community security and community insecurity. They help some and intimidate others and the fact that there are three leaves room for people to navigate in constructing their own personal sense of security.

The Migrant’s Plot is a fixed space within which residents have constructed dimensions of social organization including networks of kinship. This fixed space is not walled or fenced, but there seem to be imaginary walls that keep people in or out. Women and children experience a gendered in/security based on these walls. It is to this aspect that I now turn.
6.3 Women, Girls, and the Imagined Wall

Since the 1951 Refugee Convention, scholars, and humanitarian aid workers, have noted its lack of gender sensitivity (Firth and Mauthe 2013; Indra 1987). It is widely criticized as a product of its time, in need of major revision (Firth and Mauthe 2013). Activists sought the “feminization” of refugee law to not only acknowledge the prior exclusion of women as a distinctive group, but to also to “‘flip the binary’ and disrupt the dominant male categories by making women’s experiences of persecution in the private sphere visible” (Firth and Mauthe 2013:476; see also Indra 1987). Laws that recognize persecution in the public sphere ignored gender-based violence and other subtler forms of subjugation that occurs in the private sphere, where women are often relegated. Guidelines that promoted women’s activities needed to be addressed in the Refugee Convention (Firth and Mauthe 2013: 476-477).

It was not until the 1991 Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women, published by the UNHCR, that we begin to see the international community formally take responsibility for women’s human rights. Gender roles are often challenged during the migratory process. Men, who have been stripped of their ability to care for their families, find ways to reassert their masculinity usually to the detriment of women. Faced with devastating losses, gender-based violence in the form of domestic violence, possessive behaviors, and verbal abuse emerges during displacement. An example of the most common form of repression at the Migrant’s Plot was women’s inability to move freely in the city because their fathers or husband would not allow it, citing fear for their safety (Daley 1991).

In 1996, the IRC published research data that revealed 27 percent of women experienced sexual violence as refugees. To address this, they established the Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) program. This program has “addressed the issues of rape, domestic violence
and early marriage, and, at the request of the refugee women involved, has also been
instrumental in facilitating the supply of ready-made sanitary pads” (IRC 1999:5) Gender roles
and patriarchy becomes more ingrained in host societies as a way to preserve one’s home culture.
Daley (1991) calls this a less dramatic transformation of how patriarchy intensifies in
displacement. In Burundi settlements, the Settlement Commandant and Burundi men protect
women from the state by limiting their travel outside the settlements. The patriarchy limits
women’s participation in decision-making processes with regard to education, market
production, and behavioral policies in the settlements (Daley 1991: 255-6). Researchers have
noted that displacement can drastically limit women and girls’ daily movements (Tyler and
Schmeidl 2014: 37). These limitations affect their ability to build social networks, access health
services, receive an education, and even learn local languages.

Scholars continue to advance the argument for women’s rights in displacement through
research that demonstrates women should not be reduced to the category of victim, but instead
recognize their capacities and resilience (Daley 1991; Sandole et al. 2008). Displacement in
times of violence has made many women heads of household. This may “open up new spaces for
women’s agency and leadership within changing family and community structures” (Synder as
cited in Sandole 2008: 45). Women have had to rely on their own psychological strength,
innovation, and creativity to build successful survival strategies (Daley 1991; Gale 2007). Some
women at the Migrant’s Plot have built social networks with their neighbors. They trade food,
share stories, and tell jokes.

As we take more critical approaches to refugees, it is important that we do not
essentialize women’s experiences. The Migrant’s Plot is not a state-regulated space. There are no
walls, fences or any sort of barrier keeping women in. It is Rohingya men, exercising their
patriarchal power that keeps women limited to the settlement. Sometimes women support the
decisions of men. However, there are also women who work as shopkeepers, who leave camp to
support their family as cleaners, and there are young girls who are going to school and have
aspirations to become doctors.

There are fathers who tell me they do not want their daughters to marry when they have
the opportunity for an education in India. There are brothers who defend their sisters from early
marriage so they can continue their education. Some women want to work even though their
husbands will not let them. Some women want to stay home to take care of their children, even
though their husbands want them to work. When we essentialize refugee experiences, we are
blind to the variation of hope and desire, inadvertently dehumanizing them. The exceptions
within the generalities are where we find the uniqueness of both the urban experience and the
Rohingya experience in India. Below, I interrogate different ways in which women express their
agency in their new host country context and why they are able to think differently.

Most Rohingya women, who were married prior to fleeing, said their domestic lives have
not changed. They still cook, clean, and take care of children. Three women who are
shopkeepers noted that their faces are exposed more, meaning they interact with men by working
in their shops. Living in Myanmar they were able to maintain more humility, but here they do
what they have to help their families.

In most cases, there is safety and stability for Rohingya women in marriage. For example,
there is one young boy, age three, who has a large tumor on the side of his face. He and his
brother live with their mom and paternal grandmother. Their father died in Burma. One day I
saw the grandmother squatting outside her home in tears. She had a weathered look—sad eyes,
bony hands, and sunken cheeks. She is a lachrymose woman by nature, so I went through my
routine of squatting with her and asking how she was. Young mothers gathered at the water pumps directly across from the grandmother’s home spoke on her behalf: “she is stressed because her daughter-in-law left.” I had grown close to the daughter-in-law, Fareeda. I was working with her and various people in U.S. and India to see how we could get the little boy the surgery he needed.

“Left?” I asked.
“Left.”
“Left-left?”
“Yes. Left. She moved to Mewar.”

I sat in stunned silence as the women explained that Fareeda was tired of working as a karbari to support the family, so she remarried. He is a Rohingya man with a job in Mewar. She left the two children because the new husband did not want the previous husband’s. At that moment, I wanted to weep alongside the grandmother as she cradled the 3-year-old boy. The women did not make eye contact with her, or me, or each other. They went about their business washing dishes and clothes, resigned to such sorrow. Knowing the same was expected of me, I held the grandmother’s arm for a moment, got up, and walked further down the gully.

I was not upset with Fareeda. I do not think anyone blamed her for her decision. As a woman, being married made life easier in an urban space where families must live in a cash economy. Day-to-day life became easier for Fareeda, but not for the grandmother or the two boys.

At the Migrants Plot, there are seven widows and six women who are married to runners. Runners are men who ran out on their wives and children because the burden of a family became too much. Some wives knew generally where their husbands were (e.g. Jammu or Bangladesh).
Some had no idea. There were runners who would contact their wives seeking a reunion. One woman said she had no use for her husband and did not want him to come back even though he has contacted her. The option of remarrying is present for all of them; however, there is a lot of community support for women who are alone. The financial situation for widows and those married to runners is the same. They became the heads of household and needed to find a way to make ends meet. Direct financial assistance is not available but they manage because the Migrant’s Plot community supports them. For many, marriage provides stability, but some displaced women are finding that the tight-knit community offers the option of remaining single.

Women have also asserted independence in family planning. In small groups, they speak openly and unprompted with me about their birth experience, their bodies, and birth control methods. They use three different methods for birth control: the pill, an injection that lasts for 30 days, and the Copper-T Intrauterine Device (IUD). The Copper-T is the most effective, least expensive method that still allows couples to have full control of family planning. The Indian government fully subsidizes the product and procedure. Most women prefer the injection because they are afraid of the side effects of the Copper-T. Gossip at the Migrant’s Plot suggests that it causes heavy bleeding and pain. During one of my interviews at a health clinic, I asked a doctor about side effects and he assured me that heavy bleeding is not one of the side effects. Doctors (both male and female) complained in frustration that the Rohingya are the only group who refuse the Copper-T. Local health clinics need to conduct more targeted fieldwork (which is part of their practice) and educational workshops to be successful in providing copper-Ts to this community specifically.

Both men and women have expressed not wanting to have more children in such an insecure environment. Because couples spoke openly about family planning I assume there is no
stigma associated with their use of birth control. Although men did not approach the subject of abortion, women did. It was not a topic I was researching specifically, but I was made aware of two attempted abortions. Both women told me they went to the doctor, without their husbands knowing, to take the pill that “washes away the baby.” One woman told me about her attempted abortion in passing. She pointed to her son saying that he was small and sickly because she had tried to abort him, but it did not work. Apparently one of the side effects of an unsuccessful attempt is stunted growth of the fetus. This pill is to be taken 30 days into the pregnancy, not any later. The only method used to assess how far along a woman is in her pregnancy is taking a patient history, causing such mistakes to occur. In displacement, women employ family planning techniques due to poor living conditions, pregnancy spacing, and pregnancy prevention. I am told that these methods are not typically used or even accessible in Rakhine.

Some Rohingya marital practices have also been transposed to India. Polygamy is not uncommon in the Rohingya community. Indian laws allow for Muslims with a tradition for polygamy to marry more than one wife; however, Rohingya refugees do not register their marriages with the state. Their documentation: birth, marriage, and death are registered with the UNHCR. UNHCR policy supports the Human Rights Committee, which calls polygamy a violation of a woman’s dignity. In India, Rohingya are registered as married couples, not polygamous unions. One of the leaders at the Migrant’s Plot attempted to keep two wives, but neither woman agreed to enter into such a union. He has fathered children with both women. At the secondary camp, one of the leaders has two wives and two residences. While some families are decide to have fewer children due displacement circumstances, other members in the

---

community feel confident caring for multiple families. This points to the disparity of power, status, and economic stability within the Rohingya community.

Most women rely heavily on their husbands to work in the public sector to support the family. But some women, who dare to seize the opportunities available in a new cultural context, own a business, receive an education, redefine family planning, or remain unmarried. Women who refuse suitors are gossiped about, but because the Migrant’s Plot provides security, it is possible for them to remain single. It takes strength to defy norms, and conviction to venture outside the imagined walls of the Plot. Women who challenge cultural norms are simultaneous admired and admonished by the women in community. Democratic-urban spaces allow for unique opportunities, especially in a city with a high level of education, innovation, and supportive Muslim NGOs and universities. I am uncertain whether these opportunities can be attributed to democracy directly; however, it is the laws, the policies, and democratic attitudes that help to support such ambition.

_Fighting for An Education_

The primary concern of Rohingya parents is to ensure their children receive an education. Education was not easily accessible in Myanmar. Having access in New Delhi is an advantage to migration. In India, the constitution guarantees free primary government education for all children regardless of economic or legal status. Additionally, BOSCO offers a bridging course that brings refugee youths up to speed linguistically and substantively so they may join schools at age appropriate grade levels. In Delhi, older students also have the option to attend the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), which is a pre-degree certification program run by the government. It can be used to gain vocational skills or used as a bridge to higher education.
CFD has not only donated land to the Rohingya, but they also offer all children at the Migrant’s Plot free admission to a private education, uniforms, and books. There are two private schools that are less than a block away.

