The Displaced Rohingyas

This volume offers a comprehensive overview of the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh. It analyses the socio-cultural and humanitarian challenges of the crisis, along with the discourses that have developed on this issue via the local and international media and literature. The volume also suggests ways to build sustainable solutions for the Rohingya refugees.

It discusses wide-ranging issues including a historical overview of the Rohingyas; the Rakhine State of Myanmar and the issue of religious toleration; the struggle for existence in Malaysia and Thailand; vulnerable Rohingya in Bangladesh; and stratified lives in Bangladeshi camps. It also sheds light on social insecurity among Rohingya adolescent girls; understanding gender-based violence in camps; the portrayal of the crisis in Chinese and Indian newspapers; and Bangladesh’s policy in addressing the Rohingya crisis and repatriation.

This book will be useful for scholars and researchers of sociology, social anthropology, refugee studies, peace and conflict studies, international relations, human rights, political studies, gender studies, and South Asian studies.

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The Displaced Rohingyas
A Tale of a Vulnerable Community

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To All Displaced Rohingya in the World
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This book is a welcome addition to the burgeoning literature on the Rohingya refugee crisis. The word “crisis” is overworked, but certainly merited in this instance. With each passing day, the humanitarian, indeed existential, challenges facing the Rohingya people become more difficult and severe.

Even the word “Rohingya” is contested. Myanmar politicians and army generals made a point of interrupting me in discussions on the crisis by saying, “there’s no such people as Rohingya. They simply do not exist”, insisting that I use the term “Bengali” to indicate that there were people living in Myanmar simply did not belong—they came from what is now Bangladesh and that is where they should return. They see the use of the word as invented as tendentious—“the word itself is an argument, because it asserts that they come from Rakhine when they do not”.

As Shakespeare said “Ay, there’s the rub”. This is the key argument that must be resolved. The Rohingya are a real people, and they are not alien to Myanmar. They have lived there, particularly in the Rakhine state, for hundreds of years. They have built homes, communities, schools, and are part of the land. They should not be stateless. The steady erosion of their legal and political rights since the independence of Burma, must now end, because its consequences have proven literally catastrophic for hundreds of thousands of people. Too many lives have been lost because a narrow ideological construction of history, identity, and social and political rights has triumphed over the recognition of a human reality: the vitality of a community whose attachment to home cannot be denied.

This book adds much to our knowledge to this reality—each article painstakingly takes us further down the path to a much deeper awareness of the depth and complexity of the Rohingya struggle. For too long, it was denied a reality and name—as in too many other disputes around the world, the refusal to accept the existence of a people, with their own culture, language, and historical narrative, has led to efforts to destroy and expel. The growing depth of scholarship that has exposed these policies and practices is commendable, with journalists and scholars pointing out the reality of the Rohingya experience, the dangerous ideologies that have tried to wipe out the history, identity, and current lives of the Rohingya, and the challenges of trying to resolve the current crisis.
The last few decades have been marked by an even deeper deterioration in the condition of the Rohingya people. “Burma for the Burmese” was the rallying cry of those seeking to bring British rule and the Indian Empire to an end, and it had a double meaning—both an end to foreign hegemony and a rejection of ethnic and political pluralism as the path to a new governing system. The assassination of Aung San just before independence and the damage of civil conflict in the 1950s were followed by the 1961 military coup and mobilization of Buddhist nationalism under the mantra of “Socialism in One Country”. Millions of “foreign nationals” were either expelled from the country or forced into an ongoing civil war that is still under way.

In the vertical mosaic that was such a feature of different Burmese/Myanmar constitutions, the Rohingya were in an increasingly ignominious position. They were vilified and excluded, expelled, and driven out of the country, a situation that actually became more intense and painful as popular opinion also became engaged in political revolt and reform.

It is a terrible irony that the mobilization of the majority against the Tatmadaw through social media also marked the ultimate threat to the very existence of the Rohingya people. A religious, ethnic, and national minority was seen as the embodiment of the “stranger” and the “other” in the midst of a purely Buddhist and Bamar identity insisting on their majoritarian right to define the country. The explosion of anger and resentment meant death and loss of property to over a hundred thousand Rohingya in Sittwe in 2012 and again in 2016. The world failed to respond to this event, choosing largely to overlook it, and instead ended sanctions and engaged with a new civilian administration that had Aung San Suu Kyi as its leader.

