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Considering the Shrinking Physical, Social, and Psychological Spaces of Rohingya Refugees in Southeast Asia

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ABSTRACT

Refugees experience shrinking social, economic, political, and physical spaces at astonishing rates. However, these shrinking spaces are challenging to trace simultaneously and are rarely considered in policymaking or analysis. Using the Rohingya case study, this paper implores policy analysis to include these spaces, conceptually categorizing them into physical, social, and psychological spaces. Here we chronologize the plight of Rohingya refugees and identify how their spaces have changed over time. Our findings reveal four primary causal relationships linked to Rohingya refugees' fluctuating spaces, including: (I) Bangladesh's policy framework has kept the Rohingya largely isolated, yet their public-private partnerships have expanded their space; (ii) Bangladesh has a robust social policy framework, which has contributed to expanding refugees' spaces; (iii) Myanmar's foreign policy framework contributed to justifying war crimes, severely restricting Rohingya's space, and (iv) The lack of a social policy framework in Myanmar lead to a severe lack of protection mechanisms for the Rohingya.

Introduction

One hundred million people worldwide are forcibly displaced (UNHCR, 2022d). Of those living in a refugee context, 71% are hosted in a developing national context (UNHCR, 2022c). Exiled refugees arguably experience the most marginalized of spaces worldwide, which are generally not considered in policymaking or analysis (Landau and Amit, 2014). Failing to wholly consider refugees' spaces has led to overgeneralizations concerning policy norms surrounding the refugee experience and supports the dehumanization often coupled with refugee policymaking. Beginning to fill this gap in understanding, this paper seeks to include ill-considered spaces in policy analysis coupled with modern understandings of geographies that focus beyond the traditional physical boundaries and incorporate non-neutral areas to include physical space, social space, and psychological space through a case study on the Rohingya crisis in Southeast Asia.

Background

The Rohingya people have suffered in northern Rakhine State at the edge of Myanmar for decades, living under cruel and discriminatory treatment, severe restrictions, and stringent regulations that have severely limited their freedom of movement (UNHCR, 2016). Additionally, the Rohingya endured decades under arbitrary deprivation of nationality, threats to their life, liberty, property, sexual and gender-based violence, religious freedom, and denial of the right to health and education, among other human rights violations (Priddy et al., 2022). The violence culminated in 2017 under a ruthless military campaign against the Rohingya, generating a mass exodus into bordering Bangladesh.

Initially, the Government of Bangladesh was sympathetic towards the Rohingya, opening its borders and agreeing to lead the humanitarian response. However, despite assistance from intergovernmental organizations, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and governments worldwide, the reality of a developing nation hosting nearly one million refugees (Faye, 2021) was immensely challenging and put enormous pressure on the host country's already fragile economic and environmental systems. The reality that the Rohingya face today, after having survived genocide (Blinken, 2022) and forced displacement, offers no durable solutions. Instead, the options are limited to confinement in refugee camps which leads to their participation in clandestine activities.

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More recently, the Rohingya saw a glimpse of justice in 2019 as a legal case was launched to address the crimes against them in *Gambia v. Myanmar* before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague. While the ICJ proceedings are underway (ICJ, 2022), Myanmar continues to fail to cooperate. Beyond just their cooperation is the length of time an ICJ case takes to complete, averaging over 15 years (GCRP, 2019). While this hearing is a step toward formal justice for the Rohingya, it will likely be a lengthy process and is not a guarantor of future rights. Good governance and the adoption of civil rights protections are the only way to secure equal rights under the law for the Rohingya. Thus, a comprehensive analysis of such is essential.

This research contributes to a holistic understanding of how laws and policies influence and shape Rohingya refugees' spaces. When we conceptualize space as physical, social, and psychological, we can review policy through these lenses and provide a causal relationship analysis to better understand factors related to the Rohingya's fluctuating spaces. Doing so expounds the current situation more comprehensively, offers a transferrable framework to other refugee situations, and sheds light on the need for future research that implores policy analysis to broader spaces.

Conceptual framework

When we speak of space, we are most often referring to physical space, geographic location, or general human geographies. Scholars sometimes include distributing goods and services (Campbell, 2016). Still, in general, it refers to one's livelihood options, including purchasing or trading goods and services necessary for survival, comfort, and economic or social advancement (Bourdieu, 2014). This begins to blend into social space, which societies produce according to the spatial practices that exist within the community (Carter and Charles, 2009). Social space creates a relationship between persons, providing an environmental framework for a group's behavior, and is the combined use and perception of space by distinct social groups (Buttimer, 1969). Social space may be considered communal in how it grants access to social capital through a network of relationships that enable individuals to have group membership and reciprocal relationships that they can draw upon in times of need. For the vulnerable, social space is more complex in how it is defined by political, societal, and institutional capacities, laws, and policies. While social space offers a glimpse into the objectivity of spatial structures, it does not fully embody an entire space individually or communally.

Now blending into a more personal space, we identify the space one holds internally through experience and conditioning, known or unknown, recognizing this as psychological space. Psychological space differs from social space in that we are less concerned with societal frameworks and more with individual choices, especially choices that stem from hope or despair. When we extend psychological considerations to the refugee experience and weigh their private acts in public, the options are severely limited. The space of personal choice dwindles from plight, reception, and often ends with life in refugee camps, which are meant to be temporary spaces.

