1

Introduction

Until 2017, Rohingyas – often dubbed the 'most persecuted minority in the world' – making the perilous trek across the border into Bangladesh were predominantly male, as they were not only denied citizenship and legal rights in Myanmar, but they also lacked economic opportunities within the country to support their families and communities (Kojima 2015; Albert 2017). On 25 August 2017, an escalation of violence in Rakhine State in Myanmar – where the Rohingyas largely resided – reached a tipping point, with horrific reports of murder and kidnapping of Rohingya men by Burmese soldiers, forced public nudity and humiliation, and sexual slavery and gang rape by military captivity directed against Rohingya women and girls. These attacks resulted in a humanitarian disaster that forced over 700,000 Rohingyas to flee their native land and seek refuge in the makeshift and overpopulated refugee camps outside of Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh – specifically the Kutupalong–Balukhali mega-camp (used interchangeably with 'camp' or 'camps' throughout this book) – making it the largest refugee crisis in the world. Compared with past waves of refugees, there was a drastic increase in the number of women and girls crossing the border into Bangladesh. The concentration of refugees in Bangladesh's refugee camps is amongst the densest in the world, with tarpaulin and bamboo shelters precariously built on sharply sloped hillsides. There are now an estimated over 1 million Rohingya refugees living in the overcrowded and squalid camps, as the influx continued steadily over the subsequent months, with the majority of the camp's residents being women and girls (Ellis-Petersen 2019).

Unlike most debates on forced migration which focus on the larger structural needs of refugees, this book focuses on the lived experiences of Rohingya refugee women. Discussions of power relations and the reproduction of power asymmetries are often neglected in the dominant literature on refugee women's everyday subjectivities. The narratives of Rohingya women's perception of their own lives and the ways in which they negotiate, navigate,

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009414845.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

contest, and adjust to their surroundings are vital for understanding how these women forge kinship networks and learn to *make a life* in their new surroundings. The effects of forced migration on subjectivity are profound – understanding the lived experiences of women and their narratives of change can yield important insights into refugee women's notions about their self, their community, and their gendered bodies.

Answering these questions required 14 months of feminist ethnographic research, conducted between 2017 and 2018 (as well as frequent return to the camps every few months over the course of two years between 2018 and 2020) in the Rohingya refugee camps outside of Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh. I examined the everyday negotiations, contestations, strategies, and coping mechanisms that Rohingya women use to affirm spaces for themselves. Refugee women are often assumed to be apolitical, disempowered, and non-agentic victims – vulnerable and dependent on men. Recognizing that they can simultaneously be victimized while remaining active agents of change in their lives provides a clearer understanding of their lives as refugees. Rohingya women do not fit neatly into monolithic discourses that portray them as lacking agency and unable to understand their predicament. Rather, despite their lives being marked by trauma and constraints, this book suggests that through everyday politics, Rohingya refugee women subvert, challenge, and negotiate patriarchal structures and power asymmetries, though in many ways they still affirm, bargain, and work *within* these structures. Strategic choices and bargaining are used to reach aspirations, reclaim identity and agency, and rebuild their lives, and their everyday tactics, creativity, and contestations challenge and overturn deeply embedded gender ideologies regarding women's place in settings after forced migration.

This book further reveals that the exercise of creating a sense of home and belonging after forced migration depends largely on individual experiences during displacement and the specific ways in which refugees *make a life* for themselves through economic, social, and cultural capital. Refugee women possess the creative capacity to employ frameworks of social organization created by themselves, which often deviate from the solutions offered by humanitarian aid agencies. They possess the capacity to bring about changes in their own lives through the various coping mechanisms they employ; the empowering spaces they create, inhabit, and reshape; and the bonds of kinship and community they forge.