Aung San Suu Kyi did appoint former UN Secretary General to chair a panel on the violence in Rakhine state, and it was the very day of the report’s release in August 2017 that the destruction of villages and the loss of thousands of lives led to the forced departure of nearly a million Rohingya, who left for camps in Bangladesh, where they have lived in difficult conditions ever since.

Bangladesh has allowed the Rohingya to take temporary shelter in the region near Cox’s Bazar but has not recognized them as refugees, pointing out that the Bangladesh government has never signed the refugee convention, and insisting that they are “illegal migrants” whose forced departure is the responsibility of the government of Myanmar. As many of the authors point out, both the government of Bangladesh and many locally based NGOs have played a vital role in dealing with the multiple challenges facing the Rohingya community. Lockdowns and further restricting physical movement contribute to hardship, and in the past year, both the physical and mental wellbeing of the Rohingya in Cox’s Bazar have deteriorated. The creation of a new camp at Bhashan Char, which now has a population of about 19,000, has been marked by ongoing controversy about its isolation and the lack of job and other opportunities.
The COVID-19 crisis has only magnified the humanitarian crisis. The outbreaks in the camps have been serious, but it must be emphasized that the whole region has been affected by both the health and economic and social impacts of the disease. As problems have increased, donor countries have not always increased their funding—this remains a serious challenge. The Tatmadaw coup in Myanmar, the increased level of conflict throughout that country, and the ongoing and worsening humanitarian crisis (economic downturn of at least 20 percent) all make for a profoundly difficult situation for all groups in Myanmar, and this especially includes the Rohingya of Rakhine state. It is important to remember that there are well over a hundred thousand Rohingya in long-standing IDP camps in Rakhine, without access to education, work, and basic rights of mobility.

This grave crisis in both countries is still not receiving the attention it deserves. The Rohingya’s quest for political recognition is a necessary part of their empowerment and improving their situation—global engagement remains necessary, as is the need in both Myanmar and Bangladesh to improve the dire condition of the people who richly deserve better. Their struggle for human rights, human security, and human dignity is worthy of our greater attention and support.
Part I

Forced Displacement and Statelessness
1 Introduction

Forceful Displacement and the Rohingya

Mahmudur Rahman Bhuiyan,
Bulbul Siddiqi, and Sk Tawfique M Haque

Introduction

The contemporary world has witnessed a consistent increase in the number of forcibly displaced people. In 2019, according to the UNHCR, there were 79.5 million forcibly displaced people in the world, and this number was 70.8 million in 2018, 68.5 million in 2017, and 59.5 million in 2014 (UNHCR, 2019, 2018, 2017, 2014). Thus, the number of forcibly displaced people in the world increased by 34% in 2019 compared to 2014. People become forcibly displaced for a variety of reasons, such as political oppression, persecution, torture, and other serious human rights violations (as a result of ethnic conflict or communal violence), war, conflict, poverty, political instability, natural or human-made disasters, and pandemics (Martin, 2018).

A displaced population can be defined as “those who cannot find a state to recognise it as a member and who remain in a state of limbo, caught between territories, none of which desire one to be its residents” (Benhabib, 2004: 55). A displaced person is different from a refugee, a difference often misunderstood or not taken seriously. According to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (known as the “Refugee Convention”), a refugee is understood as an individual who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of the country (Article 1a). According to this definition, to be eligible for the status of refugee, one has to satisfy three conditions: (a) be individually persecuted; (b) be persecuted on the basis of one of the five reasons identified in the Convention definition—race, religion, nationality, membership in a social group, or political opinion; and (c) be outside their home country; that is, they must have crossed an international border (Parekh, 2017). This means that the forcibly displaced are defined more broadly than refugees.

Thus, besides refugees, there are other kinds of displaced populations. They include those who are often identified by many as “economic immigrants,” or people in “refugee-like” situations, defined thus by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2014). “Economic
migrants” are those who are perceived to have left their country of origin, not due to any form of “well-founded fear of being persecuted,” but rather they left their home country “in order to improve their economic situation” (Parekh, 2017). People in a “refugee-like” situation are those who face the same risks as refugees but are unable to gain refugee status “for political or other reasons” (UNHCR, 2014).