We must consider that in modern times, refugees can access information about international events in today's increasingly global society. Psychological mediation happens as intertextuality occurs through receiving information about life outside the refugee camp while experiencing life within. Camp life is curated, manufactured, and occupied by provisionary spaces where refugees rely on others to meet their daily needs. Although the outside world is not formally represented in a refugee camp, its representation is given ontological status. The psychological space of knowing influences social and spatial power relations, which then produces social differences and hierarchies on a global scale. While the boundary of a refugee camp physically exists, there is an increased understanding of the two worlds' imbrication, which blurs such lines. Technology and broader insights into the global world break down the psychological barrier dehumanized policymaking

sometimes uses as a safeguard. Like Goodwin-Gill (2014), we wonder if our technological world could lead to a complete social reconstruction of refugees and non-refugees that could influence the 'refugee regime' and policy. In any case, we identify a significant gap in research concerning refugees' spaces in policymaking and identify a dire need for interdisciplinarity collaborations to understand how refugees are coding this space in a globalized world. This article fills the gap by further examining refugees' physical, social, and psychological spaces. This is more sobering as we consider research emphasizing the coping mechanisms displaced people are forced to consider, including recruitment into armed groups, human trafficking, and substance abuse (Krause and Segadlo, 2021). Beyond such, the psychological space of knowing influences social and spatial power relations, which then produce social differences and hierarchies on a global scale.

Beyond concern for refugees themselves, the inclusion of psychological spaces helps us understand what cultivates peace or conflict in complicated situations and should be of great interest to policymakers, especially as we acknowledge how often research concerning the construction of societal norming runs the risk of overgeneralization or overspecialization. Typically, psychological spaces are examined from a systemic macro-political lens or a medicalized micro context of inner individual worlds. Yet, there must be room for psychological considerations, especially as globalization and technology increase, where researchers neither politicize nor medicalize but still consider in policy analysis.

Finally, the link between our conceptual framework and the human rights-based approach[1] must be noted. The human rights-based approach inspired examining physical, social, and psychological spaces as opposed to examining interest groups, political parties, and bureaucracies. It includes subgroups, histories, personal ideologies, goals, relationships, resource access, and value differences between elites and masses. In considering how policy results from values, beliefs, and interactions between and among several bureaucracies and institutions, we are in a better position to assess *policy itself* rather than the *achievement* of any policy. In this way, our research serves policymakers well who wish to analyze and create policy through a human rights framework. In this way, our conceptual framework is aligned with the human rights-based approach.

Methodology

Our research begins with the question: Why do refugees' spaces keep shrinking? Attempting to seek answers to this broad inquiry, we more specifically ask: Why are Rohingya's spaces shrinking? After an exhaustive review of the literature and qualitative data acquired through multiple fieldwork excursions in 2017, 2018, early 2020, and 2022 we identified several variables worthy of exploration. These variables were chosen based on our findings from qualitative data collected through informational interviews, observation, discussions with on-the-ground partner NGOs, and participatory action research with Rohingya refugees. It was then cross-checked and triangulated through a literature review to validate our findings. The literature review included peer-reviewed scholarly research and gray literature produced outside the academic setting, including local print media, United Nations situation reports and policy briefs, humanitarian agency reports, and discussions with humanitarian workers in Bangladesh serving Rohingya refugees. Based on findings from this study, we identified four variables contributing to the Rohingya's shrinking and expanding physical, social, and psychological spaces that both center our research question and give us boundaries for exploration.

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[1] The human rights based approach focuses on the individual rather than the general public and develops the capacity of duty-bearers to meet their obligations and encourages rights holders to claim their rights (UNPF, 2014).

Research Question (RQ): How have laws and policies influenced and shaped Rohingya's spaces?

Hypothesis: When we categorize space as physical, social, and psychological, we can review policy through these themes and infer causal relationships linked to Rohingya refugees' expanded or shrinking spaces against the backdrop of pre-existing variables.

Quite simply, our independent variable is *space* subcategorized into *(i) Physical (ii) Social, and (iii) Psychological*. Our dependent variable then is identified as *(i) expanded space, or (ii) shrinking space:* To better convey the complexity, we set antecedent, variables to include *(i) Social policy, and (ii) Foreign policy* rather than encompassing the two in public policy broadly, as is most often done among the literature.

Collectively, the resultant data was organized, categorized, and analyzed using NVIVO software and then chronicled into six phases. This new chronology includes labels of physical, social, and psychological spaces throughout, weaving our results and discussion throughout the presentation of our case study. We offer several examples of qualitative data collected through our conversations with Rohingya refugees throughout this paper that corroborate our variables. Using NVIVO software, we identified 70 references that detail the 21 policies that have affected at least one of the three spaces. Transforming these variables into themes, we find 55 references total that point to the shrinking physical space of the Rohingya, 47 references that point to the shrinking social space of the Rohingya, and 64 references that point to the shrinking psychological space of Rohingya refugees. These numbers are shown in the Appendix, Table 2: *Rohingya's Shrinking Spaces Data Summary*.

Our analysis provides an in-depth understanding of Rohingya spaces that can be applied to other refugee situations. In this way, our conceptual framework and methodology may be transferrable to other refugee population groups and serve as a guide for researchers who desire a deeper understanding of refugees' spaces and why they shrink or expand. We attempt neither politicized nor medicalized research. There is a need for future work between policymakers, psychologists, sociologists, and public health experts that can ideally utilize our study as a springboard for conversations surrounding the advancement of theory and praxis in this regard.

Case study: a space examined plight of the Rohingya

Phase I: shrinking spaces in Myanmar

The Rohingya are said to have settled in the coastal lands of Bengal in the 9th century. In 1958, they were considered an indigenous race in Burma (Green and MacManus, 2015). In agreement with this statement by the first president of Burma, the Rohingya freely consider themselves indigenous peoples of the Rakhine State (Mohajan, 2019).

As Burman nationalism evolved to challenge colonial rule, it became a driving force (Zaman, 2020). In 1962 a military coup drove ethnonational ideology into military power (Turnell, 2011). While initially not formal in policy, purging anything deemed 'foreign influence' became common practice among the Myanmar government. Ethnic minorities throughout the country, specifically non-Buddhists, experienced discrimination and violence as standard practice by the government (Walton, 2012). Rohingya experienced informal regulation like this for nearly two decades (USHMM, 2020).

