



## **The Rohingya Schema: How the Rohingya was reported by the New York Times**

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When the Rohingya Crisis erupted after the August 25, 2017 incident in the northern Rakhine State in Myanmar, reporters and writers scamper to get the news out to the world, and one of these, are writers and field reporters of the prestigious New York Times. Founded in 1851, the New York Times is an American newspaper that is based in New York City that has worldwide readership and influence, including in Southeast Asia.

Over its years as a newspaper, New York Times won 122 Pulitzer Prizes, a feat never ever achieved singularly by any other newspaper in America. Founded by Henry Jarvis Raymond and George Jones, New York Times is a broadsheet that releases daily. Its daily circulation usually bats around 571,500 while its Sunday circulation bats around 1,087,500 and 2,500,000 digital circulation. It is ranked 18<sup>th</sup> in the world by circulation.

In our effort to better understand the representation (schema) that the Rohingya obtain from the media, particularly from the New York Times, the study pursues it under the scalpel of Corpus-assisted Discourse Analysis. The study locates frequency of words in the corpora and obtaining it in the News On the Web (NOW), a corpus created by Mark Davies of Brigham Young University. Further, it analyzes the data sets for co-occurrence of words (collocation) and word and textual positions (colligation).

The world was awoken by the fast unravelling of a humanitarian crisis in Southeast Asia. The precursor was the August 25, 2017 incident when Rohingya insurgent group in Myanmar mounted coordinated attacks on 30 government targets, including police outposts and an army base, in the northern part of Myanmar's Rakhine State. Equipped with small arms, machetes, and hand-held explosives, the insurgents killed 10 police officers, a soldier, and an immigration official. Seventy-seven insurgents were killed, with one insurgent captured in the attacks (CSIS 2017). Many Rohingya fled northern Rakhine State as the Tatmadaw, the Border Guards and the Police took clearing operations that saw burning of houses and mosques, rape and torture, beatings, and killing of Rohingya on-sight.

Keywords: Rohingya, New York Times, Corpus-assisted Discourse Analysis, Corpora, crisis

## *The Rohingya Schema*

This paper delves on the representation Rohingya, as a people and a community of ethnic minority in Myanmar, to the world. There are many newspaper publications that talks and discussed, op-ed columns written on the “Rohingya”, and to a finer extent, this paper attempts to understand how they are represented to the worldwide audience by the New York Times.

The Rohingya came into worldwide attention again, in 2017 after government forces in Myanmar retaliated for the August 25 attacks. But the struggles they all faced are present prior to 2017, and it escalated with impunity and the perpetrators are never prosecuted. Parnini (2013) contextualized that the “‘Rohingya’ is considered a reconstruction of the modern nation-state system. The plight of the Rohingyas from Myanmar to Bangladesh and elsewhere in neighboring countries since the late 1970s complicated their status as well as their statelessness.” It was exacerbated when in 1982, Myanmar passed the Citizenship Law which officially barred the ‘Rohingya’ from national recognition and stripping them of their right to a name and a nationality being peoples of northern Rakhine State. It has been going-on since 1982 that the Rohingya are being relegated to an ‘outsider’ as a comfortable reference and justification to them as ‘illegal migrants’ from Bangladesh. But historically, the Rohingya, as a people and a community, has claims to the land of the northern Rakhine State to as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Anawrahta (1044-1077) was the first king of Burma and the Burmese history rightly begins with him. During the times of Caliph Haroon Ul Rasheed (5th Caliph of Abbasid Caliphate), traders (both Arab and Turk) used to come here. The Arab traders had come to Burma in 9th century and few historians assert that they came in 8th century (Goraya and Mazhar 2016).

In spite these historical claims to the northern Rakhine State, the Rohingya has been subjected to atrocities and expulsion in waves of attacks against their person, property, religion and their identity. The Amnesty International started, like many other non-government organizations and the United Nations agencies, documenting these atrocities since 1989. In one of its report, Amnesty International (2014) claimed to have documented “human rights violations by the military against civilian members of ethnic minorities, most commonly in the context of counter-insurgency operations. These include forced labour; forcible relocation with no compensation; torture and ill-treatment; and extrajudicial executions. The organization published reports on violations against the Rohingyas in 1992 shortly after their second mass exodus to Bangladesh; and again in 1997, as refugee flows to Bangladesh continued”.

Because most of the atrocities against the Rohingya is due in part to its denied citizenship status since 1982, the first manifested exclusion of the Rohingya from the very fabric of Burma’s society was enshrined in the 1948 Constitution after Britain granted Burma its independence. “According to Article 11 of the Constitution of the Union of Burma, those whose ancestors belonged to any of the indigenous races of Burma can be considered as citizens. Although the first Citizenship Act (1948) did not name Rohingyas among the indigenous races, under the provisions of Article 3 citizenship can be given to other racial group that has settled in any of the territories included within Myanmar as permanent home from a period anterior to 1823 – the Act intentionally excluded the Muslims living in Rakhine state from access to citizenship” (Kovacs-Zsanko 2017).

Documenting these atrocities against the Rohingya is daunting and the reports coming out are discouraging that the need for media representation through the newspapers or cable TV coverage is desired in order to be understood. However, international media are barred from covering and reporting from northern Rakhine State, narratives are culled out from reports of NGOs and UN Agencies. There are field reporters who encamped in nearby Bangladesh and cover the Rohingya crisis from there.

The Human Rights Watch, in (2012), even released its report on the atrocities against the Rohingya. Along this report is a citation of the stark difference between how the Rohingya crisis is reported in Myanmar and in the International Community. “Various state-controlled and domestic media outlets in Burma claimed the violence in Arakan State was perpetrated solely by Rohingya against Arakan, while international media focused on violence against the Rohingya. The independent Eleven Media Group said in a statement: “Foreign media are now presenting bias [sic] reports on the clashes between [Arakan] people and Bengali Rohingyas to destroy the image of [Burma] and its people.... Only Rohingyas killed [Arakan] people and burned down their houses”.