One’s status as a refugee has significant implications. Those who are recognised as refugees by the host country are entitled to the legal protections conferred by both international law and domestic law, such as (depending on the nation) the right to non-refoulment\(^1\) when claiming asylum, in addition to other benefits and services. They also, generally, receive more sympathy and concern than those who are not (International Labour Organization, 2016). Those who are not recognised as refugees (even those who have been forced to relocate due to generalised violence, massive violation of human rights, or serious disturbances of public order) are generally excluded from the entitlements under the international definition of refugee (Martin, 2018; van Selm, 2003). Instead, the denial of refugee status may have severe consequences, as they may be put into another category, usually one which carries negative connotations: illegal, detained, rejected, expelled, false refugee, etc. Such negative categorisation allows the host nation to ignore the displaced population as well as deprive them of different rights and provisions, including fundamental human rights (Parekh, 2017).

Considering such vulnerability of different categories of forcibly displaced population, UNHCR includes the refugees as well as the “refugee-like” people in its mandate. UNHCR also considers those who flee war or generalised violence to be “prima facie” refugees and extends protection to Internally Displaced People (IDPs)—“people who have involuntarily been uprooted and displaced but remains in their own countries” (Ryan and Childs, 2002: 49).

At the outset of any instance of forced displacement, a common response of concerned agencies and actors is to provide shelters to the displaced people in camps, often referred to as encampments. Initially, it is often thought that the displaced people will be repatriated or resettled shortly and their stay in camps is temporary. Host nations also prefer providing the displaced shelters in camps so that the displaced people cannot affect their socio-demographic structures and arrangements. Camp-dwellers are supported to meet their minimal subsistence needs. Their basic human rights and political participation in the host nations are not included in considerations, instead, seen as “unaffordable and unnecessary luxury” (Parekh, 2017).

However, this approach has raised questions in the emerging context of encampment periods becoming increasingly longer. Since the end of the Cold War, when repatriation replaced resettlement as the preferred mode of solution to displacement, the number of people living in camps is consistently increasing. Currently, about one-fourth of the displaced population in the globe live in camps, and only a small portion of those (1/2%) who
are estimated to be in need of resettlement are relocated to a third country (Centre for Global Development, 2017; Soft and Rehberg, 2021).

With the shift in preference from resettlement to repatriation, the encampment has gained significant importance. Both host countries and other countries, which once preferred to resettle forcibly displaced people in their own countries, now expect that the displaced people be repatriated to their countries of origin. However, as repatriation is deterred for various reasons, the length of stay of the displaced people in camps increases. Currently, the average length of the camp life of encamped displaced people is 17 years (Parekh, 2017), meaning that an increasing number of people are spending a significant portion of their lives in camps for extended periods of time. Camp life is no longer a temporary haven, but rather, a long-term and enduring place of residence. The subsequent denial of basic human rights of the forcefully displaced has raised moral and ethical questions.

When people’s stay in camps become longer, the availability of sufficient provisions for basic needs becomes an issue. Many basic rights, including political rights, the right to education and employment, and several forms of social protections, are compromised in camps with the excuse that these people are “going to leave soon” (Parekh, 2017). However, as days go by, such arguments come into doubt. In addition, since most (88%) displaced populations are located in low- or medium-income countries, many of which struggle with poverty, hunger, poor infrastructure and governance, and political instability, life in camps without adequate facilities and support in those countries is likely to be filled with diverse forms of deprivations and risks (Centre for Global Development, 2017).

In addition, lives of people in camps become more complex over time, and new social, cultural, and psychological issues emerge. The confined population begins to experience a loss of purpose as past generations, traditions, and cultures begin to fade. This intensifies their sense of uncertainty about the future. Their dependence on aid and the precarious situation they find themselves in push them to act differently, willing to play an active role within their communities, resulting in social reformations ushering in new possibilities, but, at the same time, creating new tensions, conflicts, and challenges. Therefore, it is now argued that encampment should be considered a long-term condition.