The principal of one private school attended by Rohingya whom I interviewed explained the condition of the Rohingya when they first arrived at her school in 2013. She said, “earlier they were devils but now, after 3-4 years, they have become human.” She goes on to say that ‘the children used to fight a lot, even amongst themselves and were not afraid of bleeding. But now they are adapting to local culture. They are very smart and sharp both in studies and sports. They were not socialized; they did not speak Hindi or English, and they would get into fights with the local kids. It has now been five years and things are better.’ The greatest challenge she faces is placing older children in age-appropriate classes. Because many Rohingya children arrived illiterate she had to place them several grades below their age level. Not all principals are willing to make such adjustments. The school accommodates Rohingya kids allowing them to skip grade levels if they perform well to catch up to their peers. The oldest Rohingya girls are in fourth grade; she confirmed that the girls tend to drop out after their menses begins. This principal talks to several parents at the end of every month on the importance of an education and cleanliness.

Globally, educators struggle to accommodate large groups of refugee children classrooms (e.g. Hacker 2016). Language ability and cultural differences are some of the biggest barriers. In Delhi, Rohingya children stand out for environmental reasons as well. For example, a different principal was invited to the Migrant’s Plot to talk about sanitation. She sat behind a table as Rohingya mothers gathered around, squatting on the floor. She reprimanded the mothers:
You don’t give proper attention to education because you are not educated. You only care about money and food. If you pay attention to your kids, you will go further. You get your girls married at 14-15. You give life but it’s not well balanced. They need to continue going to school. You all quit mid-session within four or five months; let them go at least a year. They need time to get used to it; you must let them continue. You’re sending your kids as-is, and not clean. Your kids are one of the dirtiest kids.” About twenty minutes into her rebuke she finally said something positive: “Your kids aren’t less, they are intelligent.” She continued: ‘They can easily be recognized as Burmese kids because they are dirty. You don’t want that. Whichever country you live, you want your kids to be able to compete and be better. Your kids have no other shortcoming, only cleanliness.

The mothers agreed their kids should be sent home if the children were in disrepair. Later, after the principal had gone, some of the women spoke up, telling me to look around, to look at the conditions in which their children play. The environment is dusty and dirty. They have a difficult time keeping kids clean. Being in a classroom where Rohingya children are singled out, or reprimanding parents only further isolates them. The sense of not belonging is impressed upon both children and parents. School dropouts are a growing problem in the community making it more imperative that children have a positive experience in schools.

One male youth-leader who is an advocate for education said to me: “In Myanmar, you get an education, you become a farmer. You don’t get an education, you become a farmer. Education didn’t matter. This is the mentality that I am fighting against daily. Here in Delhi, education matters very much. It is the way out for our community.” Parents seem to understand the importance of education as a concept, but living with the daily struggles of educating children overwhelms them. Their instinct is to protect their children rather than push them to excel in the face of discrimination. Children living in formal-regulated camps have limited access to education, and almost zero access to prominent universities. Educating all children is unique to New Delhi’s constitution.
Education is one of many challenges Rohingya girls face as they grow into womanhood. Most girls drop out of school to marry. Traditionally, Rohingya girls marry after their first menses (13-14 years of age). During interviews, both mothers and fathers claimed desire to educated their girls to a greater extent than what was possible in Rakhine. In Rakhine most children attended primary school, some secondary school, and/or a madrasa (Islamic school). I am not certain if the desire to educate is true or if they were taught that education is morally good by the cultural environment surrounding them (i.e. the Muslim community, university students, UNHCR, BOSCO, myself). But there is immense pressure from the Rohingya community in general to get daughters married young. Family members will travel to other camps to find suitors. I know of only one family who gave their daughter in marriage to an Indian Muslim man seeking a bride.

Education is also challenging for newly arrived girls in their teens who do not go to school because they are not familiar with Hindi or English. Their parents are reluctant to allow them to use public transportation to attend BOSCO bridging courses, thereby derailing girls’ education. BOSCO sends a Hindi instructor to the camp for women and girls specifically. Since they do not leave camp their ability to learn the language is slower than men who engage in public sphere work.

Even self-education via the Internet is not possible for most females. There is typically one pre-paid smart phone per family and it stays with the male member of the household. Men obtain news from their smart phones in Rohingya and Hindi. Once, Kabir rather innocently asked me why my president does not like Muslims in reference to the 2017 Travel Ban. Rohingya men are well informed about their political situation in Myanmar, and across the globe due to smart phones.
Although there is access to education for girls, the cultural obstacles to education and basic information prevents them from realizing the full potential of the world around them. I suspect parents do want their girls to become educated, but not at the risk of sending them out into a city they themselves fail to understand and trust.

6.4 Rohingya Youth Organizations and Civic Engagement

By examining refugee civic engagement, we see that community security extends beyond the security built within the confines of the refugee settlement and into the city. There are different ways in which immigrant youths are engaged in the community. In Delhi, community participation manifests largely with Rohingya youths, who are a subset of the larger community. Despite which settlement they reside in, youths stay friends via outreach programming, social events, and texting. Those who were young when they first immigrated to Bangladesh or India see themselves differently than do the older generation. When they consider their futures they talk about education in India or starting businesses in India. They challenge India’s democracy by creating spaces of cultural citizenship in the city (Ong 1999; Putnam 2005; Rosaldo 1994).

As aid agencies and scholar begin to work more with displaced children and youths, we begin to see patterns related to their sense of place—within their community and in politics. The liveliness of urban centers invigorates youth participation. In Hall’s (2013) study, displaced Afghan youths in urban areas feel their voice goes unheard in their community. They wanted an opportunity to contribute to their communities by working together with other youths. Hall offers the following explanation of the discontent among urban youths compared to rural youths: “anecdotal evidence has suggested that this is because of relative availability of information that prompted youth to be more critical of their environment and being more involved in the public
sphere” (54). There is a common sentiment among the Afghan youth and the Rohingya youth in New Delhi that their opinions and efforts matters in shaping the future of their country.

Similar to the integration process of immigrant youths in the United States, Rohingya youth too attempt to retain the right to be culturally different and yet also maintain full membership in society (Stepick and Stepick 2002:246). Forms of civic engagement like newspaper readership, membership in soccer clubs, and public protests are ways in which the Rohingya engaged the world outside of the settlement. Waters’ (1994) research on the ethnic identities of immigrant Haitian Americans in New York City is characterized by 83 percent of youths who do not see their ethnic identity as being important to their self-image. They do not distance themselves from Black Americans. Instead, they called themselves American, as opposed to Jamaican or Trinidadian. In contrast, Rohingya identity is important to refugee youths. Their ethnic identity is a key intermediary for civic engagement. They have a strong sense of pride in being Rohingya; even though many were very young when they fled Myanmar, their sense of rootedness lies in an imagined homeland as described by their elders (Anderson 1983; Stepick and Stepick 2002; Water 1994). Below is an account from a youth who was a toddler when she left Myanmar:

“Earlier I used to think that we should not tell our children that we are Rohingya but call themselves native of the place they live in. But now after much thought I believe that children should be taught that they too have a country. They should know that we have a country where we used to live. We also want to go there.” (Taslima, October 29, 2017)

Indian politicians who are conservative on immigration are concerned with societal security (they use the language “Muslims will take over India if we let them”), but Rohingya youths are more interested in using India’s democratic platform to push their own agenda with
regards to human rights. They do not attempt to assimilate into society with acquiring
citizenship, voting, or marrying Indian nationals. In fact, their protests in 2013, 2014, and 2015
all asked Myanmar to address human rights issues in Northern Rakhine, or for the international
community to help stop Rohingya genocide. Rohingya are astute in not raising their voices
against the Indian government, since it is their benevolence that hitherto has provided a safe
haven.

In one instance, amidst initial talks of government directed deportation, Rohingya youths
were invited to present on their experiences as urban refuges on a panel at O.P. Jindal Global
University. Each one of the youths, as if prompted, first thanked the Indian state for providing
them the opportunity of safe shelter and education. There is no single youth organization or
leader to have prompted them, but they do talk amongst themselves about the state of their
political standing in India. So, while they want to use their voice to influence the larger
international community, they are cautious about their less than legal status.

Aside from political protests and speeches, other forms of civic engagement include
extracurricular activities such as soccer clubs that help youths define a world outside their
refugee communities. Refugee youth play soccer competitively with one another (Afghan, Chin,
Somali, Congolese), but they also play exhibition games with other colleges and universities
(Figure 6.3).
Figure 6.3: An exhibition match hosted by Halqa Super Sevens FC (players comprised from various universities and institutions) in New Delhi against the Shine Stars Rohingya FC.

Engagement in formal education is also a key feature to “assimilation” (Stepick and Stepick 2002). Youth spend several hours a day at an institution that is not only about formal education, but a space where they encounter Indian culture, language, and find ways to relate with their Indian peers. One Rohingya youth, Taslima, is the first Rohingya female to take class ten board examinations\(^{49}\) in India. She is an anomaly in the Rohingya community. She reflected upon her experience as a female in India’s education system as well as her experiences interacting with other Indian girls who migrated from remote villages:

I want to prove that a girl can also become ‘something’ after being educated. So, what if we are refugees and we don’t have a ‘home?’ What will we achieve while sitting at home? If we study, we can speak up for our country. We can say that we are Rohingya, we are educated and we also want our country. We can raise our voice. There are girls [in the camp] who don’t even know Hindi. They just sit at home, feel shy, don’t want to talk to anyone. If it continues like this then we will have to keep lying here in the jhuggi [slums] for the rest of our lives… I want our people to become doctors, policemen, army men, teachers, and develop themselves and live their lives properly. Like Indians are becoming doctors and

---

\(^{49}\) The All India Secondary School Examination (AISSE) is a centralized nationwide examination resulting in a Completion Certificate. Students can only pursue higher education once this certificate is awarded. One might compare it to United States’ SAT examinations, but it is more similar to UK’s GCSE qualification.
teachers and doing everything, I want our people to do all that and glorify the name of Rohingya.

I don’t feel there’s any difference between us and Indians. Earlier I felt the difference because the language was different, their tradition was different, food was different. But not now, I share my *tiffin* [lunchbox] with my schoolmates. We have become friends. When we go to school, we learn and understand the same. We share notebooks. We are similar in sports, how we commute, and all that. There are girls who have come and settled from many different places to Delhi. When they talk about their villages and traditions then I feel slightly different. Then we all share about our cultures.

Taslima links her aspirations and ambitions to the success of her community. Her family fled Myanmar when she was very young and she has few memories of Burma, but her sense of Rohingya identity is strong. In displacement, she sees opportunities within Delhi that allow her to integrate at her own pace while growing her community.

