**Discovering, sharing, creating and hiding Intangible Cultural Heritage
Throughout the Journey of Displacement**

By

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Abstract

Throughout this thesis, I delve into the intricate interplay between Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and the pervasive challenges of human displacement, aiming to unravel the ways in which ICH is employed, perceived, shared, discovered, hidden and also newly created within displaced communities. This is exemplified by the Rohingya population, who have suffered persecution and large-scale displacements from Burma / Myanmar. The fundamental questions guiding this research are: *How is intangible cultural heritage used, viewed or created within displaced communities? And how do humanitarians utilise the intangible cultural heritage of displaced communities?*

ICH is a broad term describing the elements of a group's traditional, contemporary and simultaneously living way of life. ICH encompasses a spectrum of traditions and living expressions passed down from ancestors to descendants that are dramatically disrupted during displacement. I propose, that this disruption should be better acknowledged and understood. The research highlights how projecting a lens on ICH firstly reveals a valuable resource that displaced populations use to unify themselves in times of stress and chaos, thus also exposing a valuable resource that humanitarians can tap into in order to ease the suffering of those forced to flee their homelands.

Employing an ethnographic approach, enriched by the narrative depth of 'Yarning,' this research endeavours to document the essence of ICH within a dispersed and displaced population of Rohingya people. Importantly, my research encompasses three Rohingya groups. These groups, each navigating diverse geographies - one in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh; another in Karachi,

Pakistan; and a third of former refugees resettled in Carlow, Ireland - provide a comprehensive landscape for understanding the dynamics of ICH in displacement.

This thesis contributes to the scholarly discourse on the nexus of ICH in displacement and the Rohingya Muslim experience of identity and unity across borders. It illuminates a mimetic process within the diaspora; from many Muslim arrival stories, displacement emerges as a catalyst for creating one ethnic group of "Rohingya people" as their ICH is discovered, shared, created, and concealed as needed. The significance of ICH unfolds in various dimensions: youth employ Tarana (poetry) in peaceful protests in Bangladesh; fishermen leverage traditional skills to secure an economic niche in Pakistan; women continue traditional fashion and beauty practices even if only behind closed doors and resettled Rohingya utilise ICH from arts and language to sports for successful integration into Irish life. It is also clear that displaced communities suffer without their ability to access their ICH, and I reveal through this study how the agency to wield their ICH is intricately tied to their displacement status, gender dynamics, and acceptance by the host communities.

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Lost

Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you
Are not lost. ***Wherever you are is called Here,***
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
Must ask permission to know it and be known.
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you.
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.
No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you.

By David Wagoner

Acronyms

ANZAC	Australian New Zealand Army Corps
BMWO	Burmese Muslim Welfare Organisation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRI	Core Relief Items
HLP	Housing, Land and Property
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
ICH	Intangible Cultural Heritage
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
NFI	Non-Food Items
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RLO	Refugee Led Organisation
RUC	Rangoon University College
RWDF	Rohingya Women's Development Forum
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNESCO	United Nations Education Scientific & Cultural Organisation
WASH	Water and Sanitation, Hygiene

Explanatory Terms

Acculturation: culture change resulting from contact between cultures. A process of external culture change.

Arakanese: Applies is also only for the "Rakhaing" people, the largest ethnic group living in Arakan (the Rakhine State of Burma) and not for the other ethnic groups. The Arakanese (Rakhaings) are devout Buddhists and are called "Yakhaings" (Yakhines) by the Burmese. There are two variations of the spelling, namely Rakhaing or Rakhine. The Arakanese favour the spelling Rakhaing; however, the official spelling used by the Burmese Government is Rakhine. I have used the official spelling term in this paper.

Asylum seeker: "A person who seeks safety from persecution or serious harm in a country other than his or her own and awaits a decision on the application for refugee status under relevant international and national instruments. In case of a negative decision, the person must leave the country and may be expelled, as may any non-national in an irregular or unlawful situation, unless permission to stay is provided on humanitarian or other related grounds (IOM, 2011)."

Burma / Myanmar: In this thesis, I use the name *"Burma"* for pre-1989 and Myanmar for post-1989 present day as this aligns with the literature on Burma – Myanmar use. I have also used the word *"Burmese"* for the language of Myanmar.

Burmese or Burman: applies only to the "Bama" or "Bamar" people the biggest and, the biggest and most dominant ethnic group in Burma, and not to Burma. This relates to the self-identification of the Rohingya, Karen, Shan or Tavoyian Burmese Language speakers.

Caste system: the ranking of members in a society by occupational status and degree of purity or pollution as determined by their birth.

Cultural relativism: understanding the ways of other cultures and not judging these practices according to one's own cultural ways.

Cultural transmission: how culture is passed on through learning from one generation to another. Also referred to as enculturation or socialisation.

Cultural value: the worth placed upon a cultural good by an individual or group or society. It is important to note that values are placed upon goods by individuals (or groups) and are vulnerable to both temporal and geographical variation, rather than each good having a fixed universal value.

Displaced persons are persons or groups of persons, including asylum seekers, refugees, and internally displaced persons, who are outside their homes or places of residence for reasons related to fear of persecution, conflict, generalised violence or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order.

Durable solution is achieved when displaced persons no longer have any specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination on account of their displacement. It can be achieved through sustainable (re)integration at the place of origin (voluntary return) and local integration in areas where displaced persons take refuge or in another part of their country based on their choice. For refugees, it can also be achieved through resettlement in a third country.

Gendered Needs refer to the requirements of women and men to improve their position or status. Addressing these needs allows people to control their lives beyond socially defined restrictive roles. I use the terms 'Practical Gender Needs and Str' and Strategic Gender Needs. Practical gender needs describe gender specific development shortcomings, such as access to water, healthcare, work opportunities, while the strategic gender needs relate to power, equality, land and access to money.

Host community refers to the community within which displaced persons reside. Host communities are regularly impacted and sometimes also referred to as part of the "Displacement Affected Population" as the impacts on their environment, livelihoods, and social system can be severely compromised or enhanced.

Irregular migration has been defined as: "Movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries. There is no clear or universally accepted definition of irregular migration. From the perspective of destination countries, it is illegal entry, stay or work in a country, meaning that the migrant does not have the necessary authorisation or documents required under immigration regulations to enter, reside or work in a given country.

Heritagisation: Heritagisation refers to transforming objects, places and practices into cultural heritage as values are attached to them, essentially describing heritage as a process.

Humanitarian: When referring to "*Humanitarians*" collectively, in this thesis, I refer to the groups of international and national nongovernment organisations that coordinate under the United Nations humanitarian response system. This is opposed to the civil society and grassroots groups that often respond with altruistic intentions.

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH): The term 'cultural heritage' has changed content considerably in recent decades, partially owing to the instruments developed by UNESCO. Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.

While fragile, intangible cultural heritage is an important factor in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of growing globalisation. An understanding of the intangible cultural heritage of different communities helps with intercultural dialogue and encourages mutual respect for other ways of life. The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills transmitted through it from one generation to the next. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for minority groups and mainstream social groups within a State and is as important for developing States as for developed ones (UNESCO, Art2 2004).

Intangible Cultural Property: refers to the peoples' learned processes along with the knowledge, skills and creativity that inform and are developed by them, the products they create and the resources, spaces, and other aspects of social and natural context necessary for their sustainability.

Internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular, because of or to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border.

Migrant: "IOM defines a migrant as any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is. IOM concerns itself with

migrants and migration-related issues and, in agreement with relevant States, with migrants who need international migration services (IOM, 2011)."

Non-refoulement is the cornerstone of refugee protection. Set out in Article 33(1) of the 1951 Refugee Convention, it requires that "no contracting state shall expel or return a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his (or her) life or freedom would be threatened"

Preparedness refers to a proactive and planned response to emergency, disasters or, in the context of this study, to situations of return. The IASC speaks of preparedness as an interagency, common and planned approach. Preparedness is multidimensional and multi-levelled at individual/household, community, organisational or state levels (IASC).

Refugee: in the context of this thesis I discuss refugee as someone seeking refuge in a place other than their home. This avoids the legal and political distinctions. In the legal sense a **Refugee**; is a person who, "...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his (or her) nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself (or herself) of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his (or her) former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it". (Article 1A (2) of the 1951 Convention) 1951 Convention refers to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (also known as the 1951 Refugee Convention).

Stateless: A stateless person is not considered as a national by any country. In some cases, they are not legally recognised as a citizen by any country (a situation known as de jure statelessness). In other cases, a person may be a national in law but in practice cannot exercise their citizenship rights (known as de facto statelessness).

Sustainable (re)integration: There is no universal definition of the term "(re)integration". The IASC Framework highlights eight criteria to be used when considering whether durable solutions have been achieved, namely: safety and security; adequate standard of living; access to livelihoods; restoration of housing, land and property; access to documentation; family reunification; participation in public affairs, and access to effective remedies and justice. Meanwhile, UNHCR sees (re)integration as "equated with the achievement of a sustainable return – in other words the

ability of returning refugees to secure the political, economic, (legal) and social conditions needed to maintain life.

Topophilia: describes all the emotional connections with a place and having a strong sense of place and connection to home.

Undocumented migrant: "A non-national who enters or stays in a country without the appropriate documentation. This includes, among others: a person (a) who has no legal documentation to enter a country but manages to enter clandestinely, (b) who enters or stays using fraudulent documentation, (c) who, after entering using legal documentation, has stayed beyond the time authorised or otherwise violated the terms of entry and remained without authorisation (IOM, 2011)."

Informal settlements: are residential areas where 1) inhabitants have no security of tenure vis-à-vis the land or dwellings they inhabit, with modalities ranging from squatting to informal rental housing, 2) the neighbourhoods usually lack, or are cut off from, basic services and city infrastructure and 3) the housing may not comply with current planning and building regulations, and is often situated in geographically and environmentally hazardous areas1 In addition, informal settlements can be a form of real estate speculation for all income levels of urban residents, affluent and poor. **Also Note - Slums** are the most deprived and excluded form of informal settlements characterised by poverty and large agglomerations of dilapidated housing often located in the most hazardous urban land. In addition to tenure insecurity, slum dwellers lack a formal supply of basic infrastructure and services, public space and green areas, and are constantly exposed to eviction, disease and violence.[1]

Voluntary repatriation is the return to the country of origin "on refugees' free and informed decision". The essential requirement for repatriation to be voluntary is the counterpart of the principle of non-refoulement. The facilitation of voluntary repatriation is one of the basic functions of UNHCR.

Youth is defined by the UN as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24

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[1] World Bank (2008), Approaches to urban slums; UN-Habitat (2015), Streets as tools for urban transformation in slums; Cities Alliance (2010), Building Cities; Cities Alliance, World Bank and UN-Habitat (2002), Cities without Slums.

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1 Chapter One: Introduction to the Research

1.1   Outline of the Content of the Thesis

This thesis, exploring the intricate interplay between Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and forced displacement, unfolds across ten chapters, effectively delineated into two cohesive sections. The initial four chapters unravel the contextual nuances surrounding cultural heritage and forced displacement concluding with an overview highlighting the key points from the literature. These chapters align with the themes of the overarching research questions.

Transitioning, chapters five through nine are the empirical chapters, delving into the field research. The narrative navigates through the varied experiences of displaced communities, with each chapter acting as a lens to explore the many ways the Rohingya discover, share, create and hide their ICH while navigating life in displacement. Each section has something to say about the core components of ICH. When observing ICH within the Rohingya communities, I consider how it represents tradition, both contemporary and living at the same time. I ask, is it inclusive to the point of contributing to social cohesion and encouraging a sense of identity and responsibility? Does it represent those whose knowledge of traditions, skills and customs are passed on to the rest of the community from generation to generation? Finally, and perhaps most poignantly, is it community-based and recognised by the communities, groups or individuals that create, maintain and transmit it?

This academic thesis culminates in Chapter Ten, synthesising the conclusions and findings, providing a comprehensive capstone to this scholarly research. I answer the research questions: *How is intangible cultural heritage used, viewed or created within displaced communities? how do humanitarians utilise the intangible cultural heritage of displaced communities?* Further to this, I provide section 10.3 synthesising the ICH of the Rohingya across borders.

I adopted an ethnographic lens anchoring the fieldwork in Yarning, a methodological approach employed in collaboration with oral-based communities. It holds paramount significance in the context of this study, constituting a robust and effective approach for engaging with and eliciting insights from these traditional oral communities. The methodological section furnishes a comprehensive overview of Yarning, delving into the nuanced application of this method.

Throughout the thesis, I have employed narratives of the ICH of men, women, boys, and girls. These narratives serve as conduits, bringing forth the authentic gendered perspectives of the communities. This selection of topics aims to amplify the resonance of these voices, creating an understanding of the profound impact of forced displacement on Intangible Cultural Heritage and how it could be better utilised in displacement settings.

I begin this chapter (chapter one) with an introduction to the research, including a detailed background on how the research topic and the overall question developed. As the research progressed, this background and my experience and heritage became relative in understanding the participants' perspectives on identity and culture. In chapter one, I also include a brief overview of the methods used for data collection as I set the scene for the ensuing chapters.

Chapter Two's focal point is the rich diversity of Rohingya heritage and history and intricate ties to the Rohingya homeland. This marks a critical initiation, especially considering the overarching theme of displacement and the historical and heritage narratives encapsulating the Muslims of Arakan and the Rohingya Muslim ethnicity. The narrative unfolds, segueing into a discussion on Rohingya cultural heritage, offering a historical overview of what I feel is important to know about the Rohingya timeline. It probes an overview of the contested territory of the Rohingya homeland, historically the Arakan Kingdom, that became Arakan State, more recently renamed Rakhine State, in 1989. This research is interesting, given the contentious

nature of the concept of a Rohingya Muslim homeland within Myanmar, setting the stage for a more comprehensive examination of oral history and the limitations of access to archaeological evidence or historical perspectives on Rohingya roots in the region. Following this, the discussion shifts to the intricate interplay of culture, caste, and social exclusion, with a nuanced exploration of caste as synonymous with social and political exclusion, interwoven with influences from broader Indian culture in the region. Despite its historical association with Indian Hindu culture, I illuminate its prevalence in South Asian communities, including Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu communities through the Caste and Baradari systems and other hierarchic social structures. The chapter contributes to an understanding of; who the Rohingya are; where they came from while also exploring some elements of why they remain outcastes, their heritage of a lower social status.

Chapter Three transitions into the discourse on Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), diverging from tangible elements such as built monuments to explore cultural heritage's nuanced and dynamic aspects. Within this research, I dissect ICH as a contested Eurocentric concept, delving into its transformative evolution in recent decades. The narrative then shifts towards the oral traditions within the Rohingya community, a traditional oral language group. This discussion unravels the intricate methods by which heritage stories are preserved and orally transmitted across generations. Here, I am drawing on the idea that oral traditions are powerful tools that could be better explored in understanding a group's way of life. Coupled with this I turn to sacred or spiritual cultural heritage, delving into the religious belief systems of Buddhism and Islam, specifically Theravada Buddhism and Sufism, keeping ideas of ICH and oral tradition at the forefront. This research unfolds as a crucial examination, as these religious belief systems emerge as core components shaping the identity, culture, and heritage of the Rohingya community. The chapter contributes to our understanding of ICH heritage, the

central theme to the Thesis. It brings some understanding of the roots of spiritual heritage within the Rohingya society.

Chapter Four delves into the literature on displacement, examining the terminology, legal status, and theoretical frameworks that underpin this complex and expanding area. The exploration extends to understanding how legal status, encompassing migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and Stateless individuals, may shape their experiences and use of ICH. A particular focus is placed on dissecting Human, Cultural, and Minority Rights, emphasising their profound influence on cultural freedoms and identity. The chapter culminates by synthesising the legal and human rights frameworks, providing a nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between displacement, cultural heritage, and identity.

The concluding section of Chapter Four hones in on the crucial topic of humanitarian assistance. Recognising its pivotal role in alleviating challenges faced by displaced communities, this segment navigates through the complexities of humanitarian efforts, revealing their intersections with and impact on the preservation and expression of ICH. This chapter brings some understanding to the second research question which centres on the humanitarian mandate and the intersection of ICH.

In Chapter Five, the focus shifts to the empirical analysis, methodology, aim, and methods of the research. The introduction outlines the adoption of an ethnographic approach, providing a comprehensive overview of the methodological framework encompassing observations and the unique methodology of Yarning, characterised as a method of active story-sharing which has its roots in the early days of seafarers sharing stories. This narrative technique is complemented by the incorporation of observations, formal meetings, and diverse interviews with participants embedded in humanitarian sectors.

The section navigates through the intricate cultural context shaping the research, shedding light on the challenges encountered during the preparatory phase. Specific attention is directed towards the geographical nuances of the research sites, providing a contextual understanding of the varied locations. The discussion then delves into a reflection on personal challenges confronted during the research journey, coupled with ethical considerations that underpin the entire inquiry. This also details my placement in each location as a researcher and how work and research in the case of Bangladesh under UNHCR was defined. The chapter concludes with a reflective discourse, offering insights drawn from initial thoughts and observations in each research location, providing a comprehensive foundation for the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Six takes this thesis into the empirical phase, concentrating on the multifaceted theme of home within the Rohingya community. The primary focus of this section centres on an array of Rohingya Yarns, particularly those narrating tales of "homeland" and the journey of Muslim ancestors. Employing the Yarning method, I have gathered diverse stories spanning the research areas, offering insights into Rohingya arrivals that extend from Muslim journeys from Afghanistan to the establishment of the Kingdom of Mrauk-U.

The narrative then transitions to exploring the ICH intrinsic to the artisanal practices within the Rohingya community. This encompasses the transmission of skills, such as shelter construction and fishing, passed down through generations from father to son. A notable addition to this discussion is the introduction of the Burmese Muslim Welfare Organisation (BMWO) in Karachi, Pakistan, which illuminates leadership and communal efforts to preserve and pass on cultural practices.

The final segment of Chapter Six centres on the ICH embedded in Rohingya associations with Sufism, specifically the Tarana poetry. An intriguing dimension unfolds as this traditional poetry, once rooted in heritage, has permeated the contemporary Rohingya youth population

and finds expression in peaceful protests. The chapter concludes with exploring the intricate rituals associated with Rohingya Muslim burial, introducing the thematic elements of land and communication that will be further expounded upon in subsequent chapters.

In Chapter Seven, the spotlight turns to the often-overlooked dimension of Rohingya Women's ICH. The chapter commences by underscoring the noticeable neglect of women's heritage within the purview of humanitarian sectors, setting the stage for a critical examination of the cultural roles played by Rohingya women. A significant portion of the chapter is dedicated to unravelling the cultural contributions of Rohingya women in shelter construction in Cox's Bazar. This discussion sheds light on the pivotal cultural roles these women assume in shaping their temporary homes' physical and communal landscapes. The narrative progresses to showcase Yarns from women actively engaged in various crafts and psychosocial support projects tailored for Rohingya women and girls. Here, the introduction of the Women's Development Forum (RWDF) enriches the discourse, emphasising the multifaceted ways in which cultural heritage is interwoven with women's initiatives.