A growing number of scholars define the period of encampment as the “period of human rights violations” and suggest that this practice not be considered “the accepted norm.” These scholars advocate the promotion of “policies and practices that treat the forcibly displaced as fully human and with dignity” in camps (Parekh, 2017: 3). At the same time, it is also to be considered that as encampment is accepted as a means to repatriation, it should not be seen as a de facto solution to the problem of forcible displacement, something often complained against the Western nations. That is, while in cases of prolonged encampment, opportunities for dignified living and rights are to be promoted; it should not replace repatriation as the ultimate
solution to the problem of forced displacement if resettlement or integration into the host countries—two conventional alternatives to repatriation—is not deemed feasible. After all, encampment is a state of statelessness, with no sovereign authority to ensure protection, rights, and accountability for the displaced population.

The perspective from the Rohingya crisis is a new addition to the existing dilemma, difficulties, and challenges in resolving the issues of the forcibly displaced population, which is also the primary focus of the present book. About 1.2 million forcibly displaced Rohingya have been living in Bangladesh, some of whom have been living in camps for about three decades, some have grown up in camps, some have been living in camps since their birth up to their adulthood, and some have entered the camps in 2017, but their exit is uncertain. These people are living in camps with the collaborative support of the host nation and diverse humanitarian agencies but without fundamental human rights and dignity. Many other displaced Rohingya reside in other nation-states without rights and legal protections. Although the problem of forced displacement of the Rohingya exists for several decades, what justifies their humanitarian provisions and what justifies their deprivations from fundamental human rights and dignified living remain key but unanswered paradoxical questions. The aim of this volume is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the state of the displaced Rohingya in camps and beyond to establish a ground for a more objective and ethical understanding of the problem, the state of living of the displaced Rohingya, and a sustainable solution to the crisis. The next section of this introductory chapter provides an introduction to the displaced Rohingya, which is followed by a critical overview of the contemporary approaches to understanding forced displacement. The final section briefly introduces the chapters included in this volume.

The Displaced Rohingya

The Rohingya are a Muslim ethno-cultural group, historically located in the Northern Rakhine state of Myanmar, whose political rights were discontinued by the state in the early 1980s. Since that time, this population has been subjected to systematic oppression and persecution by the Myanmar government and their rival ethnic community, Rakhine, which forced them to seek refuge in other countries such as Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and several other countries. However, as the closest neighbour, Bangladesh has been the most popular country for them to seek shelter to escape persecution. There have been four significant influxes of the Rohingya to Bangladesh (in 1977, 1992, 2012, and 2017), which have resulted in the accumulation of about 1.2 million Rohingya living in camps and surrounding areas of the southern part of Bangladesh, particularly the District of Cox’s Bazar. According to the population figures of the Rohingya in Bangladesh, the total number of Rohingya in Bangladesh is 884,041 out of which 733,343 Rohingya entered Bangladesh during the last exodus in
who have been living in 34 camps in two sub-districts—Ukhiya and Tekhnaf—of the same district. The government of Bangladesh has recently started to relocate some Rohingya in Bhasan Char that has a capacity of about one hundred thousand. Over the last five decades, the problem of forced displacement of the Rohingya has become more complex, generating diverse geopolitical, diplomatic, socio-economic, cultural, and political issues.

Since the last exodus, efforts to repatriate the Rohingya to Myanmar have not been successful, although Bangladesh and Myanmar signed a bilateral agreement in November 2017 (two months after the exodus) to support the quick repatriation of the newly displaced. Bangladesh also did not recognise the newly entrant Rohingya as a refugee, instead, identified them as Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN) (Uddin, 2020). As a result, they remained unrecognised as refugees and outside of the coverage of refugee rights according to international and domestic law. Bangladesh still considers their stay in camps temporary and hopes that the displaced Rohingya will return to Myanmar sooner in light of the bilateral agreement between the two nations. However, the repatriation of the displaced Rohingya remained to be an illusion.

Bangladesh is not a signatory of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugee and the 1967 Protocol. As a non-signatory state, Bangladesh considers itself exempted from the legal obligations to ensure refugee rights of the Rohingya living in the camps according to the Convention. International organisations, however, normally use the term “refugee” to identify the Rohingya. Within this complex context, Bangladesh, in collaboration with various international communities, including the UN agencies, national and international NGOs, and community-based organisations, has been hosting the displaced Rohingya within its territory for decades, primarily by responding to their emergency and subsistence needs.