The Burmese government warned that giving Muslims in northern Arakan taking *yintha* status, as "Rohingya," would lead automatically to their being entitled to a zone of their own. "A part of Burma would fall under sharia law," To consider the Muslims of northern Arakan as one of the "National Races" fuses anxieties around both race and religion. The ethnonym "Rohingya" was particularly *toxic* for this reason, as it literally means "of Arakan" and implies those to whom it referred were indigenous (Myint-U, 2021). To grant citizenship under their given name would prove to be a risk Myanmar wasn't willing to take. Practice translated into policy in 1982, creating the Citizenship Law consisting of a three-tiered hierarchy of citizenship, granting full citizenship to those considered 'national races' and lesser forms with fewer citizenship rights to 'associate' and 'naturalize' (Haque, 2017). Then, Rohingyas were officially denied citizenship in Myanmar (HRC, 2018), with their physical and social spaces suddenly diminished. Physically, they were now hindered by international and, even to some capacity, regional travel. Socially, they were denied the right to vote, study at higher education, work, and access to health care.

Next came Article 354 of the Constitution of Myanmar in 2008, which severely shrank their psychological space (HRW, 2018). This article was used to justify religious restrictions citing public order and morality, law and order, or union security to justify control. The practices stemmed from Article 354 justified later policies in 2015, significantly attacking non-Buddhists and Muslims. Marriage, religious conversion, extra-marital relations, and population control measures were now under government control (White, 2015).

In 2012 the Vacant, Fallow, and Virgin Land Law allowed the state to reallocate land (Mark, 2016). This naturally stirred fear in ethnic minority regions that forced evictions or customary land use rights would be compromised. In 2015, the Burmese Parliament adopted discriminatory laws that severely restricted Rohingyas' freedom of movement, access to medical care and education, and discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities (Lee, 2019). Some of these laws include the Religious Conversion Law, which sought to "protect race and religion" and established a State-regulated system for changing religion; the Population Control Healthcare Law, which implemented a coercive approach to population control used to target minority populations; and the Buddhist Women Special Law and the Monogamy Law, both severely discriminated against women who were non-Buddhists(UNHCR, 2020).

After half a century of shrinking spaces, the Rohingya's room in Myanmar collapsed. Myanmar's government denied citizenship, and the Rohingya were now stateless as they were formally pushed out of the area they once occupied freely. Following inter-communal violence in 2012, tens of thousands of Rohingya were relocated from their villages and forced into Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps. They moved from over 200 villages in the Rakhine State to being detained in 36 IDP camps in Sittwe township against their will and severely restricting their physical space. Those that remained in their villages were faced against the Tatmadaw military in 2017. Such engagements are now considered genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes against the Rohingya population (Messner, 2019)—those who attempted to stay faced dire consequences. One man who drew his home in Myanmar during our fieldwork in 2021 explained.

"*This* [drawing] *is my house in Mone Para and my land. I constructed my house out of wood at the age of 30. I also owned a lot of farmland. I have drawn this picture taking pieces out of my memories, about my house, my village, my township. In 2016 the Myanmar military first took over my land. Then in 2017, the military forcefully removed me and my family from our home. I was tortured by the military. So, we had to leave Myanmar.*" (Male Rohingya artist, age 66).

Forced to flee for safety, hundreds of thousands made their way through the Myanmar jungle into neighboring Bangladesh.

Phase 2: the exodus into Bangladesh

The international community initially applauded the reception of the Rohingya, but it also came with its own natural and imposed restrictions. Once received into Bangladesh, makeshift camps grew to make allowance for the influx of approximately 900,000 new Rohingya refugees added to the estimated 200,000 already in the camps. Thus, the Kutupalong-Balukhali Expansion Camp was created near Cox's Bazar, providing a physical space for the Rohingya (Benz et al., 2019). As a result, what was once a wild jungle is now the largest refugee camp globally, with little to prove its once dense foliage.

Fig. 1. Road conditions inside refugee camps are challenging due to heavy monsoons. Source: Fieldwork 2018, Kutupalong/Balukhali camp near Lambasia Bazar.

One young girl recounted her migration experience, *"My family left Burma* [*Myanmar*] *because the military burned our houses and killed us during 'clearance operations.' So, we left Chan Pyin and crossed the Naf river into Bangladesh. It took us 20 days to get to Bangladesh."* (Female, age 12). After such a long journey, the Rohingya were met with camps overfilled with people. The Kutupalong-Balukhali mega camp quickly became overcrowded. Bangladesh authorities were reluctant to create permanent structures, infrastructures, and policies that would promote permanency, making these small spaces all the more uninhabitable, directly shrinking the psychological margins of trust and hope in their new host country. Limited physical space increases communicable diseases, fires, natural disasters, community unrest, domestic violence, and sexual violence (WHO, 2002). The lack of physical space also directly impacts the freedom and safety of both social and psychological space.

The newly arriving Rohingya were not given domestic legal status as refugees in the host country, thus further limiting psychological spaces. Instead, the government of Bangladesh designated them as Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMNs), making them more vulnerable to denial of freedom of movement, access to public services, education, and livelihood options. Currently, in line with the 1951 Refugee Convention, the United Nations protection system recognized the Rohingya as *refugees*. Despite their FDMN status, Bangladesh is obligated to ensure all persons within its jurisdiction, including refugees, retain fundamental rights. However, the fundamental right to education has been severely restricted, posing a dangerous threat to the social and psychological spaces of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. Rohingya children suffer widespread rates of education insecurity as they are denied a formal education but receive informal education in temporary learning centers (Al-haddad et al., 2022). According to a 2019 PRIO survey, numerous Rohingya respondents felt that the education insecurity of their children is tantamount to genocide (Olney, Haque, and Mubarak 2019), arguing that "we must prevent a lost generation through community-led education in Rohingya Refugee Camps" (p. 49). Later, in September 2019, a telecommunications blackout was put in place near the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, citing state security and public safety (Barua and Karia, 2020), further tightening their social and psychological spaces. Life in Rohingya camps in Bangladesh is complex and may be shown in part through Figs. 1-4. These images were acquired through field research in 2017, 2018, 2020, and 2022.

