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Social Interaction between 'Host' and 'Guest': Rohingya Refugee Context in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

The juxtaposition of Rohingya refugees and the host community will be explored in this article, where two parties are not only in a hostile situation but also create an amicable situation through their social interactions. This relationship will be examined using the theoretical concepts of conflict and cultural assimilation. Though the two groups did not originate from the same place, they today have a common socio-cultural heritage. That is why, to function in society, the host community and Rohingya refugees are involved in new social interactions over time and in flourishing mixed kinds of kin networks like marriage and patron-client relations. It is noted that the host community is becoming hostile, but at the beginning of the influx, they were not unsympathetic. Both groups (Rohingya refugees and host community) also have social communication with working aid agencies. On the other hand, through capitalizing on the current situation, a new economic class has emerged in the host community. It is also significant to recognize the ongoing social pattern. So, to understand the relationship profoundly between the host community and Rohingya refugees, those kinds of social interactions should count in similar social research.

Keywords: Rohingya refugees, Host community, Society, Culture, Social interaction, Kinship, and Social class.

INTRODUCTION:

During 1980's and 1990's Rohingya infiltration took place in Bangladesh for the first time followed by a series of political transitions taking place in Myanmar (Rahman, 2010). In 1962 the army took over the central power of the state in Myanmar resulting in the increase in abuse and state-led discrimination against the Rohingya ethnic population. To suppress the Rohingya people, King Dragon Operation (was a military operation conducted out by the Tatmadaw and immigration officials in northern Arakan, Burma during Ne Win's socialist government) was directed in 1978 which killed thousands of people from different ethnic groups including Rohingya people, and around 300,000 Rohingya people were forced to take refuge in

Bangladesh and Karachi in Pakistan. In 1991 during the second wave, a large number of Rohingya refugees were forced again to come to Bangladesh. In the mid-off 1992, the Bangladesh government sent back almost one-fourth of the Rohingyas to Myanmar through a bilateral agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar. It was also agreed to take back the remaining people by December 1995. However, due to the continuous non-cooperation of Myanmar, this plan was never fully executed. Instead, a large number of repatriated Rohingya returned to Bangladesh again (Rahman, 2017). The most recent Rohingya influx in 2017 crossed all the previous records by making it one of the largest humanitarian crises of the decade. Since then, an estimated 745,000 Rohingya have fled into

Cox's Bazar (data.unhcr.org). This influx and its aftermath created an enormous amount of tension in the area and brought significant changes in social life. This is because the refugee community who have come to Bangladesh recently along with those previously residing here had been sheltered beside the local community in Ukhia and Teknaf sub-districts of Cox's Bazar and in some places shelters were arranged with the locality on temporary basis. Although the local community welcomed them initially and even arranged shelter for the Rohingya community in many cases, over the time this co-living (local community and Rohingya community living together in the same locality) resulted indifferent kinds of problems and agitated the components of social-cultural changes. Gradually, local people started experiencing different adverse impacts in relation to livelihoods, economic opportunities, access to various public services, environmental degradation, interpersonal security, access to health & education, and poor communication due to the excessive demand-side pressure of the refugee population (Hoque *et al.,* 2021; Olney *et al.,* 2019).

Research commissioned around the world in refugee crisis contexts has been exploring the interaction and changing dynamics of relationships between the local community and refugee community mainly from the perspectives of economic and environmental changes. In this context, the socio-cultural interrelation and internal strife between local people and refugee people is addressed with less importance (Whitaker, 2002; Maystadt and Verwimp, 2014; Kreibaum, 2016; Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2016). But these two communities, living side by side in the same locality cause difficulties over time in mutual understanding and sometimes creates a relation of disbelief and hostility as well. In the context of ethnically diverse neighborhoods, Putnam (2007) describes the relationship dynamics as 'Hunkering Down', where scopes of trust, mutual help, cooperation, and friendship are significantly lower (Putnam, 2007). Refugee crisis may impact the financially rich and poor differently. Chambers argues that the presence of refugees serves the purposes of rich people with extra benefits, but the poor people continues their struggle to adjust with the changing situation in terms of food, economic opportunities and livelihood security (Chambers, 1986). He

described this latter category as the 'hidden losers'. He further argued that neither the local community noir the refugee communities are identical. Differences and diversities exist among them in terms of class, gender, religion, caste, political identity and power relations. Similarly, the impact of refugee crisis on the local community and the relationship dynamics between the two needs to be understood comprehensively covering all the existing determinants like class, gender, religion, political identity and caste.