Rohingya male youths have a greater sense of belonging through participation in voluntary organizations (see Figure 6.4) Many young men from their teens to their twenties participate in one or more organization. These organizations serve as a way for male youths across New Delhi to organize and support one another in mutual goals. Young men are sensitive to the political goings-on in Myanmar, thus participate in groups like the Rohingya Human Rights Initiative.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Organization</th>
<th>Year Founded</th>
<th>Primary Funding</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genius Burmese Rohingya Youth Club</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>BOSCO</td>
<td>Culture, sports, &amp; youth empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rohingya Refugee Committee*</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>United Voice, UNHCR</td>
<td>Consortium of Rohingya leaders from across India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shining Star Youth Club</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>BOSCO</td>
<td>Cultural education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rohingya Human Rights Initiative</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Crowdfunding and membership</td>
<td>Maintain news reporting and other Rohingya data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rohingya Literacy Program</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Crowdfunding</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Star</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>BOSCO</td>
<td>Youth, sports, and girls</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This is not a youth program, but youths do participate

Figure 6.4: Rohingya Youth Organizations in New Delhi

These organizations are not necessarily exclusive to Rohingya. In fact, the Genius Burmese Rohingya Youth Club includes other ethnic minorities from Burma. They build mixed soccer teams and play against one another and other refugee groups, like Afghan refugees. BOSCO also holds a talent competition for youths where various refugee individuals and groups compete in events such as singing, dancing, and performing comedy acts.

There is a call for aid agencies to take children and youths more seriously, giving them due weight and consideration in displacement (Couch and Francis 2006; Guyot 2007). According to UNHCR children and youth currently make up more than 50 percent of refugees globally. Field et al. (2017b) encourages aid organizations to look beyond building programming for urban refugees that promotes economic self-reliance, but in addition we should be seeking ways to incorporate ‘play’ into youths’ lives. The measure for well-being needs to be broader than models that focus on economic self-reliance (Field et al. 2017a and 2017b).

Conclusion
The urban setting in which refugees live informs their community security. They are not living in a manufactured camp where there is equity in the distribution of things like education, food, or health care. Therefore, the definition of community insecurity offered by the UN Handbook: “Inter-ethnic, religious and other identity-based tensions, crime, terrorism,” is too simplistic a definition, in a space where the very definition of community is challenged by displacement and the refugee identity.

The UNHCR and the state do not assist refugees in finding spaces to live, making it the first challenge in flight. The Rohingya in Delhi have regrouped to create an exclusive space where their language, traditions, and marriage practices keep them centered as a cohesive community. The Migrant’s Plot demonstrates the nuances of how emplacement is negotiated through creating a community space, maintaining it as an exclusive area, and reconstructing leadership, gender roles, and traditional practices. If we are to think of the ‘political’ in broad terms, then it must extend to the settlements themselves. Political Human Security is found beyond the relationship among Rohingya refugees, the state, and the UNHCR; it is also found within settlements. The political in this case is an interrogation of power dynamics within the settlement. Leadership heavily influences camp dynamics and the security that exists within its imagined walls. Those who succumb to the power dynamic of the camp are at the mercy of the leaders’ protection. There are no gates, fences, or barbed wire keeping Rohingya tied to the Plot. The consequences of leaving, however, outweigh the insecurities and loss of agency that are a part of the living under the settlement leadership. In fact, some find agency living under such strict leadership. Ultimately, both security and insecurity can be found in displacement.

The next chapter examines the political economy of the camp and how social capital makes the community stronger and bridges them into positive relationships with Indian
nationals. It also considers how men and women at the Plot construct livelihoods. And lastly, it discusses how the Rohingya are able to bridge into an international community based on their refugee identity, placing them in a unique position of privilege.
Chapter 7

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE MIGRANT’S PLOT

The stateless person, without right to residence and without the right to work, had of course constantly to transgress the law. He was liable to jail sentences without ever committing a crime. More than that, the entire hierarchy of values which pertain in civilized countries was reversed in his case. Since he was the anomaly for whom the general law did not provide, it was better for him to become an anomaly for which it did provide, that of the criminal.


It is problematic, the law in India, here in Delhi. There are factories that have been made, with lots of jobs, but they are for Indians. For people from Bihar, people from Assam—they are Indian. We people are from outside India that is why, for us, before getting hired for any job, ID proof is needed. ID proof we do not have. No Aadhaar card, no PAN card. Right now, we are living in a slum. The place we store wood was bigger than this in our country. Such large houses we left to come here… and like this I am spending my life, just surviving.

Faruk, age 30
There are three things that contribute to the structure of Rohingya political economy at my primary field site: the reinforcement of an ethnic identity and production of a refugee identity; both of these create a narrow sense of community. There is also an expanding sense of community that extends to the relationship they have with their Indian neighbors. They do not share an ethnicity, religion, or language with their neighbors, but they all participate in the same socio-economic circumstance. And finally, I suggest that this deceptively local settlement is a profoundly global one connecting them to people of unequal status, such as the UNHCR and international media outlets. Each of these factors is a unique manifestation of how post-colonial institutions, like the UNHCR, mass media, and community power dynamics influence the political and economic lives of refugees.

The expanding and narrowing sense of identity is the result of building different types of social capital. From Putnam (2007) I borrow the general concepts of bonding and bridging forms of social capital to demonstrate how they work in tandem to create a micro-economy at this particular settlement. Bonding social capital deepens “social support,” implying “dense ties and thick trust” (Briggs 1999; Lancee 2012:24). It is a form of social capital that is built with family members and friends. The Rohingya build “bonds” by maintaining a sense of ethnic and religious identity through shared traditions, foods, songs, language, and migration experiences. Furthermore, their refugee identity is produced through everyday experiences that set them apart from the Indian community that surrounds them.

Bridging social capital typically connects those of equal social status. It is a connection across ethnic, or social group (Aldrich 2011; Briggs 1999). Brettell (2005: 868) presents examples of bridging organizations used by Asian Indians in Texas along ethnic, national, and regional lines. However, the Rohingya in Delhi live relatively simple lives as compared to the
highly educated and mobile legal immigrants of Texas. Therefore, their “bridges” are created through relationships within the same socio-economic class; they connect with their Indian neighbors based on their shared socio-economic position, money lending practices, and participation in local cottage industries.

Linking social capital connects individual with unequal powers status. It often links individuals to government official or those with institutional power (Szereter and Woolcock 2004; Aldrich 2011). The networks Rohingya have built as a result of their refugee identity allow them to access individuals who hold positions of authority, such as diplomats of foreign embassies, UNHCR employees, and foreign media correspondents. These three types of social capital—bonding, bridging, and linking—allow the Rohingya at the Migrant’s Plot to build a capacity for resilience.

7.1 Bonding Social Capital Maintains “Rohingya-ness”

The Rohingya are a fairly small population. Prior to the 2017 Rohingya Crisis there were approximately one million within the borders of their native Myanmar and another 800,000 in diaspora. Today most Rohingya live outside of their homeland, begging the question: what does it mean to be Rohingya? The Rohingya in New Delhi express their identity through shared cultural attributes, experiences and, through activities of exclusion that help maintain their ethnic identity.

Scholars recognize that during initial displacement refugees experience a loss of culture in their everyday actions, habits, and routines that form identity (Malkki 1995; Stein 1986; Taylor and Nathan 1980). At the Migrant’s Plot, five years after displacement, the Rohingya share a sense of group identity by recounting stories about their acres of land and sharing their
memories of loss and struggle. It is the formation of collective memory, which is essential to identity and common to community trauma survival. They also maintain language, cuisine, and style of dress.

A specific form of social identification that is important to the group is language. One day I was standing alone in a public space at the Plot. I heard a soft singing. I listened harder but I could not place the language, it was not Hindi. I found one of the shopkeepers crouched on the ground signing to her daughter. I asked her what song she was singing, she smiled shyly and said, “it’s a song we sing to kids back home.” All parents at the Plot make it a point to teach their children Rohingya, even the children born in Bangladesh and India. Rohingya is an Indo-European dialect with no written script so learning Rohingya is mainly about being able to communicate within one’s own group.

Religion too is a key component of their experience of persecution and collective identity. It is a shared narrative that connects them. Since independence Myanmar has claimed to be a Buddhist nation, attempting to rid itself of the Rohingya Muslim population. As recently as 2012, a radical Burmese monk, Wirathu, sparked violent riots throughout Myanmar with his anti-Muslim hate speech. He incited fear that Myanmar might become a Muslim nation if President Thein Sein did not act swiftly to eliminate the Rohingya people. In India, there is freedom of religion, making it easier for the Rohingya to practice Islam openly. At the Migrant’s Plot, Rohingya pray daily in a shanty reserved for worship. There is a permanent Imam from the Rohingya community who maintains the masjid open

50Various scripts have been attempted, such as the Hanifi script in the late 1970s, which adapts Arabic script using Urdu sounds. A new website launched in the 2000s by a Rohingya man, Mohammed Siddique, attempts to preserve Rohingya by using English script with Rohingya sounds, calling it Rohingyalish. Rohingya youths use English letters to spell Rohingya words when texting on smartphones. Scripts have not stuck because they simply do not have ubiquitous use in a simple society. The Myanmar military has reduced Northern Rakhine state into a virtual dark zone, where universities do not exist, hospitals are few and far between, education is useless, mosque doors are locked.
to the surrounding community of Muslims\textsuperscript{51}, making it a valuable religious space in the neighborhood, and also creating positive relationships beyond their own in-group.

The Rohingya in Delhi have benefited economically (not necessarily politically) by maintaining their Rohingya identity in the city. The political environment in India for Muslims is precarious, but as the largest minority group (172 million Muslims according to the 2011 census) there are many educated and financially successful Muslim communities in Delhi who seek to help the internationally recognized Rohingya\textsuperscript{52}. The Rohingya survival strategy in New Delhi is not one of invisibility, but of self-promotion. They continually reinforce identity in the city by remaining united around a survival strategy of \textit{visibility}.

The persecution and marginalization of the Rohingya had become a key part of their diasporic memory. According to Safran (1991) diasporas “retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original” (Safran 1991: 83; see also Lacroix and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013: 685). The Rohingya share a historical memory of violence enacted by the Myanmar military. Eight interviewees from disparate areas of Rakhine spoke of their experience as \textit{cooies}, indentured soldiers for the military. They made comments such as:

\begin{quote}
In Burma I was a rice farmer. The military took my rice, left not enough for my family. I was taken as a coolie 5-6 times a month; I had no option. They would take me for 10 days, two days, sometimes three. I was made to carry backpacks, food, and travel to fight. I had to fight the Bangladesh police due to border disputes (INDHZF23 2015).
\end{quote}

While the Myanmar army fights border skirmishes with Bangladesh, boys as young as 13 were kidnapped for months at a time to carry their gear and food. Some men showed me scars from

\begin{itemize}
\item This form of bridging social capital will be discussed in the following section.
\item It is absolutely worth noting that many Hindu and Sikh communities also donate goods and services. In fact, one Hindu policeman, his wife, and brother come every Monday to deliver a hot meal to the kids. One day I observed that he brought curried potatoes, \textit{puri} (round fried bread), and a banana. When I asked him why he did this he said, “Every day is Ramzan when it comes to feeding kids.” He meant that kids should always be fed, even if it’s not a religious holiday.
\end{itemize}
beatings. Women told me they became widows due to their husbands’ conscription. Their historical memory implicates an institutionalized political process to their oppression.