Life in Rohingya camps in Bangladesh, Figs. 1-4

Phase 3: condensed spaces in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

Once COVID-19 reached Bangladesh in March 2020, refugee camps closed their borders. Containment was especially frightening given the already posed health risks of Rohingya's shelter, clothing, bedding, household items, water, sanitation, food, nutrition, information, and access to health services (Chan et al., 2018). Concerns over the spread of the Coronavirus were elevated due to under-informed health services, low testing rates, and lack of preventative measures, including increased sanitization and informational campaigns (WVI, 2020).

While informational posters existed, electronic campaigns were not used due to the lack of telecommunication services in the camps. Poor communication further isolated the Rohingya by restricting their access to information about the virus (Barua and Karia, 2020). Hindering access to information fostered misinformation about the virus and happenings between Bangladeshis and the Rohingya. After several years of on and off again internet blackouts, a task force formed by the government cited the pandemic as a reason to restore the internet to the Rohingya refugees (Sakib, 2020). The Government of Bangladesh restored internet access to the camps after three years and several calls from human rights organizations appealing to them to do so. Even so, fires in the camps and violence on camp borders continue to disrupt telecommunications systems making internet access touch and go for many refugees (USAID, 2022). Moreover, Rohingya are not legally allowed to have SIM cards, so when internet is accessible, they are not legally granted phone access (Hussain and Lee, 2021)

In March 2020, the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) published guidelines that significantly reduced humanitarian services within the camps and suspended all nonessential programs. While COVID-19 containment measures were vital to reducing the spread of the virus, they had negative implications for Rohingya's access to critical services and livelihood opportunities, including reduced access to education, health care services, markets, and religion services (ACAPS, 2021, 2020). Market closures and movement restrictions provided limited access to sufficient food. Reduced access to education and recreational activities contributes to psychosocial distress. Women and children faced distinctive challenges in refugee camps. The government suspended all services except for those they deemed essential. Social services such as child-safe or women's safe spaces were not classified as 'essential,' cutting off services promoting education and reducing gender-based violence. Examples of such spaces can be shown in Figs. 6

Fig. 2. Heavy rains and flash floods can cause serious landslides and risk human lives.
Source: Fieldwork 2018, Kutupalong/Balukhali camp near Lambasia Bazar.

Fig. 3. Girl, age between 10 and 12 years old, cleaning Betel leaves that will be sold from this roadside shop. Child labor is high among the Rohingya. Source: Fieldwork 2018, Kutupalong/Balukhali camp near Lambasia Bazar.

and 7. highlighting a child safe space in 2018 and 2020, just before the pandemic made its way to Bangladesh. One report found that with the closure of child protection facilities, children were kept at home, and an increase in child abuse, child marriage, and reports of missing children increased dramatically. The report found that this created a significant psychosocial concern among the communities (ReliefWeb, 2020). Approximately 70% of Rohingya reported that it was unsafe inside and outside the house since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (Shangstha, 2020). Additionally, parents' primary concerns for their children were disease exposure, kidnapping, drug use, child trafficking, and mental health. Around 68% of parents reported a change in their

child's behavior since the pandemic's beginning, including mood swings and anger (Shangstha, 2020). The diversion of medical resources to the COVID-19 response also negatively impacts delivering other health-related services, especially those related to psychological distress. These statistics largely resulted from lacking physical, social, and psychological space for children to grow and develop.(Fig. 8 and 9) **[CE: Figure 8 and 9 is not cited in the text.]**

The added variable of COVID-19 to the constricted spaces of refugees created isolation that extends beyond public health concerns. While access to services, camp programs, and activities has mostly resumed, understanding the impact of the closures is still to be determined. For

Fig. 4. Rohingya children eagerly attend classes despite being cramped into temporary bamboo structures – absent of any desks, chairs, or even electricity. Source: Fieldwork in Camp-4 Extension, 2020.

Fig. 5. Fig. 5 Collaborative art mural depicting COVID-19 pandemic safety measures. Source: Fieldwork in 2022.

Fig. 6. Outside of Child Safe Space. Source: Fieldwork in 2018.

Fig. 7. Inside of a child safe space. Source: Fieldwork in 2020.

Fig. 8. Rohingya refugees engage in various collaborative forms of art-based activities to support communal healing and hope. Source: Fieldwork 2022.

many refugees, COVID-19 was and still is more than a health crisis but also a socioeconomic and protection crisis, culminating in chaos affecting all physical, social, and psychological spaces. Refugees' access to social safety nets and the host community's rising fear of refugees only decrease their economic mobility, safety, and personal options (Dempster et al., 2020). While resumed activities may somewhat mitigate these realities in the coming months (UNHCR, 2022b), it is not without significant challenges. COVID-19 containment and recovery measures are met with obstacles, including the assurance of sufficient resources to maintain essential services and to operate at capacity.

Furthermore, shelter continues to be a challenge. As a result, many are being relocated to the remote island of Bhasan Char. Coupled with the relocation comes the challenge of monitoring and tracking the refugees' relocations (ISCG, 2022) to ensure safe transfer.

Phase 4: Bhasan Char

The Bangladesh Navy and Chinese and British construction crews began creating a camp on the island of Bhasan Char Bay of Bengal for housing Rohingya (Md Rafiqul Islam, 2021). The island only appeared about 14 years ago, formed by silt in 2006. Initially, several factors prevented the Rohingya from moving to the Bhasan Char camps. Many experts warn that relocation would not expand space for Rohingya but rather create a more contracted one. In addition, experts said 1) it is not sustainable for human habitation; 2) it could be seriously affected by rising sea levels and storm surges; 3) it likely would have minimal education and health services; 4) it would provide minimal opportunities for livelihoods or self-sufficiency; 5) it would unnecessarily isolate refugees; 6) the Bangladeshi Government has made no commitment to allow refugees' freedom of movement in and from Bhasan Char; 7) it is far from the Myanmar border, and 8) many refugees fear being moved there (Cowper-Smith, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic, however, seems to have created a more significant push for relocation. The disparate events resulting from COVID-19, alongside increased pressure on the Bangladeshi government economically and politically, have fueled cooperation to make Bhasan Char work.