However, as repatriation has not taken place yet, the management of the displaced in the form of mere emergency response is increasingly becoming insufficient. A dignified living of these people, their economic and psychosocial well-being, health, future of the new generation, their healthy growth, education, and sociocultural and political identity, and relationship with the host community are appearing as pressing issues. In addition, the issues of social order and control within camps are being intensified as there are frequent media reports of the displaced being engaged in deviant activities such as drug dealing, involvement with gangs, conflict with the host community, and attempts for illegal migration to other locations and countries (Ahmed and Mohiuddin, 2020; Khan, 2020). Stability of family life is an emerging concern as gender-based violence and polygamous relationships are reported to be increasing in the camps (Ainul et al. 2018). Moreover, natural hazards and other forms of disasters (such as fire) are sources of fear and harm for the Rohingya in camps. In a recent fire in March 2021, 15 Rohingya died and many have been suffering from burn
injuries. All these are closely related to the dignified living of the Rohingya in Bangladeshi camps, in addition to the issues of basic provisions, administration, and management. The Rohingya escaped to other countries only to face similar conditions as host countries (such as Malaysia and Thailand) do not recognise them as refugees since they are not signatories of the 1951 Refugee Convention.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the February 2021 military coup have resulted in much political instability in Myanmar, generating further uncertainties around the process of repatriation. Instead, there is a fear that, with the military in power, the Rohingya could be subjected to more persecution, resulting in new episodes of displacement (Westerman, 2021). Such deepening uncertainties about the repatriation and the likelihood of extended stay of the Rohingya raise some pertinent questions: What needs to be done to ensure the well-being and dignified living of the displaced Rohingya? Why should these issues be considerations for policy and management? How do we define the responsibility to address them? How to devise a permanent solution to this crisis?

An Overview of the Frameworks for Addressing Forced Displacement

There are three conventional approaches to addressing forced displacement: resettlement, repatriation, and integration. Resettlement refers to the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another state that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent residence (UNHCR, 2021). There is a general agreement that resettlement had been the preferred solution to forced displacement following World War II until the end of the Cold War (Parekh, 2017). Aleinikoff (1992) identifies three reasons for the preference of resettlement, particularly among the Western nations: (a) refugees from the war could not be asked to return to their war-ravaged countries; (b) the rival parties of the Cold War wanted to take the credits of humanitarian intervention; and (c) Western nations held that refugees would be better off if they were settled in Western nations, an approach that Aleinikoff refers to as “Eurocentric humanitarianism.” The resettlement-centric approach to intervening in the crises of involuntary displacement still dominates mainstream normative theories related to refugees in the West, which are primarily concerned about whom to be resettled and why and how many to be resettled (Parekh, 2017).

Repatriation refers to the return of displaced people to their country of origin. It is generally expected that repatriation is voluntary, based on the free and informed choice of the displaced population (UNHCR, 2008). Repatriation has gained more importance over resettlement in the post-Cold War period with the pragmatic and moral arguments that: (a) resettlement exempts states from the responsibility for causing the crisis, which may create disincentives for other states to address the displaced people’s human rights and security challenges; (b) the displaced people ought to be able to return to their home
country as their membership in their own state is a fundamental good. As Parekh (2017: 25) puts it, repatriation is believed to be “a way of returning an individual to her state, and thus restoring the relationship between the individual and the state.”

The third generally acknowledged durable solution to force displacement is local integration. It refers to allowing the displaced population to become full members of their host community in their first country of asylum (Hovil, 2014). However, the effectiveness of this approach depends on the willingness of host states. Oftentimes host states refuse integration due to the fear that it is a threat to its national security or that it may make repatriation of the displaced difficult in the future. However, when the conventional solutions to forced displacement become less effective, long-term encampment becomes a *de facto* solution (Parekh, 2017).