The current article aims to discuss how the host communities do and the Rohingya community socially interacts with each other, and what roles different stakeholders like aid agencies play. The article will also try to understand current situation of refugee camp areas in terms of their interconnectedness and continuous mutual interactions with the host community. In addition the emphasis will also be given to understand the network making process of between guest and host communities, as well as the emerging process of making a neo-economic class among host community.

METHODOLOGY:

Tensions and conflicts between refugee and host populations have risen in recent years all across the world. The lack of Refugee-Host Community projects and the shared limited resources are the main causes of stress and conflict. Most Host-Communities see migrants as a threat to their scarce resources, such as land, timber, jobs, and water, particularly as the refugee population grows. The residents of Ukhiya are experiencing a variety of unfavorable daily living situations as a result of the large number of Rohingya. In the light of this circumstance, field data of this research was collected from Ukhiya and Teknaf Upazilla of Cox's Bazar district. According to UNHCR 8, 89,752 Rohingya refugees are now living in those two Upazilla (United Nations, 2017) and obviously this is the largest Rohingya makeshift that is situated in this particular geographical location. Methodologically, this was a quailtative research and mainly three types of qualitative data collection tools named In-depth interview (IDI), Key Informant Interview (KII) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was used for data collection from the field. This research was mainly focused on host community and their existing social realities that is why most of the respondents were selected from local

community. To get a detail and comprehensive illustration from host community this research conducted total six KIIs and fifteen IDIs. Three local household owners, two NGO workers and one local political leader were selected as KII respondent. As well as IDIs were conducted with different professionals like school teachers, business owner, CNG drivers etc of local community. To understand the situation and issues from a group view, this research also conducted five FGDs with Community women, Community men, Young boys and girls. For preparing data collection guideline, this research was utterly dependent on reviewing brief available literature (articles, books, research papers, and other materials) and with the help of literature researchers, developed initial qualitative data collection guidelines for particular research. By giving feed-back on that particular version of the guideline as well as incorporating feedback, this guideline was finalized for field data collection. For research analysis, thematic analysis was done for qualitative data.

Literature Review and Theoretical Understanding of Social Interaction between Host Community and Refugees

Many studies on the relationship between the host community and the refugee have been conducted in various contexts (Kuhlman, 1991; Whitaker, 2002; Ikanda, 2008; Atim, 2013). Although refugees come from different social and cultural contexts, they go through a continuous negotiation process in order to better accommodate them in their new place and culture. However, the local community also accepts them as guests.

But when two different cultures coexist, they may share their knowledge, attitudes, practices, norms, and ideas among them. Depending on the social, cultural, political, and economic factors, sometimes the host community welcomes the refugees and sometimes they resist (Kroeber, 1940). Whitaker highlighted the economic aspects and showed in his work in the Tanzanian context that 75% of the distributed food items for the refugee population were sold in the local markets (Whitaker, 2002). Local buyers, who were mainly from the host community, purchased the food items at a significantly reduced price. In his research, Chambers (1986) argued in his research that local people do not always get into losses, but rather different types of

social service systems get developed in the affected area. Provision of healthcare and ensuring education in refugee camps do not only ensure the facilities for the refugees, but eventually also benefit the local community (Chambers, 1986). Alix Garcia and Saah, (2010) argued that sometimes refugee camps become a blessing for the local inhabitants by the increase of lots of income-generating opportunities (Alix-Garcia and Saah, 2010). However, in Africa, a strong relationship between the local and refugee communities was formed not only at the individual level, but also at the collective level through the exchange of food, tobacco, goats, and other marketable products. He coined this relationship as "bond friendship" (Gulliver, 1955). This article will go over "conflict theory" and "cultural assimilation theory" in greater detail. The "conflict theory" will be applied to research data in the following section. Concurrently, field data in the following section will conform to the "cultural assimilation theory." First conflict, from the 1990s, it is observed a significant advancement in the study of public conflict and its international/transnational connotations (Braithwaite, 2010; Buhaug & Gleditsch, 2008; Gleditsch, 2007). One of the central claims of conflict theory is that, as a societal being, humans always try to meet their basic needs, but denial and frustration of these needs by other groups or individuals can affect them immediately or later, resulting in conflict (Rosati *et al.,* 1990). Academics in this promising field have distinguished that refugees are a vital corollary of civil conflict and, rather than purely being submissive actors in need of humanitarian support, refugees play an imperative function in the dynamics of conflict (Davenport *et al.,* 2003; Moore & Shellman, 2007).