In this schema, this paper intends to understand how the New York Times, as an active member of the international media is reporting “Rohingya” and situating its analysis from 25 August 2017-January 31, 2018. This paper will then collate articles and op-ed columns published in the New York Times and analyze them using Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis. In the course of this paper, however, there are footnotes to previous atrocities reported by other newspapers other than the New York Times, to provide the springboard of its discussion. It will also make use of reports of non-government agencies, the United Nations agencies, and others, as references. As part of the methodology of the study, it uses, aside from the COCA, the Brigham Young University News on the Web (NOW), still designed by Mark Davies. The study also references the doctoral dissertation of Jasper Roe of the Uppsala Universitet who wrote as his Doctoral Dissertation, “A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis of the representation of the Rohingya minority group in Myanmar”.

### ***The Corpus-assisted Discourse Analysis and the role of media in the world events***

The need for an analysis of media representation on vital contemporary issues in Southeast Asia is paramount in our better understanding of the events as it unfolds. This is the role of Corpus-assisted Discourse Analysis. In the Handbook of Discourse Analysis, the definitions of ‘discourse analysis’ can be summed up into these three general categories: 1) the study of language use; 2) the study of linguistic structure ‘beyond the sentence’; and 3) the study of social practices and ideological assumptions that are associated with language and/or communication (Schiffrin, D.; Tannen, D.; Hamilton, H. 2001). It is also a form of mass communication analysis that concentrates upon the ways in which media convey information, focusing on the language or presentation -linguistic patterns, word, and phrase selection (which are usually lexical choices), grammatical constructions and story coherence (Watson and Hill 2003).

Defining discourse analysis is daunting for its own limitations.

It is argued that it is hard to define fundamental notions such as discourse since it is a multidimensional social phenomenon (A. S. Haider 2017). But let us define ‘corpus’ in this context: “it is based on both its form and its purpose as “a collection of naturally occurring examples of language, consisting of anything from a few sentences to a set of written texts or tape recordings, which have been collected for linguistic study (A. Haider 2016)”. This context belongs to the linguistic discourses. In linguistics, discourse has developed as the main object of investigation in two sub-disciplines: conversation analysis and the analysis of written text. Hence at least two definitions of discourse have been elaborated. Here discourse is predominantly seen as 1) language above the sentence level that is extended chunks of text; 2) language in use (Koteyko 2006).

But the ‘discourse’ assumes the philosophical treaties of Michel Foucault.

In the Australian Conference on Educational Research, Linda Graham pointed out that there are researchers applying the ‘discourse’ of Foucault to “strive to avoid the ‘positivist trap’ of essentialising the research ‘method’”. But, I must admit that I am prone to “methodological anarchy (Graham 2005)”.

The Corpus-assisted Discourse Analysis is useful in studying media framing. Media framing originates when there is a need to give prominence to a certain component of a news event or a crisis which may have a positive, negative, or neutral acceptance from the readership (Afzal 2016). This media framing follows the precursor of Noam Chomsky under its ‘propaganda model’ which we will discuss briefly. It was widely assumed under the treatise of Chomsky, that “the media serves the end of the dominant elite” in the sphere of information and discourse. Moreover, media frame is “the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration. (Weaver 2007)”. In their book, *Manufacturing Consent*, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman discussed that under the confluence and competing interests of classes and the prominence of wealth, the need for media propaganda is vital.

A propaganda model focuses on this inequality of wealth and power and its multilevel effects on mass-media interests and choices. It traces the routes by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public (Chomsky and Herman 1988).

However, these among others are part of the wider scope of political communication which also help convey the schema of the Rohingya to the policymakers in Southeast Asia and in America. This, together with agenda setting and media priming, forms part of a new trend in media communications that most scholars and researchers often venture to in the affairs and events of the world, the Rohingya crisis included.

Agenda setting refers to the idea that there is a strong correlation between the emphasis that mass media place on certain issues (e.g., based on relative placement or amount of coverage) and the importance attributed to these issues by mass audiences (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007)

while media priming according to a prominent researcher, “frames introduce or raise the salience or apparent importance of certain ideas, activating schemas that encourage target audiences to think, feel, and decide in a particular way” (R. Entman 2007).

The abuses against civilians all over the world hugged headlines and articles in many international newspapers: The case of Rwanda Genocide (Jehl 1994), (Cohen 1994) which has garnered not much of an international indignation on what was going on between the Hutus and Tutsis until it was too late. The events unfolded in April 7, 1994 however international media has in a way, unable to rally international opinion against it until genocide happened. A more recent report came out accusing France of complicity in the Rwanda Genocide (J. Moore 2017) (Rahman and Shaban 2017). Had it been that international media primed the events unfolding in Rwanda appropriately, it could have stopped the sale of arms by France to Rwanda which were being used in the genocide.

A different scenario happened in the Kosovo in 1998.

Learning perhaps from the debacle in 1994 in Rwanda, international media as well as NGOs and the United Nations, along side the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has extensively written, on the field, about the ensuing events. ***Kosovo Rebels Prepare For War With Serbians*** reported by Hockstader (1998) and Daniel Williams (1999) wrote an analysis for the Washington Post a year after and Susan Sontag (1999) defended, through her article in the New York Times, the interventionist presence of the NATO in the Balkans.

Another world event which unfolded in 1999 in Southeast Asia was between the Timorese rebels and Indonesia. The New York Times was covering the events as it was unfolding and Ronald Steel (1999) opined that ***“East Timor isn’t Kosovo”***. He wrote:

“None of this applies to conflicts outside Europe. Witness, for example, the West's nonresponse to, and even lack of interest in, the Russian repression in Chechnya. Of course, Indonesia may respond to pressure from the West and allow in troops. But that doesn't change the basic equation. East Timor is not Kosovo; the West will not start bombing to save it. This is not only because East Timor is far from the North Atlantic world, but also because of the size and importance of Indonesia.”