Simon Turner (1999: 5) suggests that while gender identities and relations are not the only aspects of refugee life that are being transformed and challenged, 'gender appears to be the perspective through which most refugees

attempt to understand social change'. Thus, I focus my ethnographic lens on the processes, relationships, and categories that illuminate the complexity of displacement, and the re-imagining of home, self, family, and identity in conflict-affected communities. My insights into these processes emerged from regular conversations with Rohingya women and others associated with the refugee camps. The women I met and spent months with spoke of their lives in Myanmar, where they were forced to live in 'modern-day concentration camps', the dangerous rickety boat journeys they took across the border, and their new lives in the overcrowded makeshift refugee camps in Bangladesh (Albert 2017). In documenting the effects of displacement, I found that Rohingya refugee women were yearning to have their stories, experiences, and emotions documented so that they could be shared with a wider audience, as they were acutely aware that their situation remains largely invisible to the rest of the world. For these women, the documenting of stories fulfils the crucial and urgent role of providing a voice to the forgotten victims of an emerging global crisis, thereby preserving historical memory for future generations (Abusharaf 2009). This book is hopefully a step forward in giving a voice to these women by following their narratives, words, and silences, with the hopes of enriching our understanding of how refugee women make a new life for themselves in refugee camps following expulsion from their native lands.

Gender, Forced Migration, Identities, and Lived Experiences

Positioned within a feminist ethnographic lens, this book addresses the effects of displacement and forced migration on women's lives and the transformations of gender roles and identities within a refugee camp by reflecting on their selfhood and subjectivity. It exposes the ways in which authority and power are constructed in refugee camps and affect women's social position within a community. Feminist ethnographers (Hackett 1996; Abusharaf 2009; McNamara 2009) have brought attention to the need to focus on the impact of forced migration on women and the importance of participatory research that uncovers their voices and viewpoints. In her comprehensive research on the situation of women refugees globally and how they differ from men, Jane Freedman (2007: 17) succinctly writes:

> …'what gender looks like' is not just about women, although women may be the primary subjects of much research on gender because it is they who suffer the primary consequences of gendered inequalities of power.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009414845.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Thus, gendering forced migration entails 'making the invisible visible, bringing the margin to the center, rendering the trivial important, putting the spotlight on women as competent actors, understanding women as subjects in their own right rather than objects for men' (Reinharz 1992: 248).

A nuanced understanding of gender is crucial for comprehending the issues that affect the lives of Rohingya refugee women within the context of forced migration, their exercise of agency, as well as their modes of negotiating and navigating their gender identity in their everyday lives. I focus on the construction of gender as understood through its social practice, in the everyday experiences, negotiations, and navigations of gender identities in the marriage process, household relations, and encounters with NGOs and other refugees.

Emphasizing issues related to gender identities and roles in the refugee context is particularly important, as gender is the site 'where many negotiations and changes occur as a consequence of displacement' (Edward 2007: 5). Gender is considered to be a 'social construct' – that is, men and women carry out their daily practices in a manner that is strongly influenced by the 'social order' and societal culture (Kandiyoti 1988; Lorber 1994; Butler 1998; Ferree, Lorber, and Hess 1999). According to Judith Butler (1998), gender identities are the 'effects of signifying practices rooted in regimes of power-knowledge characterized as compulsory heterosexuality and phallocentrism' where men are placed at the centre of understandings of gender (Jagger 2008: 17). Thus, gender does not automatically impute any intrinsic qualities. Simone de Beauvoir (1988 [1953]: 295) argues that 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (also see Butler 1998). This captures succinctly the role society plays in establishing what it means to be a 'feminine' woman (or a 'masculine' man) and the way it creates distinct sexual binaries within a cultural context (Butler 1998: 29; Schrijvers 1999).

As this book highlights, understanding gender 'norms' and 'behaviours' requires unearthing the power structures and normative frames that are embedded within people's lives (Butler 1998: 29). The subtle, and often invisible, dynamics of power and status within a relation exist in a specific context that people are socialized to see as natural and inevitable. This is particularly the case for the Rohingya community, where the male–female binary is socially constructed and maintained based on culture and religion. What emerges through my research, however, is that these dominant frameworks of power and gender norms are negotiated, contested, and sometimes resisted by Rohingya women.

Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman (1987: 135) further argue that individuals are 'doing gender' continuously in their daily interactions, becoming 'accountable' for the performances they make. These interactions are shaped by social situations, as 'doing gender consists of managing such [social] occasions so that, whatever the particulars, the outcome is seen in context as gender-appropriate or … gender-inappropriate, that is, *accountable*' (West and Zimmerman 1987: 135). In this way, society constitutes gender relations, as, according to Lucia McSpadden and Helene Moussa (1993: 204), gender allows for societies to 'construct ideas and knowledge about men and women' by allocating both sexes differing yet specified roles. Unequal power hierarchies arise from such notions of gender-appropriateness, which feminist scholars (Flax 1990; McSpadden and Moussa 1993; Indra 1998; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014) have theorized as revealing the structural hierarchies, privileges, and relations of domination within and across gender.

Understanding gender thus requires studying the ways in which societal and cultural norms and practices shape the way people perceive concepts such as masculinity and femininity, male and female, and, more generally, 'how these notions structure human societies' (Indra 1998: 6). Societal and cultural norms play a disciplinary role by delineating the 'appropriate' behaviour of expected roles of men and women, which is particularly evident in the Rohingya community due to strict notions of 'manhood' and 'womanhood' (West and Zimmerman 1987). Thus, as Freedman (2007: 17) asserts, 'gendered meanings and roles are constructed and maintained, but also [negotiated,] contested' and redefined by men and women.

Studying the transformation of gender identities and changing gender relations among refugees forces us to think about gender roles, power relations, and identity construction. In this book, I look specifically at the marriage process, the gendered divisions of labour within the family, the gendered hierarchies of different individuals in the refugee camps, and the gendered effects of development programming. Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2000: 116) contends that 'we now have a clear understanding that migration is gendered and the gender relations change with migration processes'. To echo this, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2014: 395) also notes that the role of gender in forced migration is key to understanding 'the different ways in which gender identities, roles, and relations are influenced by processes of and responses to forced migration'. The changing nature of these roles derives from entire social fabrics being uprooted and destroyed, the breakdown of former support structures, new and unfamiliar living environments that cause restricted mobility for both men and women, and entering new social relationships

which may challenge old kinship structures. A gender-based approach thus serves to 'empower refugee women and their advocates' through an understanding of the gender relations that encompass refugee experiences (Giles, Moussa, and Esterik 1996, quoted in Edward 2007: 44; El Jack 2003: 3).

This gendered dimension of social relations, as Diane Elson (1996: 1) suggests, '[structures] the lives of individual women and men – such as the gendered division of labour and of access to and control over resources'. Displacement thus has 'profound effects on the gendered distribution of labour, on the way gendered relationships like marriage or parentage are organized, and on how gendered and other social roles change in terms of the obligations and rights these imply' (Lubkemann 2002: 5). At the household level, power relations and negotiations take place where men and women have specific roles and responsibilities 'expected' of them.

Alice Szczepaniková (2006: 1) suggests that 'migration is both a gendered and gendering process'. Differentiating between 'gendering' the analysis and the 'gendered' process is important for understanding the different dynamics at work within the same social space. To understand the gendered aspect of forced migration is to analyse the way migration is experienced differently by men and women – particularly in terms of the shift in relations between them as well as the dynamics of changing power differentials in these relationships. These changes cause gendered identities to be reconstructed and renegotiated during forced migration 'at the level of individual decisions and strategies embedded within family and wider social networks' (Szczepaniková 2006: 5). An example of this is the possibility of increased women's employment (as opposed to men's employment) in displacement, which results in a shift in gender relations and power dynamics within a household. Judy El-Bushra (2000), in her research on conflict in Rwanda, Somalia, and Uganda, argues that shifts in gender divisions of labour have created new opportunities for women as spaces open up for greater decision-making power within the family. Similarly, Jennifer Hyndman and Malathi de Alwis (2003) suggest that moving away from conservative 'masculine' and 'feminine' roles has caused women in Sri Lanka to assume new roles within their households and communities, such as partaking in income-generating activities.