Cultural assimilation is a resemble process where a minority group or culture tries to merge with society's majority group through absorbing the particular values, behaviors, and beliefs, whether fully or partially (Ortmann and Rydval, 2004). During cultural assimilation, minority groups are expected to conform to the dominant culture's everyday practices through language and appearance, as well as more significant socioeconomic elements like absorption into the local cultural and job community, during cultural assimilation (Holohan, 2001).

Interpretations of Social Interaction between Three Actors Host Community, Rohingya & AID Agencies

Social interaction refers to the communication, actions, or relationships between particular individuals or groups. This kind of interaction can be made in various ways, like conflict, hostility, sexual attraction, friendship, loyalty, or economic exchange (Weber, 2008). It is fascinating that Weber considered conflict and hostility as forms of social interaction because, according to his analysis, social relations not only depend on social cohesion but also emerge between two or more diverse parties. In the context of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, the host community is becoming hostile, but at the beginning of the influx they were not unsympathetic. Most of the host community people mentioned increased pressure on social, economic, and environmental aspects due to the massive number of refugee people coming in. However, these changes and tensions were not built over night, but over time. As a result, the relationships between the host and guest communities became competitive in terms of their social and economic activities. At the beginning of the latest influx in 2017, host community people welcomed them with shelter and by providing food, clothing, etc. One of the participants from the host com-munity described,

"We, the local people, stood for the Rohingya community at the very beginning, even before any NGO and government came forward. We arranged places for them to live and food to eat. We did not let anyone die of hunger. Many people have given them shelter on their own lands. But at present, that brotherhood kind of relationship does not exist anymore. Those who have given shelter on their own land are now in a conflicting relationship with the Rohingya people "(Age-45, KII).

Another participant said that,

"Eight Rohingya families lived beside my house near the pond. When they came here, I thought that they had come for a short period of time. But now we can see that there is no sign of them returning. I cannot do fishing business in my pond. Women members in my family cannot take baths in the pond. Now a day, I am not on good terms with them over these issues" (Age-38, IDI).

According to the interviewed participants, the mutual relationship between these two communities was warm, sympathetic, and cooperative at the beginning, but that gradually turned into a competitive relationship. However, Rohingya camps soon became a major employment source for the local people. Because, it was not possible for the NGOs or the humanitarian organizations to bring a lot of people from outside of Cox's Bazar to work in the camps. Another key issue was language skills. The spoken version of the Rohingya dialect and the Cox's Bazar dialect are more or less similar. As a result, local people got preference in different jobs, especially as interpreters or communicators. Nevertheless, many of them lost their jobs due to the change in the nature of the response. This led them to organize a movement demanding preference in jobs as well as to make their jobs permanent. They demanded a quota of 70% jobs reserved for them which the study found endorsed by different stakeholders like NGOs, government, policy makers and so on. One of the participants said that,

"We helped the Rohingya community first and let them stay in our place. We shared our food and now we are losing our jobs. Many people from outside of Cox's Bazar came here to work with a higher pay scale. Foreigners spend BDT 16,000 daily. They live here, drink alcohol and have fun. Different donor agencies donate money for the wellbeing of the Rohingya community, but half of the donations are spent on foreigners. There is no record of their money. On the other hand, we do not get a good salary and this trend is rising day by day" (Age-51, FGD).

Another participant said,

"Since people from outside of Cox's Bazar get preference in all sorts of jobs, local people face challenges with house rent, excessive prices of food products, increased costs of transportation, and so on. We are unable to live a quality life. As a result, local people are initiating a movement against the employers, especially the NGOs. In addition, there is a platform established by the local people titled the "Rohingya Prevention Committee." This platform is working towards gathering public opinion against the Rohingya people and to accelerate the repatriation process" (Age-40, KII).

This job related dilemma of the host community people was described by a NGO official. He said that,

"The pattern of jobs has changed now a day compared to when the Rohingya influx started in 2017. At the beginning, we needed to know the needs of the Rohingya community. To do this, we needed people who could effectively communicate with the Rohingya people. As a result, a lot of local people were unemployed, regardless of their educational qualifications. But now we are not sketching the demands anymore but implementing different programs in order to address their needs and work towards structural changes for a longer period. As a result, we need more experienced people with technical expertise. Because of these changes, many people from the host com-munities lost their jobs. Unfortunately, people do not try to understand this fact and are initiating a movement against us (employer)" (Age-33, IDI).