The chapter then critically examines the dearth of support for women's self-reliance, underscoring the limited recognition accorded to Refugee Led Organisations (RLO) and the impactful endeavours of Rohingya women supporting each other. The discussion culminates by accentuating the indispensable cultural heritage that endures within the Rohingya women's community, spanning facets such as fashion, Henna, and Thanaka, each constituting integral elements of their identity. The chapter serves as a record of the rich tapestry of cultural heritage woven by Rohingya women, that they highlighted. Her I attempt to give their heritage some recognition yet there is still need for increased focus and support for these women within humanitarian frameworks.

Chapter Eight delves into the multifaceted social structure of Rohingya society, unpacking the historical influences of Caste and the Baradari system that have contributed to the emergence of the Rohingya Muslim ethnicity in many ways. This exploration provides nuanced insights into the socio-cultural fabric of the Rohingya society. This section has great importance as it unravels the intricate layers that shape and define the identity of the Rohingya community through social systems that are largely ignored by outsiders.

The chapter then focuses on language as a pivotal element in defining Rohingya identity. Scrutinising the language challenges, the analysis extends beyond the Rohingya to encompass their host communities and the humanitarian entities operating in the region. This examination sheds light on the broader implications of linguistic dynamics as ICH, emphasising their profound impact on cultural identity and community integration.

In Chapter Nine, the exploration extends to narratives woven by Rohingya Muslims and humanitarian actors. The chapter examines the diverse storytelling strategies employed by the Refugee Agency, UNHCR, the Rohingya in Pakistan, and IOM, each with distinct objectives in narrating Rohingya stories. The collective impact of these narratives contributes to the emergence of a larger ethnic identity, as Muslim communities today unite under the shared umbrella of Rohingya ethnicity.

The narrative then delves into the harrowing themes of violence and suffering, juxtaposed with reflections on self-reliance and the role of Refugee Led Organisations (RLOs) within the humanitarian response. This nuanced discussion sheds light on the complex interplay between human suffering, resilience, and the strategies employed by displaced communities to navigate their circumstances. A noteworthy focus in the latter part of the chapter is directed towards the positive outcomes witnessed within the emerging Rohingya community in Ireland. The narrative underscores how the Irish Rohingya community has actively shaped and crafted their

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) stories and displays, offering a powerful example of how a displaced community can assert agency in defining their cultural narrative while seamlessly integrating into their new home.

In Chapter Ten, the journey reaches its culmination as I draw conclusions and engage in a concise yet insightful discussion. The chapter commences with a focused exploration, providing answers to the research questions that have been the bedrock of this extensive inquiry. I then draw some conclusions to the interplay between the Rohingya groups all three locations of the research in section numbered 10.3. Following this, the spotlight is cast on the primary findings from the labyrinthine exploration of Intangible Cultural Heritage amidst forced displacement.

Chapter Ten concludes with a reflection of final thoughts, encapsulating the essence of the entire scholarly work. This closing section serves not only as a summary but also as an invitation to linger on the broader implications and enduring resonance of the research, underscoring the importance of recognising and preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage in the context of displacement.

In pursuing this research thesis, my objective was to unravel the intricate role of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) within displaced communities. The lens of exploration focused on the Rohingya minorities in diverse settings—Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the resettled Rohingya community in Ireland. Simultaneously, I delved into the perspective of humanitarian responders, aiming to comprehend how they perceive, utilise, and facilitate the ICH of communities navigating displacement challenges.

A pivotal aspect of this inquiry honed in on the unique experiences of women and girls within these Rohingya groups. The research probed into how they view, create, and exhibit their ICH, questioning the engagement and influence of humanitarian systems on these dynamics in displacement scenarios. Moreover, given the focus on gender mainstreaming in the humanitarian sectors, the fact that women and children make up the larger population in displacement, and there is a significant gap in discussions of women and girls in cultural heritage narratives in general, I ensured that this would be highlighted within the research.

Reflecting on years devoted to contemplating the nuances of ICH, in humanitarian environments, I have witnessed the transformative power of belonging, capable of shaping and challenging our identities. Drawing from personal experiences as an Irish immigrant raised in Australia, I observed diverse interpretations of Irish ICH utilised in nostalgic ways. Nostalgia, etymologically derived from the Greek words nostos (*homecoming*) and algia (*pain*), encapsulates the bittersweet sentiment of being tethered to myths or memories. In the Australian context, Irish families invoked ICH through songs, poems, religious practices, costumes, symbols, food, and drink—a mosaic representing a distinctly Irish way of life laden with nostalgic undertones. This utilisation not only fostered a sense of Irish identity within the

broader Australian cultural milieu but also facilitated the integration process for families like ours.

My professional journey subsequently traversed various realms of cultural heritage, encompassing the restoration of historic buildings, conservation of heritage sites, and engagement with Indigenous communities in preserving intangible, living, and natural cultural heritage. Notably, my work extended to the challenging contexts of reconstructing and conserving heritage in disasters, conflict zones, and forced displacement scenarios. Through these experiences, I have witnessed first-hand the profound significance of cultural heritage to individuals, communities, and nations—a testament to its enduring relevance and importance.

From my formative years onward, the Australian Aboriginal cultural heritage narrative has been the most profound influence on my thoughts and ideas. The Indigenous Australian story epitomises the potent impact of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and underscores the profound connection between identity and displaced communities. This narrative illustrates the dynamic nature of ICH as it evolves over time it can be obscured, yet resiliently endures until its custodians garner support, usually from influential external sources, recognising its value.

Embarking on my cultural heritage working life from 1982, the prevailing heritage narratives were firmly rooted in a colonial perspective of a White Australia. The cultural storyline of being Australian was still unfolding, shaped by tales of exploration, artists, poets, musicians, set to the historical backdrop of World Wars and the legendary Australian ANZAC spirit.[2]

The heritage stories were contributed to by the "New Australians" (*the immigrants*). Our Irish family were part of the New Australians project of white immigrant families from Britain and

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[2] 'ANZAC' stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps.
On the 25th of April 1915, Australian and New Zealand soldiers formed part of the allied expedition that set out to capture the Gallipoli peninsula. These became known as Anzacs

Ireland who had been enticed to immigrate to Australia under the Ten Pound Fare Assistance Scheme.[3] Given Ireland's poverty and weather, it did not require too much to entice an adventurous soul. The 'White Australia Policy[4] had theoretically ended in 1966, and Australia was at a juncture from being the world's most British country to becoming a "multicultural" brand, developing a global cultural heritage of its own (NMA, 2010). At this time, approximately one-fifth of all people in Australia descended from ancestors who were neither British nor Irish (Jupp, 2017). I could see how stories, myths, policies, and media had all merged to create a national identity, excluding the indigenous owners of the land in the process.

During the years of constructing the Australian identity through the ICH narrative, the indigenous Australian population confronted profound challenges, including high child mortality, low life expectancy, severe health issues, persecution in prisons, deaths in custody, and the paradox of transformed freedom manifesting as captive lives in missions and settlements; the erosion of their way of life. The struggle extended to mental health and substance abuse issues, documented by scholars such as Moodie (1973), Marchetti (2006), Cunneen (2006), and Razack (2011). By 1966, the Australian indigenous population had dwindled to a mere 0.9% (ABS, 1967).

At this juncture, although there was a shift towards recognising and supporting indigenous traditions, the unique and ancient ways of life of the indigenous population were yet to be considered significant. Instead, for decades, the prevailing aim was to assimilate ethnic

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[3] Museum of Victoria Collections: Between 1947 and 1981, over a million Britons emigrated to Australia, the majority of whom travelled under the ten pound assisted passage scheme funded by the British and Australian governments (Hammerton; Thomson, 2005). This large intake of British migrants was encouraged as part of Australia's 'populate or perish' nation-building initiative, which emerged in the aftermath of World War II (Tavan, 2005). As the name suggests, the scheme allowed for affordable travel to Australia, with the cost of an adult ticket a mere £10, and all children traveling for free by the 1960s (Hammerton; Thomson, 2005).Whilst a great number of migrants from other cultural backgrounds also emigrated to Australia during this period, an emphasis was placed on the need to attract the British. This was because they were seen to be culturally close to Australians, and in theory were more likely than other immigrants to slot into the Australian way of life (Hammerton; Thomson, 2005). This preference was also in keeping with the 'White Australia' policy, implemented in the late-nineteenth century, which by the 1920s placed quotas on European migrant intake and which actively prioritised migrants from Great Britain (Tavan, 2005). https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/13640

minorities, including the immigrants, into a modern white Australian way of life (Gardiner-Garden, 1999). The overarching policy was eradicating the indigenous population and their cultural practices from the island continent.

Australian Indigenous history, including its fast-fading narratives, remained largely unexplored and unknown to the academics of the time. Aboriginal history was viewed as a novelty, and the inaugural academic journal dedicated to Aboriginal history emerged as late as 1975, initiated by a group of white scholars primarily interested in missionaries and museum artefacts. Despite their focus, these scholars did express some humanitarian concern for contemporary Aboriginal people (Attwood, 2012).

Amid this historical immigration boom, a formidable national narrative was taking shape in Australia. Concurrently, Indigenous communities, predominantly relying on oral traditions, were steadfast in their commitment to preserving their ICH. Over time, there was a transformative shift as they documented their heritage, a conscious effort to reclaim agency and visibility within the broader narrative (Bond, 2014).

My experiences in Australia have underscored the inherent intangibility of cultural heritage, emphasising that the significance of buildings and monuments derives fundamentally from the intangible—the narrative that breathes life into these structures creates value. The Aboriginal Australian story revealed to me a deep and unwavering desire for people to have a sense of belonging, to maintain their way of life and to persist in sharing their ICH story.

In later years, when my work brought me further into humanitarian and development work, I saw great parallels in displaced communities in numerous international locations as displaced and dispossessed people struggled to restore their lost way of life, traditional knowledge and connection to ancestors. Many displacements happen quickly, and individuals are forced to flee, carrying little more than the essentials to navigate an unknown future. In this cultural

triage, people abandon not only material possessions but also their connection to land, ancestry, and the profound community ties nurtured over generations. Amidst this displacement, stories, memories, and Yarns persist, serving as resilient threads that, when supported, enable individuals to rebuild their lives, easing suffering even if only partially.

This prompts critical questions about the role of intangible cultural heritage in displacement: How is it employed, perceived, or crafted? And how do humanitarian actors leverage the intangible cultural heritage of displaced communities? Reflecting on crises, I have often concluded that a group's traditional knowledge, the trust vested in their community, the ability to create, the songs that echo resilience, and faith in a higher power collectively form a robust survival strategy in times of upheaval and great loss.

In displacement scenarios, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), operating at the behest of a host country's government, systematically orchestrates the design and construction of camps or collaborates within urban settlements. This involves formulating policies and programs to deliver essential services to displaced populations, with a primary focus on preserving lives. However, the critical question arises: How does an organisation like UNHCR integrate Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) into its response, and to what extent is it shaped by cultural assumptions regarding the needs of the displaced community?

Humanitarian agencies, in their response, may inadvertently overlook the profound impact that a group's ICH can have on various aspects of living conditions, leadership dynamics, well-being, food systems, self-reliance, health, and psychosocial support. Recognising and understanding the intricate ways ICH operates can enhance the overall protection outcomes for the displaced host community and the humanitarian sector and contribute to fostering a more comprehensive and culturally attuned response.

To delve deeper into this discussion, I aim to draw insights from the Syrian refugee experience within the Zaatari Refugee Camp in the Mafraq District of Jordan. The planning stages of the camp inadequately acknowledged or considered the cultural way of life integral to the Syrian population. The development of Zaatari unfolded in a chaotic and tumultuous manner as Syrian refugees protested against the facility's design, the lack of cultural inclusion, inadequate access to water, and restrictions on their freedom to pursue livelihoods and economic development. The inability to perpetuate their cultural practices in the camp hindered the Syrians' capacity to settle, cultivate, and preserve their traditional way of life.

Within the confines of the camp, employment opportunities were scarce or constrained, and an encampment policy limited the movement of Syrian refugees outside the camp, with only specific exceptions. Permission to temporarily leave the camp for work was granted in instances where a Jordanian landholder required labour during the harvest or for individuals with established Jordanian business connections supplying goods or services to the camp. Despite the influx of animals into the camp, veterinarians were denied the right to establish a practice, raising concerns about the potential spread of zoonotic diseases. Numerous professions, including teachers who could only function as teacher's aids, were not adequately supported. Notably, the authorities also rejected planting trees within the camp boundaries. For many displaced Syrians, particularly those from Dara'a, greenery, especially trees, held significant cultural and heritage value, contributing to their well-being and psychosocial support.

Beyond my personal experiences, a documented case exemplifying the imperative to comprehend cultural heritage as a tool for supporting the displaced is found in the UNESCO consultancy conducted by Chatelard and Hassan (2017). This study explored the impact of

conflict-induced displacement on Syrian refugees' ability to safeguard their Intangible Cultural Heritage while residing in the Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan.

As of the study's initiation in 2017, the Zaatari camp had evolved into a well-settled community featuring supermarkets, gas distribution centres, restaurants, gyms, football fields, and even a travel agency. The camp boasted a thriving marketplace with 1,438 businesses operating within its confines (REACH, 2014). Electricity is supplied by one of the most extensive solar systems in a refugee camp, as well as illuminated shops, shelters, mosques, schools, and community centres. However, this flourishing state was not the camp's initial condition; most Syrian refugees arrived with minimal possessions, greeted and registered by the UNHCR. Assigned a tent, Core Relief Items (CRIs), and a ration card, individuals or nuclear families often took it upon themselves to relocate and improve their shelters while adding essential services.

Originally designed by UNHCR site planners based in Geneva and constructed by contractors under International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGOs) guidance using international humanitarian funds, the camp underwent a unique transformation. The camp was constructed during the day by contractors and deconstructed by night by the Syrian refugees. Despite the efforts of the refugees to change the camp layout to a more culturally appropriate design, the UNHCR persisted with a standard communal facilities and service and minimalist shelter provision. The initial construction included 417 water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) blocks within the grid-patterned campsite (van der Helm et al., 2017). UNHCR had not initially planned for electricity or long-term household-level water provision, washing, or toilet facilities. In response to a camp design incongruent with the Syrian way of life, the Zaatari Refugee Camp underwent a massive organic redevelopment (primarily under the cover of darkness) led by the refugees, contrary to the UNHCR site planners, the INGO led contractors or the Jordanian Government.

The current configuration of the Zaatari camp significantly deviates from the original UNHCR plan crafted between 2012 and 2014, as refugees persistently endeavoured to reinstate elements of their way of life. The UNHCR's planning inadequately addressed the cultural needs of the Syrian population, emphasising practical essential service provision. A noteworthy aspect omitted in the UNESCO study by Chatelard and Hassan (2017) is the UNHCR's involvement or complete turnaround on-site planning in 2014, led by the Head of Sub-Office, Killian Kleinschmidt, and a UNHCR technical team tasked with assisting refugees in the deconstruction, redesign, and reconstruction of Zaatari Refugee Camp. This initiative sought to adopt a cultural approach primarily driven by the Syrian refugees themselves. Despite initial challenges marked by violence and protests, inclusive interventions, including large-scale meetings with district community leaders, catalysed positive changes and a sense of settlement within days.

The cultural approach often faced obstacles from host authorities and received insufficient support from the UNHCR head office. Nonetheless, by 2014, journalists and donors were converging on the Zaatari refugee camp to document and fund numerous cultural projects stemming from a complete dismantling and reimagining of the humanitarian sector's campsite planning methods at that time (Kimmelman, 2014).wrote,

> *Zaatari is becoming an informal city: a sudden, do-it-yourself metropolis of roughly 85,000 with the emergence of neighbourhoods, gentrification, a growing economy and, under the circumstances, something approaching normalcy, though every refugee longs to return home. There is even a travel agency that will provide a pickup service at the airport, and pizza delivery, with an address system for the refugees that camp officials are scrambling to copy.*
>
> Kimmelman, 2014

Despite the well-documented positive aspects of the Zaatari experiences, no historical account of the refugees' struggle to create their own cultural space and re-establish their way of life exists. This notable omission highlights the broader challenge of host governments and humanitarian sectors limiting displaced communities from reproducing elements of cultural normalcy within camp environments, ultimately to their detriment. While Zaatari stands out as an exception, documented by Chatelard and Hassan (2017) in their UNESCO study, it portrays an environment where refugees had already spent five years fervently fighting, burning, dismantling, and challenging the Jordanian authorities, the UNHCR, and the humanitarian sector at large.

Drawing from my youthful Irish experiences with ICH, the observations of the Aboriginal Australian narrative, and the displacement saga of the Syrians in Zaatari, my focus in this thesis converges on the intersection of "Heritage meets Humanitarianism." Delving into the cultural heritage of the displaced, I navigate the Rohingya experience by engaging with communities in refugee camps, informal settlements, and those resettled in urban Ireland. Like the Zaatari example, the displaced populations often find limited opportunities to re-establish and utilise their way of life, attain self-reliance, or establish their own culturally appropriate systems. Host Governments are often vocal in their directions to humanitarians to not let refugees get too comfortable.

In Bangladesh, a staggering 913,080 Rohingya (210,739 families) grapple with life in camps that starkly challenge the accustomed space they once had in Myanmar. Since their most recent arrival in Bangladesh in 2017, the Rohingya have endured cramped conditions well below international Humanitarian Sphere Standards, falling even beneath the minimum standards set for European prisons (Raffaelli, 2017).

In Karachi, Pakistan, the world's third-largest city, approximately 300,000 Stateless Rohingya reside in coastal slums, navigating substandard living conditions with minimal access to essential services like health and education. These Karachi-based Rohingya receive scant external support from the Pakistan Government or humanitarian and development organisations and lack legal recognition or status.

A smaller cohort of Rohingya found resettlement in Ireland in 2009, all classified as "Protection Cases" by UNHCR. They were integrated into a rural township, supported by a local community with distinct religious, environmental, and cultural backgrounds. These three locations encapsulate one cohesive group, all self-identifying with Rohingya ethnicity.

Embarking on this research journey, I confronted a formidable task in conceptualising the study of three distinct populations that identify as Rohingya across varied locations. The primary objective in answering the research questions was twofold: firstly, to unravel the intricacies of the Rohingya identity in displacement, exploring the relationship between the Rohingya and their ICH and secondly, to discern the impact of displacement exploring how humanitarians view the ICH of these populations. These investigations unfolded across disparate geographical settings, each marked by unique displacement statuses, from refugee to Stateless to Resettled thus adding layers of complexity to the multifaceted narrative of the Rohingya experience.

1.3   Development of the Research Questions

How is intangible cultural heritage used, viewed or created within displaced communities? How do humanitarians utilise the intangible cultural heritage of displaced communities?

Embarking on the research background, the emerging central research questions reflect the culmination of decades spent navigating the realms of cultural heritage and humanitarianism. In the research of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) within refugee responses, Chatelard and Hass (2017, 2021) underscore a noticeable gap in knowledge, which emerged in their exploration of Syrian refugees in Jordan's Zaatari Refugee Camp.