Changing gender identities as a result of conflict and forced migration for both men and women can also, in some cases, result in gender-based violence. Traditional notions of masculinity and femininity related to 'appropriate' gender roles and relations in certain cultural contexts often transform or shift during times of conflict, but the way they affect gender-based violence in displacement is not always understood (Meertens and Segura-Escobar 1997;

Sideris 2003; Merry 2009). As family dynamics begin to change, erosion of male power and privilege at the socio-economic level, such as through loss of economic opportunities, unemployment, and men's inability to 'reconstruct' their position within the boundaries of the family, can have consequences resulting in gender-specific violence (Huseby-Darvas 1994; Colson 2003). Displacement thus provides a space for gender identities to be negotiated within marriage and the household – sometimes opening up new possibilities for 'empowerment', while at other times exposing them to various vulnerabilities.

A further aim of this book is to understand how Rohingya women negotiate their gendered identity after forced migration within the refugee camps in Bangladesh. Selfhood and subjectivity are integral to understanding the ways in which women renegotiate their gender identity. Tania Kaiser (2016: 198) succinctly notes 'how gender identities are constructed, understood, and interpreted, and how these processes relate to other aspects of their life and experience are also influential'. It is thus 'a social process individuals come to identify themselves with [that is] a particular configuration of social roles and relationships' (Grabska 2010: 33) where femininity and masculinity are based on particular expectations of how women and men should act. These may be norms, values, or behavioural patterns. For Rohingya women, identity emerges from the negotiation of 'expected' gender responsibilities and reproductive roles within the prevailing power structures of society. In this book, I ask how these gender identities – these specific femininities and masculinities – become transformed within the context of forced migration.

Examining women's gendered identities and how they are constructed in everyday life can provide a deeper understanding of Rohingya women's various negotiations and contestations within existing power relations in the refugee camps. Scholars such as Beatrice Hackett (1996), Ewa Morawska (2000), and Rogaia Abusharaf (2009) have written compelling ethnographies that explore the implications of forced migration and displacement on the formation – and transformation – of selfhood and subjectivity. It is in the context of profound war and violence that a 'creative shaping' of notions of self and society takes place to illuminate the ways in which women enact their gender identity, which is what Peter W. Preston (1997: 53) describes as an identity 'viewed as the outcome of complex social processes which embed the person in a series of social contexts'. Thus, to understand the experiences of refugee women, the analytical point of departure should focus on the ways that the gender identity of refugees affects how they 'construct and are exposed to danger', react and respond to multiple forms of violence and political uncertainty, and engage in forms of visibility and mobility in exile (Kaiser 2016: 197). It is in this manner

that forced migration and displacement often lead to drastic and profound changes that transform every aspect of one's life – both public dimensions and intimate ones – dimensions such as 'feelings, strategies of self-representation and social interaction, and ability to imagine and create [refugees'] own life paths' (Nolin 2006; La Barbera 2015: 5).

Understanding subjectivities through a gendered analysis of forced migration helps to unravel the 'multiple pressures' and disparate opportunities that take place in the context of conflict, flight, and exile (Indra 1998; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014; Kaiser 2016). These gendered identities and the way refugees begin to understand notions of self – and subsequently the creation of 'new selves' – are constantly renegotiated and reconstituted in migration and movement. It is what Aihwa Ong (1995: 350) describes as 'dwelling in traveling', since displacement, loss, and healing cause the forging of new identities and '[necessitate] the reconfiguration of selves and of relationships with others' (Abusharaf 2009: 10). What happens through the process of change and negotiation is that the self 'is always on the move' (Erchak 1992: 3; Abusharaf 2009).