In addition to these attributes of identity, in New Delhi the Rohingya participate in activities that help to narrow a sense of group identity. Although SLIC and BOSCO do not have a direct impact on the economic aspects of the Rohingya settlement, they, along with ACCESS, play a role in producing community exclusion. The exclusiveness of the Rohingya community has made them more successful as a unit, their bonding capital is deepened thereby serving to create a sense of “Rohingya-ness” and “refugee-ness.” Exclusion is produced through programs that teach women Hindi, how to sew, and basic sanitation and health. The sense of belonging comes from participation in programming specifically created for refugees. The Rohingya refugees receive professional care from NGOs that the neighboring Indian poor watch with curiosity and envy.

Contrary to Malkki’s (1995) observations among Burundi Hutu refugees in Tanzania who adopt more cosmopolitan identities as self-settlers in urban spaces, the Rohingya at the Migrant’s Plot who are not from the same villages, or have consanguine relations, use the Rakhine state as their referent to situate their identity spatially and symbolically (Agier 2002; Kibreab 1999).

Urban Livelihoods

Another form of cohesiveness is derived from their shared experiences with livelihood strategies. Rohingya refugees who live alongside other mixed migrant groups have similar challenges in finding work. Full time employment is difficult to come by so migrants work part time in the informal sector as day laborers (Jacobsen 2005: 40-49). Almost all Rohingya were farmers in Myanmar. Some men were mid-sized shop owners, wood workers, or masons. But
Urban refugees normally do not work in their original trade (Alloush et al. 2017; Amisi 2006).

Urban refugees face additional challenges when it comes to finding work because they lack the proper national identifying documents that facilitate the employer-employee relationship. In India, they cannot work in the formal sector because national identification and bank accounts are required. Initially, lacking fluency in the host country language also puts refugees at a disadvantage compared to migrants from other states within India. Employers turn them away not because language is a barrier to manual labor, but because Hindi incompetence flags the Rohingya as foreigners in a space where employers prefer to hire their own nationals.

For one Rohingya man, even though his Hindi was good, he had to find an Indian national to vouch for him:

I can find work. My Hindi is good, but that is not why. It is because I am hardworking. I used to work at a tobacco company earning 12,000 [rupees] a month. The pay was good but the work hazards were poor; I felt dizzy after work. I packed tobacco products 12 hours a day. Initially at the tobacco company, they wouldn't hire me because I am not a national and no school certificate. However, an India guy from Sarita Vihar went with me to vouch for me (INDHZF12 2015).

Other obstacles to earning a living wage in dignified work includes meager pay, wage exploitation by employers, illegal labor, and child labor abuses. Men primarily engage in day labor, earning 250-350 INR (3.85 USD – 5.38 USD) daily.
“Day Labor” refers to construction work, construction cleanup, heavy lifting, etc. (Figure 7.1).

“Unemployed” signifies refugees who are of working age (14-77) and are the head of household but not employed. Legal working age in India is 14. Seventy-seven is the oldest working male at the Migrant’s Plot based on my interview data.

Of the 108 males at the Migrant’s Plot, 46 are of working age\(^{53}\) and 41 are employed in the informal sector (Figure 7.1). A majority of them engage in day labor 15-20 days out of the month. With a monthly income of approximately 4500 INR (69 USD) – 5400 INR (83 USD)\(^{54}\) they support an average family size of 4.59 members. The New Delhi national minimum wage rate standard is higher than what the Rohingya are earning (Figure 7.2).

---

\(^{53}\) This count does not include boys who are of working age and are students.

\(^{54}\) This particular number is based upon semi-structured interviews from 2015-2017. The reported monthly income is slightly higher from my quantitative questionnaire, which includes participants from both my primary and secondary field sites.
Most employers in the cash-based informal sector are breaking wage laws. The New Delhi Labor Department in 2017 proposed an amendment to the minimum wage, which in addition to increasing New Delhi wages, would also require all payments be made electronically (Shira 2018). If employers were to comply, urban refugees would be unable to earn a living since they are not allowed to have bank accounts or government IDs. National laws do not account for refugees and international economic migrants, thus perpetually relegating them to an illegal informal economy.

As Figure 7.3 illustrates, few women are employed outside of the settlement. There is a cultural expectation for women to labor in a domestic capacity. Sahid’s wife is skilled at sewing, but he discourages her from working for others:

I am good at it. One time this American came through like you and bought 1000 rupees worth of stuff from me. I did like this, sewing for a living. Then [Sahid] told me that my eyes would grow weak and my back will start to hurt, so I should stop. Why not just watch the shop? So I stopped. But I was very good. (June 21, 2017).

Sahid is strict with his wife. She is permitted outside of her shanty, but she rarely leaves the camp. It did not surprise to me that he did not want her to earn money outside of their family business, or to associate with outside employers. I told her she had a caring husband, knowing I should not press her further on the issue out of respect of for her high status at the Plot.
The strictest of husbands expect their wives to stay in their shanties. More liberal men allow their wives to engage in cottage industry labor, such as sewing, embroidery work, or tending family-run shops. This survey of families is based on self-reporting. Therefore, unless probed about economic contributions women humbly state that they are not economic contributors. Semi-structured interviews revealed, however, that they were not reporting occasional embroidery work and sewing (Figure 7.3) as incoming generating activities even though they can earn up to 100-150 rupees a day.

![Figure 7.3: Types of Labor and Number of Working Women](image)

“Housewife” is a category because that is how they self-identified when asked about their occupation. Families do not account for occasional work, or the savings associated with their role as housewives and caregivers to children and the elderly. “Unemployed” signifies refugees who are of working age (14-60) and are the head of household but not employed. Sixty is the oldest working female at the Migrant’s plot based on my data.

Two midwives have delivered most of the children at the camp. They are not paid for their work, but it certainly curbs the economic output for families in the long run. These domestic activities do not hold power and influence in the community. Feminist anthropologists have identified the disparity in value of the domestic roles to household economies of the poor
(e.g. Rosaldo 1974; Daley 1991 and many others). There is a differential evaluation of women’s activities compared to men’s, even though the contribution is highly valuable to the economic balance of individual families and the community generally.

Below a young Rohingya woman discusses how she feels about working, compares it to earning in Burma, and Figure 7.4 is one of her stitching patterns and an example of the type of embroidery work women do at the Migrant’s Plot.

Researcher: What sort of work do you do around the house? How do you past your days?
EIFEDH15: I do stitching…take care of the kids.
R: Oh. Do people come to you for work?
E: Yes
R: From outside or inside [the camp]?
E: From the camp, from outside …less from outside.
R: What do you stitch?
E: I stitch ladies’ suits and blouses.
R: How much do you make per month doing that?
E: In a month, around 1000-1200 rupees. It is less because I stitch less.
R: That’s really good though. It’s good because you have that hunar [skill].
E: I like to stitch.
R: That’s good. And what sort of work did you do in Burma?
E: In Burma, there was flower work/embroidery work on clothes. In my country, there’s flower work. I used to do that and stitching.
R: So, did you sell your work over there too?
E: Yes.
R: And do you earn just as much here as over there?
E: It is not much as compared to Burma. Here I get enough for nashta-pani [literally ‘breakfast-water’ but is used to refer to petty expenses]. So, it’s beneficial.
R: Do you like earning money for your family?
E: Yes, I like it. There is not much income in it. Women are doing it individually so it is less profitable. I get 80 Rupees for stitching one piece, so it is beneficial. If I earn 80 rupees every day then I feel very good. But I don’t get it every day. In Bangladesh, there’s work every day.
R: Is there a way for you to get more work? How do people get to know that you stitch?
E: People get to know because nearby migrants from Bihar tell others. Suppose someone comes to a shop out front and asks – sister do you stitch? They reply no but you can go inside [the settlement] as there are quite a few people who stitch.
clothes. People from nearby come not from far off areas. There’s more space in our country. Some people work in the field/ some do hal [some sort of work on rice, perhaps husking]. There’s no factory over there. There’s no big work, only two kinds of work [rice] field and hal. (EIFEDH15 2017)

![Figure 7.4: Sample of Stitching Pattern & Embroidery Work](image)

From home, while tending to her children, she earns nearly one-fourth of what the average Rohingya man earns at the Plot. Her earning capacity with her skill set is of significant economic value to the household. She teaches other women at the Plot to sew and do embroidery work as well. Few do it for income because they are not as skilled or they are not motivated in promoting their work. In addition, husbands do not want wives to do it. The women who sew and do embroidery work from home do not leave the settlement for fear of community gossip and employer exploitation.

Urban refugees also experience various forms of exploitation by employers. Urban refugees working in the informal sector earn nearly half the city labor law standard. They recount stories of being paid less than their Indian counterparts, having wages withheld, or not being paid at all.
About a month ago I did a lot of work and was owed 4450 rupees. I kept asking for it and was told, you're a refugee, I'm going to call the police. This happened to two other guys at the camp too. I also did work carrying stones and mud. Middlemen kept taking a cut for seven months. I received no money. Sometimes it matters if you're a refugee, sometimes it doesn't. Some are nice to you all day, give you food and tea, and then at the end of the day they don't pay you if you're a refugee (INDHZF13 2015).

Implementing partners, like SLIC, work to educate the police that the refugee ID card is a valid proof of legal residence, but some of the Rohingya still fear the police. Perhaps this has to do with their prior experiences with “authority in uniform” in Burma, experiences that commonly involve exploitation and sometimes torture. Additionally, stories circulate around camp of a few negative experiences with Indian police. When asked directly, a majority of Rohingya men reported that they felt the Indian police were compassionate, but the negative narratives tend to occupy more space in their memory causing persistent apprehension when dealing with local authorities.

Rohingya have also reported being made to do illegal labor. “As a kabadi [rag picker] I was promised 7,000 rupees but they kept 2,000. I never got paid in full. They did this to only the UNHCR cardholders. We used to get used syringes, baby bottles, wash them, and resell them to small shops” (INDHZF12 2015). The reselling of unsanitary materials is illegal in India, and yet urban refugees participated in such activities either unwittingly or to earn a wage.