Many analysts tend to see the problem of forced displacement in terms of the refugee regime, particularly the 1951 Refugee Convention and related protocols (particularly that of 1967), and thus emphasise the formal, legal obligations of actors with regards to the rights of the forcibly displaced population. These scholars point at those nations which conceded the covenants while tending to exempt those which have not. That is, a nation which is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention has no responsibility to the displaced. Their focus is *responsibility of* rather than *responsibility for*. To them, the issue of the statelessness and resulting harm, suffering, and loss of a dignified life are only secondary considerations, and, therefore, responses to be defined in light of legal obligations, rather than moral or ethical. This approach makes it discretionary for nations to respond to a problem of forced displacement unless they are obligated by international or domestic laws. It also exempts many nations, particularly developed nations in the West, from any legal obligation to resettle displaced populations who are geographically located far away from their territories or are not able to reach them. The practical implication of this approach is evident in the fact that only a handful of nations resettle refugees in their territories or contribute to the UNHCR fund. Moreover, this legal approach excludes some displaced populations from the right to protection and assistance under the refugee regime, particularly those who do not meet the criteria for refugee status.

But the problem of forced displacement can be seen from moral and ethical perspectives too, by focusing on the experiences of the displaced living in camps—in terms of their treatment and need for a dignified living. There are two ways to do it. First, to see the problem of forced displacement from the point of view of sovereign states (in light of the ethical principle of state sovereignty), that is, the sovereign states are the final authorities on regulating the movement of people across national territories, irrespective of purpose—as tourists, scholars, diplomats, business people, economic migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers. If necessary, states can make international arrangements to determine and collectively regulate cross-border movement as members of a society of states (Frost, 2003). As in the case of the 1951 Refugee
Convention, the sovereign states have agreed under which circumstances it is an obligation for them to grant asylum and how to treat these asylum seekers. This perspective is positively linked with the legal approach described above, usually known as the “traditional order” (Frost, 2003: 115).

The other ethical approach can be put under deontological logic, which sees the suffering of the forcefully displaced people as morally and ethically unacceptable (Olsen, 2011). While this perspective is fairly new, it is becoming increasingly relevant in the context of the intensification of encampment. This approach necessitates paying attention to the harm caused to the people by displacement and long-term encampment. Parekh (2017) identifies two kinds of harms experienced by the forcibly displaced people, both of which have significant implications for moral and ethical responses. These are: (a) legal or political harm and (b) ontological deprivations directly resulting from legal/political harms. The first kind of harm involves the loss of political community and legal identity in the form of citizenship (Parekh, 2017). As people lose political identity, they lose the ability to participate in the political process in the conventional and widely recognised forms of interest articulation, interest aggression, and political communication as described by Almond and Coleman (1960), or in the input and output functions of the political system, outlined by David Easton (1953). They are practically disconnected from the political processes of the nation-state system (democratic or non-democratic), and they lose their voice and representation, turning them into an alienated segment of the population. Such consequences of statelessness and living outside of the nation-state system hardly receive attention in the Western normative and legal theoretical discourses of forceful displacement.

The second kind of harm, as identified by Parekh (2017), is ontological deprivation, fundamental to humanity, a condition that threatens one’s existence with human dignity. Parekh points out the “structural injustice” displaced people are subjected to when they live in camps. Such injustice results from poor living and subsistence arrangements in camps, and restrictions on movement, education, and economic activities. As Parekh suggests,

this injustice is not often the result of deliberate policies of a given state intended to harm the displaced nor the result of ill-intention on the part of the international agencies. It arises as a result of different sovereign states acting in their own best interests.

(Parekh, 2017: 6)

In fact, structural injustice can be better understood by looking at the actors’ responsibility for unjust outcomes instead of looking at the responsibility of actors for their own actions.

Displaced populations’ statelessness and loss of political identity make it difficult for them to fight against or overcome the ontological deprivations and structural injustice they experience while living in camps. Capturing a moral perspective to forced displacement allows us to take the issues of
ontological deprivations more seriously. It also lifts the limits of looking at the problem of forced displacement from merely political and legal perspectives and allows it to be observed through moral and ethical lenses. Capturing a moral perspective, Hannah Arendt suggests that we should be concerned about all those who are without any form of effective citizenship or political belonging, regardless of how they are categorised legally since they “belong to no internationally recognisable community and are effectively outside ‘of mankind as whole’” (Arendt, 2003: 150). Pointing out the potential moral role of individual states, Parekh (2017: 10), similarly, suggests that

those states that have a vested interest in seeing themselves as upholding justice and is committed to broader moral principles, such as universal human equality and dignity, ought to reconsider the moral, as opposed to legal or political obligations that they have.

