Relocation, Climate Change and Finding a Place of Belonging for Rohingya Refugees

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Abstract

An estimated 745,000 Rohingyas were forced to flee to Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, after a deadly crackdown in Rakhine state, Myanmar in August 2017. Responding to this crisis, the Bangladesh government launched the relocation of Rohingyas from the dense camps in Cox's Bazar to Bhasan Char island in the Bay of Bengal in December 2020. This article argues that the refugees' perceptions of their idealized "home"—their place of belonging—composed of complex needs with security tied to environmental stability, have not adequately been considered in their relocation to Bhasan Char island. Further, the physical threats of climate change on the island combine with a denial of the spatial and cultural dimensions of home, creating the threat of Rohingyas becoming "recycled refugees." The findings are based on qualitative case study research conducted with Rohingya refugees residing in Cox's Bazar and with those recently relocated to Bhasan Char.

Introduction

How does climate change intersect with both forced displacement and refugee relocation efforts? How can understanding refugees' conceptions of "home" improve relocation plans? We argue that answering these important questions at the climate change–humanitarian–development–peacebuilding (HDP) nexus requires an understanding of how these issues are perceived at the grassroots level. Examining the case of Rohingya refugees expelled from Rakhine state during violent outbreaks, particularly those

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of 2012 and 2017, this article argues that finding suitable, safe, and sustainable solutions must be rooted in how refugees both conceptualize "a place to belong" and experience it in their everyday lived reality.

A significant body of literature examines climate change in conflict settings from a political lens (Gleditsch, 2012; Koubi, 2019; Salehyan, 2008), recently so with respect to the peacebuilding–development nexus (McCandless, 2020). In this article, we expand the discussion to look at the everyday lens of spatiality and belonging among Rohingya refugees (De Certeau, 1984; Hirsch & Hanlon, 1995; Taylor, 2009). Doing so provides insight into the relationship between Rohingya refugee conceptions of their idealized "home," the Bangladesh government's relocation plan to move Rohingya refugees to Bhasan Char island beginning in May 2020, and the entwined impacts of both climate change and social instability among Rohingya refugees.

Literature on refugee movements has recently introduced the concept of "recycled" refugees, which signifies repeated migration experiences between an origin and a destination, of displaced people who are affected by frequent departures and returns (Vlassenroot et al., 2020). Examined through this lens, the Rohingya refugees' experience of constant movements tends to blur any spatial and cultural consistency defining their home. With Bangladesh as the Rohingya refugees' receiving country, its relocation plan within Bangladesh provides an important case for studying these issues.

This article offers in-depth empirical analysis to advance understanding about the relationship between climate change, relocation, and conflict. In doing so, it suggests expanding the HDP nexus to incorporate issues of climate change. It begins with a literature review that explores the spatial (i.e., the occupancy of space) and cultural dimensions of "home" as the entry point drawing on De Certeau (1984). It then engages with current debates on climate change within the triple nexus—reflecting both crises and responses that are pushing needed evolutions of the peacebuilding–development nexus (McCandless, 2021). The analysis moves beyond a political lens, with emphasis on a grassroots-level understanding of climate change and conflict issues among refugees, with a particular focus on refugee relocation, intent on informing relocation plans that avoid the creation of recycled refugees (Vlassenroot et al., 2020). The connections between a sense of belonging, climate change, and refugee relocation have not been well explored in the literature, particularly from the perspective of refugees themselves. Thus, this article examines refugees' conceptions of their idealized "home," composed of social meanings and physical properties, with complex needs tied to environmental stability. In looking at the relocation plan and specifically its housing on Bhasan Char island, the article argues that these do not resonate with the refugees' conception of home in a cultural sense and do not satisfy their need for social interactions, threatening to produce recycled refugees.

Context and Methodology

In August 2017, extreme violence amounting to ethnic cleansing drove an estimated 750,000 Rohingya refugees across the border from Myanmar's western Rakhine (Arakan) state to Bangladesh's Southeastern Upazila of Teknaf, known as Cox's Bazar camp (ISCG, 2018). At the peak of the violence 100,000 Rohingyas crossed the river into Bangladesh in 1 day. Unable to work in Bangladesh and without legal recognition in Myanmar, Rohingyas became stuck in limbo (Bandur, n.d). In response to the growing number of Rohingya refugees, the government of Bangladesh forcibly relocated a significant number of people from Cox's Bazar camp to Bhasan Char island, which is prone to heat waves, heavy rains, and cyclones, providing them with basic housing. The purpose of the relocation was to reduce the population in the overcrowded camps across the country's coast, with the overarching objective of eventually sending them back to Myanmar.