Formation of New Kinship

The arrival of Rohingya people has influenced the local kinship in both direct and indirect ways. Many widowed, abandoned by husbands, or unmarried Rohingya women marry people from the host communities. This trend can be observed globally in refugee settings. This similar social interaction was also observed between Turkana and refugees in Kenya. In Kenya, many refugee men married local Turkana women (Aukot, 1969). Intermarriage between the Syrian refugee and Turkish host community is also an acceptable practice where Turkish men marry Syrian refugee women (www.wfp.org). Another kind of kinship pattern is that, people who came to Cox's Bazar from outside to work in the Rohingya camps as NGO workers were getting married to locals. Data revealed that, if interested, it was very easy for the powerful local people (especially for the local government representatives) to marry any Rohingya woman. In that case, little or almost no objection is posed by the girl's family. The majority of the participants said Rohingya parents are concerned about the security of their daughters. Marriage, in this regard, is considered a powerful tool to ensure their daughter's safety. Besides, marriage also serves as a powerful strategy to establish a strong relationship with the local people. Once the relationship through marriage is established,

it is an assurance for them that they have some relatives here and no one can oust them from here all of a sudden. One of the respondents said,

"Someone named Rahim (pseudonym), who was married, unemployed and father of a 4 year old child, married a Rohingya girl, and this created some problems with his first wife. However, he did not leave his Rohingya wife as she was beautiful and her father also gave her a dowry of BDT 40,000 (USD 500). He convinced his first wife that he got married because of the money only and that he could not leave her even if he wished to" (Age-42, KII).

Another aspect of changing relationship dynamics is the interaction between the local people and those who come to Cox's Bazar for work from other parts of the country. One respondent said that,

"Many boys and girls from this area work in Rohingya camps representing different organi-zations. Thus, they develop some professional understanding with the people who come here to work. Sometimes these professional relationships turn into love or marriage" (Age-29, FGD).

It is also noticed that a patron-client relationship has existed between the host community and Rohingya refugees. Basically, a patron-client alliance life on equality, power, and exploitation (Beidelman, 1959) as well as this tie is "lopsided friendship" (Pitt-Rivers, 1968) in which "one partner is clearly superior to the other in his capacity to grant goods and services" (Wolf, 2013). In the vicinity of Shamlapur refugee camp in Teknaf Upazilla, a patron-client relationship was seen between the local community and the Rohingya community. Local people used to provide fishing boats and nets on rent to the Rohingya people for fishing. The Rohingya people used to go fishing in the sea using a boat and net. Local people did not go fishing by themselves but earned money through Rohingya people.

Rise of New Economy Class among HOST Community

Though the pressure of the large Rohingya community has had some negative impacts on the local community, local people have developed some adaptive techniques to adjust to these changing circumstances.

Nevertheless, these adaptive techniques are not the same for everyone, especially since they differs according to an individual's social position and identities like religion, caste, land ownership pattern, political affiliation etc. This section discusses how a new host community based economic class has appeared using diverse adaptive mechanisms. Scholars have discussed both positive and negative aspects of the refugee influx (Jacobsen, 2002; Boateng, 2009; Washoma, 2003; Taylor, 2016). Displacement situations, especially refugee settings, work as a potential space for the growth of the aid industry and the aid industry can also boost and reshape the host economy (Hammar, 2014). However, it is not certain that all the host com-munity people will benefit equally from this system (Harrell-bond, 1985). Most of the existing literature has discussed the economic impact of the refugee crisis on the host community, but it is also essential to address the social interaction pattern responsible for making the impact. In the context of Rohingya refugees, it is identified that there is an interaction that exists between NGOs and the host community as well as bet-ween Rohingya refugees and NGOs. Through this interaction, both the host and guest communities are maintaining and fulfilling their needs. In Ukhiya of Cox's Bazar district, those who are financially stable and own land, make new buildings and give them on rent. Because, immediately after the influx in 2017, many NGOs and humanitarian agencies came to respond. These organizations hired a lot of people from different parts of the country who started living in Ukhiya, Teknaf and Cox's Bazar Sadar. As a result, the demand for housing skyrocketed overnight. Through this process, many host community people create a good income source, which leads them to be a part of a new social class. On the contrary, people who are not financially stable, choose alternative professions thro-ugh which they handle the extra economic and social pressure. One of the NGO representatives said that,

> "We, two people, rented a house for eight thousand taka. House means one room and a toilet. The ceiling is made of tin and the floor is brick with an attached bathroom. There is no gas, and we have to pay the electricity bill separately. Also, in Kutu-palong, the house rent for a two room apartment is 35,000 taka (USD 400)" (Age-35, IDI).