Without erasing the distinct variations in refugee women's responses to their circumstances, understanding the re-creation of family and kinship ties, the establishment of new social networks, and the adoption of new cultural markers helps to reveal how women assume ownership of their gendered selves and recognize their agency (Abusharaf 2009; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014). This narrative of agency and empowerment is ignored in many studies that talk about the 'refugee woman', as women are often portrayed as victims of war, dependent on men, and apolitical. In the literature on forced migration, the depiction of 'refugee women' as 'madonnalike' figures or weak victims without agency fails to recognize their multiple 'strategies of selfhood' for survival (Enloe 1991; Bhabha 1994; Malkki 1995; Chatty 2014; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014). At the same time, agency must be contextualized in a new environment marked by different – and changing – societal constraints, gender differentials, and power hierarchies.

In her work with refugee women, Roberta Julian (1997) notes that refugee women are rarely consulted or given the opportunity to represent themselves in public forums to share their personal experiences; rather, they are spoken about and represented by others who ultimately portray a stereotypical image of them as 'victims'. This 'process of "victimization"', Julian (1997) suggests, controls the image of the refugee woman in larger public and political narratives of forced migration. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2014: 398) further argues that before reducing refugee women's experiences to simply being vulnerable

victims of sexual violence, it is important to recognize that 'displaced women could simultaneously be victim*ized* and yet remain active agents deserving of respect and not simply pity'. Patricia Daley (1991) takes the conversation a step further by suggesting that in many ways forced migration can be a 'liberating force' that helps women escape patriarchal control and find ways to challenge, negotiate, or even reinforce their expected gendered roles and behaviours. Katarzyna Grabska (2010), however, notes that while there may be liberatory aspects to refugee women's access to income and change in gender roles within the household, this 'does not necessarily lead to greater empowerment'.

Even in the most difficult of circumstances, women retain their agency and do not engage as mere 'passive bystanders' of power and domination; rather, they actively work to 'maximize their own life chances' through what Deniz Kandiyoti (1988: 280) considers the 'patriarchal bargain'. Narratives of Rohingya refugee women, their lived experiences, and the ways in which they negotiate, navigate, contest, and adjust to their new surroundings reveal that strategic choices and coping mechanisms are used to reach aspirations, reclaim identity and agency, and rebuild their lives.

A key assertion of this book is that Rohingya refugee women perform acts of resistance through their *everyday* actions. In thinking about women's agency, Amani El Jack (2008: 257) succinctly asserts that the transformation of gender roles and subjectivities in refugee contexts does 'not mean the end of patriarchy but rather the everyday practice of resistance and agency performed' by refugees. The acts of resistance performed by Rohingya women can be noted in the subtleties of everyday life. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003: 83) writes, '… resistance inheres in the very gaps, fissures, and silences of hegemonic narratives…. Agency is thus figured in the small, day-to-day practices and struggles of Third World women.' Within the development studies discourse, the social transformation of gender dynamics has often been linked to notions of progress, with change (in social behaviour, norms, practices, and so on) presumed to be a linear process moving towards an idealized goal and normally associated with outward, public, and often vocal displays of 'resistance' (Crisol 2001). However, I argue that *incremental change*, or 'silent challenges' (El-Bushra 2000; Kabeer 2005), and everyday contestations against patriarchal oppression are often ignored when discussing transformation. Though these silent acts and performances may seem insignificant, they underscore how voice and public resistance are not the only forms of 'empowerment' and paths towards an idealized 'gender transformation' (Pedersen 2016). Rather, quotidian performances of resistance, negotiations, and contestations can bring about incremental changes – even if slow and undetectable – that translate

into new patterns of living and forms of empowerment, both individually and collectively. In this manner, I suggest that Rohingya refugee women's *everyday*, small, mundane negotiations – which include women coming to terms with their new breadwinner role due to their husbands' lack of employment and husbands dealing with the loss of this 'traditional masculine' role – are a form of transformation in their own right. Culturally, these tensions, negotiations, and navigations underscore how transformation is not necessarily linear or openly broadcasted and cannot be measured against a particular set of economic or political baselines (Kabeer 2005). Rather, in many ways, it is a personal act of committing to change within given societal circumstances that by no means suggests an 'end to patriarchy' but rather a move towards 'disrupting and challenging the prevailing discourses of the powerful while providing space for solace, sharing, and collective empowerment' (Parpart 2010: 8).