The Steel opinion in the New York Times provided a clear picture of Indonesia and compare it to Serbia and the growing influence of international media in the forming of its own reality and influencing public policy discourse at the regional and national levels.

Moreover, Seth Mydans (1999) of the New York Times wrote that “the strong turnout on Monday of nearly 99 percent of registered voters was a defeat for their campaign of intimidation, and it suggested the strong possibility of a victory for the pro-independence side.”

These accounts of articles and opinions of international newspapers such as The New York Times brought into the fore the core arguments on the role of media in international

relations. The media help to construct the reality of international politics (Coban 2016). In this regard, because mass media deal directly and indirectly with peoples' sociability, they play a strategic and special role in this regard, identity building a discourse governing the society (Firoozi, Mostafaye and Khaledian 2014). However, concerns loom over the independence of media in politics, international affairs, world opinion and foreign policy. There were debates over which the mass media serves elite interests or alternatively, plays a powerful role in shaping political outcomes has been dogged, by dichotomous and one-sided claims (Panagiotou 2005).

This study establishes premium on the role of media as a responsible entity and not agents of disinformation as claimed by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (Seneviratne 2017), as well as misinformation (Gowen and Bearak 2017) (Safi 2017) (Wescott and Wright 2017) such as those which supports the proliferation of fake news on social media sites.

### ***The Findings and contextual analyses***

The study made used of Brigham Young University's News On The Web (NOW) online software where I inputted the word "Rohingya" and added a part-of-speech marker '\_nn\*' to get the return 'noun only' for the collocates for all nouns, ensuring that only the correct noun will be provided by the search function on the software.

The data collection through the NOW was conducted at the Commission on Higher Education on 13 March 2018 at 1:18PM. The NOW as of March 13, 2018 has a growing corpus of 30,774,442 new words of text from the last week (18-03-05 through 18-03-11). Between August 2017 to January 2018, the period of the collation of the articles and op-ed pieces of the New York Times, the NOW recorded the following, representing the whole corpus:

Month	#websites	#Texts	#Words
January 2018	5,498	225,082	111,580,592
December 2017	5,559	262,714	133,918,015
November 2017	5,895	295,797	149,681,461
October 2017	6,159	317,865	159,346,309
September 2017	5,966	302,127	152,068,378
August 2017	5,740	296,632	147,940,367
Total	34,817	1,697,217	854,535,122

The data revealed that the word "Rohingya" gained a total of 100 concordance lines. The top 15 collocates for the node "Rohingya" is contained hereinbelow:

<b>Fifteen Most Common Collocates for the word 'Rohingya' in the NOW corpus (all noun)</b>	
<b>Word</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Muslims	6965
Refugees	5044

People	1851
Crisis	1504
Refugee	1280
Militants	911
Community	867
Issue	799
Minority	798
Salvation	633
Villages	587
Population	544
Children	520
Insurgents	482
Women	456

The noun collocates within the search at NOW returned at least 6965 frequencies and the lowest at 100<sup>th</sup> collocate is at 16, for a total of 27913 representing all frequencies from the top to the 100<sup>th</sup>.

Now, with these top 15 collocates, the study situates it by manually re-reading and highlighting the corpora as written in specific reference articles, opinion, editorial or op-ed pieces published by the New York Times, from August 25, 2017 - January 31, 2018. It randomly selected articles and op-ed pieces through the search engine, Google. The articles and op-ed pieces are then copied to the MS Word format for easy reading and collection of pertinent corpora for the study.

Based on the New York Times articles, editorials, opinions and op-ed pieces that were taken for the study, hereunder are the results:

Corpora	Frequency
Refugee/s	135
People	101
Muslims	82
Children	80
Village	69
Women	62
Crisis	48
Minority	41
Militants	34
Community	28
Population	26
Insurgents	18
Salvation	15
Issues	13

In terms of frequency of use of the corpora by the New York Times, as a noun, Rohingya meant “refugee or refugees”, “People”, “Muslims” and “Children”, “Village”, “Women” and finally, “Crisis”.

In analyzing these data sets, the study avails of the concepts of phrasal schemas by Michael Stubbs by deeply incorporating case grammar, frame semantics and construction grammar by Fillmore.

Michael Stubbs (2001) highlighted that “phrasal schemas – at this lower level of phraseology, pragmatic meanings are often conventionally encoded in lexicosyntactic form. The extent of nonlinguistic inferences has been exaggerated, and the extent of what is encoded has been correspondingly underestimated”.

This study attempts at establishing if the lexis of the Rohingya as reported by the New York Times portends control and supports the phrasal schema. Along this line, we also use the NOW to search for the collocates of “Rohingya” as a verb. Firstly, as a noun we generated the top 15 collocates and thereafter, the collocate words are now run into the NOW to find the ‘verb’ equivalent. But we will only be analyzing the top 7 collocates namely: “Refugees”, “People”, “Muslims”, “Children”, “Village”, “Women” and “Crisis”.

But we will get back to this context later as we analyze the data sets.

As in the ‘phrasal schema’, we must cite example from the New York Times. Let us use this phrase “The situation is dire” as spoken by Matthew Smith, the Chief Executive of Fortify Rights to explain his group’s description of the events that unfolded in the northern Rakhine State: “Mass atrocity crimes are continuing. The civilian government and military need to do everything in their power to immediately prevent more attacks (Ramzy, Boats carrying Rohingya Fleeing Myanmar sink, Killing 46 2017)”.

The phrase “the situation is dire” can be gleaned by lexical information as espoused by Haegemann in 1991. She argued that the sentence structure is to be determined by lexical information (Stubbs 2001). This phrase illustrated the situation most of the Rohingya endured from most of post August 25 exodus from the northern Rakhine State. Because of its contextual reference to the on-the-ground situation, let us take off from this phrase.