Even prior to this, climate change had created important environmental challenges that pushed Rohingya communities further into poverty. In 2010, Cyclone Giri negatively affected 260,000 people in Rakhine state. From July to October 2011, nearly 1.7 million tons of rice was lost due to heavy rain and flooding. Then in mid-2015, Rakhine state was hit by severe floods, which was declared as a natural disaster zone. Further, malaria outbreaks and waterborne diseases rendered the population sick and vulnerable (Bandur, n.d). Meanwhile, as the receiving country for Rohingya refugees, Bangladesh is also one of the world's most vulnerable countries regarding global warming and climate change (Khatun & Saadat, 2021). The influx of Rohingya refugees created burdensom and multifaceted pressures on the Bangladesh government, such that the commissioner of the United Nations Human Rights Office recently stated that climate change in Bangladesh has become a new frontier of human rights (OHCHR, 2022).

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With this as background, the current article examines the relocation experience of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, and in particular, the importance of acknowledging and integrating grassroots conceptions of home in relocation plans. The underpinning study employed a qualitative research methodology comprising 19 in-depth virtual interviews, and then focus group discussions (FGDs) with the same people. Two rounds of FGD (with 6 and 13 participants in the first and second rounds, respectively) served to triangulate interview data. Data collection participants were deliberatively identified through the research team's existing network of contacts in Cox's Bazar camp and Bhasan Char island, ensuring an equal number of males and females. An interview guide was prepared to help navigate the conversations, while interviews were semistructured so as not to constrain interviewee voice and perceptions. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated from the Rohingya language to English and Burmese. During the first round of data collection, which took place in both Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char, questions focused on understanding interviewees' conceptual understanding and perception of their idealized "home." During the second round of data collection, participants located in Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char camp were asked questions focusing on their lived experience and how environmental change has affected their situation since moving there.

The data was first organized and then analyzed using a coding system that filtered raw data and organized it into key themes. First, the raw data was analyzed and organized into open codes, which were then further refined by the research team by looking for relationships between each code. From this, core codes were selected which were then interpreted to generate and construct insights and meaning. The findings section below contains key findings from this process, with insights and meanings contextualized, related to the literature, and with significance finally explained. Accompanying each point are illustrative quotes that represent key messages emanating from the research.

There are limitations with this approach, with a notable one related to translation. Most importantly, there are limitations associated with translating interviews. As information is filtered through various languages, there is a risk it will lose some of its meaning in the process. This limitation was mitigated through the researchers' peer review of each other's transcriptions and translations, to ensure nuance is maintained, minimizing what may be lost in translation. Besides this, there were challenges with contacting interviewees as internet access varied across the region. However, to be able to interview 19 people and receive this level of openness from the community is illustrative of the level of trust built over a long period of time through communication, relationship building, and strong networks within the camps. Because of this, conversations were candid and open, adding to the reliability and validity of the findings.

Spatial and Cultural Dimensions of Home

Can we *belong* to just *any* place? Employing the everyday perspective approach (De Certeau, 1984), a place is not necessarily a space, and a house is not necessarily a home. However, through a dialectic process, a house can be transformed into a home, while home can lose its spatial and cultural character imbued upon it and become merely a building. Such a shift may be influenced by perceptions of belonging to a place beyond physical presence. Understanding the concept of home requires us to first discuss how a home differs from a house. Referring to Lawrence (1987, p. 155), a house is a physical unit that defines and delimits space for the members of a household, providing shelter and protection for domestic activities. Mallett (2004) adds that conceptions of home fixate on the physical structure, and it is where space and time are controlled and structured functionally, economically, and esthetically. A sense of belonging is strongly associated with the concept of *home* in English, whereas a *house* inclines more to a physical place. Home is a multidimensional concept that has no set standard qualities pertaining either to the person or the place. Rather, each home features a unique and dynamic combination of personal, social, and physical properties and meanings (Sixsmith, 1986).