Lastly, there are two particular sites where Rohingya children were employed as kabari, which disregards India’s child labor laws. In Jammu, a city bordering Pakistan in the Northwest has a community of approximately 5,500 Rohingya. Work prospects and living conditions are not good in Jammu, thus driving Rohingya children to join their families in earning money. Unfortunately, there are heavy restrictions against UNHCR operating in Jammu, hampering
Rohingya children’s access to education. When I visited, young girls of 13 and 14 begged me to make it so they could go to school. They showed me notebooks where they had carefully copied words from magazines and newspapers to practice writing in Hindi. When I visited other areas in India children would ask for gifts, candy, or money, but these girls asking to learn demonstrated a desperate yearning for something to which they had no access. Instead their predicament led them to work as kabadi alongside their families. Access to education and UNHCR resources in the city prevents children from engaging in child labor, in contrast to locations that are further away from UNHCR headquarters.

Mewad, a region in Haryana 35 kilometers Southwest of New Delhi, also has a growing population of Rohingya refugees. UNHCR recently began contracting IP in this area. Approximately 400 families reside there. For some time, Rohingya children were working as kabadi, but the leaders of the community put an end to this practice by partnering with educators and the local authorities to ensure child labor laws were being enforced (EIMAMW01 2017).

Urban refugee livelihoods in Delhi are precarious because of the arbitrary nature of employment in an informal sector where employers may either sympathize with foreigners or exploit them. I asked men if there were treated differently by Muslim versus Hindu employers. All responded negatively. They said religious affiliation did not make a difference. The livelihood strategies Rohingya employ includes vouching for one another with employers, concealing one’s refugee identity as long as possible, and employing other Rohingya when promoted to supervisory roles. Although job prospects are better in the city, men only find employment 15-20 days out of the month. Their inability to acquire stable work with career

55 Since my visit in October of 2017, tensions between Hindus and Muslims, citizens and foreigners, have risen in this border-city. A majority of Rohingya families have moved to other regions in India, like the state of Haryana.
laddering opportunities keeps families in poverty, unable to reside anywhere but the slums of the city.

Remittances

Remittances are an additional source of economic support. They do not hold economic value alone; they also have cultural and social value (Adger et al. 2002; Cohen 2011; Osaki 2003). Remittances are defined as economic transfers from a migrant back to the host country (Maimbo and Ratha 2005 as cited in Cohen 2011:104); however, for the urban Rohingya refugee, remittances are sent and received depending on the economic stability of the recipient vis-à-vis the sender. Rohingya who have family members in countries with a higher currency value than the Indian rupee, like United States, Canada, or Saudi Arabia tend to be recipients. Those who have relatives living in more economically depressed conditions, like in Myanmar or Bangladesh, send money from India.

Out of 43 families surveyed, 34.88 percent send remittances. One hundred of those are sent to families and villagers in Myanmar. Annually they remit 4,000–60,000 rupees (61-923 USD). In conflict-affected areas like Rakhine, even small amounts of remittances mean survival from violence, hunger, and internal displacement.

One young man, a youth leader among the Rohingya, suffers from depression. For a short time, I saw him frequently. When he could not handle the stress of his life any longer, he retreated without a word, neglecting his commitments. In the aftermath of the August 25 attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), his parents hid in their home. The villages surrounding them were burned down. They were running out of food and water and could not leave. He sent money via an intermediary who covertly brought food and would eventually
smuggle them out to Bangladesh. His morning routine consisted of a WhatsApp call to them to see if everyone was alive. Once he had confirmation, he mustered the will to begin his day. Refugee scholars write about remittances that flow from the third country to the first (Carling et al. 2012; Horst 2004 as cited in Jacobsen 2005; Jacobsen 2005; Lindley 2009), yet during increased violence in Myanmar, even second country displaced Rohingya felt the economic burden that determined the fate of their loved ones.

Huennekes (2018) research on remittances sent and received by Rohingya in Malaysia is consistent with the attitudes of the Rohingya in New Delhi. He argues “remittance practices provide the emotional resources for maintaining family ties and a buffer to the precariousness of life locally and transnationally” (354). Rohingya who were able to send remittances to help their families following the Rohingya Crisis of 2017 were desperate to offer support. Without the freedom to reunite with their families, or access to legal mechanisms, remitting money was the only way they could connect in a meaningful way.

Those who receive remittances from United States, Canada, or Saudi Arabia receive them through Western Union or similar types of financial systems. Sending money to Myanmar, however, is far more complex. It travels through informal channels of middlemen (who are usually related) on both sides. The middlemen on each side agree to the amounts being sent and received in order to complete the transaction. It is remarkable and unique that during the 2017 Rohingya Crisis the flow of money did not stop, the middlemen simply doubled their rates because of increased danger.

Out of 41 families surveyed, 12.2 percent receive remittances from relatives in other countries of settlement. Remittances from other diaspora communities are an important source of

---

56 Aside from the fact that Northern Rakhine was in a state of chaos, once a person fleeing persecution receives legal status as a refugee, s/he cannot go back to her/his country without losing refugee status.
revenue for refugees living in their second\textsuperscript{57} country of flight (Jacobsen 2005:47). Rohingya families report receiving anywhere from 10,000 - 50,000 rupees annually from friends and family living abroad.

It is difficult to report accurate numbers of household income or remittances because refugees often underreport. Jacobsen (2005) argues the underreporting is due to discounting of certain categories, which is the case with the urban Rohingya. Some do not want to reveal their sources.

My research indicates that there is also an element of performing deservingness (Chauvin et al. 2014; Horton 2014; Willen 2012 and 2016). Even though my interlocutors at the Migrant’s Plot have known me for years, there is always a sense of “she’s going to take us with her to America” or “she is going to make a huge donation to me/us.” I could not shed this part of my foreign identity, no matter how much time I spent within the community. I had to cross-reference stories, numbers, and events constantly in order to identify slivers of common elements to each story. This is not to say that refugees do not need remittances or that the remittances enable a comfortable living. It demonstrates perceptions and survival strategies employed by this group. It also elucidates why underreporting may occur.

There is restorative social value for refugees who are able to send remittances during seminal cultural occasions such as Ramadan (Chavez 2004; Cohen 2011). Families beamed with pride when they told me they were able to participate in zakat, the concept of giving, by sending small amounts of cash to their families in Myanmar. Only a select few Rohingya at the Migrant’s Plot are financially stable enough to send money. When sitting around with women at the camp they talked casually about who receives money from abroad, claiming that they have fewer

\textsuperscript{57} Refugee scholars refer to first country as the refugee’s home country, the second host-country as the country they fled to, and the third country as the one they may have resettled to.
burdens because they are looked after. There is a certain level of pride associated with having family in Western countries. The narrowing sense of community bonds the Rohingya via experience and support. Not all inhabitants are from the same region or related, so these bonds serve to build trust within the community.

Scholars who write about labor migration remittances emphasize that the earning potential of migrants who move to other destinations is expected to be higher, than the country of origin causing a one-way send-and-receiving transactional dynamic (Taylor 1999; Lindley 2009; Jacobsen 2005). Generally, the Migrant’s Plot remittance behavior fits into what has been written for migrant populations across the globe; however, sending and receiving are relational activities. The uniqueness of the situation is that remittances are flowing in two directions for a refugee group that has experienced the same causes of flight. The Rohingya diaspora has placed some Rohingya in more economically advantageous positions than others. The transnational processes of resettlement (to U.S. and Canada) and economic migration (to Saudi Arabia\textsuperscript{58}) have allowed some Rohingya refugees more economic stability than those who labor daily for their families in Delhi and Myanmar; thus, they receive money from these countries. But those who have no ties abroad, except for family in Myanmar, end-up being senders of remittances to Myanmar. It is important to understand remittance flows further because the movement of money informs us about the extent of the Rohingya diaspora. Families and friends are linked through financial exchanges facilitated by WhatsApp messages and phone calls across the globe. Many of these social networks have existed for decades. These extensive networks help to deepen a sense of Rohingya identity, creating a global form of what Putnam (2007) refers to as bonding social

\textsuperscript{58} Interviewees informed me that in the 1980s and 1990s many Rohingya obtained work visas to work in Saudi Arabia. Today an estimated 400,000 live and work there.
capital, but could potentially lead to forms of bridging capital that occurs across nations as Rohingya adopt more complex national and cultural identities.

Bonding social capital at the Migrant’s Plot occurs in the Rohingya’s ability to live together in a single settlement and practice their religion, raise their families together, speak their language, and share memories. They participate in creating new memories that builds upon their shared experiences. Bonding and bridging capitals work together to create a sense of emplacement— or what has been theorized as a sense of “place” or “place-making” in studies of displacement (Chatty 2014; 6; Chu 2006; Englund 2002).

7.2 Bridging Social Capital Into India

Bridging social capital is built through linking groups within a broader community (e.g. different church, social or, ethnic groups). Putnam (2007) explains bridging as a form of “social capital [that] can generate broader identities and reciprocity, whereas bonding social capital bolsters our narrower selves” (20-1). The Rohingya refugees at the Migrant’s Plot are involved in several cottage industries supported by cash grants from the UNHCR livelihood program. In order to be successful these enterprises rely on customers from outside the settlement. Through more detailed observations my data show that these enterprises not only provide economic stability for select families in the community, they also provide a platform to build social capital with the surrounding community of migrant Indians. Furthermore, it allows women desiring financial independence, to make strides towards this goal.

ACCESS’ livelihood programming provides several opportunities to improve the urban refugee economic circumstance. The program that has had the single largest impact on the community is the small business cash-grant program. Refugees can apply for a one-time small
business grant of up to 25,000 INR (385 USD). Figure 7.5 shows images of three small Rohingya-owned enterprises.

![Figure 7.5: Small Open-air Enterprises at the Migrant’s Plot](image)

Six shop owners have successfully applied for ACCESS’ grants. One is a butcher who sells halal chickens, another a vegetable seller with a mobile cart, a third woman sells luxury goods like facial moisturizer and jewelry, and there are three convenience shops that sell a bit of everything (e.g. rice, oil, soap, tobacco, candies). These shops operate to serve the refugee settlement as well as neighboring shanties. Since these enterprises opened, traffic on the dirt path leading to the settlements has increased. There is no advertising, but word of mouth diverts day laborers who may want to have *chai* before heading to work, or a cigarette on their lunch breaks.

Sol Tax’s (1953) concept of “penny capitalism” describes a Guatemalan-Indian agricultural society that functions as a capitalist society on a microscopic scale. It is without credit, large corporations, factories or industry. Money flows in small denominations. Sometimes just pennies are exchanged (Tax 1953: ix). In the case of India it could be just rupees. The Migrant’s Plot has the main attributes of Tax’s definition of penny capitalism, but it does not
occur in a rural space, nor do owners rely on microfinance loans. Similarly, the Plot’s small businesses operate in an informal economy. Their small businesses are not registered with the state. They do not conduct business from formally constructed buildings or pay taxes. Instead they are open-air stalls that fold away into the side of their homes at night. They operate in cash only and do not barter. The businesses are in Delhi’s peri-urban space where mix-migrants live due to growth of the surround urban space. This creates fragmented space that has both rural and urban characteristics. This form of penny, or “rupee,” capitalism on the outskirts of a booming economy serves a unique need for India’s poor. You find such shops across India, serving local populations. But Rohingya owned shops uniquely have a monopoly on the immediate area and have lending practices that create social capital that bridges the refugee group to others in the vicinity.