In the phrase “situation is dire”, situation could mean a synonym for ‘a set of circumstance or a state of affairs’ and at the same time, it could mean the ‘surroundings of a place’. The lexical derivatives of the ‘situation’ as quoted by the New York Times is suited to the “state of affairs” of the Rohingya community, inclusive of its people, social structure and their property. In the context of its people, the ‘situation’ also describes the predicament that involved their ethnic identity and traditions, its history and culture while their social structure may include their in-group institutions and kinship relationships, from the individual to the family structure and finally, their property which could mean “homes” and/or “mosques”, the two salient compositions of the Rohingya community under constant attack.



## 1. *The corpora “Refugee/s”*

When the New York Times wrote so many times “refugee/s” as a representation of the Rohingya and its attendant crisis which captured the world’s attention after the crackdown (Calamur 2017) of the Government of Myanmar on ‘terrorists’ among the Rohingya in the northern Rakhine State, it referred to those who have reached Bangladesh after the turmoil of their own self-imposed exodus after August 25, 2017. It also referred to those Rohingyas who are on their way to the border, either by walking for three-days without food and water, or those who swam to cross the Naf River to Bangladesh.

It also refers to the “*refugees*” residing already at the “*refugee*” camps inside Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh.

Posting a question like “why are hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees fleeing Myanmar?” (Gonchar 2017) indicates the international media’s concerns of what is happening inside the northern Rakhine State as they are barred, along with the UNHCR staffs and humanitarian groups to get into ground zero in the northern Rakhine State after August 25. This question raises also the concern for the looming humanitarian crisis in Southeast Asia. This question also is being directed to the Civilian and Military government of Myanmar as well as an attempt to ‘red flagged’ a looming Rohingya crisis to get the attention of the world through the United Nations and its instrumentalities.

An opposing inquiry for this question posed by the New York Times could also be “why are hundreds of thousands of Rohingya stayed in Myanmar?”. So, to pose a comparison of the two, the study presupposes that the Government of Myanmar, its Tatmadaw, its border guards and its police are not harboring the atrocities against the Rohingya people and their communities but only targeting the ‘terrorists’. But this assumption is baseless because the world saw what unfolded in the Rakhine and it has Tatmadaw fingerprints all over.

Analyzing this comparison, we refer to Michel Foucault’s *Order of Things* treatises. He argued that for a comparison, one finds the “sign”. The ‘sign’ as espoused by Foucault can be translated to the modern parlance of “hallmarks” as in its relation to the possible presence of genocide against the Rohingya people. This “hallmark” was uttered by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, Yanghee Lee. So, in this discussion, we countenanced that the ‘sign’ here refers the quality, or an event whose order of occurrence means a probable occurrence of something big and this was genocide.

While Michel Foucault’s description of the sign is that of the sixteenth to the seventeenth centuries respectively, we refer to his arguments by borrowing it to juxtapose the realities of times in relation to our study of the Rohingya crisis. According to Michel Foucault (2002):

“In the sixteenth century, signs were thought to have been placed upon things so that men might be able to uncover their secrets, their nature or their virtues; but this discovery was merely the ultimate purpose of signs, the justification of their presence; it was a possible way of using them, and no doubt the best; but they did not need to be

known in order to exist; even if they remained silent, even if no one were to perceive them, they were just as much there”

And to continue, Foucault said:

“From the seventeenth century onward, the whole domain of the sign is divided between the certain and the probable: that is to say, there can no longer be an unknown sign, a mute mark. This is not because men are in possession of all the possible signs, but because there can be no sign until there exists a known possibility of substitution between two known elements. The sign does not wait in silence for the coming of a man capable of recognizing it: it can be constituted only by an act of knowing”.

Now going back to the original question raised by the New York Times, it can also be applied that there were ‘signs’ prevalent in the Rohingya community in the northern Rakhine State which compelled them to flee to Bangladesh and become, effectively, by the circumstances of their departure, ‘refugees’. Ergo, there were ‘signs’, apparent or not, officially sanctioned or not, that triggered more than 615,500 Rohingyas (ISCG 2017) to flee Myanmar to safe haven in Bangladesh. To understand the framing of the question, this study situates it to the ideological process coined by Stuart Hall as *“moral panic”*. He argued that moral panics represent a way of dealing with what are diffuse and often disorganized social fears and anxieties, not by addressing the real problems and conditions underlying them, but through projections which are then displaced onto an identified social group” (Hall 2016). While “moral panics” are considerably prevalent among politics and mass media in Europe after the exodus of refugees from the Middle East to the continent, such can perhaps be found in the way the western government including the international media is responding to the exodus of the Rohingya towards Bangladesh. The subdued “moral panic” on the part of the Bangladeshi government could be on the impact of the expanded settlement in Cox’s Bazar to an already burgeoning population and depleting natural resources, job opportunities and terrorism. This manifested in the 2015 international human ping-pong between Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand when boats carrying hundreds of hungry and dazed Rohingya refugees came to their shores (Fuller and Cochrane 2015).

The word ‘refugee’ is often used interchangeably with the words migrant or asylum seeker, has been essentialized as a fixed and rigid category in which refugees have been delineated as those who are “worthy” or “unworthy”. Or those “who qualify” for protection and those who “fail to qualify”, or in other words, those who deserve our compassion and sympathy or those whom we should be afraid of, ignoring the diversity of their experiences, journeys and the historical contexts that led them to leave their homes (Matar 2017).

Further, the corpora ‘refugee’ also infer to the location where mostly the Rohingya would seek safe haven in Bangladesh. These are the ‘refugee’ camps established by the UNHCR and other humanitarian groups in Cox’s Bazar. The contextualization of a ‘safe haven’ for the Rohingya may not be as suitable a place for their growth but provides safety nonetheless.