A comprehensive review of the existing literature reveals a wealth of scholarship addressing the legal dimensions of ICH in humanitarian responses, exemplified by works from Vrdoljak (2005, 2009, 2014), Ross (2019), and Blakely (2013). Recent studies delve into heritage within Syrian societies in Lebanon (Haman, 2021) and Ukrainian populations (Brodowska, 2022), showcasing the interconnectedness of ICH safeguarding, human rights enforcement, security issues, and peacebuilding activities. Byrne (1991, 2004) has contributed robust research on the ICH of displaced Indigenous communities in Australia, emphasising the critical need for cultural preservation amid colonisation and modernisation. Jeffery and Rotter (2019) offer insights into the displacement of mixed heritage Islanders, specifically Chagossian populations.

A nuanced understanding emerges from recognising that efforts to transmit and inscribe ICH do not rigidly "freeze cultural change" into a "static element" (Jeffery and Rotter, 2019). Melis and Chambers (2021) explore strategies like inventorying to frame ICH within the discourse

of fragility and immateriality, drawing upon Foucault's power/knowledge. The discussion on displacement and ICH extends to the challenges posed by climate change, as highlighted by Herrmann (2017) in the context of culture on the move, advocating for an inclusive framework for climate-related displacement. While the literature is growing in areas of heritage and displacement, the agency concerned with cultural heritage, UNESCO, is largely absent from humanitarian coordination in the field.

While UNESCO's role in humanitarian coordination remains limited, its presence is noted in regions where tangible heritage is threatened, as seen in Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Syria. However, historical critiques point to a Eurocentric approach and a predominant focus on tangible heritage, such as buildings, monuments, and museums in conflict and disaster scenarios (Glendinning, 2013; Beardslee, 2016). The intersection of displacement and ICH introduces new complexities to a contested concept, particularly for minority groups. Documenting or promoting the ICH of persecuted minorities, as exemplified by the Uyghur population of China or the Saharawi of Western Sahara, involves navigating challenges and ethical considerations (Anonymous, 2020; Rguibi & Belahsen, 2006). Ethical concerns may also arise from the intersection of political and cultural activism in ICH (Posada, 2016) and the varying degrees to which ICH practices align with human, cultural, or animal rights (Moghadam & Bagheritari, 2007; Chen & Bond 2010; Lenzerini, 2011; Twala & Hlalele, 2012; Blakely, 2013).

Furthermore, gender dynamics within cultural heritage, often overlooked in international law, are illuminated by Blake (2015). The lack of focus on women's heritage and questions of power underscores the need to give voice to women and girls, leading to the dedicated exploration of Rohingya women's ICH and heritage space in Chapter 7 of the empirical section. While cultural heritage is a concept constructed by Europeans that I will expand on, the more recent

definition, which includes the intangible, living, and spiritual heritage, makes cultural heritage more relatable across global contexts and links heritage more closely to traditional knowledge and identity.

The essence of ICH lies in the traditional knowledge intricately held and transmitted by the community from their forebears. Among the Rohingya, this concept is encapsulated in the term *"Raywase Shekka,"* encompassing the transmission of habits, customs, behaviours, and beliefs that foster communal sharing, connection, and identification. In the context of Pakistan, the Rohingya also employ the Urdu expression *'saqafati virsa.'* Central to saqafati virsa is the notion that heritage resides in knowledge, which finds expression through the creation of objects, craftsmanship, and environmental landscape management. Traditional homes, Rohingya boats, rice fields, forests, and gardens are examples where heritage is embodied. Techniques like terracing and water management in rice paddies or the cultivation of bamboo lots exemplify the adept management of traditional knowledge among the Rohingya. In a more spiritual dimension, the Rohingya elders often invoke the term *'sawlasoul,'* representing the beliefs, morals, and ethics transmitted within the group.

Delving into this research question brings us closer to comprehending a community's way of life during displacement. Understanding the nuances of ICH requirements may enable displaced individuals to rebuild their communities more effectively. In the humanitarian sector, gaining insight into these ICH needs may pave the way for more sustainable support for traditional livelihoods, ensuring the preservation of knowledge related to food and health systems—a contribution of significant value.

1.4 Research Aim

The research aims to cultivate a comprehension of the significance of intangible cultural heritage within displaced communities. This will be achieved through an ethnographic exploration of the life and segments of the displacement journey experienced by the ethnic Rohingya minorities across three distinct areas embedded in diverse cultural settings. The primary objective is to unravel the interplay between the displaced community and their Intangible Cultural Heritage, examining the intricate links to their social, cultural, biological, and economic milieu.

1.5 Research Methodology

The methodology is ethnographic, where I view groups of the Rohingya ethnic minorities in their cultural setting, thus creating a descriptive narrative about aspects of their way of life. I contrast and compare my findings with the existing relevant literature. The methods used for the research include observations, Yarning (as a form of informal interviewing with oral communities) and key informant interviews (which I apply to the participants from the humanitarian sectors such as UN Agencies, NGOs and INGOs). *Yarning* is a term from the seafarers of old, where oral traditions were used to pass on stories critical to a journey. The use of Yarns in academic circles has primarily been developed further by Australian health researchers when working with Aboriginal communities. Likewise, historians have also made use of Yarns as a valued research method when working with oral communicators, as yarns can verify events that predate written records. In part, it is Storytelling, but it is embedded in trust through sharing experiences. Yarning differs significantly from focus groups or structured interviews, as it is centred on multiple meetings with the individual or group in an environment

that allows discussion to flow freely from story to story. For example, my Yarning's with Rohingya were during activities such as;

- demarcating sites
- constructing shelters
- treating bamboo
- planning sites for facilities (distribution sites, health facilities, schools, mosques, madrasas, offices, shops)
- travelling in boats and fishing, repairing nets
- making crafts or preparing food

During these Yarning activities, the Rohingya participants explained their cultural reasoning for their way of life, their family and community background and memories, and their traditions and myths.

The ethnographic method is well-suited for the investigation of social interactions, behaviours, and perceptions within groups, teams, organisations, and communities. Originally developed in anthropology with a focus on isolated or remote societies, ethnography has proven effective in understanding specific cultural communities (Reeves et al., 2008). In this research, an ethnographic approach is adopted, reflecting an Etic perspective shaped by my viewpoint and experiences as an outsider during a specific snapshot in time, particularly with the Rohingya and other cultural groups.

This methodological choice is particularly apt due to its inherent strength in navigating the cultural context of the research, especially when delving into sensitive topics such as the past and traumatic experiences. The approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the various groups within the Rohingya and associated populations, shedding light on Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) values in the context of displacement. It is noteworthy that there is a

range of narratives on ICH, but it is still a relatively new area of study thus research is limited within the context of displacement.

Chapter five provides a detailed discussion of the methodology adopted for this study, encompassing an exploration of the challenges and limitations inherent in the chosen approach. The chapter further elaborates on the specific research methods and techniques employed and the geographic locations under consideration. This thesis ensures transparency in the research process, offering readers insights into the rigour and considerations that shape the study's methodology.

The gap in knowledge addressed by this research:

This research significantly contributes to bridging a noteworthy gap in the understanding of displaced communities, specifically focusing on the intersection of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and its application in the context of displacement. While cultural heritage is commonly perceived in terms of tourism, art, or pastime, its deeper significance, as highlighted by the British Council (2016), lies in shaping identity, influencing conflict dynamics, and fostering integration. This research asserts that cultural heritage should play a crucial role in the lives of individuals undergoing displacement, whether they are refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), or Stateless people.

> *Further in-depth study to understand the importance and roles of ICH, particularly in situations of displacement, and gather knowledge on the role of communities in both safeguarding their ICH at risk in emergencies and mobilizing it as a tool for resilience and reconciliation.* (Chatelard and Hassan, 2017)

In the years following the UNESCO study, the United Nations (UN) has maintained a level of focus on related topics. Since 2017, several academics have contributed to the discourse, including Herrmann (2017), Jeffery and Rotter (2019), Melis and Chambers (2021), Haman (2021), and Brodowska (2022). This ongoing academic engagement at the UN level underscores the continued relevance and importance of the research topic, further highlighting the urgency and timeliness of this study in expanding our understanding of the intricate relationship between cultural heritage and human displacement.,

Contribution to the Field:

This research significantly enriches the scholarly discourse and knowledge surrounding Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) within the context of the Rohingya Muslim community's journey of identity and unity across borders. An integral aspect of this contribution is the deliberate attention given to the gender dimensions inherent in ICH. By addressing the interplay between ICH and gender, this research provides nuanced insights into how identity and unity are shaped and experienced by the Rohingya, shedding light on the dynamic processes of development, strengthening, sharing, or potential loss of their intangible cultural heritage in the face of displacement.

Moreover, this thesis makes a distinctive contribution to the methodological landscape by emphasising the use of ethnographic research, with a specific focus on the utilisation of Yarning as a research method. Yarning, with its unique strengths, emerges as a valuable tool in the study of oral traditional populations. The positive attributes of Yarning play a crucial role in facilitating a deeper understanding of the experiences, perspectives, and cultural nuances of the Rohingya community during their displacement. This research, therefore, not only advances our understanding of ICH within the broader context of displacement but also

contributes methodologically by highlighting the efficacy of Yarning in capturing the narratives of communities with rich oral traditions.

1.6   Conclusion

In the opening section of this research, a concise overview of each chapter's thematic content was provided, offering readers a comprehensive roadmap for their journey through the thesis. This roadmap is complemented by a diagram in the Theoretical Framework section, visually emphasising the intersection of key areas in the literature review and empirical chapters.

The theoretical foundation was laid, drawing from personal experiences in Australia related to cultural heritage and briefly acknowledging the influence of my Irish immigrant background and humanitarian work. Utilising the Australian context as a focal point, the narrative explores the power of controlling narratives in shaping national heritage, highlighting the potential for minority voices to shape the emergence of cultural heritage. Grounded in years of practical engagement, this exploration ignited a curiosity that propelled a more profound inquiry into the utilisation and significance of ICH.

The inclusion of the 2017 report on the Syrian refugee experience in the Za'atari Refugee Camp, authored by Dr. Geraldine Chatelard and Ms. Hanan Kassab Hassan, injected a crucial dimension into the rationale for the research. This report not only highlighted the potential benefits of safeguarding ICH amid displacement but also underscored a significant knowledge gap in the field. Building upon this insight and drawing from various experiential examples, the research is poised to address this gap, making a substantial contribution to our understanding of ICH within the context of displacement.

The research methodology was introduced, emphasising an anthropological approach that leverages ethnographic methods. A notable aspect of this methodology is the core research method of Yarning, an approach deeply attuned to cultural sensitivities in oral traditional contexts. This unique choice in methodology, further elucidated in Chapter Five, reflects a commitment to capturing the nuanced narratives of the Rohingya community during their displacement. Chapter Five not only delves into the intricacies of Yarning but also elucidates the specific research questions guiding the exploration of ICH in the context of Rohingya displacement.

In conclusion, this research significantly contributes to the intersection of Intangible Cultural Heritage and Human Displacement, blending theoretical underpinnings with methodological innovation. The research not only advances scholarly discourse but also offers practical insights into the lived experiences of displaced communities.

2   Chapter Two: A Rohingya Heritage and Homeland

2.1   Chapter Introduction

In this chapter, I delve into the rich cultural heritage of the Rohingya ethnic minority within the historical context of Burma and Arakan. The nomenclature shift from Burma and Arakan pre-1989 to Myanmar and Rakhine State post-1989 serves as a pivotal point, marking a transition occurring four decades after Burma gained independence from colonial rule in 1948. The ongoing debate surrounding these name changes not only exacerbates ethnic divisions but also amplifies the influence of elitist factions resistant to cohesive reform (Gravers & Ytzen, 2014).

Titled "A Rohingya Heritage and Homeland," this chapter focuses on unravelling the arrival stories of the contemporary Rohingya Muslim ethnic groups. Exploring arrival inherently raises questions of belonging, heritage, and citizenship. Throughout this chapter, I highlight the documented connection of the Rohingya Muslims to the region, tracing their roots alongside the emergence of Islam. The narrative broadens to encompass the broader ethnic and religious dynamics of the country, examining the impact of the National Races Policy.

This exploration is grounded in a theoretical framework, specifically focusing on unravelling the social construction of Caste and its intricate connections to social exclusion. The chapter traverses the landscape of Rohingya culture, providing nuanced insights into their heritage. Concurrently, it delves into theoretical discussions illuminating the complexities surrounding accepting one's position through religious belief, family name or connections and its pivotal role in perpetuating social exclusion.

Including discussions on accepting a lower place within the community, particularly among older Rohingya men, is a distinctive contribution to the thesis. This element is relevant as it reflects a common theme in the narratives of oral traditionalists within the Rohingya community and Sufism. Their reflections and discussions on accepting one's place within the community contribute a unique perspective to the broader discourse on identity, belonging, and societal structures.

Furthermore, this discussion holds broader relevance within the global context of ethnography, as similar systems exist in various cultures. In this thesis, I refer to Caste in the Burma context and Badahari in Pakistan. Yet, similar social stratification systems are common globally as we see the concept of Wasata in the Arab world, Badahari and Safarish in South Asian Muslim populations, Guanxi in China, Yongo in Korea, and Blat in Russia, parallels the discussions within the Rohingya community. This comparative analysis enhances the significance of the exploration, illustrating the universality of grappling with societal structures and acceptance of one's position across diverse cultural landscapes.

In essence, this chapter provides an understanding of the Rohingya culture within its specific historical and social context. It contributes to a broader conversation on the universality of issues related to social structures and acceptance across diverse cultural settings. This nuanced exploration sets the stage for a comprehensive examination of the intersection between ICH and Displacement in subsequent chapters to capture the lived experiences and perspectives of the Rohingya community.

The regions' first people of Burma can be traced back to the Indo-Aryans who arrived and occupied the area as far back as the 7th century BCE. It was not until the 11th Century CE that we see the first unified version of Burma centred around the Kingdom of Pagan. The Pagan Dynasty was also central to the Burmese Language[5] and much of what is perceived as Burmese culture today includes the spread of Theravada Buddhism in South-East Asia. This is a highly important chapter in Burma's history, as numerous accounts of the creation of Burmese culture emerged in this era. The historical records of the British place the ethnic Mon people at the centre of Burmese culture and crediting them with creating the core of Burmese civilisation. [6] This goes beyond the spread of Theravada Buddhism to traditional fine arts, and extraordinary Buddhist architecture that we see in Buddhist temples to the Burmese writing (Myint-U Thant, 2008).

This excerpt from the Burma Debate 1996; "*A Noble Past, an Uncertain Future, The Issue of Nationhood*" outlines the general perceptions of Burma's Mons cultural heritage and history.

> *They enhanced the power and prestige of their king by adopting the Hindu ritual of coronation and developed a new art of sculpture by blending the native traditional wood carving with the Greco-Indian conventions of making images of the Buddha. They built stupas along the Indian model and developed new forms of temple architecture with a mixture of native and Indian traditions. Within a few decades, the Mon became the most advanced people in Southeast Asia, and they assumed the role of teachers to*

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[5] In keeping with conventional usage, Burman' refers to the principal ethno-linguistic group in the present-day country of Myanmar, while Burmese refers to the language, culture or political system of that ethno-linguistic group.

[6] The Mon were one of the first groups to settle in Burma, possibly even before the first millennium BCE. They gradually expanded eastward into Thailand, reaching as far as present-day Laos, but were stymied in this movement after the eighth century when they encountered the Khmer kingdom of Angkor. A series of Mon kingdoms ruled much of Burma for a large portion of the next 1,000 years, but their dominance was increasingly eroded as ethnic Burmans and Tai began to move into the region and assert themselves, as in the year 1057 when Burmans established the kingdom of Bagan after having defeated the Mon (Minority Rights, 2022).

their neighbors, spreading Theravada Buddhism and their new culture over the entire legion. Their cousins, the Khmer, were the first to benefit, followed by the Burmans. Even in the 13th century when their glory had passed and they were a conquered people in the Me Nam Valley, the Mon freely shared their cultural heritage with the new arrivals, the Tai.

The contested nature of Burmese cultural identity is evident, as the Burman (or Burmans) challenge the notion that Burma's culture is the creation of one ethnicity. Aung-Thwin (2012) contends that the historical narrative cantered on the Mon people is deceptive and aligns with the colonial project's goal to diminish the achievements of the Burman majority. He suggests that this deliberate distortion aimed to divide the population along ethnic lines, strengthening British political power. Aung-Thwin (2012) further argues that colonial interpretations of Burma's history distort accurate accounts of its pre-colonial past, contributing significantly to the ethnic divisions observed in Myanmar today.

Islam (2018) emphasises that Burma's cultural landscape cannot be examined in isolation, as it is a convergence point for three borders: Burma, Bangladesh, and India. The influence of Indian heritage and social stratification systems in the Burma region is often overlooked, with Islam (2018) asserting that geography links the Rohingya more closely to India than to Burma. Collis (1985), drawing from 22 years of work in Arakan, highlights the region's character as essentially Indian. The border between Myanmar and Bangladesh, cutting across Arakan, symbolises a division between the Buddhist and Muslim worlds in Asia and among Indo-Aryan and Mongoloid peoples. Historical, geographical, ethnological, and cultural influences underscore the interconnectedness of these regions, evident in historical references to Arakan as Greater Chittagong and Chittagong as Greater Arakan. Phayre's (1841) account of Arakan notes the adoption of Hindu prejudices by the Arakanese, reinforcing social stratification.

Burmese history is marked by numerous empires and waves of ethnic armies, introducing a diverse mix of cultures to the region (Alam, 1999; Bhattacharya, 2002; Bhonsale, 2015). The Mongols, for instance, conquered the Pagan Empire in 1287, controlling the area until the mid-16th century. The early 17th century saw the British East India Company attempting to establish trading posts along the Bay of Bengal, leading to the Anglo-Burmese War in 1824-1826. Eventually, Burma was annexed into British India, emerging as a separate colony by 1937 (Yegar, 1972).

While Pagan is central to Burmese civilisation, Mrauk-U is pivotal to Arakan (now Rakhine). Rakhine State, covering over 600 kilometres of coastline along the Bay of Bengal, was an independent kingdom before being conquered by the Burmese in 1784. Rohingya historians claim a national status traceable within Arakan for over a thousand years, a narrative they have had to defend since independence (Charney, 1998). Understanding Myanmar is challenging due to its historical obscurity (Subrahnayam, 1997). Historically, Arakan's borders extended to include Chittagong, now part of Bangladesh. The Rohingya are said to have emerged in Arakan in the 1430s, coinciding with the development of Mrauk-U, the centre of the Arakan Kingdom. Numerous scholars document the arrival of Muslims during this period (Ba Tha, 1960; Ravi, 1978; Razzaq and Haque, 1995; Thant Myint-U, 2006; Baher, 2010; Koepping, 2011; HRW, 2012; Topich & Leitich, 2013; Sarmin, 2020). Muslim influence persisted for the entire 350 years that Mrauk-U sat at the center of Arakan (Topich & Leitich, 2013).