The population in this area is divided into two groups: Rohingya refugees and mix migrants. Migrants come to Delhi in search of work. They come from the rural areas of various states east of the capital. Map 7.1 shows the states (Bihar, Assam, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh) they have come from.

Map 7.1: Origins of Mix Migrant Groups in New Delhi (Source: Modified version of https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SevenSisterStates.svg#/media/File:SevenSisterStates.svg)
The main products sold are food and household items: candy, rice, flour, soap, and tobacco products. Small children beg parents for a rupee or two to buy candies or chips. Passersby stop for a cigarette, *paan*, or pouch of water. Women come with empty containers in-hand for a daily portion of flour or rice. These pop-up shops are convenient for a population who live day-to-day and are relegated to a peri-urban space distanced from the finer stores across the freeway. What is more, it creates a way for Rohingya women to extend their networks outside of the Plot.

The Migrant’s Plot receives attention from local Muslim organizations, individuals, masjids, and university students who provide cash donations, clothes and promises of long-term investment in the community. Community leaders disperse these donations among the 225 residents. Often there are too many donations for such a small community to absorb, so families begin selling goods to their non-Rohingya neighbors. Neighbors negotiate the purchase of items such as rice, sugar, oil, or blankets. Rohingya women team together to set market prices and engage in spirited haggling. These micro-economies create a power dynamic between the Rohingya and the local community, as well as a gendered power among women in the community. The UNHCR is painfully aware of the disjuncture created between the Rohingya and local Indians by their programming and outside support. However, they have little control over outside contributions.

Shop owners travel 23 kilometers to Old Delhi to buy products wholesale from petty traders. There, shop owners purchase items for resale, including popular brands of Burmese cigarettes and candies. The business model is to buy in bulk and sell products at a slightly higher price. They only buy products they know are in demand. Refugees and migrants have been
known to engage in petty commerce in host countries (Daley 1991; Verillo et al. 1993). These micro-economies not only sustain migrants, they also contribute to the overall economy.

Segura is the only female shop owner at the Migrant’s Plot. Originally she ran a convenience shop when I first met her in 2015. By 2017, she had decided to primarily sell luxury items for women. “I know women who travel quite far to get these shampoos and kajal [similar to eyeliner]. So my idea was to sell it here.” Luxury goods include shampoo, face wash, eyeliner, hair barrettes and ties, ornate necklaces, bangles, bindis, cosmetics, as well as bras. She says Rohingya buy some, but so do Hindu women who live nearby.

Segura came to India by ship through a middleman. Her husband passed away in Myanmar working as a coolie for the Burmese army. They had one child together. Once in India, she remarried and had a second daughter. When the baby was only three-months-old her second husband ran away. She thinks he is in Bangladesh, but does not know for certain.

Refusing to remarry, Segura is a determined woman. She is the only female who has a cellphone at the camp. She has rigged her cell phone to a speaker that blares Bollywood music in her shop. Everyday she greets me with a smile and a firm handshake. She says she has no family to watch after her children, so instead she decided to apply for a small business grant with ACCESS. Unlike like shop owners who are married couples, she works alone, meaning she has to close her shop when she decides to travel to Old Delhi, take a nap, or use the bathroom.

Segura’s ability to maintain a shop by marketing goods to local Hindu women, and have the gumption to travel to congested Old Delhi in a full burqa to haggle wholesalers is demonstrative of how bridging social capital is a form of capacity building. And in her case, it has led to financial independence and resilience. She often spoke about how the male leaders tell her she should marry. They say it does not look good for a single woman to be so independent.
She told me she refuses all suitors because she does not want the hassle of a husband. Her independence allows her to resist her community’s conservatism towards her gender.

Segura makes about 400 INR (6 USD) a day. The sum of 12,000 INR (185 USD) a month is more than most men make working in the public sector. She also puts a third of her profits aside as saving for reinvestment or loan repayments. Occasionally she has to borrow from friends in the community for investments like a refrigerator that allows her to sell cold drinks during hot months.

Owners are reluctant to specify their profits, but generally the convenience shops earn 500-1000 INR per day (15,000-30,000 INR a month). Although this is a good income, it comes with precarity. These are informal businesses and can be shut down easily. Adding to the precarity, as shops grow, tables or benches are set out in front to extend their structure into public spaces (similar to a sidewalk or public square). These types of transgressions provide an excuse for local police to bribe and hassle owners. Additionally, owners are not legally able to open bank accounts to manage their cash, making their profits insecure. In fact, I was told that a fire at the Migrant’s Plot in April of 2018 burned all cash, supplies, and ledgers of business owners, forcing them to build again from nothing. The Rohingya at the Migrant’s Plot are a good example of how urban spaces can create greater economic security for refugees as they participate in the local economy, but always in the context of broader challenges and potential precarity (Kibreab 1999).

Aside from the economic stability these shops generate for the Rohingya, they also create a bridge between them and the larger community they serve. Since the plight of most living poor is to live hand-to-mouth, owners keep a tab for those who cannot pay immediately. This interest-free lending between Rohingya shop owners and the Indian community not only increases their
profitability in the long run, but from a cultural point of view it builds social capital through feelings of trust and indebtedness. Coleman (1988) observes that in the wholesale diamond market the level of trust necessary to facilitate the transactions of the market requires strength of social ties. Anyone along the production chain could substitute a stone, stealing the more valuable one. But this does not happen because trust produces social capital, and social capital makes everyone more profitable over time. For the Rohingya this indebtedness creates a larger sense of community and emplacement that extends beyond their settlement to the entire neighborhood. One Hindu woman in the street stopped to chat with me. She said she was not Rohingya but knows the community well because she and her family shop at their shops because they are the closest ones around.

Coleman (1988) makes a distinction between the productions of trust in an urban space versus a rural area, stating that there is a high degree of social disorganization preventing such social capital to be created (S103). To the contrary, the Rohingya and India’s urban poor are a profoundly disenfranchised group who has developed capacities through bonds grounded in an informal economy and penny capitalism. They rely upon each other to survive in the city, and this includes forms of economic indebtedness. The urbanness of this particular space does not supersede the consequence of poverty.

This form of social capital also helps to facilitate non-economic bonding. Generally, there is a sense of diplomacy between the Rohingya and their Indian neighbors. Rohingya rarely speak ill of their neighbors and their neighbors express sympathy about how difficult it must be to leave one’s own homeland. Coleman (1988: S104) argues that the formation of social capital can facilitate actions as well as constrain others. Part of that constraint seems to be a stifling of any form of envy the neighbors may feel towards the Rohingya. It took months of small talk with the
Indian neighbors before an older woman finally launched a small tirade regarding the *Burmawala*, or people from Burma. She believed they receive a lot of help from the Indian government while she and her neighbors receive nothing. The ladies around her fell silent. The complaint was more about the Indian government than it was about the Rohingya themselves.

Through participant observation, I notice that women sit and gossip in Hindi outside of convenience shops, while men tend to have a more distanced-formal relationship. Women do not watch each others’ children, but the children occasionally play together.

The Rohingya community has access to resources offered by the UNHCR that are different from the resources to which the Indian poor have access. For example, the Rohingya are not able to utilize food ration cards, an ID card that allows citizens living below the poverty line to purchase subsidized food grain from the Public Distribution System. In actuality, the Rohingya do not have any form of direct state or government assistance. Overall both communities realize that their success and safety is tied to one another.

Ultimately, it is in the families’ interest to encourage and develop positive relationships within the neighborhood. The Rohingya tend to have a ‘big-brother’ relationship with their neighbors not simply because of the economic relationship, but because the Rohingya draw the interest of visitors such as the media, religious clerics, researchers, photographers, representative from international agencies, etc. The worldview of the Rohingya is much larger than the peri-urban space they inhabit. In the following section I will discuss how their identity as refugees has influence over the space in which they live, making it of global concern.
7.3 Linking Social Capital at A Global Settlement

The refugee identity is a global identity fashioned by the UNHCR, automatically casting light on the subjects of their protection. In a democratic country, attention to urban refugees who live among local citizens brings a certain level of accessibility. Rohingya refugees are able to contact local and international media outlets to report on their experiences, just as easily as reporters are able to approach them. Transnational NGOs can locate this small settlement to provide humanitarian aid. And because this particular settlement has received disproportionate media attention over five years, it has turned a small peri-urban plot of land into a global space. The Rohingya’s ability to create linking social capital, a form of capital that builds networks vertically, rather than horizontally, has benefitted them immeasurably. Their access to international agencies uniquely provides Rohingya refugees with a form of linking social capital that far surpasses the life experiences of their neighbors.

The general public, including most university students and NGOs, would not be aware of this space if it were not for journalists reporting on Rohingya settlements. With every breaking international news event, local media outlets are quick to visit Rohingya settlements in New Delhi to help locate India’s position in the larger story of displacement. Most media outlets do not protect the location and identity of their subjects thus allowing the general public to literally drive-up to the Migrant’s Plot.

After a particularly busy media week for the Rohingya, I walked up to one of the shops where a female photo-artist sat speaking with a female shopkeeper. As an occupation she takes photos, renders drawings of her subjects, and writes stories about her art online. After reading about the camp in the newspaper she wanted to take photos of the children because “what chance do these kids have? Look at them.” I disliked her immediately. When looking at the mostly
naked children who run around the camp barefoot, covered in dirt, one might quickly assess that they have no future prospects. If she spent time at the camp she would know that these kids go to a private school, are learning English and Hindi, and have a community that supports their education. The next day she came again. This time she brought two bunches of bananas for the children. She held them up and the children swarmed her: clawing, jumping, screaming, and crying. Scared, she dropped the bananas, ran backwards, stumbling, and clutching her chest. The children who were cute and helpless suddenly became a source of fear. The shopkeeper and I looked at each other and stifled our laughter. The kids scattered after an elder yelled at them for misbehaving. A mashed pile of bananas lay on the ground, wasted. I wondered how her story would read.

On another occasion a young man arrived with five friends from a nearby university. I asked a few questions about their goals in visiting the Rohingya. The leader responded that I did not understand the situation, and that the Rohingya did not have any water and were eating from the trash. (Neither was is true.) They had come to give them nutritious food. I did not ask what his source of information was. I simply watched them deliver rice, lentils, oil, and sugar. I never saw them again.