Hereunder is the matrix of the population of Rohingya in “refugee” camps:

Location	Population before 25 Aug	Post-25 Aug Influx	Total Refugee Population
<b>Makeshift Settlement / Refugee Camps</b>			
Kutupalong-Balukhali Expansion	99,705	336,263	435,968
Kutupalong RC	13,901	11,842	25,743
Leda MS	14,240	9,468	23,708
Nayapara RC	19,230	15,327	34,557
Shamlapur	8,433	17,515	25,948
<b>New Spontaneous Settlements</b>			
Hakimpara	140	54,942	55,082
Thangkhali	100	28,619	28,719
Unchiprang	-	30,384	30,384
Jamtoli	72	33,100	33,172
Moynarghona	50	21,410	21,460
Chakmarkul	-	10,500	10,500
<b>Host Community</b>			
Cox’s Bazar Sadar	12,485	1,683	14,168
Ramu	1,600	830	2,340
Teknaf	34,437	34,075	68,512
Ukhia	8,125	9,543	17,668
<b>Total Rohingya refugees</b>	<b>212,518</b>	<b>615,501</b>	<b>828,019</b>

Table 1. Rohingya refugees reported by Location Source: (ISCG 2017)

So, let’s juxtapose the ‘signs’ of Foucault to the contemporary Rohingya situation where “elements of genocide are present” (Nebehay 2017). The element will be our sign. The sign according to Foucault, “does not wait in silence for the coming of a man capable of

recognizing it: it can be constituted only by an act of knowing”. The “act of knowing” is the United Nations deliberations on the report of the UN Human Rights High Commissioner Zeid Ra’ad al-Hussein. Apart from the United Nations, Nicholas Kristoff (2017 ) wrote for New York Times – “In the past I’ve referred to Myanmar’s atrocities against its Rohingya Muslim minority as “ethnic cleansing,” but increasingly there are indications that the carnage may amount to genocide.”

But more so, the Rohingya *refugees* in Bangladesh does belongs to the parlance of being a ‘victim’ and a ‘threat’. The refugee, in other words, is a victim of war and conflict in need of protection, yet also a threat to ‘our’ community of belonging (Moore, Gross and Threadgold 2012). This scenario somehow, can be ascribed as a ‘humanitarian securitization’, a novel framework designed for critical migration and security studies, following the influx of refugees to Europe. It is in this context that the European Union said that ***“they are engaged in a “search for the balance of humanitarian needs with concerns over sovereignty”*** (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski 2017). The same explains too of the commitment of the European governments to the refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar.

Furthermore, by description, the refugee camps at Cox’s Bazar is far from the ideal but it is where safety is present, but it is the “gates of hell” (Costello 2017). In his blog, Costello wrote “Their stories of the violence they fled are horrific. More than half of them are children and about 20 percent of those children under the age of five are now suffering from malnutrition. Living conditions are appalling. Water, sanitation and hygiene facilities have been overwhelmed and without water and sanitation there is a high risk of disease outbreaks. The United Nations has described it as the worst refugee crisis in decades.” He was referring to the Rohingya children refugees he encountered at Cox’s Bazar. These refugees continue to be inside barricaded squalid camps (Barron 2018) in Bangladesh.

## **2. The corpora “People”**

The second corpora noun for Rohingya garnered ‘people’ which represented a group of ethnic minority residing in the northern Rakhine State. In this context, the ‘people’ are the Rohingya men, women and children whose narratives are reported by the New York Times.

New York Times wrote as story of a Rohingya woman named Rajuma (Gettleman, Rohingya Recount Atrocities: ‘They Threw My Baby Into a Fire’ 2017) in this manner:

***“People were holding the soldier’s feet, begging for their lives. But they didn’t stop, they just kicked them off and killed them. They chopped people, they shot people, they raped us, they left us senseless”***

The narratives of the Rohingya people are central to the reporting of the New York Times. In this particular story, Jeffrey Gettleman wrote about how Rajuma, a refugee in Cox’s Bazar is coping up by the lost of her son, her two sisters, and her younger brother, at the hands of the Tatmadaw.

This is also the same ‘*people*’ which the United Nations say were the fastest to be displaced since the Rwanda genocide (Beech, Across Myanmar, Denial of Ethnic Cleansing and Loathing of Rohingya 2017 ), which is part of the profiling done on the Rohingya by the international community. According to the report of the United Nations, “the military crackdown on the Rohingya had led to gang rapes, the killing of hundreds of civilians and the forced displacement of as many as 90,000 *people*, acts that is said were most likely crimes against humanity” (Ramzy 2017). These are the same people who were lucky to reached Bangladesh while at least 12 Rohingya, including 10 children perished as their boat capsized (Wright and Griffiths 2017 ).

In the narratives of Rajuma, the ‘people’ she referred to are from her own ethnic group and they are like her, the Rohingya of northern Rakhine State.

### 3. *The corpora “Muslims”*

As used by the New York Times, ‘Muslims’ in these contexts refer to the Rohingya who live in the northern Rakhine State, formerly known as the Arakan. This is the reference freely given by the Government of Myanmar instead of calling the Rohingya by their name: Rohingya. This is an apparent attempt to breakdown the ethnic identity of the Rohingya to mere religious denomination, more than its unique place in the history of Burma before the dawn of its independence in 1948 and even before Britain had it under its imperial wing via India. The study also notes that a connotation of “Islam” or “Muslim”, in western news generally portrays negative bias (Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery 2013). Writing from a different perspective and specifically in the context of the Western media’s coverage of Islam and Muslims, Edward Said, has argued that “sensationalism, crude xenophobia, and insensitive belligerence are the order of the day, with results on both sides of the imaginary line between ‘us’ and ‘them’ that are extremely unedifying” (Said 1997).

But Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is comfortable referring the Rohingya people as “Muslims”. Asked why the violence had overwhelmingly affected Muslims, she deflected, saying that Buddhists lived in fear of “global Muslim power.” (Taub and Fisher 2017 )

In an editorial by the New York Times, it said that “Daw Aung San Suu Kyi purports to be mystified why ***“numbers of Muslims are fleeing across the border to Bangladesh”***” (NYT 2017). This baffled inquiry of Aung San Suu Kyi also supports the question raised by Michael Gonchar which we previously discussed, only hers was the preferred profile name of ‘*Muslims*’ than Rohingya. By doing so, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her government effectively deprived the Rohingya its right to a name and nationality. For the record, Aung San Suu Kyi shuns the word “Rohingya” and because the word reviled by so majority Buddhists in Myanmar, she requested the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State headed by former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan to refer them as “Muslim” or the “Muslim Community in the Rakhine State” instead of “Rohingya” or its other version, the “Bengali” (Cagape 2018). Worse, the Rohingya are called “mad dogs” by ultranationalists monks led by Ashin Wirathu (Ives 2017 ) or “*kalar*,” the derogatory term denoting South Asian origins (Callahan 2017).

Following the reference of the Government of Myanmar and the Tatmadaw of Rohingya as Muslims support also the avowed principle of the Tatmadaw as the protector of the Buddhist majority people of Myanmar. This reference was justified by the very policy adopted by the Tatmadaw and its atrocities carried out against the Rohingya because they are ‘Muslims’. The New York Times wrote, ***“in its latest campaign against the Rohingya Muslims in northern Rakhine State, which has no notable resources to extract, there still has been a tangible gain for the military: a nationalist victory for a force that casts itself as the champion of the country’s ethnic Bamar Buddhist majority”*** (Paddock 2018). This profiling of the Rohingya as ‘Muslims’ and pitting them against the Buddhist majority fuels the national sensation against the Rohingya and further exacerbated by the hate speeches by prominent Buddhist monks who despised the Rohingya for their faith and for being “Muslims”. These narratives are carried out by monks and civilians who are part of the Organization for the Protection of Race and Religion (MaBaTha) in Myanmar, an organization which was formed in 2014. MaBaTha also shares the same platform with 969 Movement.

The most prominent of the nationalist monks has been U Wirathu, who was featured on the cover of a July 2013 issue of Time Magazine above the words ***“The Face of Buddhist Terror”***. Literature produced by those connected with 969 and MaBaTha states that the objective of these movements is to protect and promote Buddhism and the Myanmar nation as a whole against perceived threats within and outside the country (Walton and Hayward 2014). These realities in the national social fabric within Myanmar society, forms the bases for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the Government of Myanmar including the Tatmadaw, to act its atrocious and condemnable acts against the Rohingya for their Islamic faith and for them being a “Muslim”. Sustaining the narratives of the Rohingya as “Muslims” than just ethnic minority group in the Rakhine State will continually fuel the hate against the Rohingya. This however, is how the international media, including the New York Times, profiled the Rohingya too. In the face of terror and atrocities for being “Muslims” than by simply as Rohingya is both suicidal and deplorable. It reduces the schema to religion or in the context of “religious” which segued the atrocities from purely human rights issue to a religious discourse.

This narrative too on the profiling of the Rohingya as “Muslims” resulted to public policy debate in America which supports its foreign policy towards Myanmar. It was reported by the New York times that the ***“Trump Administration threatened to take punitive actions against Myanmar unless it pulls back from its violent military campaign against the Rohingya Muslims, expressing what it called “our gravest concern” over a crisis that has killed or displaced hundreds of thousands of people”*** (Baker and Cumming-Bruce 2017).

So, the media framing on this reference of the Rohingya as ‘Muslims’ foremost than being an ethnic minority in Myanmar/who/practices/Islam kind of profile resulted to a worldwide propaganda that pitted the Rohingya against the majority Buddhist population because again, they are ‘Muslims’ and a minority ethnic group who happened to be born and reside in the norther Rakhine State for generations, practices Islam. The propaganda very well played into the hands of the MaBaTha or the 969 movement and of course, to the advantage of the ferocious Tatmadaw to the detriment to the stateless Rohingya which we saw post-August 25 incidents and massive exodus to Bangladesh.

Now let us delve on how ‘Muslims’ are presented by American mass media including the New York Times in other studies. Though careful with its coverage of the Rohingya crisis, particularly on the aspects of Rohingya “Muslims”, in the past, the New York Times did also however cover many misrepresentations on Islam such as social, economic and political ills; the absence of democracy, educational shortcomings; population explosions; economic stagnation; youth unemployment; failure of science in Middle Ages are some of the representations portrayed about Islam and Muslims (Gerges 2003). It is because the ‘Muslim’ situation in the Rohingya narratives are different from the ones coming out of the Middle East, the New York Times, similarly with other American newspapers are covering the issue in considerably approving representation. Their biases could only be on the Rohingya as “refugees” driven from their homes, of “Muslims” who were deprived of citizenship, access to education, marginalized too much away from state services such as civil registrations, marriage, religion, health services and more. That the narratives are those of women and children, stories such as: “***with so many men missing, single mothers now head 17% of Rohingya household in refugee camps in Bangladesh*** (Beech 2017)”. This media framing of the Rohingya ‘Muslims’ validates the “orientalist discourse which is present in the reporting of events. Orientalism treats the Orient and the Orientals as an “object” of study inscribed by “otherness” (Rane and Abdalla 2008). Orientalism is “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient”, of which its principle dogmas include “absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, underdeveloped, inferior” and believes that Oriental other is “eternal, uniform, incapable of defining itself, and requiring either to be feared or controlled” (Jahedi, Abdullah and Mukundan 2014).

Moreover, in this context, there should be more emphasis placed on outlining the reality and diversity in the Muslim world to overcome stereotypes, better understand the ‘other’ so that it is no more. There should be an open condemnation of ethnocentrism (Reza 2011) and by this, the New York Times have deflected misrepresentation of Muslims in the extant situation of the Rohingya crises in Myanmar and openly accuses the Government of Myanmar of ethnic cleansing and genocide. In most situations, it finds itself on the side of the Rohingya Muslims.