The concept of home is constructed and perceived in different ways, depending on cultural factors and utilitarian functions, which also makes it challenging to conceptualize universally. In De Certeau's (1984) view, a home (as a space) is a practiced place, and similarly for Mallett (2004), it is where domestic communitarian practices are realized. Such diversity becomes even more apparent among refugees and displaced people. Movements across nations and boundaries challenge the singular idea of being connected to one area and or homelessness. For refugees, these spatial notions of place must be inscribed with more nuanced meaning, such that home becomes an idea and memory, while remembering one's home provides brief respite from the pain of not being there. Refugees can find themselves in a state of limbo, as they reside in one country (having been forcibly displaced), while belonging to another, their home. Historically, people were perceived as rooted to their land, so that dislocation led them to being described as homeless or refugees. In such situations of not belonging, refugees experience the loss of house and home, while often trying to maintain or restore the certainties of a perceived static past in their imagination. Being in a transitional state provides refugees with a more adaptable interpretation of home, such that their conception of home fits within their current context and situation, connected to physical, imagined, and social spaces (Arvanitis & Yelland, 2021; Vlassenroot et al., 2020). Thus, home becomes the lived space in which personal and social meanings are attached to perceived places and conceived symbolic spaces. In De Certeau's (1984) view, a place (like a house, or physical inhabited buildings) is a fixed location with a unique and unchanging character. Taylor (2009) argues that many refugees perceive their lost home as being static or stable, while continuing to maintain a strong connection to it because of the uncertainty of exile. Malkki (1992) suggests that home is more complex, ambiguous, such that contradictions that characterize concepts of home in refugee imaginations or realities are created over time as they search for new lives.

Apart from pertaining to a distinct spatial dimension, a place to belong is strongly linked to a community's cultural dimensions. For example, the notions of place and space in conflict settings are pertinent to understand in markets, where segregated communities (re)shaped a place for economic transaction into a space of rebuilding trust by revisiting their pre-established cultural and social capital before the conflict erupted (Wardani, 2020). The market, bearing the function of a temporary economic space during a conflict, provides a sense of peace among diverse communities because the space reminds them of a nonconflictual (or preconflictual) period, seeing the communities meet and interact through economic activities. In the context of home, Hirsch and Hanlon (1995) argues that home is more accurately seen as a product of cultural and historical processes; the meanings ascribed to home change over time through human and cultural experiences and social activity. The temporal

home refers to a refugee's idea of past, present, and future spatial–temporal connotations. Taylor (2009) states that temporal meanings ascribed to a home are not linear but cyclical and repetitive.

In conflict environments, the concept of repetitive mobility points to the constant movement of internally displaced people and refugees, triggered by fear and traumatic experiences, while seeking security and protection (Vlassenroot et al., 2020). Refugees, however, live in the present moment, located at a physical and temporal distance from their lost home, unable to predict if they will return or continue to be in exile. Downing (1996) explains that exile breaks them away from their routine, which then creates ambiguity and a loss of status. The establishment of new routines is how they create a new home and acquire agency. Reflecting on the past is another way in which refugees maintain the concept of home. Taylor (2009) states that it is through memory that the ambiguity of refugee experiences, intersecting with their current needs, can be organized into frames of relevance. The past acts as a point of reference to help them rebuild their present and maintain a sense of history while reconstructing home.

Notions of culture provide insights on the concept of home. Definitionally, culture has been conceived as that which individuals learn from others that continues to generate customs and traditions in shaping human lives (Whiten et al, 2011)). Tradition, as an aspect of culture, may be understood as the unique behavior patterns that two or more people share, that persist over time, and that new practitioners learn (Fragaszy & Perry, 2003). Relatedly, "social learning" refers to learning through observation of, or in interaction with, another animal or its products (Heyes, 1994). Similarly, Bibeau and Corin (1995) understand culture and tradition as a system of meaning, knowledge, and action. Culture, as a system of action, allows for members of a community to create new meanings. In Southeast Asia, literature on the definition of culture has taken various approaches. On the one hand, culture is equated with the arts. On the other, it is understood as traditional ways of life followed and practiced by communities sharing the same values and goals. Further, culture may also be understood as an individual's means of interpreting the world and guiding action (Nastasi, 2017).