Scholarly perspectives on the Rohingya diverge, and some scholars, such as Leider (2017) and Nasir (2020), characterise them more as an ethno-religious group. Myanmar, as a multi-religious, multi-ethnic country, has witnessed the ascendance of "Theravada Buddhism" as the state-promoted religion in recent decades. While statistical data indicates major religions as "Buddhism 75.2%, Christianity 8.8%, Islam 5.6%, and Hinduism 1.6%," these figures also

encompass various practices within each faith tradition.[7] Buddhism's roots in the region date back to 300 BC, but the prominence of Theravada Buddhism emerged later, gaining prominence in the 11th century under King Anawrahta. This period marked a significant increase in the influence of Buddhism throughout Burma. Interestingly, despite the historical narratives and the promotion of Theravada Buddhism, contemporary Myanmar remains a remarkably diverse country.

In terms of religious diversity, Myanmar boasts various practices within Buddhism, a significant Christian presence among ethnic groups like the Chin, Kachin, and Kayin, and a sizable Muslim population. Notably, the heritage narratives often associated with Theravada Buddhism coexist with the religious diversity observed today. This diversity challenges a simplistic characterisation of Myanmar as exclusively Buddhist, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of the intricate tapestry of religious and ethnic identities within the country.[8]

The Rohingya in Rakhine undoubtedly possess a rich and diverse ancestry. Sunni Muslims have been connected to Arakan for centuries, and Arakan itself maintains a history of isolation from the rest of Myanmar, with a history of documented interactions with Bengal. The origins of the Rohingya are said to be traced back to a diverse mix of Arab, Moor, Turk, Persian, Mughal, Pathan, as well as local Bengali and Rakhine populations. The Rohingya language, a variant of Chittagonian, remains primarily oral, despite recent efforts to textualise it (TWB, 2018).

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[7] "Country: Myanmar (Burma)", Joshua Project, http://joshuaproject.net /countries/BM#Religions.
[8] "Table: Religious Composition by Country, in Numbers," Pew Research Center, December 18, 2012, http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/table-religious-composition-by-country-in- numbers/.

A significant chapter in Rohingya history unfolds during the Burma Campaign from 1941 to 1945, known as the "Forgotten War." This period transformed Arakan Muslims into a supportive military alliance for the British, with the Rohingya willingly cooperating to gain administrative autonomy over Arakan. However, the British retreat led to local violence against the Rohingya for their alliance (Yegar, 1972; Sarak, 2018).

In 1947, the Rohingya were not formally recognised by Burma as one of the official national Races. This pivotal omission excluded them from citizenship or associate citizenship, as outlined in the 1982 Citizenship Act. This exclusion left the Rohingya largely stateless, subjected to exploitation, movement restrictions, inequitable marriage, land confiscation, limited access to education beyond primary school, and violent persecution (Cheeseman, 2017).

Adding to their plight, the Rohingya face the potential erasure of their Islamic heritage as Mrauk-U, a historic site, remains predominantly promoted as the Buddhist centre of the old Arakan Kingdom. Mrauk-U served as the capital of the Arakan kingdom until the Burmese Konbaung Dynasty's conquest in 1784. During British colonial rule, Mrauk-U was referred to as Myohaung (meaning old city) (June Minn Khine, 2019). Presently, Mrauk-U awaits significant archaeological investigation and UNESCO World Heritage listing, holding untold stories that may shed light on the Islamic presence in Arakan and its likely connection to Rohingya heritage.[9]

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[9] The question of the continuity and the purity of the Buddhist teachings is differ- ent from the question of the cultural impact of Islamic culture. There is no contradiction between the conservatism of the monkhood and the continuity of religious beliefs on the one hand, and the fact that Arakanese governors of Chittagong and some Arakanese kings adopted Islamic titles on their bi- and trilingual coins or the fact that, as some sources sug- gest, the court was influenced by the prestigious culture of Bengal. For a recent account of the Bengali Muslim cultural presence at the court of Arakan, see Bhattacharya (2002) and new research done by Thibaut d'Hubert on the literary work of Alaol (forthcoming). Questions regarding the Islamic impact on the kings are dis- cussed in Leider (1998a).

The narratives surrounding the Rohingya are multifaceted, with oral stories, like that of Narameikhla, founder of the Kingdom of Mrauk-U, contributing to the layered history. Narameikhla's exile to Gaur and return with Muslim soldiers considered ancestors of some Rohingya, is a thread in this complex narrative (Qanungo, 1967). As Graeber and Wengrow (2021) would acknowledge, the historical discourse transcends a mere discussion of facts but constitutes a fluid account of cultural heritage, acknowledging that everyone has originated from somewhere at some time.

The Rohingya ethnic minority in Myanmar has confronted documented ethnic and religious persecution over centuries, resulting in recurrent displacements (Yegar, 1972; HRW, 2012; Leider, 2013; Ibrahim, 2016; Wade, 2017; Leider, 2017). Despite Muslim communities being present in Burma since the 9th century, the Rohingya face non-acceptance, being viewed as outsiders or foreigners by the Burmese. The contemporary narrative surrounding the Rohingya sparks contentious debates on belonging, national race, and ethnicity (Aye Chan, 2005; Leider, 2013, 2018; Yegar, 1972). Yegar (1972) refers to census data, such as the 1931 census, indicating 130,524 Muslims in the Buthidaung Maungdaw region, but notes that a significant number couldn't be identified as Arakanese Muslims (Rohingya).

Leider (2013) observes that the term 'Rohingya' gained prominence in the 1950s, particularly in the context of human rights abuses in Burma following independence in 1948. Aye Chan (2005) traces the long-term history of the Rohingya to Muslims from the Mayu Frontier in the remote western region of Arakan (Rakhine) State, separated from modern-day Bangladesh by the Naaf River. Nurul Islam (2018) describes the Rohingya as borderland people with a deep history in the region, predominantly under the Kingdom of Arakan until the Burmese took control in 1784 (Chan, 2005).

Scholars like Chan (2005) argue that the Rohingya, tracing their heritage in Arakan State back over a thousand years, primarily rely on myths and legends. Notably, not all Muslims in Rakhine today identify as Rohingya, leading to an inherent dilemma in defining ethnicity. According to Aye Chan (2005), various groups, including the Chittagonian Bengalis in the Mayu Frontier, the Kaman (descendants of Muslim mercenaries), the Muslim groups of Myedu, and the Burmese Muslim groups in the coastal District of Sandoway, contribute to the complexity of the Rohingya identity.

Kyi (1950), Tin and Luce (1960), and Tun (2006) highlight the critical role of Burma's ports in Arab trade and the arrival of Islam, placing Muslim arrival in Arakan (Rakhine) in the 9th century, predating the establishment of the Burmese empire in 1055 AD. Scholars like Yegar (1972), Lay (1973), and Tonkin emphasise the intermarriage of Muslims with local Arakanese women over centuries during the visits and settlements of Arab traders in Arakan. [10]

Following the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26), the Arakan region fell under British control. Simultaneously, the Mrauk-U Buddhist Kingdom (1429-1785) thrived in the area alongside the neighbouring Bengal Sultanate. Colonial administrators encouraged the migration of low-skilled Bengali-speaking labourers, predominantly poor Muslims and some Hindus, to work in Arakan's tea and rubber plantations, thereby expanding the local Muslim population (Yegar, 1972). This prompts reflection on the nuanced question: at what point does

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[10] Tonkin (2018) notes the passage from the 1921 census: "The Arakan-Mahomedans are practically confined to Akyab district and are properly the descendants of Arakanese women who have married Chittagonian Mahomedans. It is said that the descendants of a Chittagonian who has permanently settled in Akyab district always refuse to be called Chittagonian and desire to be called Arakan- Mahomedans; but as permanent settlement seems to imply marriage to an Arakanese woman this is quite in accordance with the description given. Although so closely connected with Chittagonians racially, the Arakan-Mahomedans do not associate with them at all; they consequently marry almost solely among themselves and have become recognised locally as a distinct race. The Arakanese Buddhists asked the Deputy Commissioner there not to let the Arakan-Mahomedans be included under Arakanese in the census. The instruction issued to enumerators with reference to Arakan- Mahomedans was that this race-name (in Burmese Yakaing-kala) should be recorded for those Mahomedans who were domiciled in Burma and had **adopted a certain mode of dress** which is neither Arakanese nor Indian and who call themselves and are generally called by others Yakaing-kala."

someone not considered indigenous or a first people become native to a land or be termed local?

The Rohingya's struggle for recognition as an ethnic minority in Myanmar is not unique. The historical timeline of the Burmese nation is pivotal to understanding the Rohingya's existence, and though there is limited documented evidence of their presence, independent sources provide valuable insights. Phayre (2000) traces the first known settlement in Myanmar some 13,000 years ago, describing a people who believed in a spirit they called "Nat" governing their daily activities. Subsequently, Aryan and Kshatriyas immigrated into the region, contributing artisanal skills, agriculture, and Buddhist teachings that transformed the area over time.

Hinduism also has historical roots in Burma, with Mishra (2002) challenging the perception that 'Hindu' is a 19th-century British invention, arguing that the term originates from the Persians, referring to people living East of the River Indus (Tharoor, 2017). Tharoor (2017) acknowledges the heterogeneity of Hinduism, while others assert that Hinduism is a conglomerate of diverse beliefs, gods, and traditions (Mishra, 2002; Ilaiah, 2018).

Myanmar lacks a clear discourse on nation-building or a consensus on defining Myanmar-ness. Promoting Burmese as the official national language is seen as supporting Burman rule (Wong, 2019). The ethnolinguistic landscape of Burma remained largely apolitical for ethnic minorities until the 1920s when Rangoon University College (RUC) imposed a high minimum standard of Burmese language proficiency for university admission, coupled with a requirement for high proficiency in English.

Displacement and Ethnicity in Burma

In the mid-17th century, Arakan witnessed the ascendancy of the Mughals. The British East India Company, established in 1599 and officially recognised with a Royal decree in 1600, exerted considerable influence in the region and stands as a noteworthy historical cornerstone for the Rohingya people. However, as the Mughal empire underwent a period of decline, Britain, leveraging the growing favour towards the British East India Company across the continent, spearheaded an expansion into Bengal in 1651. The East India Company adeptly negotiated the acquisition of strategic villages, including the village of Kolkutta, by 1698. A pivotal moment came in 1717 when the Mughal Emperor issued a royal Farman, endowing the East India Company with import/export tax-free status, a significant factor contributing to the eventual British takeover of Arakan by the 18th century.

During the British exploration of Arakan, in 1799, Francis Buchanan published an article stemming from one of the earliest comprehensive Western surveys of the languages within the Burma Empire during Bò-daw-hpayà's reign (1782-1819). Buchanan's work notably documented the term "Rooinga" (Rohingya) as an ethnocultural identity, representing one of the few instances where the Rohingya received acknowledgment in the early surveys. Tonkin (2018), in discussions of citizenship, highlights that despite Buchanan's initial use of the term Rooinga, he refrained from employing it again in subsequent encounters with Muslims along the Bengal-Arakan frontier.[11] Additionally, the East India Company chronicled the century-long conflict between the Rakhains and Arakan. As a response to the escalating refugee population, Captain Hiram Cox was dispatched to the region in 1798. Although Cox initiated

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[11] Tonkin has undertaken extensive work on Muslim origins through Burma's census records. The British firstly designated the Muslims as "Mohamedans", by the 1921 Census had decided on the name "Arakan-Mohamedans" as a race category; this became "Arakan-Muslim" in the 1931 Census.

the establishment of the area now known as Cox's Bazaar, his untimely death in 1799 left the region incomplete.

In 1937, Arakan became a division of British Burma until 1939 when World War II erupted, leading to the Japanese occupation of Arakan. The subsequent liberation of Arakan took place during the Burma campaign (1944 – 1945), during which Burmese Muslims fought alongside the Allies, aspiring to establish a Muslim Arakan State. Unfortunately, this vision never materialised (Ramachandra, 1981; Bahar, 2010).

The Rohingya Muslims have experienced waves of displacement into Bangladesh, occurring in the late 1700s, early 1800s, the 1940s, 1978, 1991-92, and notably in 2017. In 1991-92, around 250,000 Rohingya sought refuge in camps with cramped conditions in Cox's Bazaar due to escalating violence. Over the decades, Rohingya have been compelled to flee their homeland, seeking refuge in Thailand, Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and other countries. Many have also been resettled globally under UNHCR Resettlement programs, with a significant population remaining in Myanmar, including 150,000 living as IDPs in camps as of 2019. In 2022, UNHCR recorded a total population of 936,733 registered Rohingya in Bangladesh, with several hundred thousand also residing independently throughout the country (UNHCR, 2022a).

Presently, the Rohingya community constitutes more than 2.5 million people, including officially recognised refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and stateless individuals. Approximately 860,000 Rohingya reside in Bangladesh (UNHCR, 2020), and the next largest population of Rohingya outside Myanmar and Bangladesh, estimated at 300,000, resides in Sindh province, Karachi, Pakistan (Latiff, 2019). The Rohingya population in Karachi dates back to the 1960s and 70s, with indications of more recent arrivals fleeing continued

persecution in Myanmar and Bangladesh, often with the approval of the then-President of Pakistan.

Myanmar's political landscape is marked by legal contradictions, exemplified by the government's adoption of the 'National Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.' However, the official nomenclature refers to Indigenous people as *'ethnic nationalities'* or *'ethnic races.'* Myanmar officially recognises 135 ethnic groups, with more existing unofficially. The country comprises seven ethnic minority states and seven divisions with a Burmese majority, often called Bamar. Myanmar is linguistically diverse, with over 100 languages spoken (MRGI, 2020). Despite the rich diversity, there is a paucity of detailed and accurate information about Indigenous Peoples, partly due to a poor understanding of the internationally recognised concept of "Indigenous." The Myanmar government employs a system known as taing-yin-tha, asserting that all citizens are "Indigenous." This allows the exclusion of certain minorities from the list of national races while simultaneously dismissing Indigenous Peoples' rights activists who use the Burmese term hta-nay-tain-yin-tha, based on international principles, incorporating non-dominance, historical continuity, ancestral territories, and self-identification (Dubford, 2019).

The 21st Century Panglong forums have encountered a deadlock amid the intensifying conflict over states and ethnicity in Myanmar. The government of Myanmar officially recognises eight ethnic groups as taung yin tha (National Races): Kachin, Karen, Chin, Karenni, Burman, Mon, Arakan, and Shan. According to the 1982 Citizenship Law, ethnic groups present in Myanmar's current geographical area since 1823 (the commencement of the first British annexation) are deemed taung yin tha. Nevertheless, Myanmar boasts a multitude of self-identified ethnic groups, adding complexity to the ethnic landscape.

Contrary to various United Nations Conventions, Myanmar has refrained from signing the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and has not ratified ILO Convention No. 169 (The Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989). While the nation is a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), it opposed a bill for the ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, citing concerns about threats to national sovereignty. In 2017, Myanmar became the 165th State Party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). These international stances underscore the complex legal and ethical landscape surrounding Myanmar's engagement with human rights conventions and its approach to addressing issues of discrimination and sovereignty.

The current situation in Myanmar for ethnic minorities remains fraught with turmoil, reflecting the country's multicultural landscape. However, the challenges of pluralism are starkly evident due to Myanmar's suppressive governance and nation-building approach.[12] The legacy of six decades of conflict has fostered deep-seated mistrust among various ethnic groups, particularly towards the Burman majority. [13] Ethnic identity in Myanmar is marked by complexities and challenges, with a disconnect between official recognition and self-identification. While some ethnic groups have well-documented histories, the division among certain tribal groups, such as the Burman and Karen people, can be challenging to discern. Despite sharing a common language, these groups perceive clear distinctions in customs, clothing, religion, and overall way of life, underscoring Myanmar's cultural diversity amidst a Buddhist predominance.

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[12] The majority of those affected are ethnic Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Mon and Shan as well as Muslim populations in the Rakhine state. There are also estimates of over 100,000 ethnic Chin refugees and migrants in India and Malaysia.

[13] Norway has spent NOK 40 million to help fund a census in Myanmar (Burma). The census results are at odds with previous assumptions and may increase the level of conflict in the country in the run-up to the elections in 2015. Norway must take responsibility.

Monique Skidmore (2004) provides a poignant depiction of life in Myanmar, characterising the populace as living in perpetual fear. The people, she suggests, present themselves as automata, offering lifeless bodies for the use of the Myanmar State, while their minds or spirits exist in alternative realities. The state's pervasive control extends to every aspect of Burmese life.

The question of belonging in Myanmar is intricately tied to notions of autochthony, where one group claims precedence over another (Nira Yuval-Davis, 2011). This mindset significantly impacts the Rohingya's opportunities for settlement and integration despite multiple generations being born in Myanmar, adding complexity to discussions around belonging and autochthony. According to Nira Yuval-Davis (2011), the challenge lies not in the inability of migrants or indigenous people to assimilate into Myanmar society, but rather in their alignment with different heritages, languages, and histories. The contradiction between national ideas of Rohingya-ness and belonging appears intertwined with, yet distinct from, notions of autochthony and citizenship. While national belonging excludes the Rohingya based on autochthony, the same imaginary national belonging does not include those without a known link to Arakan, a former independent kingdom.

In the following series of maps, we observe the evolution from the historical Arakan Kingdom of 1400 CE, extending northwest to Chittagong in Map (1), to the depiction of Arakan as part of Colonial British India (Hindustan) in Map (2), and finally, to the contemporary portrayal in Map (3), where Arakan is presently situated within Myanmar, now noted as Rakhine State, delineating its current administrative divisions.