Again, the moral focus on the lived experiences of the encamped population should not downplay the moral call for the repatriation of the displaced to their home countries. While it is important to re-establish the fundamental relationship between the displaced population and their country of origin, it is also imperative that nations that provide shelter to the forcibly displaced are not penalised for responding to a humanitarian call.

The role of Bangladesh in hosting the Rohingya can be seen and explained from the second ethical perspective as Bangladesh is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol does not have a leading role in creating refugee regimes and is even not a resettling country or nation-state that accepts displaced people or refugees for economic purposes. Bangladesh has responded to four exoduses since the 1970s purely on moral, humanitarian grounds to save the Rohingya who had crossed the border to flee Myanmar military persecution. Since the 1990s, about two hundred thousand Rohingya have been living in the camps in Bangladesh. This number has been topped by another eight hundred thousand displaced Rohingya who fled the latest Myanmar military campaign in 2017. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the February 2021 military coup in Myanmar, it is likely that the displaced Rohingya’s stay in Bangladesh will be even longer than initially anticipated. Viewing their lived experiences from legal as well as moral and ethical grounds is now, therefore, imperative. For example, defining the new entrants (those who entered Bangladesh during the 2017 exodus) as FDMN and, thus, not recognising them as refugees have significant implications in contributing to deprivation and structural injustice. These people are not entitled to the legal protections that refugee status confers in both international and/or domestic law systems and do not receive the sympathy and concern that refugees tend to do. As such, this collection of essays seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the statelessness of the Rohingya and the kind of harm it engenders, with the objective to situate ourselves, nation-states, and the global community in a better position to understand
our moral obligations to the people in this situation. While our objective in this book is not to suggest any direct solution to the Rohingya crisis, we want to draw attention to what needs to be done and why—both to support a dignified living of the Rohingya in camps and to solve the crisis itself. As Carens (2013: 201) points out, it is important to figure out what is “right in principle before moving to the question of what we should do in practice.”

A majority of the chapters of the book try to address two main questions: (a) What should happen and/or what can be done if the Rohingya cannot be repatriated within a reasonable period of time and why? (b) What can be done to ensure that the displaced Rohingya do not remain confined in camps indefinitely? The authors investigate the state of the displaced Rohingya largely from a non-ideal viewpoint, focusing instead on the circumstances of the Rohingya in Bangladeshi camps and in other locations (particularly in Thailand and Malaysia) and derive an empirical understanding of the harm caused and what course of actions would minimize their suffering while also coming to a possible long-term solution to the crisis.

Themes Covered in This Volume

This volume comprises thirteen chapters (this being the first) written by authors from eight different countries who have utilised their disciplinary expertise to provide sophisticated analyses of the complex conditions of the Rohingya crisis. Thus, the book intends to provide the readers with a holistic understanding of the Rohingya crisis at this point in history. It will cover the following thematic areas:

- Theme 1: Forced Displacement and Statelessness
- Theme 2: Humanitarian Issues and Uncertainties
- Theme 3: Women, Children, and Vulnerability
- Theme 4: Rohingya Voice, Media, and Representation
- Theme 5: Policy and Sustainable Solution

The second chapter by Ishrat Zakia Sultana and Abantee Harun begins with a historical overview of the Rohingya crisis within Myanmar and the beginning of their marginalisation. Although the settlement of the Rohingya goes back to the ninth century, persistent denial of this by the dominant ruling class of Myanmar forced them to live a marginalised life and eventually try to leave Myanmar and seek refuge in Bangladesh and other countries. Such denial has first turned the Rohingya ethnic community into stateless refugees and then made them victims of genocide. This chapter concludes that the complexity of the Rohingya crisis is rooted in its history, which is unchangeable, yet useful to gain knowledge about in order to contribute to the solution of their crisis.

In the third chapter, Md Ishrat Ibne Ismail and Muhammad Mizanur Rahman refer to the atrocity of the Rohingya as an act of state-sponsored