In December 2020, the Bangladesh government transported 160 families to Bhasan Char. Later in February 2021, an additional 3000

Fig. 9. Rohingya refugees are encouraged to share and explain their artwork. Source: Fieldwork 2022.

Rohingya were relocated, notwithstanding harsh criticism from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the international community (Paul, 2021). Now it is estimated nearly 30,000 Rohingya have been relocated (UNB, 2022; HRW, 2021), and a memorandum of understanding between the UN and the Government of Bangladesh has been reached (Portilla, 2021). Despite outcries against relocation, when spatial reasoning is considered, it may be asked what such options for livelihood exist on the island. The relocation efforts provide little room for growth and instead assist in shrinking spaces. Nonetheless, it seems that countries outside Bangladesh are beginning to support the effort.

Foreign donors are increasing but appear split on supporting relocation to the island. By way of example, Japan recently committed two million US dollars to support Refugees in Bhasan Char (UNHCR, 2022b). Additionally, The United Kingdom issued a financial promise with vocal support for Bhasan Char (Manley, 2022). However, The United States, which is currently the largest donor to the Rohingya response (UNO-CHA, 2022), has posed to "not currently support(ing) Bhasan Char" (Loy, 2022). It has been called 'warehousing,' holding "disturbing parallels to offshore detention of refugees" (Nguyen and Lewis, 2022). Despite such, more Rohingya are planned to be relocated throughout 2023.

Phase 5: the most recent Myanmar coup

The small space of hope for repatriation closed on February 1st, 2021, with the newest Myanmar coup d'état. Amid unsubstantiated allegations of voter fraud, President Win Myint and State counselor Aung San Suu Kyi were imprisoned by the Tatmadaw military along with ministers, deputies, and members of parliament (Peck, 2022). With power now vested to Min Aung Hlaing, the Rohingya are more insecure than ever about returning to their home country.

Many have pointed out that while Aung San Suu Kyi is responsible for sanctioning acts of genocide, it is, in fact, Min Aung Hlaing who is primarily accountable (MAP, 2021; Filseth, 2021). He was banned from the United States in 2019 and had his American assets frozen as of 2020 (USDT, 2020). In addition, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter banned him after the UN confirmed an investigation regarding the Rohingya (Domino, 2021). While the door to return to Myanmar may have once been slightly open, it appears that, after the recent Myanmar coup, it has now been sealed shut for the Rohingya.

Phase 6: recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic

The 2022 Joint Response Plan (JRP) begins by highlighting the temporary nature of Bangladesh housing Rohingya Refugees, and priority number one is working toward the "sustainable repatriation of Rohingya to Myanmar" (UNHCR, 2022a). The language strongly suggests the limited resources to sustain the 1.1 million refugees. The JRP estimates a need of over $881 million to implement 178 infrastructure projects and 136 partnerships. As of April 2022, slightly over two years after initial relocation efforts to Bhasan Char began, now nearly 30,000 Rohingya (UNB, 2022; HRW, 2021) have been relocated to the island, despite it only being 'empirically studied' and approved as a 'suitable *temporary*' facility for the Rohingya (Md Rafiqul Islam, 2021). Furthermore, in partnership with UNHCR, the Government of Bangladesh agrees that needs-based assistance to Rohingya refugees on Bhasan Char will provide critical assistance and support. This all suggests a further undoing any progress made in the expansion of Rohingya's physical, social, and psychological space.

Relocation to the island or repatriation to Myanmar creates isolating situations for the Rohingya that lack social support. This sends the message that their safety in Bangladesh is ending as they know it. Beyond such, it is suggested in the JRP (2022) that the Rohingya want to return to Myanmar. However, our conversations in the camps during our 2021 visits suggest mixed feelings about the desire to return, citing fear and oppression as reasons. At the same time, The Joint Response Plan calls for Bangladesh to implement informal learning of Myanmar curriculum for the Rohingya. Without a doubt, this practice is a reminder of the control the Rohingya faced in Myanmar and the interconnectedness of policymaking. One man explains:

"The military started torturing rich and educated people first. My cousin was abducted. After about 45 days later, the family received confirmation that my cousin was dead. My cousin was 26 years old and was a student at university. He was taken after returning home from the university campus. My cousin was taken while we were playing soccer and I witnessed it. I was 12 years old at the time and my cousin was 26 years. We often played soccer together. A couple of years later, I was also abducted by the Myanmar military for two days when I was 14 years old [in the 1990s] along with other boys. During that time, we were only fed rice and chilis. The chairman of the village negotiated to us back. I also witnessed many young girls being raped when the military patrolled the area. The men fled and the women were home. I witnessed a 27-year-old girl being gang raped by the military." (Male Rohingya artist, age 46)

While the UN system in Myanmar continues working to "support and encourage the authorities in Myanmar to create the conditions for voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return" (UNHCR, 2022a), we find it problematic for two reasons: (1) the informal learning of Myanmar curriculum fails to provide refugees with adequate education and perpetuates their learning insecurities (Al-haddad et al., 2022) while simultaneously shrinking their psychological space; and (2) Myanmar does not have the social or foreign policy frameworks to create the conditions that systemically support a *voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return.* This sort of plan grooms them to return to what they escaped from. A lack of policy that considers their previous social and psychological spaces will inevitably lead to repetitions that have occurred over the past century and the events they are struggling to heal from.