Map (1) Arakan 1400AD Map of Arakan Kingdom extending North West to Chittagong
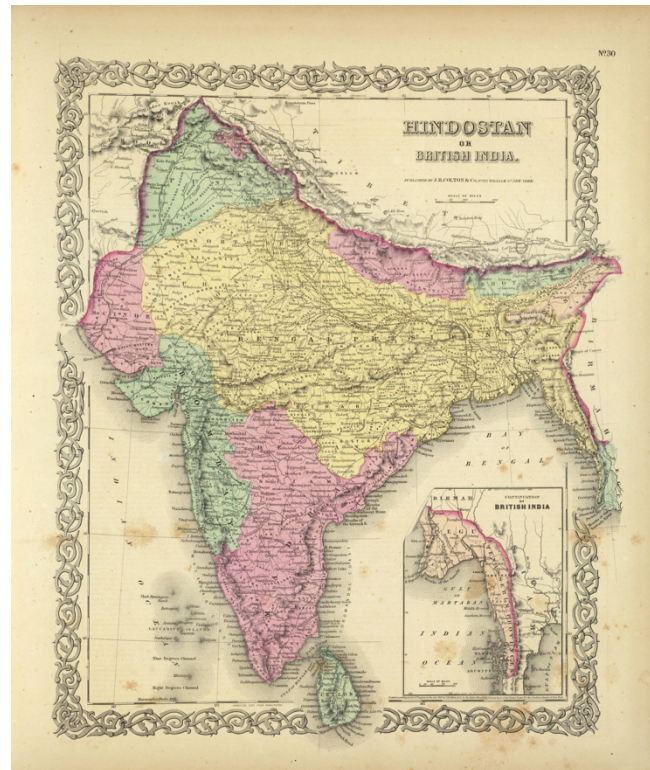
Map (2) British India (Hindustan) 1856 encompassing Arakan southwards to the Irrawaddy River
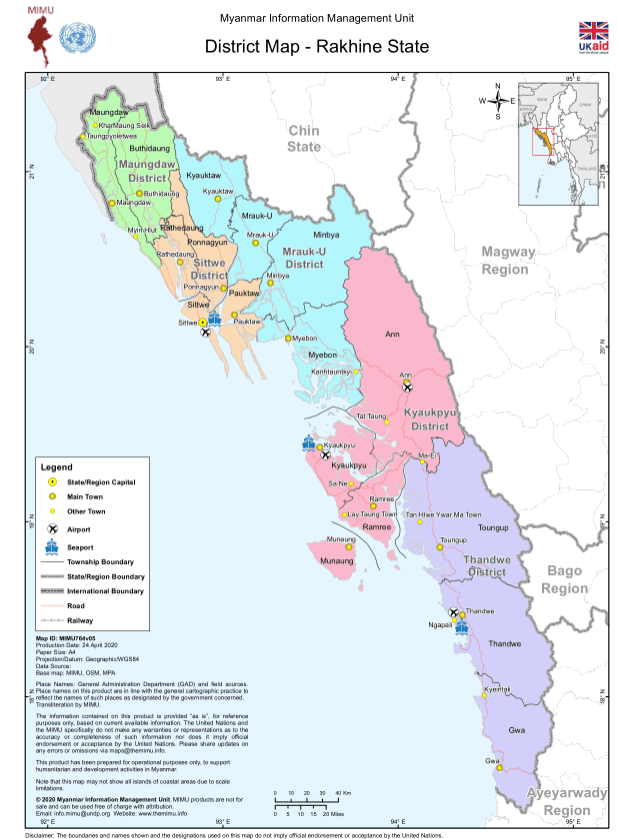
Map (3) Current Arakan (Rakine State Myanmar) as seen today under separated border now the Naf River

In alignment with trade routes, maps illustrating historical borders provide a tangible means to comprehend the intricate cultural heritage of a specific geographical area. Map (2) on the preceding page serves as a foundation for the subsequent exploration in Section 2.3, delving into heritage within the broader context of the Indian subcontinent in this chapter on historical context. Myanmar (Burma) is often perceived predominantly within a Buddhist state's framework. However, a broader perspective emerges when examining Colton's 1856 map of British India / Hindustan, revealing that it encompassed a substantial portion of Arakan Burma, extending as far south as the Irrawaddy River.

In contemplating the ties to the broader South Asian culture, exploring the systems of power, hierarchies, and cultural stratification ingrained in structures such as Caste becomes imperative. These systems, encompassing Castes, Baradari, Zaat or Qaum, tribes, or Clans, play a pivotal role in shaping cultural heritage. In the specific context of the Rohingya, as emphasised in the historical narrative, the earliest documented record of Arakan was inscribed in Sanskrit. The influence of Indian systems and other cultural elements from South Asia continues to impact the region significantly. Singer (1980) further underscores that Arakan, in particular, underwent substantial Indian influence, emerging as one of the initial areas in Southeast Asia to embrace the Dharmic religions.

2.3   Culture, Caste, and Social Exclusion

Humanity is woven with the threads of hierarchical social systems that control power, wealth, and resources. For much of Asia we see the complex and deeply embedded phenomenon of caste or similar systems. Across the region, these systems manifest in various forms, known as Baradari, Zaat, Safarish, Qaum, each determining power and social stratification (Ahmand, 2009; Mumtaz et al., 2022). In the historically rich land of Arakan, where Hindu, Buddhist,

and Muslim legacies from South and South-East Asia intertwine, the lens of caste becomes an essential perspective to comprehend the intricate social structure, hierarchy, and stratification among the Rohingya Muslim heritage and their neighbours (Phyre 1841; Collis 1985; Islam 2018).

Centuries ago, during Buddhist times, the Brahmins, the highest caste, laid the foundation for the enduring existence of the caste system. As history unfolded, the contours of caste metamorphosed across Asian societies. In the exploration of this complex societal construct, Brinkhaus (1978) and Dumont (1970) contribute detailed studies on the development and ideology surrounding caste, respectively. Quigley (1993) critiques contemporary theories, shifting the discussion from caste systems to the realms of kinship, while Subedi (2016) views caste as a mode of power and a critical element in shaping collective identity within groups. Fearon et al. (2000) further elaborate on the strengthening of social identity through violence.

Despite the modern ethical stance that condemns the association of birth, ancestry, religion, or heritage with social exclusion, many societies, especially in South Asia, grapple with the persistent influence of caste. The Indian Constitution explicitly bans caste-based discrimination (Article 15), yet caste remains deeply ingrained in Asian societies, posing contemporary challenges (Riser-Kositsky, 2009). Scholars find themselves confronted with methodological challenges when attempting to delve into the minds of past societies, navigating the complexities of early Buddhist, Hindu, or Islamic systems and their manifestations in today's power structures.

In recent studies, Muslims, particularly across the Indian continent, have been viewed through the lens of lower caste, leading to the emergence of terms such as Dalit Muslims. As Islam spread globally, it absorbed elements and cultural nuances from other religions, shaping the diverse practices seen across Asia (Momin, 1975). Geographical isolation and entrenched

social structures in India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan provide fertile ground for the persistence of caste-like practices (Usman, 2017).

When examining caste in its primary form, it encompasses various hereditary systems and derived cultures, creating unjust hierarchies that constrain human development. Simon (2020) notes that history is replete with hierarchies justified by quasi-biological groupings based on inherited privilege or stigma. While contemporary societies challenge archaic notions, remnants persist in some European societies, posing intriguing parallels with South Asian caste systems.

The term 'caste' itself, derived from the Portuguese 'Casta,' adds another layer to its complexity, signifying lineage, breed, or race (Freitas, 2006). Caste presents a challenging concept, yet it has become a universally accepted lens for outsiders to view Hindu populations and for Hindus to perceive themselves. The British, in constructing the narrative of the Hindu, chose a blanket term for the diverse cultures east of the Indus, despite the richness of cultural diversity, worship, myth, and celebration (Ilaiah, 2001; Tharoor, 2017).

Caste, however, extends beyond the boundaries of South Asia, as acknowledged by scholars such as Chakravarty (2003), Sikand (2000), and Werbner (1989). While outsiders might perceive caste in terms of economic opportunities, the reality is that it serves as an accepted basis for discrimination, violence, and persecution. Anderson (2011) even links caste to economics, describing it as a societal response to market failures.

In essence, the intricate dynamics of caste systems persist as a challenge to Western understanding and remain deeply ingrained in Hindu and Muslim societies across the subcontinent. While we navigate the contours of fading cultures, the examination of caste systems emerges as an essential lens through which we can decipher the complex interplay of history, culture, and social structures in Asia and beyond.

Olcott (1944) delves into the ancient roots of the system, referring to it as the "Varna" system, a concept that extended its influence on the region of Arakan. Originating in the early Vedic era, the Varna system is often described as a "tribal organisation" with roots reaching back 2,000 to 3,500 years, marking it as one of the most enduring legacies in South Asian life (Sharma, 2005; Bidner and Eswaran, 2015). The hereditary nature of caste, intricately tied to occupation, underscores its enduring presence in the modern-day landscape of South Asia.

Caste is not merely a static social structure but a dynamic force that significantly influences the lives of individuals. Endogamy, where marriage is primarily confined within the caste, and a clearly defined hierarchy between castes characterise this system (Anjum, 2011). However, one facet that often remains less discussed is the vulnerability of women within the caste system, becoming targets for those in more powerful positions, acting as guardians of social order and authority (Diwakar, 2020). Many societies are immune to the overt use of violence against women through caste, simply based on their historical societal position.

The development of caste is traced back to early Buddhist times through Brahmanism, dividing society into four castes known as "attu vanna": priests, warriors, traders, and laborers, with the outcastes or "Sudra" residing outside this structure (UNESCO, 1968). Despite the less-explored connection between Buddhism and caste, remnants of this heritage persist in Buddhist practices across diverse regions, from Sri Lanka and Tibet to Japanese Buddhism and Tantric practices in Nepal (Allen, 2000). Burmese Theravada Buddhism, as discussed by Spiro (1982), transformed significantly to maintain popularity, adopting a ruling system that aligns with caste-like structures. Although Buddhism did not endorse caste promotion, scholars like Conze (1951), Spiro (1982), and Allen (2000) argue that monks form a Buddhist elite, aligning themselves with ruling systems that vary only in their chosen strictness.

The embedded nature of caste within groups or families, as highlighted by Bidner and Eswaran (2015), underscores its internal perpetuation despite broader religious and social contexts. The family's heritage is closely linked to caste, with skills passed down from fathers and mothers, creating a shared repository of occupational knowledge. In the past, occupational activities of families were communal, with men and women jointly adopting complementary skills that contributed to the family's income.

Beyond the economic and marital dimensions of caste described by early scholars, Human Rights Watch (HRW) sheds light on the darker aspects of the caste system. Suppression, imposed hierarchy, and extreme forms of violence, including rape and slavery, are identified as critical components of caste systems (HRW, 1998). A comprehensive study by HRW reveals the prevalence of rape, particularly in rural areas among lower castes, emphasising the systemic and violent aspects that persist within this deeply entrenched social structure. As we navigate the complexities of caste, it becomes imperative to recognise its multifaceted impact on individuals, families, and communities, prompting a critical examination of the societal structures that perpetuate inequality and discrimination.

2.4   Conclusion

In this chapter, the unfolding exploration of Rohingya culture illuminated their heritage and the historical trajectory of Rohingya Muslims in Arakan. The ongoing ethnic turmoil in Myanmar over the decades has driven questions about the Rohingya's place as an ethnic minority in the country's multi-ethnic landscape. The disconnection between official recognition and self-identification in Myanmar's ethnic identity, coupled with experiences of acceptance and persecution, hinted at the Rohingya's ability to navigate alternative realities,

possibly rooted in their Sufi heritage. These reflections set the stage for further inquiries into Rohingya identity, belonging, language, homeland, and the unique challenges of researching with oral communities in the Empirical Chapters.

The examination delved into theoretical discussions, unravelling the intricate dynamics of self-identification based on religious beliefs, family ties, and social connections. Parallels were drawn with Caste across South Asia. At the same time, global analogues like Sundra (Outsiders or Outcasts) in the Arab world, Badahari and Safarish in Muslim communities, Guanxi in China, Yongo in Korea, and Blat among Russians strengthened the comparative analysis. This underscored the universal challenges inherent in navigating societal structures and accepting one's position across diverse cultural landscapes.

The influence of Indian heritage and social stratification systems in the Burma region, often overlooked, was highlighted. Collis (1985) pointed out that geography links the Rohingya more closely to India than to Burma, emphasising the region's character as essentially Indian rather than Burmese. The adoption of Hindu prejudices by the Arakanese further reinforced social stratification, prompting a deeper investigation into the context of Caste aligning with patterns in other South Asian Muslim contexts.

The interconnectedness between regions was emphasised through historical, geographical, ethnological, and cultural influences, referencing Arakan as Greater Chittagong and Chittagong as Greater Arakan, along with the heritage of Mrauk-U. The rich and diverse ancestry of Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine, primarily noted as a Sufi-infused Sunni Muslim sect, raised questions about Sufi-Sunni identity and its link to Rohingya identity. This also gives cause for focus in the Empirical chapters. Can we determine the Rohingya as an ethnic group or a sub-set of Muslims from Burma. The significance of the Rohingya language, a variant of Chittagonian primarily transmitted orally, was highlighted, leading to the adoption

of the Yarning method, an inquiry through shared stories, as a central research approach. We can see how language is an important identifier for any group and importantly in the research we can see how the Rohingya are using their language. While they are developing text which indicates a strengthening of their ICH, the vast majority of the Rohingya remain oral traditionalists.

The prominence of the term 'Rohingya' in the 1950s, especially in the context of human rights abuses post-Burma's independence, prompted a critical examination of the role of humanitarians in shaping Rohingya ethnic narratives. Insights into the global displacement of the Rohingya shifted the focus from refugees in Bangladesh to understanding Stateless Rohingya in Pakistan or resettled generations in places like Ireland, questioning the influence of humanitarian efforts on their ethnic identity in displacement.

This chapter identified key areas and gaps within the literature critical to the thesis and research questions. Questions surrounding Rohingya self-identification, the significance of being Rohingya, and the merging of global Muslim arrival stories into a unified Rohingya ethnicity have been prominent. Questions about the unique aspect of being a "Sunni-Sufi" and the role of humanitarians in constructing a Rohingya identity were also highlighted. The social construction of Caste or analogous systems globally and their contribution to social exclusion were examined but need further understanding within the Rohingya context. Finally, the role of oral traditions and language in Rohingya identity, while requiring further exploration, emerged as a justifiable area to direct the research approach towards the Yarning method.

3   Chapter Three: The Many Layers of Cultural Heritage

3.1   Chapter Introduction

Chapter 3 of this Thesis embarks on a multifaceted exploration of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), aiming to challenge the prevalent perception of cultural heritage as a static entity. To dismantle this notion, I begin by delving into the intricate web of literature surrounding heritage, emphasising its dynamic nature, and critiquing the misleading characterisation of intangibility. Numerous insights underscore the subjectivity inherent in cultural heritage interpretation, revealing a kaleidoscope of diverse perspectives as individuals consider heritage as identity and traverse heritage sites.

Steering away from Eurocentric heritage theories, this chapter immerses itself in the discourse on ICH, conceptualising it as a vehicle designed to foster cultural diversity. I assert that ICH encompasses all immaterial expressions of culture, serving as a vibrant testament to the expansive array of humanity's living heritage. In this context, the exploration delves into the literature on language and oral traditions, unveiling the intersectionality of linguistic diversity and cultural identity. A focal point emerges as I explore the value of languages such as Rohingya or the overlapping Chittagonian language, prompting a probing question: what significance does language hold in the realms of heritage and belonging?

The narrative transitions to examining the literature on oral and cultural traditions, spotlighting life cycle rituals that include rites associated with births, weddings, coming of age, burial ceremonies, and traditional healing practices. This holistic approach underscores the interconnectedness of these traditions with intangible cultural heritage, forming a rich text woven with the threads of human experience.

The exploration further extends to the literature on sacred heritage, elucidating the profound connections individuals forge with cultural heritage through geographical ties and societal

foundations inherited from their ancestors. The chapter culminates in a journey into the literature surrounding the complex topics of myth and ritual—two integral facets woven into the very fabric of cultural heritage. As we navigate this intellectual journey, it becomes increasingly evident that heritage, in its intangible dimensions, is not merely a static archive of the past; instead, it unfolds as a dynamic, ever-evolving process intricately intertwined with the diverse threads of human experience, identity and way of life.

3.2   Intangible Cultural Heritage

Federico Lenzerini (2011) contends that the term "intangible" in cultural heritage signifies a vehicle for fostering cultural diversity, encapsulating all immaterial facets of culture that mirror the vast spectrum of humanity's living heritage. Building on this perspective, Smith (2006) posits that, fundamentally, all heritage is intangible, rooted in the dynamic process of ascribing meaning to heritage places or events throughout their identification, definition, management, exhibition, visitation, or observation. Gisil (2004) critiques our contemporary approach to material reality, describing it as limited, constricting, confused, and perilous, with these tendencies becoming increasingly invasive and pervasive in our lives, posing a threat to our existence. Gisil (2004) also traces this danger through Western European history, highlighting shifts in perspectives on the relations between the tangible and intangible, the spiritual and the physical.

Aristotle's belief that the soul encompasses all things and that knowledge unites us with the known is not dismissed as archaic foolishness but is acknowledged as a nuanced perspective (Shields, 2020). This historical context sets the stage for a deeper exploration of the World Heritage Convention (WHC), which, since its establishment in 1972, has significantly influenced national and international cultural heritage policies and practices (Smith and

Akagawa, 2009). However, critiques of the WHC abound, with concerns raised about its Western European approach that introduced the notion of the "shared heritage of humanity" or universal value of natural and cultural heritage (Byrne, 1991; Sullivan, 2004; Keough, 2011).

Keough (2011) argues that UNESCO's involvement in heritage sites through the World Heritage program may have inadvertently contributed to economic and political challenges during conservation efforts and human rights advocacy. The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Paris aimed to rectify these issues by bringing greater cultural heritage relevance to indigenous and traditional communities globally, particularly in Asia, Africa, and South America (Smith and Akagawa, 2009). Under the Convention, intangible heritage is defined as the spiritual and social cultural elements transferred through generations, providing communities with a sense of continuity and identity (art. 2). However, the UNESCO approach to tangible heritage reveals concealed difficulties, such as states exploiting power to marginalise cultural groups for political or religious goals, engaging in practices challenging human rights (Kurin, 2004).

Konach (2015) identifies institutionalisation as a fundamental issue in the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Keogh (2011) laments UNESCO's erosion of its once-solid foundations, suggesting that bureaucracy and external influences have weakened its principles and priorities. Brown (2005) suggests that ICH may also be described as a "performative" expression of culture, and is transformed into a highly politicised commodity. As stated by Smith (2006 p23), when focusing on heritage,

> *"Almost inevitably it is the grand and great and 'good' that were chosen, to 'remind' the public about the values and sensibilities that should be saved or preserved as representative of patriotic American and European national identities. Even when it is the 'bad' that is being preserved, it is very often the exceptionally 'tragic' event that is*

commemorated, rather than unpleasantness that is more mundane or reflective of the general inequalities of human experiences. The very idea of monumentality – drawing on a sense of the inevitability and desirability of inheritance, of grand scale and of aesthetic taste – derives ultimately from ruling and upper middle-class experience."

In contemporary parlance, ICH eludes a singular definition, transcending narrow confines to encapsulate the rich tapestry of a community's ancestral knowledge and living heritage. This expansive term encompasses natural, spiritual, artistic, and man-made elements, manifesting in spaces, places, items, activities, traditional practices, and an intrinsic sense of place. Despite its outward appearance of being all-encompassing and holistic, the operational approach adopted by UNESCO reflects a decidedly top-down perspective.

UNESCO's emphasis on crafting a catalogue of 'cultures' unwittingly aligns with a reductionist paradigm reminiscent of early anthropological methodologies. In this process, cultures are systematically distilled into quantifiable components, inadvertently overlooking the dynamic, interconnected nature that defines them. Cultures are, inherently, more than the mere sum of their identifiable parts. While seemingly systematic, the conceptual reliance on lists and inventories introduces reductionism into the preservation framework and gives rise to significant issues.

One notable consequence of this approach is the legal protection challenges it poses for ICH. As observed by Konach (2015), the imperative for identification, description, and inventorying may induce a partial shift from "allographic" to "autographic" characteristics within an intangible culture. In simpler terms, the emphasis on documentation and categorisation risks tilting the balance from communal shared attributes towards recorded, individualistic forms.