Conceptualizing the Refugee Camp: Beyond 'Bare Life'

Living in a refugee camp is widely perceived to 'break down' and 'erode' traditional life, where 'refugees invariably live in conditions of insecurity and deprivation' that are 'harsh, dangerous and characterized by social chaos and lack of normal social structures' (Wilde 1998: 109–110; Bartolomei, Pittaway, and Pittaway 2003: 87). Giorgio Agamben (1998: 139) suggests that camps strip persons of identity and agency, essentially reducing them to 'bare life'. The camp, according to Agamben (1998: 139), is in a 'state of exception' where the rule of law does not hold and where 'life ceases to be politically relevant … and can as such be eliminated without punishment'. In the context of the Rohingya refugee camps, the Bangladeshi government considers Rohingya refugees to be 'extra-territorial *persona non-grata* and a threat to the country; therefore, they are placed within restricted boundaries controlled by specially designed rules and restrictions until official measures are taken for their repatriation' (Farzana 2015: 151). In embracing the 'refugee' label, Agamben (1998) contends that refugees must necessarily be helpless, dependent victims, essentially rendered a 'speechless emissary' (Malkki 1995). This, however, fails to take into account the materiality and heterogeneity of the social world of refugee camps and the diverse ways in which refugees themselves contribute to camps, transforming them into vibrant social spaces over time.

Agier (2014: 19, quoted in Turner 2015) further suggests that 'the camps are places of relative closure but they are also cosmopolitan cross-roads'. While insecurity and vulnerability drive people to refugee camps, insecurity alone does not entail the full extent of their experience and the simplicity of

everyday life. Turner (2015: 143) argues that these spaces are filled with social life, where diverse norms and ideas work to 'create new identities'. In a similar vein, Julie Peteet (2005), through her own research of camps in the occupied Palestinian territories, suggests that studies of refugee camps must go beyond abstract, grand theories of 'bare life', but rather must be grounded 'empirically'.

Refugees in camps are thus not simply helpless victims; rather, they learn to adapt to the life of the camp. Adaptation to life in the camps may also cause 'new social forms and opportunities' to emerge, where *everyday life* is viewed through the mundane, daily routines of the *ordinary*) – where new identities materialize and social worlds are transformed, making life in the camp different from life elsewhere (Turner 2004; Peteet 2005; Gren 2015).

Refugee camps are shaped by ambivalence and contradictions – they are neither 'neutral' spaces of humanitarianism nor perfect 'safe harbours' for refugees (Turner 2015). Rather, it is an 'out-of-the-way place' – to borrow from Anna Tsing (1993) – where new social imaginaries, expanded possibilities, and the transformations of 'being and becoming' someone take place (Turner 2015). Refugee camps are thus carefully constructed spaces in which women, men, girls, and boys attempt to *make a life* – a life that is meaningful and hopeful despite the various adversities and constraints that they face. Time and locale within the camp are 'made meaningful, albeit within the spatial and temporal peculiarities of the camp' (Turner 2015: 143).

Any analysis about camps and refugees must be integrated using a feminist theoretical lens and from a gendered perspective. The refugee camp, instead of being a space of 'exception', is instead a microcosm of a larger system of power intertwined with gender, race, and class, as well as other systems of social inequality and subjugation. The whole process of forced migration and displacement is a gendered process, and gender identities, roles, and relations can be challenged and negotiated in the process of migration. Refugee camps thus provide an opportunity to transform the structures of domination and power. I agree further with Turner (1999, 2004) who, in his study of a Tanzanian refugee camp, finds that social changes and transformation are primarily perceived through the prism of gender. Furthermore, Asha Hans (2012) suggests that focusing on camp contexts emerged from the gendered experiences of subaltern women, which have occupied a central position within risk zones, and that central to a woman's experiences is her body and her sex. Women remain in a precarious position during the process of displacement as they must deal with the new challenges of refuge. In adjusting to their new circumstances, they remain resilient, transforming the refugee camps in a way that contests deeply held gender structures.