#### **4. The corpora “children”**

Media agenda setting affects policymaking in the countries of destination, especially of the sense of ‘crisis’ related to immigration. The crisis of migrants and asylum seekers, as well as the tragedies of early times-by-side in the Mediterranean shifted the public discourse. The photo of Aylan Kurdi, a three-year old layed dead on the Turkish coast, induced a human sympathy and solidarity in host countries (Kosho 2016).

Aware of this impact on public policy and influencing how America would take its foreign policy towards Myanmar, the New York Times’ narratives about the exodus of the Rohingya are mostly centered on ‘women’ and ‘children’. It is so because ***more than 300,000 children are among the Rohingya refugees, who were acutely malnourished*** (Baker and Cumming-Bruce 2017) and these children are very unlike those of Rohingya children who went to school, receive medical care and learned to read as they found settlement in Rogers Park in Chicago (Lapetina 2017). These are the children who survived the atrocities done to their elder sisters or brothers, their fathers and mothers.

***“The children who survive are left haunted: Noor Kalima, age 10, struggles in class in a makeshift refugee camp. Her mind drifts to her memory of seeing her father and little brother shot dead, her baby sister’s and infant brother’s throats cut, the machete coming down on her own head, her hut burning around her... and it’s difficult to focus on multiplication tables”*** (Kristoff 2017 ). This is how New York Times narrate the stories of children who reached the refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar, in Bangladesh.

***Doctors Without Borders estimated that at least 6,700 members of the Rohingya Muslim minority, including 730 children below age 5, has met violent deaths in the month after a military crackdown on their villages*** (Beech 2017). The narratives continue to grow exponentially over the span of 6 months that this study reviews the articles, editorial, opinion pieces and op-ed pieces of the New York Times pertaining to the Rohingya crisis.

These narratives are usually sad, unfortunate and shocking.

Their future altered and bleak. Sayed Alam, 12, who arrived in Bangladesh nearly four months ago from Myanmar, makes \$1.20 a day pulling in fishing nets on a beach not far from the refugee camps. It’s a job he also worked in Rakhine, he said, just like his father and grandfather before him. He has never attended school (Beech 2017). And when asked what he hope to do when he grows up, Sayed replied: ***“I don’t have any dreams. I will take whatever job I can find”***.

### **5. The corpora “village”**

One of the repeated corpora in most of the articles, opinions, editorial and op-ed pieces evaluated for this study is ‘village’. It directly refers to the villages in northern Rakhine State that were discriminately attacked by the elements of the Tatmadaw, in complicity with the local Buddhist residents or singularly under attack by locals or the police.

Like most nations on earth, villages are pluralistic, communal and whose government services are shared. This is also the backdrop of the northern Rakhine State villages.

***Just a few hundred yards separate two villages at the northern end of the Rakhine State in Myanmar, but after a brutal crackdown by security forces in August, a deep chasm of fear now divides the Muslim residents (Rohingya) of one from the non-Muslims in the other.*** (Cumming-Bruce 2017)

Such is the description of how horrors grip villages previously deemed plural and whose traditions shared. The fear and the hate engulfed what could be a space for peaceful co-existence and co-habitation in the village. It was irreparable and deep-seated.

Because the majority Buddhist population reviled the Rohingya in the northern Rakhine State villages, it was easy for the Tatmadaw to undertake its atrocities with utmost impunity. ***The campaign, carried out by Myanmar’s armed forces and allied militias, has uprooted hundreds of thousands of Rohingya from their villages in the western border state of Rakhine since August.*** (Gladstone 2017)



The attacks against the Rohingya are also within their social structure – their own villages. Their houses and their mosques burned down. ***There were reports of rape, murder and entire villages being burned to the ground*** (Rudd 2017). Rudd, a former Prime Minister of Australia pointed out in his Op-Ed opinion that the “International community, therefore, faces a dual crisis of its own: First, an enormous humanitarian emergency in Rakhine State. Second, a military strategy manufactured to undermine Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi’s standing at home and abroad, and to pave the way for a return to a form of military rule”. Both proved disastrous, at the present and in the future.

***Satellite imagery has revealed 288 separate villages burned, some down to the last post*** (Gettleman, Rohingya Recount Atrocities: ‘They Threw My Baby Into a Fire’ 2017) and the Human Rights Watch claimed that the Burmese military is directly responsible for the mass burning of Rohingya villages in northern Rakhine State (Ramzy 2017).

## **6. The corpora “women”**

Women were, as reported by the New York Times, central in its media framing and media priming with regards to the Rohingya crises. Like children, Rohingya women are repository of narratives of their survival, of tales so dumbfounded when narrated because it was replete with stories of abuses: rape, killing, murder, humiliation and the portrayal of the undignified Rohingya woman.

A recent report by the Human Rights Watch said there was also evidence of widespread rape of Rohingya women and girls by uniformed members of the military (Landler 2017).

The narratives of Rajuma (Gettleman 2017), Rahima (Beech 2017), Setara (Beech 2017), Morjan (Gettleman 2017), Jehora Begum (Beech 2017), and Dilbar, Hasina, Asma and Shafika (Kristoff 2017 ) have one common experience: rape, physical abuse, killing, burning of houses, fleeing northern Rakhine State and all these in the hands of the Tatmadaw.

These women carry with them the narratives which scarred their humanity forever.