In the words of Konach (2015), "the requirement of identification, describing, and making inventories can lead to a partial loss of its 'allographic' characteristics in favour of recorded 'autographic' forms." This insight serves as a poignant reminder of the nuanced challenges inherent in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. It underscores the need for a preservation approach that acknowledges the richness of diverse cultural expressions and strives to strike a delicate balance between documentation and the preservation of the communal essence that defines the vitality of these living traditions.

Arizpe (2004) optimistically envisions the UNESCO-led emphasis on Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) as a catalyst for shaping a new 'cosmoculture'—a global perspective reflecting the constant evolution of human creation and communication. However, she acknowledges the potential challenges in the delicate relationship between ICH and cultural diversity. Emphasising the profound interconnection between tangible and intangible dimensions, Arizpe (2004) contends that all human achievements derive from the realm of Intangible Cultural Heritage, emphasising that tangible heritage holds little value without the narrative and intangible elements that give it meaning.

In contrast, Smith & Campbell (2017) view the term "Intangible Heritage" as a tautology, asserting that it introduces complexities in negotiating heritage value and exacerbates the dichotomy between tangible and intangible heritage concepts. Smith (2006) disrupts the established heritage discourse by illustrating how the term "intangible heritage" challenges the authorised heritage discourse. The ambiguity associated with intangible "value," as discussed by Smith & Campbell (2017), further complicates the discourse, contrasting it with the more concrete and legitimate values attributed to tangible heritage.

Carman (1996) offers a nuanced perspective on valuing heritage, proposing a process where value emerges through social arrangements and preferences. While this method aligns well

with tangible heritage, questions arise regarding its application to intangible value. Carman (1996) highlights the role of researchers, particularly in archaeology, in bringing attention to intangible heritage. The significance of intangible heritage becomes apparent as questions are raised about the places where values are ascribed, emphasising their importance to local communities and projecting this significance outward.

Graham (2002) introduces a critical argument by suggesting that heritage, when operationalised in societies, can limit the notion of multiculturalism and complicate the relationship between place and identity. Mountcastle (2010) notes the significant power inherent in heritage discourse, highlighting that as a powerful actor, UNESCO plays a crucial role in shaping the narratives of groups, ethnicities, and nations. However, Hafstein (2009) counters this perception, arguing that despite the apparent power of UNESCO, its impact in the field is limited and its activities constrained. These perspectives collectively contribute to a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted dynamics within the discourse on Intangible Cultural Heritage.

UNESCO's approach to heritage is primarily characterised by the compilation of lists, serving as a mechanism for selection and public display. Hafstein (2009) critically evaluates this approach, asserting that UNESCO positions ICH as a tool for channelling wealth into cultural practices. He contends that this presentation of ICH is elitist and inherently hierarchical, emphasising a political perspective over an anthropological one. Consequently, UNESCO's emphasis on listing may inadvertently encourage governments to assert the cultural richness of their heritage for self-flattery, potentially diverting attention from the authentic value and purpose of heritage. This inclination could also lead to neglecting the ICH belonging to less influential minority groups from the state's viewpoint.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) echoes a similar concern, highlighting how cultural heritage agencies can transform spiritually significant local locations into mere tourist destinations. Poulios (2014) criticises the tendency of heritage conservation professionals to marginalise local communities, excluding them from the management of their own heritage stories. He advocates for a community-based approach that acknowledges the creators of heritage sites as an integral part of the heritage, distinct from other groups involved in protecting and utilising heritage.

Carman (2018) acknowledges a positive shift in heritage agencies towards community-based approaches, contributing to the concept of heritage sustainability. However, he emphasises that UNESCO's reliance on lists risks decontextualising heritage, diminishing the power and value of heritage as owned and used by the community. Carman (2018) stresses that this is not merely a call for organisations to be more inclusive; instead, there is a need to transition from authoritative roles to facilitative ones.

Ablett and Dyer (2009) advocate for a transformative shift from a monologic to a dialogic approach in heritage, emphasising a rights-based perspective. While UNESCO's approach is viewed positively by some for its protection of those openly expressing their heritage, Oman (2010) highlights its limitations, particularly for minorities such as refugees, indigenous populations, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), or stateless individuals. Arendt's (2005) argument about the universalism of rights tied to citizenship and heritage underscores the complexity of the relationship between heritage, citizenship, and human rights. Cultural rights, minority rights, and refugee rights, nested within human rights, are intricately linked to citizenship and recognition. Oman (2010) acknowledges the United Nations' power and resources but questions persist about the willingness to wield such authority effectively. This

intersection of heritage, citizenship, and human rights notes the intricate and multifaceted nature of UNESCO's role in safeguarding diverse cultural legacies.

In challenging conventional notions of cultural heritage, archaeologists like Wengrow (2010) argue against the skewed emphasis on the physical built environment, often centred on visions of Imperial Rome, the Aztec Empire, or Ancient Greece. Wengrow posits that the essential elements of civilised society—evolution, ingenuity, and innovation—were born not in towering ruins but in the small networks of prehistoric societies long before the advent of writing.

Anthropologist Mark Dyble (2015) sheds light on the evolutionary advantage of sexual equality in early human societies. He suggests that equality fostered broader social networks, increased innovation, and facilitated the development of cultural objects through cooperation between unrelated individuals. Wengrow (2010) reinforces this perspective, highlighting critical components of civilisation, such as navigation, the sail, metallurgy, and innovations stemming from women's heritage with plants, food, or needlework.

In Myanmar, we see numerous forms of ICH that are links between women and nature that have a depth of heritage value. Thanaka, for example, is a distinctive feature of Myanmar's cultural landscape, it is more than just a cosmetic; it is a living heritage that threads through the daily lives of Burmese women, encapsulating centuries of tradition, identity, and social significance. This pale yellow paste, derived from the bark of the Thanaka tree (principally from species such as *Limonia acidissima*), is not only valued for its cooling, sun-protective, and aesthetic properties but also serves as a cultural emblem, symbolising purity, beauty, and ethnic identity (Green, 2019).

The history of Thanaka use in Myanmar stretches back over 2,000 years, and its application is a ritual passed down from mother to daughter, a rite of passage that initiates young girls into a

tradition steeped in the values of their ancestors. The patterns, ranging from simple smears to elaborate designs, are more than mere adornment; they are a language of cultural expression, each stroke imbued with meaning and tradition. In Burmese society, Thanaka is more than a beauty product; it is a marker of cultural identity and social cohesion among women's groups. It transcends social boundaries, being used by women and girls across different ethnicities, regions, and social strata in Myanmar. This widespread use highlights Thanaka's role in fostering a sense of belonging and community among Burmese women, serving as a tangible link to their heritage and a daily ritual that reinforces social bonds (Myint, 2018).

The significance of Thanaka extends beyond its cultural and aesthetic values; it embodies the principles of sustainability and harmony with nature that are intrinsic to the cultural way of life for Women in Myanmar. The sustainable harvesting of Thanaka, which involves grinding the tree's bark into a paste, reflects a deep respect for the natural environment and a commitment to preserving it for future generations (Kyaw, 2017).

Recognising the profound cultural importance of Thanaka, efforts have been made to safeguard this tradition for posterity on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage. Such recognition by UNESCO would not only honour this ancient tradition but also contribute to its preservation by raising awareness of its cultural value and the need to protect the natural resources that sustain it while also recognising a significant element of Women's ICH. The story of Thanaka is a testament to the enduring strength of cultural traditions and their role in shaping identity and community (UNESCO, n.d).

Within the heritage narrative developed in archaeology, women's ICH often plays a seemingly minor role. Wengrow (2010) critiques the crude deception in determining the importance and origins of heritage, noting that a civilisation's perceived historical significance is disproportionately linked to the size of its remnants. In archaeology, the theory of 'differential

preservation' recognises that some elements endure while others decay. Beck and Head (1990) provoke thought by questioning what the world's story might look like if rewritten by women from the perspective of women's archaeology. The skewed representation of women's cultural heritage, as Wengrow (2010) suggests, leans in favour of those who know how to wield its influence most effectively. This underscores the importance of adopting a more inclusive and diverse perspective in narrating and preserving cultural legacies.

ICH is Our Way of Life

The concept of *'cultural areas,'* as delineated by anthropologists and geographers today, can be traced back to the work of Ratzel (1844-1904), who introduced the *Kulturkreise or cultural circles*. Ratzel explored the distinct cultures and heritage of various regions, considering them *"as old as mankind."* This cultural area concept, rooted in the European perception of global history and heritage, finds its origin in Ratzel's influential ideas (Brown, 2001).

In the early 19th century, French geographer Paul Vidal de la Blache further developed a related concept known as *"genre de vie" or "the way of life."* This concept delved into the distinctive living patterns characterising individual cultures and their livelihoods (Hilkovitch & Filkerson, 2006). The early heritage discourse focused primarily on intangible elements as reflections of past power dynamics (Lloyd, 2009). While ICH has become a critical tool in peacebuilding and settlement, recognition of its role in reintegration was limited until the post-World War II era, marked by the emergence of the International Committee of Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC) and the UN agency UNESCO (UNESCO, 2018).

The establishment of UNESCO marked global acknowledgement of the importance of education and science, recognising cultural heritage as a pivotal tool for peacebuilding, reconstruction, and human integration (UNESCO, 2018). Unlike tangible heritage, which can be restored or rebuilt, essential elements of ICH related to memories, oral traditions, artistic

expressions, social practices, rituals, festive events, music and instruments, local knowledge, and traditional crafts may not be easily preserved (UNESCO, 2011).

However, the capacity to maintain heritage and promote a way of life often lies with those in positions of power. Unfortunately, less powerful minorities, particularly women and girls, frequently find their cultural rights denied (Ekern et al., 2012). Within the humanitarian sphere, there is a growing acknowledgement of the empowerment that comes from allowing women, the vulnerable, and the powerless to voice their own cultural narratives (Ekern et al., 2012; Foucault, 1997). The heritage discourse, often privileging the powerful, has inadvertently contributed to a hegemonic construction of place. Recognising and rectifying this imbalance is crucial for fostering inclusivity and a more equitable representation of diverse cultural narratives. Moreover, as Ekern et al. (2012: 218) note;

> *By appearing as 'universal' and 'fundamental' morals, the spread of human rights has engendered much controversy about how a set of rules for state behaviour put in written form by a committee of mostly 'Western' men …*

Anthropology and history stand as pivotal academic disciplines shaping our perceptions of the past (Bond and Gilliam, 1994). Notably, they play a crucial role not only in historical and anthropological frameworks but also in guiding cultural engagement within humanitarian responses and international development interventions. Fundamentally, these disciplines are designed to comprehend people's culture, heritage, and ways of living, leveraging this knowledge to alleviate suffering and enhance the long-term well-being of individuals and communities. Medical anthropologist Stéphanie Larchanche (2020) accentuates the challenges inherent in providing assistance when the cultural and linguistic knowledge of the intended beneficiaries is overlooked.

3.3   Language and Oral Traditions

British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein astutely remarked, 'The limits of my language mean the limits of my world' (1922, as quoted by Bayer 1984). Within this section, an exploration of the literature on language and oral traditions beckons, raising the fundamental question: Do the languages we speak and the oral traditions we share shape how we think, remember, value, and perceive our ICH? Kipling (1923) evocatively likened words to the most potent drug wielded by humankind.

The Whorfian hypothesis, introduced by Whorf (1956), posits that language significantly shapes human thoughts and behaviours. Brown (1986) and Ozgen (2004) conducted subsequent cross-cultural comparisons supporting the notion of linguistic relativity, affirming the profound cognitive impact of language among speakers. However, Noam Chomsky (1965) challenged this perspective, proposing a universalist theory of language. Chomsky contends that languages share the same core structure, hard-wired into the brain with a limited set of rules, dismissing the cognitive effects of language based on linguistic structure. Some linguistic researchers go further, asserting the independence of thought and language, suggesting that humans use language as a communication tool while thinking in a meta-language beyond any natural language (Pinker, 2007).

A recent study by Regler & Xu (2017:11) rigorously tested Whorf's hypothesis, concluding with two key tiers. Firstly, all humans perceive things as they are, and secondly, language structures influence how we uniquely classify things. Consequently, diverse languages lead to distinct worldviews by shaping perception and collective thinking modes. This underscores the

inseparable link between language and culture, giving rise to numerous cultural expressions (Chen & Bond, 2010). Various studies emphasise how language primes cultural norms related to personality, values, and emotional expressions (Bond, 1983; Matsumoto & Assar, 1992; Ramírez-Esparza et al., 2006). These findings suggest that language significantly shapes cognitive harmony, especially in the context of collective action versus individualism. Additionally, learning a new language entails encoding new cultural systems associated with that language, resulting in varied perspectives and behaviours.

Chen, English & Peng (2006) posit that East Asians exhibit heightened dialectical thinking, leading to more contextualised self-views. They elaborate on the less defined conceptual self among East Asians, evident in the tendency to rate oneself in traits. Indigenous cultural groups, such as the Hopi people, perceive time and space differently, with no clear distinction between past and present but rather a continuous flow (Kluckhohn & Leighton, 1951). Similarly, the Navajo people display little emphasis on developing tenses and highlighting different types of activities.

Australian Aboriginal people perceive time as a continuum, emphasising a specific creation time known as the "Dreamtime" (Chatwin, 1988). This cultural perspective reflects the profound influence of language on shaping not only temporal concepts but also broader cultural narratives. Hou & Beiser (2006) underscore the crucial role of language in navigating societal integration, highlighting the experiences of resettled refugees in Canada. Their study tracked a group with no English language skills, revealing that only 17% spoke English well after two years, 67% had an average understanding, and 16% still spoke no English. Hou & Beiser (2006) linked language acquisition to ethnic identity, suggesting that those with stronger ethnic ties were less inclined to learn the local language. Interestingly, individuals who distanced

themselves from their ethnocultural background exhibited improved language skills and lower levels of depression.

In contrast, Jetten et al. (2018) offer a positive perspective on immigrants maintaining connections to their language, cultural heritage, and traditional practices. In their longitudinal social psychology research, Jetten demonstrates that such connections have a lasting positive effect, particularly in overcoming health and mobility challenges associated with ageing in a foreign country where the local language is not the first language.

The expressive capacity of language, particularly in conveying emotions, holds crucial significance, as emphasised by anthropologist Robert Levy (1973) in his study on Tahitians. Levy noted that Tahitians faced challenges expressing grief, a phenomenon he termed *"hypo-cognition"* in cognitive linguistics. Hypo-cognition refers to the absence of words for certain cognitive and linguistic representations, hindering the communication of specific concepts. This concept not only underscores the limitations of language but also sheds light on how new terms emerge, enabling individuals to articulate their stories and emotions in their own language.

The multicultural perspective challenges the conventional notion of a homogeneous cultural and linguistic identity within a nation. As Kyaw (2015) described, Southeast Asia has predominantly favoured the traditional concept of monolingual nations despite its diverse linguistic landscape. Globalisation has induced rapid regional changes, underscoring the intricate interplay between language, scientific knowledge, and economic development. For instance, Singapore and Malaysia have adopted English as a critical language of instruction, recognising its necessity for staying abreast of international research.

In Myanmar, the complex sociolinguistic heritage presents challenges to developing a national identity. English was the sole compulsory foreign language during the colonial period (Aye

K.K. and Sercombe, 2014), contributing to today's linguistic diversity. Myanmar, with its 135 ethnic groups, grapples with language-related issues, and the lack of comprehensive knowledge about its languages and dialects complicates the creation of a unified "Myanmar-ness." The struggle to balance linguistic diversity and national identity persists in the face of evolving global dynamics (Hock and Suryadinata, 2007).

Oral Traditions

Oral traditions are diverse forms of human communication that function as channels for receiving, preserving, stories and transmitting knowledge, art, ideas, and cultural material (Vansina, 1985). [14] Nietzsche (1878) contends that all symbolism finds its origin in imitating gestures, asserting that the human inclination to move in rhythm with others predates language. Drawing on his observations within suppressive Christian societies, he provocatively suggests that without expressions like dance, our ability to comprehend the goodness in life diminishes, and our sensory awareness becomes dull to our surroundings. Nietzsche's inquiry resonates throughout his works: *where are the books that teach us to dance?* He draws on the insights of philosopher Heraclitus, concluding that, as a collective, we remain largely unknown to ourselves (Acampora, 2015).

Helen Thomas (2003), an expert in dance and culture, illuminates the insufficient understanding of the intricate relationship between the body and culture. She underscores its connection to the formation of values and the cultivation of sensory awareness. Thomas

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[14] Vansina, Jan: *Oral Tradition as History* (1985), reported statements from present generation which "specifies that the message must be oral statements spoken, sung or called out on musical instruments only"; "There must be transmission by word of mouth over at least a generation". He points out, "Our definition is a working definition for the use of historians. Sociologists, linguists or scholars of the verbal arts propose their own, which in, e.g., sociology, stresses common knowledge. In linguistics, features that distinguish the language from common dialogue (linguists), and in the verbal arts features of form and content that define art (folklorists)."

observes that dancing is often overlooked in academic and cultural studies, where Western forms of artistic expression, such as film, literature, and mass media, take precedence over the narrative conveyed through rhythmic movement. Despite being educational tools fostering awareness and perceptual skills, she argues that these forms of expression are seldom accorded more than fleeting attention.

Drawing from various case studies, Thomas demonstrates that dancing serves as a form of cultural knowledge conveyed through the "bodily endeavours" of those engaged in the act rather than through verbal articulation (Thomas, 2003:215). Historically, traditional expressions, categorised as activities displayed by the robust, served as mechanisms for processing experiences, managing anger, and addressing the need for revenge (Nietzsche, 1878). European colonial powers, seeking to assert dominance, endeavoured to suppress the traditions of indigenous cultures and often stigmatised these practices as primitive. This suppression was integral to the colonial "civilising" process, with contemporary scholars highlighting the political and moral challenges these cultural practices posed to the establishment (Comaroff, 1985; Schechner, 1990; Udall, 1992; Reed, 1998).

Early anthropologists diligently recorded a myriad of traditional expressions, ranging from life cycle rituals such as births, weddings, and coming-of-age ceremonies to profound practices like burial rituals and traditional healing. However, the accounts of these expressions faced scepticism and discrediting from both academia and Western media (Shankman, 2009). A shift in contemporary scientific understanding, as illustrated by Llinas (2006), has introduced a new perspective on these cultural expressions. Llinas emphasises the role of bodily movements in brain development, underscoring their integral contribution to establishing neuromuscular coordination. Research indicates that the body stores memories of movements as emotional tags, recalling them when mobilising the same movements.

In refugee communities, the preservation of artistic expressions assumes great significance but is often only documented in grey literature, reports, and small-scale studies. For example, the Burundian population venerates the *"dance of the royal drum"* as a vital aspect of their cultural identity. Despite UNESCO's acknowledgement of this artistic expression, the agency does not actively contribute to preserving this valuable tradition among the displaced (UNESCO, 2014). The Burundian people harness the spirit of dance in various gatherings, fostering community unity and providing a platform to celebrate their heritage.