Pre-existing conditions

The plight, reception, and confinement of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh make more sense when considering broader dynamics, including foreign and social policymaking and practice. Indeed, Myanmar and Bangladesh's foreign and social policies provide a framework that has affected the situation considerably. Because both are developing nations, the lines between their foreign and social policies are blurred. This is because most social policies are rooted in international covenants and funded through foreign aid as both nations build their state and, more specifically, their welfare state. In this way, their social policy programming, whenever in existence, is often initiated in informal ways through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), local communities, and families. In the case of Myanmar, we briefly see how their lack of foreign policy has hindered their social policy. In contrast, in the case of Bangladesh, their utilization of foreign policy has opened doors for subsequent social policies through partnership and funding, although imperfectly. In this way, these nations' foreign policies determine their social policies due to their developing national contexts.

Myanmar's foreign and social policy overview

Since independence, Myanmar has consistently adhered to the foreign policy of neutralism with some variations depending on international and domestic politics. In theory, its foreign policy has been based on the liberal tradition that the state will stand independently and follow the international principle of peaceful settlement of disputes. However, the state leaders' perceptions of changing global and domestic politics put foreign policy implementation on a realist path. As a result, Myanmar took sides or grouped with other states to balance the powers likely to interfere in its national affairs. Under military rule, it remained largely isolationist (Sein, 2016). To serve the domestic political-security imperative, foreign policy has focused on persuading its neighbors to adopt more precise policies of non-interference to reduce the government's confrontations with ethnic insurgents along the border.

Concerning Myanmar's involvement with the international community, Myanmar is a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). However, they have primarily isolated themselves in practice, especially since the 2021 military coup. We will likely see little change as reports from on-the-ground specialists paint a humanitarian crisis, much less state building. UN Special Rapporteur, Thomas Andrews, has called for the international community to deny the legitimacy of Myanmar's military junta (UN, 2023) in hopes of recovering ground lost in moving from commitment to compliance with the country's international obligations. Myanmar's foreign policy, in practice, explains a lack of influence from foreign bodies in preventing racism, religious intolerance, and other ethnic conflicts.

Concerning social policy, before 2010, China was assumed to be a primary source of assistance for the state-building process conducted by the Tatmadaw government. China was seen as a significant aid provider for domestic economic development and the protector of Myanmar in international politics (USIP, 2018). Domestically, it has sponsored loans, grants, technical assistance, infrastructural development, and aid. Such assistance was used by the military backed government, which naturally limited capacity for state-building. Outside of China's investments, Myanmar's government has done little to strengthen its welfare state, leaving it up to communities and informal sectors. This sort of agreement seems to hold no end in sight. Chinese foreign minister, Wang Yi, recently announced after a visit that it would back the Myanmar regime "no matter how the situation changes," in what the Associated Press considered "the latest show of unequivocal Chinese support for the ruling military council that seized power last year" (Kurlantzick, 2022).

Concerning the Rohingya, most Myanmar locals do not see the Rohingya genocide as an act of the government. Instead, they see it as more complex and part of a long history of Muslim insurgencies in Arakan since 1948 (Kipgen, 2022). This may explain why there has been little advocacy to promote social policies to protect the Rohingya from locals in Myanmar. The minimal informal welfare in Myanmar has no place for advocacy, much less advocacy to extend such to the Rohingya. Without a social policy institutional framework, ad hoc informal welfare will continue for select citizens through family and community-based organizations, is far from all-encompassing, highly exclusionary and inaccessible to the Rohingya.

Bangladesh's foreign and social policy overview

Bangladesh's fundamental foreign policies originate from Article 25 of the Constitution of Bangladesh. The theme of foreign policy stems from the country's constitution to safeguard its national interests and achieve goals within its international relations milieu. Unique to Bangladesh's history is how the country primarily operates from a foreign policy-based approach to social elms since colonization. Under British rule, Bangladesh was subject to foreign goals and often robbed of its resources. Under Pakistan, Bangladesh's resources were squandered and sent to West Pakistan. Under dictatorship, substantial military control existed. This culminated in revolution and a need for foreign aid leaving Bangladesh somewhere in the middle of the need to sustain their people and meet the foreign requirements to continue aid reception. As such, we see a nation finding their place in the global world while engaged in state building and welfare-state building while hosting the world's largest refugee population. Nonetheless, Bangladesh is strengthening its institutional capacity for social policymaking and implementation.

For example, social protection for the citizens of Bangladesh is embedded in Article 15 (d) of the country's National Constitution (1972). It is also the cornerstone of the National Social Security Strategy (2015) and its accompanying Action Plan (2018), which both cite plans to introduce a National Social Insurance Scheme covering sickness, maternity pay and protection, old age pensions, workplace accidents, and unemployment benefits for workers in the formal economy (GOB, 2015). Bangladesh has, over the years, built a good foundation for social security as a core strategy to deal with the triple problem of poverty, vulnerability, and marginalization. A primary reason they have been successful is because of NGOs who are on the ground implementing aid efforts. However, refugees have been left out of these institutional initiatives almost wholly.

Instead, the refugee response is handled through partnerships with NGOs. Social services are primarily distributed through NGOs under the management of the NGO Affairs Bureau, which is housed under the prime minister's department (Ahmed, 2016). While what would be considered social policy has been moving in a positive direction for Bangladesh through the help of NGOs, it is ultimately subject to and under the foreign policy and the prime minister's department in the Bangladesh government. As we have seen, Bangladesh's crisis response

Table 1
Overview of Rohingya's shrinking spaces[2].