Through the everyday lives and lived experiences of Rohingya refugee women, as this book shows, there is more to refugees than *bare life*; instead, refugees cope with the hardships and conditions of exile and express social and economic agency even in the most difficult circumstances. The camp creates a space where Rohingya women's gender identities and subjectivities and their gender and social relations are transformed, negotiated, and contested.

Overview of the Book

This book is divided into eight chapters that weave together an ethnography that *tells stories* and *unfolds lives*. In the next chapter, Chapter 2, I discuss the methodological frameworks that form the foundation of this research. I introduce my ethnographic field site and the spaces I inhabited, the women's worlds I entered, and the constraints attached to conducting ethnographic fieldwork in these spaces. This is followed by Chapter 3, which situates the recent migration of Rohingyas from Myanmar to Bangladesh within the greater context of conflict, systemic violence, and oppression in Myanmar's recent history. This chapter introduces the Rohingya as a borderland people in Myanmar, their life under siege, and provides a glimpse into Rohingya gender relations and roles prior to displacement.

To elucidate the narratives of the everyday, in Chapters 4–7, I explore the subtle ways in which women seek to *make a life* in their new host communities by providing thick descriptions and ethnographies. These chapters demonstrate that refugee life within the Kutupalong–Balukhali mega-camp in Bangladesh shapes their gendered identities in distinct ways.

Chapter 4 examines the experience of home and belonging after Rohingya women arrived at the camps. I illustrate the re-establishment of life after migration, where bonding, kinship, and social organization are of utmost importance. This chapter engages with Rohingya women's profound, productive actions as they craft a sense of 'home', 'place', and belonging and, in the process, negotiate their gendered identities and subjectivities. I further explore the desire for social continuity in the formation of community and the way social relations and practices shape the physical and social environment to 'impose symbolic meaning on place' (Peteet 2005). In particular, I show how placemaking through spaces such as the *taleem* provides moments of respite during hardship through collective prayer and creates a sense of belonging and semblance of 'home' in displacement.

In Chapter 5, using the voices of young Rohingya women, I explore some of the aspects of the marriage process that colour everyday life in the camps,

as the negotiation of gender identities and practices through marriage and family expectations is a particular part of the encampment process. Marriage is fundamental to life in the camps – it recreates the bonds of family that may have been lost or damaged during migration. Contestations around gender identities are part of the refugee experience, and the negotiations of norms through marriage, marriage processes, and family life are examples of this.

Chapter 6 delves into the various bargaining strategies and power asymmetries through the politics of housework, paid work, and familial or gendered responsibilities and duties within marriage and the household. This chapter illustrates that changing gender relations are related to negotiations and transformations taking place within the household. It captures the changing gender relational dynamics after displacement with regard to work and livelihoods and their effects on gender subjectivity, suggesting that displacement has created not only a crisis of masculinity but also a crisis of femininity.

The preceding chapters revealed gender dynamics regarding marriage and the household and the factors that shape Rohingya women's agency, negotiations, and navigations in these spheres. However, these changing dynamics must also be gauged alongside the new currents of change brought about by the burgeoning humanitarian aid agencies that have mushroomed across the camps. The final ethnography chapter, Chapter 7, extends debates on gender and humanitarian aid and analyses Rohingya women's encounters with, and exposure to, the humanitarian or NGO industry as well as 'gender programming', and how these programmes directly impact and transform gender asymmetries within the camps.

Taken together, Chapters 4–7 offer a unique perspective, weaving together an intricate narrative of transforming gender relations and roles and the negotiation of identities and relationships among Rohingya women in Bangladesh's refugee camps. These chapters illuminate Rohingya women's voices and viewpoints and the powerful and often vibrant relationships that unfold in settings of despair and struggle through the friendships, social networks, and explorations of self and community that take place. In the final chapter, Chapter 8, I conclude with an overview of the book's contributions to knowledge and what prospects remain for the future of Rohingya refugees – particularly Rohingya women.