Reports on Rohingya and Syrian refugees shed light on the adverse effects of suppressing cultural expressions, including dance, music, and song (Áañt [bú-on] in Rohingya and Dabke in Arabic). The lack of space for performing cultural practices exacerbates mental health issues among these communities (Anera, 2020).

Building on this, Schechner (1990) and Udall (1992) extensively document the impact of European and American colonial rule on the traditional practices of diverse communities, ranging from the Javanese to the Hopi Indians. They elucidate how the sophisticated traditional practices of these communities underwent transformation through colonial interpretation, conveyed through mediums like photography, sketches, and paintings—the artistic expressions of the colonial world. Additionally, they highlight the intrusive role of colonial and post-colonial spectators who often deemed one performance version as "true" while dismissing others as corrupted. The scholars emphasise that those documenting traditions frequently establish normative expectations, perpetuating a form of colonial thinking (Schechner, 1990; Udall, 1992; Reed, 1998).

Ondaatje's poem *"Last Ink"* eloquently underscores the imperative to preserve the human experience through art, likening it to the instinctive desire to die in a lover's arms. In contexts marked by profound emotions stemming from conflict, violence, and loss, these sentiments

often find expression through intangible cultural and heritage manifestations. In oral-based communities, where outsiders predominantly document narratives and perceived culture, there is a historical precedent for misinterpretation of subtle signs and nuances, which hold intrinsic value for the community's moral and ethical framework (Nunn, 2018). The oral expressions encapsulate the community's heritage and serve as a repository of narratives seldom adequately documented. Conventional engagement methods grounded in Western-centric scientific paradigms often fall short of capturing the essence of these oral-based community narratives. Attempts by others to delineate between truth and apocryphal may inadvertently overshadow the community's nuanced self-representation and identity definition (Carman, 2011).

Contrary to the misconception that traditional communities represent failed attempts at modernity, they present distinct and diverse ways of perceiving and expressing the world, each reflecting a unique worldview (Davis, 2007). Nunn (2018) underscores how oral-based communities serve as repositories of positive, meaningful knowledge sharing and learning from the past, emphasising the risk of losing critical biological and cultural diversity elements inherent in the human spirit. Contemporary discussions on oral traditions, traditional knowledge, and cultural heritage have expanded to encompass the socially complex intangible manifestations of the way of life and learning among oral-based or traditional communities (Bouchenaki, 2003; Smith and Akagawa, 2009; Taylor and Lennon, 2012). Multiple perspectives now contribute to conversations about the heritage of oral-based societies.

However, the ownership and direction of the narrative are often wielded as tools of power, particularly within state-building contexts. Jenkins (2014) elucidates how heritage narratives of minorities are manipulated to shape or reconstruct entire societies. She argues that the ownership of heritage stories plays a pivotal role in nation-building, determining which community memories, stories, and activities become integral to the national identity while

others fade into obscurity. The challenge for oral-based minorities often lies in overcoming the lack of written evidence for their past, rendering them susceptible to discredit (Nunn, 2018).

Can individuals entrenched in a Western written mindset truly fathom the depth of meaning embedded in stories passed down through generations within oral-based communities? Couch (1989) raises doubts about the capability of oral technology to preserve precise and accurate information over time, a scepticism shared by many students of orality. Cooke (1990) delves into a comparative analysis of education systems, contrasting the development of the Western scientific psyche with the lifelong learning of the traditional Yolngu people in Northern Australia. The Western mathematical mind, Cooke notes, is conditioned to separate itself from nature and spirit, engaging with mathematically and scientifically constructed concepts. In contrast, the Yolngu psyche emphasises integration with the land, nature, and the spirit world. Rather than exploring from an external standpoint, the Yolngu people embrace a holistic approach, learning from within the dynamic, living world that surrounds them and sharing their knowledge through stories, songs, Yarns, dances, and more (Cooke, 1990).

Folklorist and linguist Gísli Sigurðsson (2004) suggests that students must reconsider their perspectives and derive new insights from the wealth of information embedded in living oral societies, all while framing innovative questions based on the limitations of oral resources. Over centuries, ethnographers from Western scientific backgrounds have grappled with understanding indigenous, traditional, or native communities through diverse forms of engagement (Vermeulen, 2008). This history reveals a consistent tendency among Westerners to dismiss oral communities' subtle communications and teachings. In *"A Land of Plenty,"* Cathcart (2013:1) uncovers a persistent strain of white imperialists who, despite their desire to showcase superior knowledge, struggle to survive and comprehend the environments of others. Numerous historical accounts highlight colonisers' disregard for local knowledge and

traditional community practices (Blue et al., 2001). Berger (1972) articulates, "the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled," emphasising the oversimplified view that things are either simple or complex, neglecting the depth and mysteries inherent in reality.

To challenge perceived fallacies and myths, scholars have explored avenues such as "geomythology." Mayor (2004a:1) defines geomythology as the study of etiological oral traditions created by pre-scientific cultures to explain geological phenomena poetically and mythologically. Addressing the Earth's geological origins, Vitalino (1974) draws parallels between scientific theories and etiological geo-myths, attempting to explain observed mysterious facts. Nunn and Reid (2016) conducted a study on transgenerational knowledge across 21 coastal locations along the Australian coastline. The stories shared by communities were empirically validated by geological surveys, aligning with evidence of a postglacial sea-level rise over 7000 years prior. This exploration suggests the remarkable longevity of oral traditions, hinting at the existence of similar records in cultures worldwide (Nunn and Reid, 2016).

Globally, resource managers, researchers, and governments are increasingly recognising the value of engaging oral-based traditional communities and tapping into their knowledge across diverse fields such as ecology, waste and wildlife management, as well as fire and aquatic environment management (Braithwaite, 1996; Butts, 2009; Huffman, 2013). This oral knowledge, far from being isolated, is deeply embedded and reinforced through various activities and traditions.

In a broader cultural context, the sentiments of the bhakti traditional Indian oral poet Kabir resonate powerfully. According to Kabir, listening goes beyond the mere reception of words; it entails a living engagement of the body, a wholehearted presence that contrasts with the

ethereal nature of mere words and ideas. Expressing his disapproval of those attempting to document his oral tradition, Kabir eloquently states:

> *I talk of what I've seen with my own eyes; you talk of what's written on paper. How can your mind and mine ever get together?* (cited by Hess, 2015)

Kabir, revered by many Dalits (often referred to as the 'untouchables'), resonated with those who lacked access to formal education due to their low-caste treatment in society. With a poignant blend of social criticism, Kabir poetically conveyed observations on life, caste prejudices, religious sectarianism, and the prevailing hatred of his time. Through oral means, he delved into discussions about the mind and body, urging people to awaken and cultivate consciousness (Winand, 2000).

An important consideration, likely concurred by anthropologists and folklorists, is that rarely is a society purely oral or purely literate among oral societies (Rosenberg, 1987). Many ancient societies incorporated various written methods to transmit knowledge. For instance, Marshack (1972) revealed how observational knowledge and symbols of lunar cycles led to the creation of the calendar over 30,000 years ago, serving as a cornerstone for complex social structures. While contemporary society interprets this as mathematics, Cooke (1990) explored the Yolngu communities' writing system, examining the message stick used for cross-tribal communication. This symbol-laden stick allowed messengers to share information about upcoming events across tribal boundaries. While early observers often perceived this technique as basic mathematics in a traditional oral society, Michael Cook (1990:4) cautioned that:

> *By removing words, concepts, and structures from their Aboriginal context and putting them into a European box called 'mathematics', I have inevitably lost much of the full significance of their meaning and have certainly not done justice to the intricacy and complexity of the Yolngu world.*

Harris (1995) views oral and written text-based societies as antithetical, emphasising more differences than similarities in their ways of perceiving the world. Albert Bates Lord, a scholar of Folklore and Mythology, once characterised the written text as a disease, asserting that printed text introduces the notion of "fixed." He argued that once text dominates an oral society, its performances become reproductions rather than creations, leading to the "death of oral tradition" (Lord, 1960:137, cited by Rosenberg, 1987).

Numerous authors concur that a significant juxtaposition exists in ways of seeing and interpreting the world. The knowledge of traditional oral communities is often devalued in favour of text-based Western societies (Lord, 1960; Rosenberg, 1987; Cooke, 1990; Hess, 2015). Retaining the skills and techniques developed by oral-based communities in knowing, seeing, and sharing their world is essential (Clinton and Erland, 2003).

3.4 Sacred and Spiritual Heritage

Michel De Montaigne (1595) astutely observed, *"Nothing is so firmly believed as that which we least know."* The realm of sacred heritage, a profound and intricate subject, permeates the entire journey of human history, contributing significantly to discussions on ICH, conflict, and displacement. This section explores two foundational theologies: Buddhism, emerging in the 6th century BCE, and the inception of Islam in the 7th century CE, marking a temporal span of approximately 12 centuries between their origins. Despite their historical differences, they remain two growing global religions with a plethora of heritage, sacred and spiritual contexts to explore, contrast or compare.

But I also focus more broadly on sacred heritage, exploring literature that will shape my understanding of the subject more holistically for this thesis. How does religion and spiritual

faith shape heritage narratives? Does religion justify violence, or does it serve as a force for peace and tolerance? Is religious heritage a pawn entangled in the political machinations of power brokers? Navigating a theological stance grounded in kindness, non-violence, and truthfulness amid a world marked by destructive and inhumane acts poses a formidable challenge.

Meyer and de Witte (2013) noted that sacred heritage is a nuanced and contested field, demanding thoughtful scholarly engagement to unravel its complexities. Numerous questions persist, probing how ancient and mystical aesthetic practices intertwine with cultural heritage, shaping identity, fostering peace, or becoming focal points of conflict. What dynamics govern the selection of specific religious sites and practices? What roles do those authenticating sacred heritage play in the communities affected by conflict and displacement, and does cultural heritage really contribute to peace-building?

Meyer and de Witte (2013) introduce two pivotal processes at the intersection of heritage and religion. They delineate the *"heritagisation of religion,"* which addresses the recognition of traditions as heritage, and the *"sacralisation of heritage,"* where heritage forms acquire a powerful, authentic, and indisputable aura. Sacred sites distinguish themselves from other cultural heritage forms by holding spiritual significance for specific religious groups across time, from the past to the present (Alexopoulos, 2014). These sites, integral to worship, often bear witness to disturbance, violence, and battles waged in the pursuit of peace, statehood, or empire-building. The understanding of religious violence necessitates an examination of the religious imagination itself, as the roots of religion and human violence share an intimate connection (Bernat and Klawans, 2008).

Religious heritage gracefully straddles the fine line between the tangible and the intangible, the seen and the mystical unseen. It invites contemplation on questions of consciousness, the spirit,

temporal understanding, identity, ethics, and conflict. Furthermore, it showcases some of the world's most opulent and beautiful structures, emblematic of material wealth beyond imagination. Buehler (2016) frames sacred heritage as an integral part of the conscious exploration of our inner selves. He contends that understanding one's conscious self requires time and dedication, often facilitated by external support embodied in religions and their associated sites. The endurance of contemporary religions is intricately linked to the histories and heritage handed down by preceding generations, fostering moral sensibilities and providing pedagogical guidance for the future.

UNESCO (2022) highlights that over twenty percent of the properties on the World Heritage List are connected to religious or spiritual elements. In countries worldwide, spiritual places dominate heritage lists, irrespective of their historical significance (Alexopoulos, 2014). Many embody what ICCROM terms *"Living Heritage"* (ICCROM-CHA, 2013). Since the 2003 forum on "Living Religious Heritage," the discourse on Living Heritage has expanded, particularly concerning heritage linked to 'communities' and their enduring traditions and practices (Stovel et al., 2005). Wijesuriya (2013) defines it as places maintaining continuity of use in their original intended function with a community connection. The term "Living Heritage" also frequently denotes the continuation of traditional practices passed down through generations by skilled artisans or craftspeople (ICCROM, 2020).

From a nuanced perspective, Buddhism exists both as a philosophy and a formally organised religion. It has indelibly shaped the way of life across much of the Asian region for over 2,500 years (Silva & Chapagain, 2013; Wijesuriya, 2013). As per ICCROM (2013), Buddhist heritage stands as one of the most widespread categories in the Asian heritage landscape, encompassing archaeological sites, vibrant living temples, extensive collections of objects, and a myriad of associated traditions, practices, and festivals. Anderson (2009) situates the

significant spread of Buddhism in Asia around the third century CE, as Buddhist pilgrims traversed the southwestern routes of the Silk Roads. This period witnessed a substantial rise in South Asian Buddhist centres, resulting in culturally significant overlaps. However, understanding Buddhist heritage necessitates grappling with the principle of impermanence, even as there is a simultaneous emphasis on maintaining permanence through the preservation of heritage and the built environment, including monasteries, stupas, statues, and temples.

The Buddhist philosophy centred on change, impermanence, and immaterialism may seem at odds with international conservation ideals (Dukpa, 2002). Some view ruined Buddhist temples and stupas not merely as architectural remnants but as objects of worship and symbolic structures imbued with profound spiritual significance. To address the challenge of heritage maintenance without perceived over-investment, Wijesuriya (2013) introduces the ethical practice of *"merit-making."* This involves followers of Buddhist teachings engaging in conservation work as acts of goodwill, although it poses inherent limitations regarding the requisite skills and knowledge for the continuity of heritage in conservation practices.

Amidst the diversity of doctrine, philosophy, and cultural practices within Buddhism across different regions, the roots of Buddhist cultural heritage trace back to the collision of Europe and Asia in the ancient Gandhara Valley, present-day Pakistan (Frankopan, 2015). The development of Buddhist statues and worship sites in response to the threat from new religions in the 6th century underscores the cultural influence of "Greater Gandhara" stretching from the Indus River to the Bamiyan Valley in Afghanistan and northwards to the Hindu Kush and the Karakorum Mountains of the Western Himalaya.

Subsequently, as Islam swept across the old Gandhara, Buddhism and Islam found ways to coexist in many regions of the Indian continent and Southeast Asia. The interactions between Islam and Buddhism are as ancient as Islam itself, evident in the exchange of religious ideas

and artefacts along the Silk Road from Persia across the Asian continent (Yusuf, 2013). While documented engagements often carried political and economic motivations, Scott (1995) emphasises that negative images of one another in literature and actions coexisted with comparative images contingent on religious interpretation. For example, the influence of Buddhist teachings on Islamic madrasahs in eastern Iran illustrates the permeation of ideas across religious boundaries (Yusuf, 2013). Artisanal techniques, ranging from masonry and pottery to textiles and various crafts, also demonstrate cultural interplay across religious and royal domains, underscoring the reality that cultures rarely evolve in complete isolation.

The emergence of international concepts of Islamic heritage, despite the longstanding history of Islamic architecture, can be traced back as recently as 1978. The catalyst was the first symposium on Islamic architecture and heritage convened by the Aga Khan Foundation, which marked a pivotal moment akin to the contemporary Western heritage narrative. The symposium focused on the conception of an essential Islamic identity intertwined with the material culture of Muslim societies. At a time when Iran experienced newfound oil wealth, and Islam rose in prominence within the architectural world, the conference aimed to deliberate on Islam and its architectural identity. Aga Khan emphasised the lack of a unified stance on what an appropriate architectural idiom for Islamic societies might entail, advocating for a universal Islamic identity and culture (Holod, 1980, P.viii).

Harvey (2001), in discussions about Islamic heritage, challenges the notion of linear historical perceptions of heritage, asserting that heritage has always been shaped and appreciated contextually. He questions the perpetuation of limited geographical perspectives, noting that heritage is a product with roots in nineteenth-century Europe. Since the introduction of the heritage concept to Islam, Islamic heritage has evolved through distinct methodologies, languages, ways of knowing, and cultural boundaries. The contemporary patterns linking the

past and present in the construction of Islamic heritage exhibit diversity and nonlinearity (Rico, 2017). Shahzad Bashir (2017) suggests that in Islam, heritage gains value by maintaining continuous significance and that cultural heritage, in turn, shapes Islamic identity through textual constructs.

Feener (2017) argues that there is no singular approach to Islamic cultural heritage; it varies based on the acceptance and integration of pre-Islamic culture, resulting in a diverse and hybridised vernacular Islam worldwide. Thus, Islamic heritage is multifaceted, comprising an internationalised dimension connecting all Muslims and a local facet that exhibits significant variation in its social construction.

Bashir (2014) delves into the contested discourse within Islam, particularly regarding the core character of Islam, "Mohammad." He highlights the narratives and disagreements over historical facts that often flatten into a continuous timeline from Muhammad to the present day. Bashir underscores the dependence of religious writings on internal rules about evidence and possibility, framing them as a fusion of information and interpretation. Intriguingly, he suggests viewing Islam as a metaphorical building where words and concepts serve as basic construction materials. In contrast, the forms of the buildings reflect the worldview of the people constructing them.

Considering the critical implications of the Islamic historical context, Bashir (2017) emphasises its role in shaping the question of Islamic heritage. The largest subgroup of Muslims today, encompassing populations in Bangladesh, Western Myanmar (Rakine State), and Pakistan, shares a heritage that dates back to the arrival of Islam on the Indian subcontinent. Once spanning current national boundaries, this group reflects a diverse heritage rooted in their collective history.

Throughout history, conflicts between the Buddhist and Muslim faiths have often resulted in the destruction of each other's heritage, leading to suffering and displacement (Stovel et al., 2005). Today, a significant portion of Buddhist and Hindu heritage is situated in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, while Islamic cultural heritage is widely dispersed across the Indian continent.

Similar to Buddhism, Islam encompasses a diverse array of teachings, ranging from the various schools of theology and jurisprudence to the mystical traditions of Sufism. Sufism, considered the esoteric branch of Islam, is also perceived by some as an ancient wisdom of love predating all religions. Vaughan-Lee (2016) characterises it as the breath of human consciousness. Within Sufism, a state known as *"Fana"* involves shedding the ego, while *"Baka"* represents the state of abiding with God, akin to the concept of Nirvana in Buddhism. Baka is considered the culmination of the seeker's journey (Vaughan-Lee, 2016). The Sufis earned considerable respect within the Muslim community for their resistance against the worldliness that permeated early Islam during the Caliphate period (Hawting, 2002).

As a transformative practice, Sufism revolves around self-awareness and wisdom, opening the mind to dimensions difficult to articulate objectively. Despite the construction of physical shrines, Sufi shrines are often impermanent structures (Johnson, 2013). Much of Sufi heritage is intangible, relying heavily on oral transmission across generations (UNESCO 2003; Kurin 2004). The intentional rejection of materialism within Sufism has made many Sufi-practicing ethnic groups vulnerable minorities and susceptible to attacks by more powerful religious and ethnic majorities. For instance, the Uyghur Muslims in China and the Rohingya both follow a Sufi-inflected variation of Sunni Islam (Kadir et al., 2017).

In the contemporary context, no religious or cultural group exists in isolation. Research on religious conflict and the protection of vulnerable minority groups is a burgeoning area within

social and human sciences (Wiles et al., 2012; Pauwels 2008; Prosser 2000; Kadir et al., 2017), although the role of heritage within these conflicts is understudied. Recognising that all heritage is inherently political (Smith, 2015), religious heritage becomes even more so given the prevalence of political conflicts in the name of religion. Smith (2015) underscores the persistent failure to fully understand the links between heritage and disputes, revealing flaws in how heritage is discussed, valued, listed, promoted, and managed. Heritage assumes a critical role in discussions about cultural, minority, religious, and human rights.