Physical	Social	Psychological
• Myanmar 1982 Citizenship Law (denial of citizenship, freedom of movement, restricted access to medical care, food and adequate housing, forced labor, and restrictions on marriages, etc.) • Myanmar 2012 Vacant, Fallow, and Virgin Land Law • Myanmar 2015 Restriction of Freedom of Movement • Myanmar 2012 Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camp relocation in Sittwe township • Exodus into Bangladesh in 2017 and Isolation to Kutupalong-Balukhali Expansion Camp • Bangladesh COVID-19 Refugee Camp Isolation Policies • Bangladesh Relocation of 3000 to Bhasan Char in 2020 • Myanmar 2021 coup d'état, • Bangladesh Relocation of 18,000 to Bhasan Char in 2021	• Myanmar 1962 a military coup and informal control • Myanmar 1982 Citizenship Law (denial of right to vote, healthcare, and access to work) • Myanmar 2015 discrimination laws restricted access to medical care and education • Myanmar 2015 Marriage Laws • Myanmar Buddhist Women Special Law and the Monogamy Law (targeted non-Buddhist women) • Bangladesh 2017 The Label of Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMNs) over Rohingya Refugees • Bangladesh 2019 telecommunications blackout • Restriction of access to formal education and the right to work • Bangladesh 2020 COVID-19 Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) Guidelines • 2022 Joint Response Plan (limits aid to needs based programming, Myanmar informal curriculum)	• Myanmar 1982 Citizenship Law-Denial of legal name • Myanmar Article 354 of the Constitution of Myanmar in 2008 (religious restrictions) • Myanmar 2015 Marriage Laws • Myanmar 2015 Religious Conversion Law • Myanmar 2015 Population Control Healthcare Law • Bangladesh 2019 telecommunications blackout (fear, paranoia, and frustration) • Bangladesh 2020 COVID-19 Containment Measures (paranoia) • Bangladesh 2020 Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) Guidelines • 2022 Joint Response Plan (setting up for repatriation and relocation)

[2] *Note.* This table summarizes and organizes policies that decreased Rohingya's physical, social, or psychological space. These policies were put forth by either the Myanmar (the Burmese) Government or the Government of Bangladesh.

utilizing foreign policy has been a century-old practice (Schendel, 2020) and is mirrored in its response to the Rohingya crisis. Their pre-existing foreign policy framework has been strong enough to keep the Rohingya primarily isolated from the rest of Bangladeshi society but still open to public-private partnerships to support refugees. More recently, however, Bangladesh's foreign policies surrounding the Rohingya largely reflect long-held grievances that have been bubbling under the aid response in Bangladesh.

Speculation of future conflict is considered in bordering districts of the refugee camps. The anti-Rohingya sentiment has grown in Cox's Bazar, one of the country's poorest districts (SAHR, 2017). Distrust, stigmatization, hate speech, and racism rapidly deteriorate security dynamics between the two communities (Mostofa, 2020). Many are frustrated over the aid Rohingya receive, feeling it is at the expense of their needs (Hossain, 2020). Analysts predict that the growing tensions are built upon resentment among the local communities, feeling like they live in the refugee response's shadows (Ansar and Md. Khaled, 2021). The influx of refugees has raised prices in Bangladesh while lowering wages (UNDP, 2018).

Many have called for a response to include host communities and better develop the surrounding areas; however, the policy response to COVID-19 cut development projects such as this by 25%, showing little chance of recompense (WURN, 2020). As local communities continue to express grievances, tensions between the communities grow, which adds to the complexity of long-held grudges that have been bubbling under the foreign aid response. This leads us to wonder how long Bangladesh can utilize foreign policies to achieve their social policies and how they will navigate their citizens' grievances, leading us to conclude that analyzing the shrinking spaces of the Rohingya in policy analysis is perhaps more important than ever.

Discussion

Making our way from 1962 to 2023, we identified six phases of transition for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh under 21 overarching policies that affected their physical, social, and psychological spaces. Additionally, we find pre-existing variables primarily resulting from being in a developing national context and arriving in a developing national context where foreign policy frameworks are primary determiners of social policy practices. As we have seen, many of these policies have affected these three spaces to various degrees. The findings reveal that the Rohingya refugees have experienced shrinking physical,

social, and psychological spaces for decades. Foreign and social policies have mainly supported this outcome in their home country of Myanmar and their host country, Bangladesh. However, when social policies implemented alongside NGOs were created, space expanded somewhat. This may be due to the pre-existing nature of Bangladesh's social policy framework and the establishment of the NGO Affairs Bureau. In this way, other countries supporting refugee situations may consider Bangladesh's institutional framework concerning NGOs.

We have shown how the case of the Rohingya depicts how policy can shrink or expand spaces for refugees in physical, social, and psychological ways. While each space is interrelated and interdependent, the psychological space is perhaps the most concerning finding mental health concerns including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, explosive anger, psychotic-like symptoms, somatic or medically unexplained symptoms, impaired functioning, and suicidal ideation (Tay, 2018). Participants in one study endorsed local idioms of distress, including somatic complaints and concerns associated with spirit possession. In addition, they found very high levels of daily stressors perpetuating symptoms such as problems with food, lack of freedom of movement, and safety concerns (Riley et al., 2017) where another study adds daily stressors to include socio-spatial confinement, idleness, break-up of families, domestic disputes and uncertain prospects for the future (Lars Rune Christensen, 2020). While these studies are beginning to blend into a medicalized discussion, we must mention policy contributing to these unfortunate outcomes as categorized in Table 1, column 3. While each of these policies contributes to shrinking psychological space, we find two significant policies that are primary contributors, including the labeling of FDMN status and Bhasan Char relocations.

The application of FDMN status keeps the Rohingya from obtaining rights other refugees are entitled to. Labeling FDMN status means that Rohingya refugees do not have a special status in international law with rights specific to their situation. It is merely a descriptive connotation that denies the Rohingya their human rights. Additionally, the relocation to Bhasan Char is ripe with concern as it removes the Rohingya from the public eye by "warehousing" them on a sinking island (Nguyen and Lewis, 2022) as we saw highlighted in Phase 4. Those on Bhasan Char experience shrinking physical, social, and psychological space that should seriously concern refugee studies, peace studies, and human rights scholars. The vast isolation is one of the most difficult aspects for those living in Bhasan Char. One Rohingya refugee explains, *"In the camp [in Cox's Bazar], if any of us became sick at least we would be able to*

Table 2
Rohingya's Shrinking Spaces Data Summary.