The concept of "home," examined through the cultural lens, generates the following two dialectics (among others): first, as an identity/communality (i.e., the degree to which homes display bonds between residents and the community); and second, the extent to which it is open or closed (i.e., the degree to which homes project how open and accessible residents are, or how closed off they are to the wider community) (Gauvain & Altman, 1982). A home projects the uniqueness of its residents, their personal or family identity, along with their connections to the wider community. For example, in some cultures, it is important to have originality in the display of the house compared with others on the same street. In others, too much difference would invite perceptions of nonconformism, which in some places is culturally to be avoided (Gauvain & Altman, 1982). In some cultures, shared connections between residents are evident in the surrounding facilities like courtyards or plazas (Waterson, 1991). Within such spaces, cultural activities are undertaken, and communal harmony and unity are exhibited. Openness or projection of unity with the wider community can be seen in a house's location in relation to such shared spaces (Gauvain & Altman, 1982). These dialectics point to the meaning, knowledge, and action found in the location of homes in a community, as well as the openness and closedness of individuals in, and of, their societies. Thus, a home is a space that provides a key to cultural systems of a society, itself playing a practical and symbolic role in an individual's life in community (Waterson, 1991). In case of the Rohingya refugees, who have been displaced for years, their cultural practices have had to change and adapt to cope with their current and evolving situations. In addition, their systems of meaning, knowledge, and action have had to change to deal with the stressors of being in a transient state. Therefore, such condition have influenced and reshaped cultural practices within their homes (Waterson, 1991). This will be discussed in more detail below, as related to the relocation plan of the Bangladesh government.

Conflict, Climate Change, and Refugee Displacement

As climate change is the defining crisis of current times, it is important to understand how it affects society, particularly the most vulnerable, and how the different variables of war, resources, and human migration interact and overlap in complex systems (Berchin et al., 2017; Briggs, 2020). More specifically, this article seeks to understand how climate change intersects with humanitarian crises in affecting refugees, who are among the most marginalized of populations.

Existing literature on climate-related disasters recognizes that environmental stressors contribute to shaping the development of human societies. It also engages with the complex and intertwined nature of poverty and inequality, fragility, crisis, and violent conflict, and the challenges of constructing similarly complex and sustainable responses (McCandless, 2021). Early literature argued that fractionalized societies marked by polarization, poor governance, and social inequality were more prone to situations of climate-related disasters and violence (Homer-Dixon, 1999). Furthermore, the same author also explains the connection between scarcity and conflict, stating that renewables, particularly necessary resources such as food and land, which become scarce, can undermine human well-being. Indeed, conflict triggers were found to arise from resource scarcity (Gleditsch, 2012).[1] Scarcity can be caused by climate change leading to "structural scarcity," the unequal access to natural resources in a society, and "resource capture," which is the act of elite segments of that society redistributing resources in their favor. There is strong evidence that inequitable distribution of resources is related to conflict risks and may reinforce structural violence that fuels cleavages with real or perceived deprivation growing alongside the capacity of disaffected groups to fight (Peters, 2022).

In this sense, climate change has been studied and understood as a "threat multiplier," about how climatic change catalyzes conflict in fertile ground; indeed, direct, causal links between environmental issues (like climate change) and conflict are generally no longer accepted (Koubi, 2019; Schleussner et al., 2016). Thus, climate change may be understood as a potential risk enhancement factor for conflict outbreak, aggravating fragile inter-ethnic relations, perhaps especially in contexts where systematic ethnic cleansing has taken place. Thus, as highlighted by Khatun and Saadat (2021), anthropogenic climate change is increasing the probability of natural disasters and threats to security.

Turning to the specifics of the Rohingya community, studies have drawn attention to the topography of Rakhine state, with its low-lying landscape that makes it prone to cyclones and saltwater intrusions (Bandur, n.d.). The effects of Cyclone Giri in 2010 affected more than 260,000 people. By 2011, about 1.7 million tons of food was lost due to floods. Similarly, in 2015 Rakhine state was hit again by severe floods threatening the state's food reserves. By 2016–2017, the worst ever case of intercommunal violence occurred against the Rohingya population. Ahmed et al. (2021) argues that the ethnic violence that occurred in 2012 could be traced directly to the impacts of Cyclone Giri, given that residents complained that the Myanmar government did not do enough to warn all communities with equal attention. Indeed, it was found that the government evacuated residents from certain areas but not others, which heightened resentments, nourished conspiracy theories, and led to the creation of pro-Buddhist groups and militias who ultimately played a significant role in the 2017 genocide.