Rajuma as presented by the New York Times, speak of her experience to writer Jeffrey Gettleman. She told her story in this manner:

**While she was standing in chest-high water, clutching her baby son, watching while the Tatmadaw burned her village, soldiers called her. Before raping her, soldiers snatched her baby boy from her arms and threw him into a fire. The baby was screaming for her as he burned to death.**

Her narrative was also similar to the Hasina Begum:

**I was trying to hide my baby under my scarf, but they saw her leg. They grabbed my baby by the leg and threw her onto the fire”**

Dilbar on the other hand, narrated her story:

**The Myanmar soldiers herded the women and girls into huts to be raped. Noor and Dilbar were taken into one hut, along with Noor's 2-year-old sister, Rozia, and another brother, Muhammad Kashel, a baby still nursing.**

**Dilbar said: "they took my baby and cut his throat.**

Shafika Begum's narratives are as follows:

**Soldiers shoot dead her father and four brothers; they then took her, her mother and her 11-year-old sister into a hut. The soldiers cut her sister's throat in front of her, and she said that when she screamed, the soldiers clubbed her on the head and knocked her out.**

Setara Begum, Rahima and Jehora Begum shared their narratives of escaping the horrors unleashed by the Tatmadaw in their villages. Setara is a 28-year-old mother of four boys and one girl who waded across a stream separating a no-man's land from Bangladesh. Rahima was scarred on her cheek after a soldier bite her face. Jehora Begum is a fast-runner, racing through rice paddies and splashing in canals. Though she was shot on her pelvis, she and her younger brother, Khairul Amin managed to flee to the safety in southeastern Bangladesh where a refugee camp is.

These narratives are the description of the New York Times of the Rohingya woman and their stories have been read many times over, by policymakers in America and even in Southeast Asia and the Pope even uttered *"I would like to express my full closeness to them"* (Horowitz 2017)

## **7. *The corpora "crisis"***

The New York Times, like most western mass media, would cater to the news as it unfolds whenever crisis arise.

This study attempts to analyze the representation of the New York Times on the August 25 and post-August 25 exodus of the Rohingya which resulted into a lingering humanitarian and refugee crisis in Southeast Asia.

The crisis resulted from the attacks of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) on military and police posts on August 25, 2017. More so, the New York Times uses 'crisis' in reference to the 'refugee crisis' happening as the Rohingya crosses into Bangladesh and settled in Cox's Bazar, with harrowing stories to tell.

Aside from the narratives of the Rohingya refugees, the New York Times describes the condition of the camps in Cox's Bazar. The Doctors Without Borders assessed the health conditions at the refugee camps and said it's a *"time bomb"* (Baker and Cumming-Bruce 2017). And as Fabrizio Carboni, head of the International Committee of the Red Cross delegation in Myanmar said: *"I didn't meet a single person who wasn't afraid. There is a mix of fear and anxiety about what will come next"* (Beech 2017).

And finally, the crisis was summed up by United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights, Ms. Yanghee Lee:

*“there is so much hatred and hostility against the Rohingya”.*

*“I want to tell the whole world my story. I want to tell what happens in Myanmar”*

In conclusion, the study assessed 50 articles, opinions, editorials and op-ed pieces of the New York Times from the span between August 25, 2017 to January 31, 2018 and found that the New York Times uses the corpora: Refugees, People, Muslims, Children, Village, Women and Crisis frequently in its entire corpus.

The above quote was the very words of 15-year-old Shafika Begum, whose life was altered by the Tatmadaw and whose face was marked forever, of an evidence of the atrocities done to her, when a soldier bite her cheek”. This narrative suit into the entire media frame of the New York Times. The headline and the by-line of the New York Times articles on the Rohingya acted as an important indicator of its news framing. News frames are conceptual tools which media and individuals rely on to convey, interpret and evaluation information (Rasul 2014).

The New York Times thematic frames, as found qualitatively by this study are centrally around: Misery, Helplessness, Poor or poverty and fear.

- ***On Misery*** – the New York Times highlight stories about women suffering from physical abuses, rape, being witnesses to their babies being killed by throwing them to a fire, of the killing of their husbands, or fathers and brothers, of how their houses are burned to ground. The narratives of family sufferings and the exodus to Bangladesh without anything on their back except for their own little dignity left and of a journey for days without water and/or food;
- ***On Helplessness*** – the New York Times wrote stories of young girls impregnated by soldiers and had to seek abortion when they reached the refugee camps at Cox’s Bazar; uncertainty of their future at the refugee camps, of knowing no one will ever rescue them from the antagonistic hands inside their homes in the northern Rakhine State;
- ***On Poor/Poverty*** – the New York Times presented the Rohingya as uneducated with nothing much of a job than subsistence fishing and farming; that a description of women and children without proper clothes when they reached Cox’s Bazar and that the journeys of most Rohingya is a story of how poorly they were treated by the Government of Myanmar, of Bangladesh and the International Community;
- ***On Fear*** – the New York Times wrote on the stories of brave women who endured the pains of rape, of segregating male and female – where male will be slaughtered, and female will be raped, of their fear of the Tatmadaw and even the local Buddhist population because they saw their villages burned to the ground and of landmines preventing them of ever returning back to Myanmar.

Framing is a fundamental part of political communication and news reporting. Specifically, frames “shapes individual understanding and opinion concerning an issue by stressing specific elements or features of the broader controversy, reducing a usually complex issue down to one or two central aspects (Aaroe 2011). Further, it is also a process of selecting some aspect of perceived reality in news in order to enhance their salience “in such as way to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation (R. Entman 1993).

Unlike the arguments raised that while media make soothing noises about the openness and generosity of Canadians, they also continue to depict refugees along an inaccurate and misleading continuum between being needy and lacking agency (Tyyska, et al. 2017), and as a possible threat, the New York Times narratives are carefully crafted to represent the Rohingya in the best possible light and frame.

### ***“Ami dukkhito”***

The phrase is a Bengali I lifted from the article of Jeffrey Gettleman for the New York Times and it meant – I am sorry.

While undertaking the review and the collation of the materials for this study, I stumbled at narratives that are deeply touching and introspectively reflected on it as a scholar. It never swayed my opinion in these extant analyses, but the New York Times was able to present the Rohingya in the best possible light, absence of misrepresentation.

The limitation of this study is that it focused only on the New York Times, and do not consider other American newspapers for the reason that the New York Times is widely read in Southeast Asia. Also, the study only covers the period from August 25, 2017 to January 31, 2018 as this represented roughly 6 months of reporting by the New York Times.

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