Law or Policy	Physical Space Inferences	Law or Policy	Social Space Inferences	Law or Policy	Psychological Space Inferences
Myanmar 1982 Citizenship Law (denial of citizenship, freedom of movement, restricted access to medical care, food and adequate housing, forced labor, and restrictions on marriages, etc.)	2	Myanmar 1962 a military coup and informal control	1	Myanmar 1982 Citizenship Law-Denial of legal name	2
Myanmar 2012 Vacant, Fallow, and Virgin Land Law	2	Myanmar 1982 Citizenship Law (denial of right to vote, healthcare, and access to work)	2	Myanmar Article 354 of the Constitution of Myanmar in 2008 (religious restrictions)	
Myanmar 2015 Restriction of Freedom of Movement	5	Myanmar 2015 discrimination laws restricted access to medical care and education	5	Myanmar 2015 Marriage Laws	5
Myanmar 2012 Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camp relocation in Sittwe township	2	Myanmar Buddhist Women Special Law and the Monogamy Law (targeted non-Buddhist women)	1	Myanmar 2015 Religious Conversion Law	6
Exodus into Bangladesh in 2017 and Isolation to Kutupalong-Balukhali Expansion Camp	3	Bangladesh 2017 The Label of Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMNs) over Rohingya Refugees	3	Myanmar 2015 Population Control Healthcare Law	6
Bangladesh Relocation of 3000 to Bhasan Char in 2020	19	Bangladesh 2019 telecommunications blackout	5	Bangladesh 2019 telecommunications blackout (fear, paranoia, and frustration)	5
Myanmar 2021 coup d'état,	19	Restriction of access to formal education and the right to work	5	Bangladesh 2020 COVID-19 Containment Measures (paranoia)	19
Bangladesh Relocation of 18,000 to Bhasan Char in 2021	3	Bangladesh COVID-19 Refugee Camp Isolation Policies	19	Bangladesh 2020 Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) Guidelines	19
		Bangladesh 2020 COVID-19 Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) Guidelines	3	2022 Joint Response Plan (setting up for repatriation and relocation)	2
		2022 Joint Response Plan (limits aid to needs based programming, Myanmar informal curriculum)	3		
Total Amount of Inferences to Space	**55**		**47**		**64**

go to a doctor or hospital or the NGOs [non-governmental organizations] could arrange better treatment, but here when our people are dying, no one cares" (HRW, 2021). Beyond the isolation exists a dire concern for access to services. With no psychosocial (mental health) or medical services for cases of physical and sexual violence, a healthcare worker explains, *"If there were any rape cases or other sexual or gender-based violence [on Bhasan Char], they will not be able to access much needed medical treatment or psychosocial counselling"* (HRW, 2021). The isolation and lack of services are ripe with concern over the options Rohingya refugees have in their future and could lead to unrest.

Outside of the more alarming policies and outcomes, we have confirmed that when space is categorized as physical, social, and psychological, we can review policy through these themes and infer causal relationships between policy and refugees' expanded or shrinking spaces against pre-existing variables. Doing so gives us more information about the policy itself. Moreover, it invites interdisciplinary collaboration to understand these three spaces better and solve each area's unfortunate outcomes.

In chronicling the plight of Rohingya refugees and categorizing their spaces throughout their migration, we discovered four causal relationships specifically related to public policy, including (i) Bangladesh's foreign policy framework has kept the Rohingya primarily isolated from the rest of Bangladeshi society but is still open to public-private partnerships which expands space for refugees; (ii) Bangladesh has a robust social policy framework, and while still building their implementation and strategy, it has similarly contributed to expanding space for Rohingya refugees; (iii) Myanmar's foreign policy framework contributed to justifying war crimes, essentially cutting off space for the Rohingya; and (iv) The lack of a social policy framework in Myanmar, leading to an absence of protection mechanisms for the Rohingya. These findings highlight the importance of considering pre-existing foreign and social policies regarding refugees' spaces-especially now as we see a global push for the repatriation of the Rohingya in the Joint Response Plan of 2022.

Conclusion

This study has found that Rohingya refugees have experienced shrinking physical, social, and psychological spaces for decades. We have also determined that when we consider how policies affect refugees' spaces, we can more fully examine the policy itself. This offers room to work toward a framework that fully supports human rights. In this way, our research serves policymakers wishing to analyze and create policy in a human rights context. Studies have shown that enacting exclusionary policies are counterproductive to a country's national security (Haddad, Aliaga, and Attree 2018). Thus, domestically, a human rights policy framework helps safeguard a host country's national security and benefits the refugees that they host. Failing to consider these spaces runs the risk of unrest, conflict, and harmful coping mechanisms for refugees, which should be a concern not just for the host country but also for countries in the region and the international community. Neglecting these spaces or only partially considering them has been shown to lead to national security concerns.

If we want to expand refugees' spaces to prevent these poor outcomes, we must understand more about policies and factors that affect each space. As such, we recommend that future research considers physical, social, and psychological spaces in policy diffusion studies and refugee contexts—knowing that when programs accidentally or systemically fail to meet refugee needs, host countries put themselves in a position to create dependent or desperate situations dangerous to refugees and citizens. Transferring this framework to other protracted refugee situations would be a good place to start to confirm factors and variables common to refugee contexts. Additionally, future studies that trace specific policies through diffusion research to include refugees'

physical, social, and psychological spaces may more specifically reveal where space can expand. Governments wishing to test new policies intended to expand refugees' space would serve as a model when including policy diffusion researchers throughout the process. In any case, including refugees' physical, social, and psychological spaces contributes toward a holistic understanding of how laws and policies influence and shape refugees' unique spaces. When we conceptualize space in this triune way, we can provide a causal relationship analysis to understand factors related to expanded or shrinking spaces and better explain complex situations more comprehensively in research.

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Appendix

Table 2

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