It could be said that diminishing food resources coupled with the country's political instability gave the government more reason to instigate genocide against the already targeted Rohingya. Existing studies on the issue also point out that environmental scarcity produces social stress that can contribute to subnational violence, such as ethnic clashes. In such situations, primary victims of environmental scarcity will be poor, marginalized communities within poor countries that are seen as competitors for limited resources. Similarly, Barnett and Adger (2007) argue that climate change undermines human security by reducing access to natural resources needed to sustain livelihoods. They argue that the direct and indirect impacts of climate change on human security increase the likelihood of violent conflict,

while undermining the capacity of states to provide opportunities and services that help people sustain livelihoods and maintain peace. Even those who do not see robust and direct linkages between climate change and conflict onsite (e.g., Koubi, 2019) recognize that there are nuances and exceptions to be accounted for. For example, Koubi (2019) argues that contexts that rely on agriculture, and experience low-level economic development and marginalization like Myanmar, are conducive for climate change to contribute to violent conflict. This is because of the poor infrastructure and weak government systems that could not handle the pressures of climate instability.

When looking at links between intercommunal conflict and climate change, the literature shows that there are multiple factors working together and that there is no clear and direct connection. However, climate change can be understood as a "threat multiplier," which is played out in Myanmar. The topography and weather patterns that create a situation that limits resources ignites the elite segments of a society to capture and selectively redistribute resources. Having a marginalized community, which already is seen as an outsider, creates an enabling environment for persecution when scarcity is prevalent. The dialectic connection between "home" as identity and communality that displays the bonds between residents within the community becomes threatened when resources are limited. The Rohingya's understanding of having a home, and how basic resources interact with and sustain their homes, has impacted their relocation experiences as well, and will likely contribute to ethnic tensions where they have landed.

Rohingya Refugees Searching for Home

A recent study by Morsalin and Islam (2021) identified landlessness as a challenge for the rural poor and refugees in Bangladesh. Landlessness heightens the difficulty of climate change adaptation, as it hinders livelihood and income generating activities of those living in rural, coastal, and otherwise fragile regions. They further argue that agriculture is susceptible to climatic impacts such as floods, droughts, salinity intrusion, and cyclone-induced storm surges, all of which degrades land and productivity. In this part of the world, climate change adaptation relies on access to land for food security, aimed at minimizing vulnerabilities.

It is predicted that climate change will cause erratic rainfall and higher intensity and frequency of floods, cyclones, and the spread of waterborne diseases. Typical landless households do not have their own water and sanitation infrastructure due to insecure land tenure and temporary settlement patterns (Morsalin & Islam, 2021). Landless communities such as the Rohingya are not equipped for the threats of climate change because of their noncitizen status in Myanmar and their refugee status in Bangladesh, which denies them long-term access to land. In both contexts, Rohingyas do not have stable housing or land to settle on. In Bangladesh, many are housed in substandard housing (if at all) and are vulnerable to even the most modest weather changes. Moreover, being displaced limits their opportunities for informal and menial work, leading them to move to climate-sensitive areas such as coastal regions in search of jobs. Morsalin and Islam (2021) explain that the temporary nature of refugee settlements is one of the reasons why they do not invest in permanent and climate proof housing.

Mitu et al. (2022) furthers this argument saying that living as a refugee in Cox's Bazar is difficult because of the environmental challenges that intersect with the socioeconomic vulnerabilities they experience. For example, because their families do not have enough money to reinforce their shelters, and by being less able to adapt economically to climate shocks, Rohingya refugee adolescents are further impacted by climate change (Mitu et al., 2022). Mitu et al. (2022) argues that these multidimensional vulnerabilities are experienced differently between boys and girls who have traditionally different roles in Rohingya society. The links between land and property ownership with climate change

adaptation are strong. Stateless communities such as the Rohingya do not have the means of protecting themselves from changes in weather patterns and extreme temperatures. Fortified housing, access to work and food, as well as locating further from "climate change prone areas" such as coasts are out of reach. This review of literature on how conflict, climate change, and adaptation interact with refugees illustrates the rising attention to how environmental changes affect resources that can in turn influence intercommunal conflict, creating refugee movement to other areas, causing new environmental challenges. It also shows that fractionized societies marked by weak governance systems are prone to experiencing heightened consequences of climate change. Adaptation to climate change is dependent on landownership and resources, with a deficiency in either causing difficulties of survival. Nevertheless, there are no direct causal links between environmental issues and conflict, rather climate change acts as a threat multiplier, exacerbating ongoing issues. Acknowledging such challenges, understanding refugee conceptions of "home" becomes vital to informing responses aimed at appropriately relocating them, thereby preventing them from becoming recycled refugees and perpetuating negative environmental impacts.