Whether these accounts offer an accurate representation or not, it is experiences like these that catalyze increased responses, near and far, from NGOs, the media, and researchers, myself included. Those visitors who arrive with good intentions, and not all do, come with donations. Unbeknownst to the donor, these items are valuable in terms of resale. Through support of local donations, the settlement has been able to maintain an Imam for their masjid, rebuild their toilet facilities, and generally sustain their economic position in the neighborhood. Some have acquired sewing machines, rickshaws, and refrigerators from individual contributions.
The resale of donated items has brought Rohingya women into the micro-market economy. Women from neighboring shanties arrive in groups walking up and down the gullies, asking for whatever it is that they need: blankets, rice, oil, sugar, etc. Rohingya woman haggle vociferously in the gullies with their customers. One Rohingya woman told me that rice was 22 rupees per kilo in the local markets, but here Rohingya women sell it for 20 rupees per kilo.

The global can also be observed in the attitudes of the people. The inhabitants (including the children) barely flinch when visited by Westerners because international journalists and researchers frequent the Migrant’s Plot. They are accustomed to seeing their own faces in newspapers, and they often critique the reporting. Their engagement with foreigners and international matters is far greater than that of the average Indian. Therefore, the power dynamics of the settlement is not simply defined by its economic vitality; instead it is the constant reification of a Rohingya refugee identity that places them at the apex of a political micro-economy with a global imprint.

Oscar Lewis (1966) argues that a “culture of poverty” transcends national identity, and that poverty bonds people who adapt to common problems in a common space. Alternatively, authors such as Carol Stack (1975) prefer to conceptualize this as a culture of support built on ties of kinship. It is this culture of support that is exhibited at the Migrant’s Plot between refugees and economic migrants. Everyone in this mix-migrant space is poor but this analysis is about relative poverty being informed by the politics of place and refugee identity. Because the Rohingya are internationally recognized group, they have access to building linking networks that are international, and can solidify a certain level of community, economic, and political security. But this is against a larger more powerful backdrop of political precarity. They have

---

59 The term “cultural of poverty” has become an incendiary phrase to refer to urban blacks trapped in welfare dependency (cf Vaeltine 1968). I use Lewis’ phrase and meaning in a much more circumstantial way—the “culture” in my example is one of resilience and support, not of self-perpetuating dependency.
emplaced themselves finding a sense of belonging within their immediate neighborhood, however their legal position with the state is one of political insecurity.

Conclusion

Bonding social capital is surprisingly important at the Migrant’s Plot because the residents are not all related or from the same region of Rakhine. They entered the Plot as strangers, but bond over their “Rohingya-ness,” their common experience historically, as well as their new experience in Delhi. Bridging social capital within the neighboring community is created by the Rohingya’s ability to lend money and participate in shared activities, like prayer. They build vertical links through linking social capital based on their relationship with the international media, UNHCR, and lawyers.

These forms of capital allow refugees to build and negotiate their own security, but only to a certain extent. In New Delhi, urban refugees have what Leferbve (1996, original in French 1968) refer to as “Rights to the City.” Refugees theoretically have freedom of movement in India, but their identification loses power the further they move from the UNHCR hub. In practice, refugees are allowed rights to the city, but not the country. This further embeds the notion of a dual political identity informed by the triangular relationship between the UNHCR, India, and urban refugees. The UNHCR authority only extends to the Delhi, making refugees “illegal” migrants in other spaces in India. And even as recognized refugees in Delhi, they face exploitation. They are made to negotiate their right to the city daily once they leave their settlement.
Chapter 8

CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONAL INSIGHTS

I just want a normal life. A free life. Where no one restricts me from going where I want. Now I am the first person to go to university in India from my community. That gives me hope. Maybe I can support my family. Maybe we can apply somewhere for citizenship, then maybe we have dignity. Maybe I’ll have a good future. But it’s uncertain. I just can imagine it is possible. People say it’s good to have hope.

I’m hoping.

*Ali Johar, age 22*
In this study, I sought to understand the subjective nature of human security as experienced by Rohingya refugees in New Delhi, through ethnographic fieldwork at three urban refugee settlements. I examined how the economic, community, and political dimensions of human security are created and maintained in an urban space, as opposed to refugee camp settings. Furthermore, I wanted to understand the role international actors, the state, and the Indian community had on the process of a person-centered securitization.

Rohingya insecurity did not begin in New Delhi, India. There are deep-rooted experiences of displacement that began in the 19th century when kingdoms of disparate ethnic and linguistic backgrounds were thrust together under the banner of one British Raj. Systematically, and since independence in 1948, the Rohingya have been denied a sense of belonging. There was and continues to be the result of the divisiveness of religion in defining Burmese state identity. The Burmese dance towards democracy has been rife with selectively choosing behaviors that exhibit equality on the one hand, such as voting and free trade, and inequality and repression on the other, by favoring some groups over others and by challenging secularism, the freedom of the press, and equal rights.

I think it is worth repeating here that there are other Muslim ethnic minorities who enjoy the benefits of full citizenship in Myanmar. The Rohingya “othering” is not solely about religion, but a fight for coastal territory replete with minerals and natural gas, as well as a struggle for a homogenous “look” when defining Burma. This is indicated in the Myanmar use of the term “kala,” meaning “dark” and “foreign,” to refer to the Rohingya. Because other Muslim groups are allowed to exist as citizens, it leads me to argue that religion is secondary to the ethnicity. Ethnicity is used to scapegoat the Rohingya in a country of Buddhists, making it easier for people to rally behind religion as a way to define their identity as a nation.
In India, the Rohingya entered a country with a long history of religious tensions with Muslims, at a time when Islamophobia was legislatively integrated into the administration’s modus operandi. Sharma and Gupta (2006) suggest that refugees entering countries decrease state sovereignty because they cross borders “illegally,” are unable to leave for fear of persecution, and challenge a nation’s notion of citizenship. Although, UNHCR wants to bring protection to urban refugees, the Indian state wants to be rid of them. UNHCR works to create protection and stability by establishing refugee rights similar to those of citizens, while India attempts to thwart the process of integration into society.

It is against this political backdrop that the outcomes of my data begin to take shape. Security must be understood within the context of urban refugee displacement. Urban refugees are exposed to a different set of experiences than are camp refugees. They are intermixed with the host population, in a country that deems them “illegal.” They find safety, resources, and hope for resettlement through the UNHCR. However, after three renditions of the Urban Refugee Policy, it still does not address the initial concern of a displaced group, and that is shelter. When the Rohingya first arrived in New Delhi they were scattered, inhabiting spaces under bridges and along highways.

The outcomes of my data regarding community security demonstrates that without the state and UNHCR participation in finding shelter, refugees sought to emplace themselves in a single location in order to form a unified community. This is difficult to do in cities where space is such a valuable commodity, pushing many to live in peri-urban plots (Migrant’s Plot), flood plains under bridges (secondary field site), and on rural agricultural land (tertiary field site) far away from the UNHCR offices. The urban poor and displaced are often made to pay rent for unoccupied empty land and to build their own shelter (Crisp et al. 2012). Also, this study found
that the further urban refugees live from the UNHCR offices the more precarious their lives become.

In displacement, their social organization is reordered to fit the situation. In this case leaders arise out of peculiar circumstances: men who know the local language, or are able to use their social capital to help bring stability to the community gain “big” man status (Sahlins 1963). Over time their authority, unchecked, leads them to take advantage of their position to make their family’s lives more secure, sometimes at the expense of their Rohingya countrymen. Some families and individuals find security under their leadership, while others feel they are living at their mercy.

Rohingya women are not a homogenous unit. Their unique experiences inform a broader conversation on gender and urban displacement. Migration scholars have found that women in displacement are often placed into more traditional roles than in their home countries and while this is true for many; Rohingya women also experience the opposite. Like other studies on gender and migration (Pessar 2005; Sadoway 2008) my research too demonstrates that women experience empowerment in displacement through politicization and self-awareness. In a cosmopolitan city some have found liberation in the ability to engage in family planning, to start businesses, or to seek an education. As stateless non-citizens in Myanmar some of these options were simply unavailable.

With regards to economic security, the Rohingya are limited to informal labor and business. Their opportunity for economic growth in the city is stunted by their refugee status. But they have found that capitalizing on UNHCR’s small business grant program allows for greater economic stability. The amount of small businesses that can exist is mitigated by the amount of
space the Migrant’s Plot has along the street. This space is coveted by the powerful at the camp, linking community power to economic progress.

Another outcome of this research helps us understand not just how social capital is built, but also how it is leveraged to create community embeddedness in the city. Through UNHCR programming and the ability to live together, the Rohingya created deeper bonding capital. This capital is exhibited in their ability to share common experiences, provide each other with social support, and even in how they protect widows and single women. These bonds can also lead to certain forms of insecurity, such as bullying and exploitation by the stronger individuals. The manifestation of this particular form of insecurity is unique to the Plot. Even though the Migrant’s Plot is the smallest most dilapidated Rohingya inhabited slum in New Delhi, it is the envy of all refugees because it is rent-free. This makes the leaders of the Plot very powerful.

Bridging capital built with local nationals provides a wider safety net within their immediate neighborhood community. This form of security has been referred to as “urban sociabilities” among urban migrants (Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2016:1). It is formed among migrants who feel equally disempowered in a city with limited institutional support. The poor migrants from other states in India and the Rohingya relate through their common tribulations in the city (Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2016; Lewis 1966). The Rohingya are able to build businesses due to grants offered by the UNHCR. It is an instance of how their political identity has created economic security within their immediate environment.

My research also contributes to anthropological theories of the state by exploring ethnographically how operations of power becomes disaggregated and dispersed through institutional bureaucracy (Foucault 1979, 1991; Ong 1999; Sharma and Gupta 2006). These institutions instill normative behaviors and hegemonic ideas about belonging, race, and culture
School principals, police officers, and even UNHCR Implementing Partners have used exclusive “othering” language in speaking to or about the Rohingya. Landlords and employers also implement the ideal of promoting nationals above “foreigners.” These national narratives further embed the subjugation of Muslims in India. Even though the Rohingya population has no connection to India’s historical narrative of Partition, the Rohingya endure the discrimination of being Muslim “infiltrators” by the state, conservative media outlets, and their bureaucratic extensions.

My research builds upon the concept of fragmented bureaucracy, by offering an argument that such fragments extend to supranational powers as well, such as the UNHCR. Sassen’s (1999) ethnographic work demonstrates that immigration policy is impacted by supranational policies, but in India the exact opposite is exemplified. India is unimpacted by UNHCR desire to affect India’s refugee policy, or lack thereof. In fact, since 1960, India has parceled out the administration and RSD process to UNHCR so that they may maintain positive international relations with refugee-producing countries. They did this during the Cold War to protect their relationship with Russia and again presently, so as not to harm their economic relationship with Bangladesh and Myanmar. Fragmented bureaucracy is not necessarily in compliance with supranational organizations, but is rather a means to leverage UNHCR utility to India’s political benefit.