In addition to the demand for residential buildings, different humanitarian organizations rent buildings as their office space. As a result, a lot of new buildings have been constructed, and the office rent is also very high. One of the participants said,

> "One person rented a small piece of land to a non-government organization (NGO). The NGO built a three storied building on that land and also pays the owner one lakh taka (USD 1200) every month as rent. People who has land can earn a large sum of taka (local currency) through rental" (Age-40, FGD).

On the other hand, those who are not financially well-off are choosing optional professions like security guard for humanitarian agencies, driver, cook, small business etc. Many humanitarian agencies hire security guards for the security of their offices, and for these security guards they engage many security supplier organizations. These organizations hire local people as security employers. One respondent said that,

> "Currently I am working as a security guard. Before this profession, I was an auto-rickshaw driver. But after the establishment of this office, I came here with my CV and they told me to go to the Cox's Bazar office. I went there and submitted my CV. Then within one month, I got this job. Now, my salary is 28,580 taka (USD 335). Now, and I can run my family pretty well" (Age-45, IDI).

On the other hand, another woman who works in a humanitarian organization as a cook, said that,

> "I was not working before. I usually stayed at home. But after the establishment of this office, I got a job here as a cook, and currently I am earning 23,000 taka (USD 280). Although my duty time is from 9:00AM to 5PM, but I can go to my house as needed as I stay close to the office. My husband also works here as a driver. Together with our income, we smoothly look after our family. In addition, we can save some money every month. Like me, many women are now working as cooks in many bachelor houses in this area. They are earning 15 thousand to 20 thousand taka (USD 200-240) every month by going once a day to different bachelors' houses and cooking for them" (Age-50, IDI).

On the other hand, many temporary shops were conserved in the markets. In those shops, relief products were sold, which were given to the Rohingya people as relief products. Many people were seen doing this temporary business of relief products in front of many refugee camps. One of the participants said that,

"I sit in Ukhiya market in the afternoon at my shop. In my shop, you will find all types of products used by the Rohingya. My wife and my two brothers go to the Rohingya camps every morning. They buy rice, lentils, sham-poo, toys, powdered milk, soap and buckets from the Rohingya people at a cheaper price. It is good for our business that Rohingya people do not use these materials; they sell them at a cheaper price. Here, everyone (humanitarian agencies) gives almost the same kind of relief to the Rohingya people, but they do not use everything. They sell surplus products and buy salt, vegetables, meat, and firewood. I sell these materials in the market at a slightly higher price. Suppose a 10-liter bucket price in the market is 300 taka to 400 taka (USD 4-5). But Rohingya people sell this for 100 taka (USD 1-1.5). And I sell this in the market for 200 to 250 taka (USD 2.5-3). I make a good profit from it" (Age-40, IDI).

In a nutshell, local people were seen changing their professions and exploring different options that emerged after the 2017 influx in order to adapt to the changing economic and social order. At the same time, they were also engaging Rohingya refugees to create new ways of earning money. These changes and adaptive techniques helped the local community survive.

Limitations of the Study

This study aimed to better understand the native people's socio-cultural interactions with the refugee (Rohingya) community, and local community members were the primary respondents, according to the study objectives. However, conducting interviews with the guest (Rohingya refugee) would be fascinating. However, permission from the authorities was not obtained, and this study encountered some language barriers during data collection.

CONCLUSION:

The Rohingya influx in Ukhiya and Teknaf sub-districts of Cox's Bazar has forced the local people to face an unexpected and surprising socio-economic transition. They were neither familiar nor had experience of dealing with these changing realities. However, they are trying to recover from the situation by applying different social and economic techniques. At the same time, the liberal support of the government and donor agencies towards the Rohingya community has created some frustration among the local people. Local communities and people are gradually being transformed by new economic opportunities, changing social structures, and the transformation of existing kinship patterns. The protracted nature of this situation can change, modify or enhance the socio-economic status of the locals with the help of positive interactions and cooperative living with the Rohingya community. As a result, a new culture of compassion, cooperation, and sustainability can bloom.

Ethical Considerations

Researchers collected data with great sensitivity and informed respondents about the study purposes, procedures, benefits, and risks. They informed study participants about their voluntary participation in the research and their rights to withdraw from the study at any point during the course of the interview. Written or verbal informed consent was taken separately for the interviews and audio recording. The interview was conducted at a place where participants felt comfortable.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

There is no potential for a conflict of interest in the publication of this paper.

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