Findings and Discussion

Rohingya refugees perceive their idealized homes as multifunctional spaces that satisfy their physical, social, and cultural needs. As one source explained, "Home is like a house or shelter where we can enjoy sleeping, eating, and celebrating religious and social events." Another source from the camp

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added, "[a] home is a place which has all the family members who can stay freely, building a house with safety and security. Now I have a shelter in the camp, but I want to have my own home in my motherland if I can return, or there will be a possibility to have a home in a third country." This aligns with De Certeau's (1984) assertion that a space is a practiced place, meaning that the spatial dimension of a home is heavily influenced by the cultural practices that the Rohingya communities perform daily in and around their house. For example, one respondent described the spatial use of their home explaining that:

> "We partition our houses depending on what it is for. Our living room is where male guests are welcome, our bedrooms are private where precious items are kept, the kitchen is where female guests are welcome but not always since we do not separate dining room from kitchen. Our backyard is for gardening and poultry but the front of the house is where we keep goats and cows."

This illustrates the spatial usage of different areas of the house that is also organized to separate guests by gender and privacy. Therefore, a housing project must keep in mind the various purposes and divisions within a home.

Connection to their ancestral land is another key component to refugees' understanding of what makes a home. As one respondent said, "We can find a home when we return to our ancestral homeland or get resettled with other citizens." This connection to their ancestral land as a part of their conception of home is highlighted by Taylor (2009), who argues that it is the idea of the stable and static homeland that gives refugees hope in their uncertain circumstances. It is likely that the need to be closer to where they are from ties to their narrative as a people who identify their historical homeland in Rakhine state, which will play an important role in their satisfaction when relocating. In other words, relocating to Bhasan Char island would not be as satisfactory as moving back to Rakhine state, which is key to their identity and narrative.

The dissonance between the Rohingya refugees' narrative about their ethnic identity and its historic ties to Rakhine State juxtaposed to their current and undesirable situation will likely exacerbate their grievances. It is likely that being geographically proximate to their hometown in Maungdaw, the camps in Cox's Bazar, as opposed to Bhasan Char would be better in so much as it provides feelings of familiarity to the place they once belonged in addition to their finding it difficult to associate the idea of "home" with the newly built island camp of Bhasan Char (Pratiwi & Wardani, 2022). In a recent study, Rohingya perceptions of homes found that the modern style buildings used in Bhasan Char island did not resonate with their idea of home, for not providing them with a sense of cultural and psychological connection to their previous experience. Though this housing stock is arguably a slight improvement from their previous housing situation, the new houses do not resonate with Rohingya refugees in a cultural and perceptual sense (Pratiwi & Wardani, 2022). For instance, the materials of the houses were dissociated from their cultural meaning, as the Rohingyas have long used bamboo to make their homes.

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Faced with the sense of disconnection in Bangladesh due to being in camps and having little interaction with the broader Bangladeshi society, many would prefer to seek refuge in a completely new destination such as Malaysia or Canada where their extended families are currently living and where they can acquire a sense of comfort and security (Vlassenroot et al., 2020). However, their desire to return to their ancestral land remains strong. Indeed, the desire for a reconnection to their ancestral land likely plays a crucial part in the development and maintenance of their culture, identity, and sense of familiarity—and ultimately may well be a determining factor in their choice of home. Their displacement to Cox's Bazar, and their later transferal to Bhasan Char island, creates compounded distance and isolation from their perceived idea of a home and stability. That is why a recent report by Knowledge Hub Myanmar (2022) saw some Rohingya refugees voluntarily return to Rakhine, although faced with the prospect of returning to an oppressive system. A majority of respondents reportedly indicated that their return generated surprise among acquaintances; when questioned why they would come back, they replied that it was because Rakhine was their homeland.