The mistrust of the UNHCR by India contributes to a tenuous relationship that extends to the refugees UNHCR is supposed to protect. The refugee identity prescribed to the Rohingya by the UNHCR recreates them as political bodies making them recognizable in New Delhi as foreigners. Based on the perception of refugees as foreigners, the Hindu-conservative state publically and legislatively argues for their deportation, causing UNHCR India and even the
headquarters in Geneva to question India’s authority in repatriating a population involuntarily to a country where they continue to be persecuted. So, while the UNHCR and interested local partners attempt to expand the protection space in the city, the state increasingly gestures towards legislative limitations of protection. Media coverage of escalating violence against Muslims demonstrates how the political human security of migrating Muslims like the Rohingya is in danger, as xenophobia and Islamophobia are supplanting democratic values.

There seems to be a conflict of morality. UNHCR operates apolitically, contending that all refugees should be protected equally. However, India’s historical regional experience makes them behave differently. South Asian borders have been historically determined along religious and cultural lines. Even the Afghan and Pakistani nationals who are seeking refuge in India are primarily Hindu and Sikh. There is a well-established understanding of religious alliances, so that refugees understand which countries in South Asia will be responsive to their struggle. The Rohingya know very well that India is not a Muslim-friendly country, but they also have family and friends who sold them tales of a democratic country with freedom of movement and economic opportunity, which is not entirely untrue.

India’s morality, right or wrong, is informed by a distinct political history. The UN imposing their views of moral obligation does not sway a conservative administration that is both anti-immigration and anti-Islam. These opposing ideologies inform policy and practice of the state and the UNHCR. The Rohingya are left to negotiate security in a tug-o-war of political sovereignty.
**Directional Insights**

Lastly, I offer insights for stakeholders who could potentially benefit from the application of the following lessons from the field. One, it is noted repeatedly by UNHCR and refugee scholars that urban refugees are understudied populations. They are not an easy population to understand because locating them is difficult; they may be scattered individually or in groups in densely packed, yet sprawling cities, and the most vulnerable (women and girls who have fallen into transactional sex) remain deliberately invisible. Urban refugees must come forward as such in order to receive the assistance of UNHCR and other agencies, but in some cases invisibility is a survival strategy.

The initial 1997 Urban Refugee Policy was met with great controversy and was labeled by Human Rights Watch as a program that sought to prevent refugee movements into urban areas. UNHCR managers felt the camp system was more efficient and that urban spaces drain their resources and are highly political. Both might be true but forcing refugees to confined camps also does not allow them agency in their own lives. The 2014 policy document now approaches urban areas as a solution to refugee self-sustainability, but is still fraught with ill-conceived notions of apoliticism (Crisp 2017).

In order to close the gap between understanding and addressing these populations, more long-term ethnographic data needs to be collected across several different geographic areas to understand what common tasks UNHCR could undertake in such disparate urban spaces. Finding the population is possible, learning about their needs is possible, but is UNHCR willing to invest the resources up-front to develop a more nuanced policy?
There are 12 protection objectives of the Urban Refugee Policy (2009). Based on my experience with UNHCR India, below are four specific amendments to the policy that would be beneficial in the India context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective 1: Providing Reception Facilities</th>
<th>The state must handle its own RSD process at FRRO offices. This would cut the amount of mobile teams in circulation. Also resources that are currently allocated for RSD can be shift to other more necessary areas.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objective 3: Ensuring Documentation</td>
<td>Mobile field teams need to visit remote settlements once every 6 months to ensure infants and children are documented. Documentation is their only form of protection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective 8: Promoting livelihoods and self-reliance</td>
<td>Advocacy with local employers in large enough institutions that provide career laddering opportunity and job security. These institutions must be willing to pay in-cash.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective 7: Maintaining Security</td>
<td>Rohingya living in high security risk areas like on the border of Pakistan needs to be moved to a safer place by incentivizing refugees with transport to another city, better living conditions, access to education, and livelihoods.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Refugees who live in urban spaces should be able to enjoy freedom of movement, but sometimes the places they are able to afford to settle are not secure locations. With this in mind, UNHCR’s IP teams could attempt to find areas and municipalities that are more migrant friendly, or in the case of the Rohingya, Muslim-friendly.

Additionally, UNHCR needs to examine its rigid position of apoliticism. Their action, and inaction at times, clearly places them in the arena of politics. In India, during the deportation hearings at the Supreme Court, no representatives of the UNHCR were present to even remind the High Court of its international obligations and that the international community was
watching. Embracing their position of power, and bargaining for protection is a more noble use of perceived politicism than remaining coy in the face of the Indian state’s targeted discrimination.

The UNHCR managers in Crisp’s (2017) firsthand account deem urban spaces too political; this study most certainly confirms this statement, but it is for this reason that refugees need protection. Urban refugees are now 60 percent of the world’s refugee population, making it incumbent upon the international protection agency to address its policy and knowledge dearth.

Finally it is time to re-evaluate the three durable solutions of voluntary repatriation, third country resettlement, and host country integration. Countless refugee scholars from a variety of disciplines have offered ways to make each of these more effective as well as offer new solutions altogether. In order to address the urban refugee situation we will necessarily need to look towards durable democracies and not just durable solutions. What sorts of municipalities are governing the cities to which refugees are moving? Democracy has changed; it is formulated in the vision of each sovereign state, and very few are full democracies as defined by Pew Research Center. India seems to be moving towards a theocratic democracy, although they would never describe themselves as such. What sorts of things do we need to know about the city and its governance in order to negotiate successful refugee protection in such spaces? Are there interagency (e.g. UNDP, UN Security Council, UNHR) relationships that can help negotiate such protection? Considering the type of government refugees are living under and the limits of their municipal powers versus central government powers may allow UNHCR to divert refugees to areas receptive to receiving migrants to grow their economies.

Historically, the UNHCR operates as an expression of Western values and norms; for example, in the West one does not discriminate based on religion. However, many communities
in India will not compromise their family integrity by associating themselves with people of other religions or lower castes. Due to the historical relationship between Hindus and Muslims, and a very conservative leaning federal government, Muslims are treated as second-class citizens. It is therefore, not entirely surprising that the state is treating Muslim-Rohingya differently from Hindu or Sikh refugees. The Urban Policy must not operate under the assumption of local integration, as it does in India. If the host government does not accept local integration, then the actions of UNHCR will be in direct conflict with the attitudes of the Indian state, making the lives of refugees still more precarious.

Although this dissertation focuses on the Rohingya in India, the endemic issue of statelessness is a growing global issue. The UNHCR estimates that there are approximately 10 million stateless people worldwide. The problem is ever increasing due to disputed boundaries, discrimination, and children born into statelessness. For the Rohingya, the entire population was stripped of citizenship making them stateless overnight. They had to leave their homeland and become “illegal” migrants into another country, in order to access their human rights. Due to their statelessness and inability to access human rights in their own county the Rohingya have suffered acts of genocide, widespread torture, and sexual violence. If the international community is to take the prevention of statelessness seriously they must recognize, and more importantly act, when they learn of decades of abuse and violence.

Ali Johar is quoted at the beginning of Chapter Four essentially stating that the Rohingya wear many different labels in displacement. The UNHCR labels them refugees, the state calls them illegal immigrants, and the local population perceives them as foreigners. But in the end their sense of belonging always relates back to Rakhine. In spite of this longing for home and the many challenges found in a city teeming with people and with poverty, the Rohingya have
contested insecurity through resourcefulness and capacity building, which leads to resilience. They have constructed productive lives for themselves in Delhi despite challenges and negative odds.
APPENDIX

QUALTRICS-FORMATTED ELECTRONIC QUESTIONNAIRE
20-25 MINS

Limiting Criteria:

Q1. Are you over 18 years of age?
Q2. Are you registered with the UNHCR?
Q3. Please specify your ethnicity?

Basic Demographic Information:

Q4. Sex
Q5. What year were you born?
Q6. What is your highest level of education:
Q7. Which religion do you adhere to?
Q8. What languages do you use speak?

Household Composition:

Q8. What is your marital status?
Q9. How many children do you have? [pregnancies count as 1]
Q10. How many members in your household?
Q11. What is your relationship to the members in your household?
   How old is each member of your household?

Migration Information:

Q12. You came to Indian directly from which country?
Q13. What month and year did you arrive to India?
Q14. State other cities you’ve lived in India?
Q15. You’ve been in New Delhi since what year?

Economic Security:

Q16. Number of household members earning an income:
Q17. Current Monthly household income?
Q18. What is your individual contribution per month?
Q19. Is this enough money for your household per month?
Q20. What type of work does each member of your household engage in?
Q21. Does you household have debts?
Q22. How much debt do you owe?
Q23. For what do you owe money and to whom?
Q24. What do you do if someone needs medical care?
Q25. If you have to borrow money, who do you go to?
Q26. Does anyone in your household send remittances?
Q27. To whom do you send remittances?
Q28. To which country?
Q29. How much do you send annually?
Q30. How do you send the money?
Q31. Does anyone send your household remittances?
Q32. Who sends you remittances
Q33. From which country?
Q34. How much do they send annually?
Q35. How do you receive the money?
Q36. Who manages the money in the household?

**Language Usage Assessment**

Q37. What do you think secure/suraksha/hefaazat is? How do you define it?
Q38. Do you feel secure/suraksha/hefaazat?
Q39. What do you and your family need to feel secure/suraksha/hefaazat?

---

60 Used to understand the translation, meaning, and application of the word “security.”
Bibliography


Bhagat, R.B., 2016. Internal migration in India: are the underclass more mobile?. In India Migrations Reader, pp. 132-150. Routledge India.


Brettell Caroline. 2003. Anthropology and Migration: Essays on Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and Identity. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira


Butalia, U. 2017. The Other Side of Silence: Voices From the Partition of India. Penguin UK.


Deepak, K S. 2010 Stateless in South Asia: The Chakmas Between Bangladesh and India. Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd.


--- 2017b Urban Refugees in Delhi: Identity, Entitlements and Well-being.


--- 1996. The Right to the City. Writings on cities, 63181.


Madhukar, Abhishek and Rina Chandran. Sixty Years after Fleeing Tibet, Refugees in India Get Passports, not property. Reuters. 21 June 2017.


McDuie-Ra, Duncan. 2012. Northeast Migrants in Delhi: Race, Refuge and Retail.


McLeod, Ganj. 2017. Tibetans Born in India to Get Indian Passport. Tibet Sun, 29 March.


Nicolaus, P 1995 'A Brief Account on the History of the Muslim Population in Arakan'


Press Trust of India. 2018. Tiwari Reiterates Demand for Identification Deportation of Illegal Immigrants in Delhi." Theweek.in. 24 Nov.


Sadoway, G., 2008. The Gender Factor in Refugee Determination and the Effect of" Gender Guidelines".


**Personal Interviews and Field Notes:**

INDHZF18. 2015. August 28. Personal Interview
INDHZF25. 2015. September 4. Personal Interview