The physical and social isolation that the refugees feel is a factor that influences their dislike of the Bhasan Char relocation plan. This is because the relocation plan moves refugees from the mainland to Bhasan Char, which is an isolated island off the coast of Bangladesh. As one respondent who lives on the island explained, "we are afraid to live on this island because there are no villages nearby. Whenever we open our eyes, we see only water (ocean) in all directions, which makes us feel unhappy." Other respondents compared the isolation to being in prison, as they are unable to move off the island once transported there. Explanation of their feelings of isolation are not confined to just a physical space but socially as well, as contact and communication between relatives and friends on and off the island was near impossible. As

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explained by one respondent from a refugee camp on the mainland, "one of my friends moved to the island and ever since I lost contact with him." Their resettlement onto Bhasan Char acts as a physical and cultural separator between Rohingyas, with wider Bangladeshi society, as well as with their ancestral home. This resonates with the suggestion of Gauvain and Altman (1982) that home has two dialectic dimensions: a shared identity that creates bonds with the wider community, and its

projection of an image of openness or closedness to that community. For Rohingya, the physical structures of the new homes are constructed as barriers between the home and the community, creating feelings of secrecy, detachment, and separation between the individual and the community. It is not surprising then that relocating the Rohingya to Bhasan Char, an island over 100 km away from the mainland, has created feelings of isolation and distance, further compounded by the sense that both Myanmar and Bangladesh are pushing the Rohingya out of sight from their societies. Such dislocations can lead to endless quests for finding a place to belong.

The governments of both Myanmar and Bangladesh, in different ways, are not addressing the root cause of the issues with the Rohingya, which could lead to a situation where they become recycled refugees (Vlassenroot et al., 2020). As argued by McCandless (2021), the HDP nexus' potential for success lies in addressing root causes of conflict, fragility, and crisis in national and transnational settings, and those emanating from the wider global political economy. At the very least, limiting Rohingya livelihood and educational opportunities, while relocating them in remote areas with limited freedom of movement, will ensure they remain in their current situation.

While isolation inhibits their connection to broader society, it also restricts their movements and with that their ability to earn an income. "The earning is not as good as before … and I heard that there are no work opportunities on the island unlike the refugee camp." Another respondent said, "according to my knowledge, it's not easy to travel on the island and to other camps, one person needs two responsible adults to accompany them and the house owner in which they stay needs two responsible people per person to let them stay in their homes." As argued by Morsalin and Islam (2021), landlessness is a key challenge to climate adaptation because it restricts livelihood and income generating activities. The Rohingya's situation in Cox's Bazar is similar to the landless people native to Bangladesh who are situated at the bottom of the social power structure. From a climate change adaptation perspective, being at the bottom of a societal structure deprives people from livelihood necessities, and access and use of common resources. This often has much to do with elite capture. As Arya et al. (2020) argue, in community-based climate change adaptation programs currently exercised by many governments and nongovernment stakeholders, the context of elite capture is inadequately addressed. It is then conceivable that the combination of isolation, landlessness, and freedom of movement could contribute to a failure in the relocation plan over the long term.

The Rohingya's sense of security in relation to their perception of a home is influenced by the environmental situation and their ability to adapt accordingly. One respondent commented that "what I heard about the Island is that it only just appeared and that the soil is not hard yet and can easily disappear if there are earthquakes… according to scientists." In another conversation it was mentioned that "During the monsoon season it is very dangerous [as] there are floods and houses are damaged. During summer it is extremely hot and dangerous for children and old people." This aligns with a wide literature pointing to the fragile living conditions that refugees often face in Bangladesh (Khatun & Saadat, 2021). As highlighted by Morsalin and Islam (2021), as a result of living in fragile areas, refugees face other forms of vulnerability that include lack of clean drinking water and poor sanitation due to the transient and makeshift shelters in which they reside.

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This is evident in the discrepancy between perceptions of those on the island and those on the mainland. Those on the island speak more about environmental challenges, for example, "what I'm experiencing now, summer is not a good time for everyone, winter (monsoon season) is dangerous for the health of children, and it's hard to move during the rainy season as our streets and homes are destroyed." Those on the mainland do not have similar concerns about the weather. As one mainland respondent stated about their experiences of climate change that "I have no knowledge about this now," illustrative of

the perception of others. Nevertheless, adaptation is dependent on refugee access to proper housing and also food security, in an era when climate change is increasingly threatening both. This leads many of the inhabitants on the island to rely on the government for food aid and livelihood. As a respondent said, "we do not have earnings and rely on food assistance, and it is not enough for our family. We must ask the government for permission to do business, which is not easy." The most marginalized groups, Rohingya refugees in this case, inequitably experience the effects of resource scarcity in the controlled distribution of food, aid, and other resources to the population.

Climatic instability in the region and its impacts on food security will continue to worsen and have negative social impacts, particularly for Rohingya refugees on the Bhasan Char. As one respondent explained, "it will be difficult with food and health when there is heavy rain and wind…it will affect the health of the children and old people," further evidenced by the fact that the island is hours from the mainland, inaccessible during monsoon season, and prone to cyclones (see Alam et al., 2020). It is likely that if monsoon and cyclone trends were to continue, they will interact with the political and economic factors that will create difficulties for the inhabitants, which in turn would heighten risk of social unrest, yet further heightening the risk of perpetuating the cycle of recycled refugees.

Conclusion

This article has explored grassroots perceptions of "home"—the place of belonging—in the context of Rohingya refugees' relocation from Cox's Bazar camps in Bangladesh. It illustrates how climate change-related environmental challenges are interacting with, and compound with the reluctance for relocation to the newly built Bhasan Char island as part of the government of Bangladesh's refugee relocation plan. By understanding the underlying need to belong as understood both spatially and culturally, this study helps explain the lack of suitability of relocation plans on multiple fronts, and particularly with respect to housing. The longing to belong among Rohingya refugees needs to receive more attention when offering an alternative place to live. Through the data collection and analysis process, this article found that the Rohingya conceptions of home are multifaceted and that understanding this is important for a successful relocation plan. Their concept of home includes a space that serves multiple functions, with privacy and cultural practices being an important part of daily life. Connection to community is also important, as this not only serves their needs to socialize but also to generate income. Moreover, their sense of security in relation to home is influenced by problems linked to climate change, which have shaped narratives related to the Rohingya refugees' perception toward their idealized home in the face of relocation plans to the environmentally challenging island of Bhasan Char. Further, home is deeply tied to their cultural narrative as a community and identity that their ancestral home is in Rakhine state.

The findings support the definition of home as a dynamic combination of social and physical properties and meanings. Although the Bangladesh government offers better houses in Bhasan Char than in Cox's Bazar, Rohingyas do not consider them suitable as a home. Fundamentally, they do not associate this housing with their cultural sense and perception of a home. The tall concrete buildings are not constructed of familiar housing materials, nor are the spatial dimensions appropriate, given they are smaller and do not allow for cultural practices. Home, as a space, is a product constructed through social interactions, relationships, familial bonds, and economic networks that represent and are enacted in everyday life. The study also highlights that the physical and social distance from their ancestral place and broader Rakhine society, the denial of their existence as an ethnic group in Myanmar, and the transient nonpermanent situation in refugee camps—all work to remove a sense of security and stability.

By virtue of their movement, Rohingya refugees started losing their social networks, which has then impacted their social capital and economic status. In the face of this reality, Rohingya and other refugees collectively try to remake their social connections in new physical spaces. Their homeland practices are reproduced to provide economic, social, and educational opportunities while maintaining ties with social practices of the past. However, on the island of Bhasan Char, this has not been possible; instead, they have often lost contact with their friends and family. Adverse and extreme weather conditions on the island threaten their feelings of security, food provision, and livelihoods, which are all intimately tied to their idealized home. Indeed, income generation became one of their main reasons for resisting the relocation plan. Therefore, it is pertinent that any relocation plan for the Rohingya—and all refugee relocation plans ideally, in an era of climate change with complex insecurity—must consider their idea of what constitutes both home, and a home. They must be cognizant of (actual and potential) climate change impacts in terms of the habitability of the area. Failure to address the intrinsic needs of the Rohingya refugees will impact the growing number of people trying to escape from the camps, increasingly the likelihood that they will become permanent and recycled refugees.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Note

1. Conversely, resource abundance may also be a source of instability. As argued by Ross (2015), the effects of resource wealth on civil war and democratic rule appear to be related, while the effects of resource wealth and authoritarian rule and corruption appear linear, with more resources leading to worse outcomes. However, this argument overlooks historical and international aspects that are key to the resource curse, that is, the connections with past and present colonialism perpetuating authoritarianism in some contexts (Mukoyama, 2019).

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