Jerryson (2017) introduces another challenge in religious conflict research, noting that the peaceful Buddhist narrative is often flawed by Western perspectives, hindering a comprehensive understanding of the root causes of violence. He argues that Buddhists possess agency beyond the stereotypical portrayal of mystical monks in Shangri-La.

The sociology of religion, as Asad (2020) contends, is laden with anti-religious assumptions, and religion, to a large extent, is defined as such by anthropologists and others. Asad et al. emphasise the role of myth in fulfilling a function in primitive cultures by enhancing and codifying belief, echoing Malinowski's (1948) assertion that myth is a vital ingredient in all human civilisations.

Myths, and Rituals

Quoting Oscar Wilde, "A thing is not necessarily true because a man dies for it." (1901); this statement invites reflection on the nature of truth and belief, setting the stage for an exploration of myths, rituals, and their significance in the context of sacred and spiritual heritage. The term "myth" traces its origins to the Greek concept of 'mythos,' which is defined as archetypal themes and psychic realities shaping cultural beliefs and behaviour (Elkin et al., 1991). In contemporary discourse, myths are often relegated to fictional stories, especially in Western

contexts. However, for many indigenous cultures, myths are a profound mode of experiencing, perceiving, and expressing the relationship between the visible and invisible worlds that have shaped creation.

Scholarly perspectives on myths, rituals, and belief systems vary. Some, like Kajiru & Nyimbi (2020), view them as potentially dark, false, and manipulative, causing harm. In contrast, the "Western World Myths" may highlight positive narratives, such as spreading democracy, promoting peace, or advocating for gender equality and sustainable development. Bouchard (2013) argues that symbols of sacredness support these positive narratives in the Western context.

The necessity of myths in societies is underscored by Harari (2011), who proposes that our ability to engage with and believe in myths played a pivotal role in Homo sapiens' ascent to the top of the food chain. Myths, especially national ones, have been instrumental in shaping territories, building nations, and establishing collective identities, particularly religious and spiritual identities. National myths, deeply rooted in cultural representations, fuse groups around shared identities, values, and beliefs.

Myths are diverse and dynamic, embodying polysemy and plasticity across various academic perspectives. Claude Levi-Strauss categorises myths into fallacious histories or formulations of religious mysteries (Golsan, 2002). Daba-Buzoianu (2011) suggests that myths are a means of thinking and communicating, born from a combination of reality, desires, and hopes for a better world, evolving over time without being tethered to historical themes.

Psychologist Carl Jung, who is consistent in engaging with myth throughout his work, agrees that myths indirectly reveal crucial elements of human behaviour (Segal, 1999). Rene Girard's Mimetic theory challenges the simplistic view of myths, proposing them as distorted reflections of natural phenomena rooted in actual acts of violence against real victims (Golsan, 2002).

According to Bouchard (2013) and Harari (2011), myths often emerge from collective suffering, becoming engines of mythification within nation-forming. When associated with a group or nation, Suffering leads to the development of stories and rituals that commemorate, invigorate emotions, and perpetuate national myths. Myths are not isolated stories or statements but are accompanied by action (Segal 2015). Foundation myths, throughout history, have faced challenges and reinterpretations. Girard's Mimetic theory posits that human nature's innate tendency to imitate others leads to desires, rivalry, and conflict, ultimately resulting in the construction of myths to unite groups against an innocent scapegoat.

The role of myth in managing community resources is an area that warrants further exploration. Shanker (2012) notes that the relationship between lived experiences, environmental values expressed in religious rituals, and the conservation of resources remains understudied. Anthropological approaches reveal that cultural practices are diverse and fluid, challenging preconceived notions of tradition-based conservation. Myths are intricate narratives intertwined with action, shaping identities, beliefs, and cultural practices. Understanding their complexity requires a nuanced exploration encompassing diverse perspectives and recognising their role in individual and collective human experiences..

Culturally, diverse attitudes toward the environment yield varied outcomes in resource management, with no straightforward correlation between ethical traditions and actual performance (Berkes, Colding, and Folke, 2000). Anderson (1996) suggests that traditional societies have often successfully managed resources through religious representation or ritual processes. Reader's (1988) seminal work delves into human cultural and environmental relationships, particularly emphasising the construction of culture and ritual in shaping societies and natural landscapes. Reader (1988) underscores the importance of maintaining a

balance between resource renewal and human population through rituals and governance in island communities. Notably, the conception of children, initially perceived as success in resource-limited settings, decreased an individual's prestige in society, leading to a cultural shift, altruism, and a perception shift from selfishness as the optimal approach to maintaining socio-ecological balance.

While historical perspectives have often portrayed population growth as the greatest threat (Ehrlich, 1968; Wittemyer et al., 2008), Golden (2009) reveals a nuanced narrative. Modern myths in impoverished populations focus on fortune and opportunities in cities, challenging the historical association of population growth solely with rural areas. Reader (1988) illustrates how missionary colonisers' disruption of traditional cultural systems, imposing their Christian Mythology, drove population growth beyond carrying capacity in the Polynesian Islands. This, he points out, was a lack of foresight around myths, rituals and how they relate to resource management in complex traditional societies.

The evolution of religious myths is intricately linked to social, cultural, economic, and historical components. Cruz and Frijhoff (2006) highlight the dynamic nature of myths as cultures change, adopting new narratives to address existential questions. For instance, Christianity borrowed mythical events and characters from ancient times to provide answers to unexplored questions, fostering faith in the contemporary myth of the times (Dobson, 2014).

Religious traditions significantly influence cultural heritage engagement, shaping attitudes toward investment choices, land management, and heritage conservation (Dudley et al., 2009). Cultural heritage benefits from direct state protection, particularly at sacred natural sites, encompassing myths and rituals that extend to communities surrounding religious sites and buildings. Sacred natural sites represent one of the world's oldest forms of habitat protection,

forming a predominantly unrecognised "shadow" conservation network in various countries, where communities often exert stringent management regulations (Flood, 2004).

Yet, so-called "modern societies" also create new myths through social and public communication mechanisms (Jensen, 2009). While fashioning myths are seldom acknowledged, they can be highly destructive, influencing cultural dimensions like art, religion, politics, and mass communication. Jensen (2009) singles out fashion myths as an example, illustrating how industries promise access to a lost paradise through consumer society. These imaginative, mythological realms intricately intertwine with consumerism, playing a role in some of the world's most pressing challenges from a distance. Remarkably, spiritual and religious fashion myths, rituals, and codes permeate various cultural and religious groups, ranging from the distinctive Christian priest's robe to the orange Kāṣāya worn by Buddhist monks, the Islamic Hijab, to the spiritual, hippie, and bohemian styles adorned with beads and sandals. In diverse ways, we all carry a heritage that visually displays our myths and beliefs.

3.5   Conclusion

The interconnections between these domains and their implications have been delved into in this exploration of the literature on Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), language, oral traditions, and sacred/spiritual heritage. The examination of myths and rituals has also provided insights into the intricate links between ICH and spiritual beliefs and practices.

Critiques of cultural heritage, particularly when viewed through the lens of UNESCO, reveal Eurocentric biases, prompting questions about its relevance in diverse cultural contexts such as those of Myanmar, Pakistan, and the Rohingya. While UNESCO emphasises the

safeguarding of ICH as a means of preserving spiritual and social culture elements, the literature suggests potential exploitations of power, marginalisation of cultural groups for political or religious objectives, and challenges to human, minority, or cultural rights. Navigating these complexities demands a nuanced understanding and recognition of the fluidity inherent in contemporary cultural heritage discourse.

The challenges in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, while aligned with tangible heritage, raise questions about the applicability of existing methods to intangible value. Carman (1996) emphasises the role of researchers, especially in archaeology, in shedding light on intangible heritage. However, questions persist about the effective wielding of authority by institutions like the United Nations.

Wengrow's perspective challenges conventional heritage narratives by asserting that essential elements of civilisation emerged not in towering ruins but in the small networks of prehistoric societies. This underscores the importance of recognising women's contributions to intangible cultural heritage, often overlooked in archaeological narratives. Unfortunately, women and girls, among less powerful minorities, frequently face the denial of their cultural rights. The thesis advocates for a deeper understanding of cultures, especially oral-based societies, emphasising the critical role of language and the challenges posed by hypo-cognition—the absence of words for certain cognitive and linguistic representations. As highlighted in the section on dance, poetry, and the arts, oral traditions serve as crucial communication tools, conveying knowledge vital for the community's moral and ethical framework.

Physical space is also a significant factor in preserving cultural practices, with a lack of space exacerbating mental health issues within communities. Outsiders often misinterpret the subtle signs and nuances prevalent in oral-based communities, emphasising the need for a more

nuanced perspective and a better understanding of links between heritage practices and special needs impacting the broader society particularly in displacement.

In the context of sacred and spiritual heritage, the importance of artistic techniques and cultural interplays across religious and spiritual domains is acknowledged. The reality that cultures rarely evolve in complete isolation is underscored, emphasising the interconnectedness of diverse cultural practices. Arguably, religious groups have more in common than they may see at first. This it seems can also be seen of great distances as we see the exploration of Sufi heritage among the Rohingya, relying heavily on oral transmission, draws parallels with the Uyghur Muslims of China a Sunni/Sufi Muslim ethnicity.

Within the section I also posed questions of; how does religion and spiritual faith shape heritage narratives? And how does religion justify violence, or does it serve as a force for peace and tolerance? Religious heritage might just be a pawn entangled in the political machinations of power brokers?

In this instance, I also note that Girard's Mimetic theory of scapegoating should be better considered in understanding conflicts, while the role of myth in managing community resources is also recognised as an understudied area.

In conclusion, this chapter seeks to amplify oral perspectives in discussions about the heritage of oral-based societies, recognising the importance of language, space, and nuanced understanding. It advocates for a more inclusive approach to cultural heritage, acknowledging the contributions of diverse communities and promoting a holistic understanding of the interconnectedness of cultural practices, myths, and rituals that are to be elaborated within the field research.

4   Chapter Four: Culture Heritage & Displacement

4.1 Chapter Introduction

Chapter 4 of this PhD thesis delves into the intricate relationship between cultural heritage, displacement, and the humanitarian framework, exploring several key dimensions: Displacement, Human, Cultural & Minority Rights, and Humanitarian Assistance. The framing of policies within humanitarian contexts holds significant consequences for the protection of displaced communities, particularly in expressing and utilising their Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). While existing literature extensively covers the legal aspects of ICH in humanitarian response, there remains a surprising gap in understanding how the displacement status of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), or stateless individuals affects their ability to engage with their cultural heritage in displacement settings.

The chapter commences with an exploration of the humanitarian system and its relationship with ICH, aiming to develop a nuanced understanding of this intersection. The review of relevant literature spans displacement, humanitarian assistance, and the terminologies associated with displacement and humanitarian interventions. Displacement emerges as a pressing global challenge, with the number of displaced people surpassing 100 million in 2022, marking a significant increase from one million in 1951 when the UNHCR refugee convention was established. The evolving nature of conflicts and their resolution or lack thereof shapes the contemporary context of displacement. The section on displacement focuses on defining and discussing the terms related to refugees, IDPs, and stateless individuals.

Recognising the growing awareness of the importance of expressing cultural identity, the chapter explores the intricate challenges linking ICH with the rights of expression and freedom in displacement. Existing literature highlights the complexities faced by displaced populations in maintaining their cultural heritage. This looks at some well-referenced authors such as

Rguibi & Belahsen, 2006; Posada, 2016; Moghadam & Bagheritari, 2007; Chen & Bond, 2010; Lenzerini, 2011; Twala & Hlalele, 2012; and Blakely, 2013. The discussion places heritage within a human rights framework, departing from the more technical lens commonly associated with heritage conservation discourse.

The final section critically examines displacement itself, scrutinising the nature and purpose of humanitarian interventions. The progression from a *'Dunantist style'* of humanitarian response to the current focus lying between what Hilhorst (2018) terms abandonment and the proposed self-reliance within the humanitarian system is explored. Additionally, the chapter sheds light on the endurance displayed by protracted populations receiving a disproportionately small share of the global budget as noted by Hendrickson, (1998) and Brun, (2016). This multifaceted exploration aims to contribute valuable insights to the intersection of cultural heritage, displacement, and humanitarian responses as it guides the field research.

4.2   Displacement

In the contemporary global landscape context, borders are undergoing a notable reinforcement, manifesting through increasingly stringent laws governing citizenship, passports, and visas. Scholars such as Diener and Hagen (2012) and Farzana (2015) posit that borders are crucial in shaping political and economic processes that significantly influence human lives. They serve as determinants of both human mobility and the movement of goods, impacting the ways in which people and their possessions navigate the world. While more fluid and temporary movements marked historical migrations, the current migration landscape is characterised by intricate bureaucratic processes. Legal identity and affiliation with a state have evolved into indispensable elements for human survival, affording citizens access to essential services

within a state, including education, healthcare, and voting rights. These services become even more critical for those compelled to move due to conflict.

The United Nations categorise displaced persons into distinct groups, namely Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Stateless Persons, Asylum Seekers, and Economic Migrants. Defining these states of displacement is crucial for understanding their implications for cultural expression within the context of this research. The recognised displacement status may vary between the host state and the United Nations, and the ensuing status significantly influences the freedoms and access to cultural expression.

Status assumes critical importance, as each situation confers different rights and levels of protection under the law, contingent upon host states' legal recognition of these terms (Mohammad, 2012; Venugopal, 2018). The political nature of displacement is evident in instances like Bangladesh, which, although not a signatory to the 1951 Convention/1967 Protocol, initially recognised early Rohingya arrivals as refugees, later designating the most recent arrivals as illegal migrants despite documented persecution. Displacement status is often a more broadly politicised issue than we might at first imagine.

No two displacement episodes are identical, and there is no singular pattern of movement or migration. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to integrating refugees into new states or communities, patterns often emerge in second generations, as discussed by Zhou (1997) in the context of "segmented assimilation," a concept explored further within the context of durable solutions (Section 3.4).

United Nations agencies play a vital role in coordinating and supporting displaced communities throughout their journey, with the scope of their work varying depending on displacement status and the country involved. For instance, UNHCR focuses on "Refugee Protection" for asylum seekers and Stateless populations, while IOM may cover the area of undocumented

migrants or IDPs (UNHCR 2017). Although there is no specific set of international laws governing treatment in refugee camps, various United Nations agreements, alongside basic principles of law, standards, and human rights, apply to refugees, IDPs, and Stateless people.

In the context of refugee camp situations, host governments often refrain from exercising their territorial policing authority (UNHCR, 2006). Another critical point of discussion in all displacement situations is the cost and burden-sharing for countries of first asylum. Most of the world's displaced populations find shelter in impoverished countries, compounding these nations' internal economic challenges. These countries, already grappling with poverty, are often hesitant to acknowledge a duty to protect, posing a challenge to ensuring a standard of care and protection for temporary populations that is not necessarily extended to host citizens.

Amid clear distinctions between the legal status of displaced persons, it is imperative to emphasise that anyone seeking asylum or recognised by the host government as a refugee or unauthorised alien should be provided with legal protection and respect for their human rights (Rehman, 2003). The "Declaration of Non-Nationals 1985" by the United Nations underscores that all non-citizens are entitled to the same level of protection as a state's citizens. This declaration guarantees rights such as the right to life and security of the person, freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention, freedom of thought, opinion, conscience, and religion, and the right to retain one's language, culture, and traditions (UN, 2022).).

Refugee

What does it mean to be a refugee in today's world? The accepted definition of a refugee encompasses an individual who crosses a border and, due to persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or

political opinion, cannot return to their home country (UNHCR, 1951). For many refugees, escaping their home country often results in what is colloquially known as the *"Refugee Trap"* — a harsh reality marked by violence that becomes normalised, living day to day for sustenance, lacking any state protection, limited freedom of movement, and enduring suffering, discrimination, and the loss of cultural systems (Bartolomei, 2015).

Refugees have been analogised to prisoners of war or individuals in limbo, existing in an alternate world on the periphery of societal norms (Arendt, 1973; Malkki, 1995). Authors such as Stein (1981) highlight refugees' profound challenges, including the loss of culture, identity, and established habits. Turner (1967) refers to refugees as *"naked, unaccommodated men and undifferentiated raw materials."* Ardent (1973:300), reflecting on World War II refugees, notes that *"the abstract nakedness of being nothing but human was their greatest danger."* In this context, the humanitarian system often perceives refugees as powerless and culturally bereft individuals requiring decisions to be made on their behalf. Humanitarian sectors, however, may inadvertently create an environment that insufficiently addresses refugees' cultural needs, prioritising physical humanitarian access for service delivery.

While a nation, as Bhabha (1990:1) defines, is a *"system of cultural significance,"* refugees temporarily exist without a nation, rendering their culture, heritage, and future less discernible. Turner (1967) describes rites of passage accompanying every change of place, with three phases: rites of separation, rites of transition, and rites of incorporation. The liminal period of rites of passage involves 'structural invisibility,' a concept denoting that society perceives only what it expects to see, conditioned by cultural norms. Turner (1967) observes that refugees systematically remain invisible in the literature on nations, being problematic citizens and not native informants. Refugees can no longer adequately represent a specific local culture. Before Turner's narrative, Douglas (1966) noted that the structural invisibility of refugees frames them

as a problem and a threat to national security, a theme echoed in media narratives, portraying refugees as the cause of a crisis rather than victims of conflict.

As Arendt (1973) notes, refugees occupy a unique status, neither nationals nor foreigners. Malkki (1995) observes that agencies dealing with refugees tend to frame them as an anomaly requiring specialised therapeutic and corrective interventions, becoming almost generic figures and objects of specialisation for humanitarian response businesses.

Historically, states have provided protection to people forced to flee persecution, often under various forms of religious doctrine such as the *"Aman."* Islamic law, for instance, encompasses the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, placing a duty of care on the host community until they can safely return to their place of origin (Eidrup, 2014). Modern refugee law, predominantly post-WWII, evolved significantly, with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) playing a pivotal role. The UDHR laid the foundation for international rights, particularly the right to seek and enjoy asylum in another country, as articulated in Article 14. While the UDHR is a declaration and, therefore, soft law, subsequent regional human rights instruments have solidified the right to seek and be granted asylum in foreign territories, including the American Convention on Human Rights, Article 22(7); the African (Banjul) Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, Article 12(3); the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Human Rights Declaration 2012; and the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (CDHRI), adopted in Cairo, Egypt, in 1990..

The primary document on refugee law is the international convention on refugee law of 1951 (1951 Convention). This is coupled with the 1967 Optional Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (OHCHR 1967 Optional Protocol). 149 States are signatories to the 1951 Convention and/or the 1967 Protocol (UNHCR, 2011a). The 1951 Convention clearly institutes the definition of a refugee, the principle of non-refoulment and the rights afforded to those granted

refugee status. Although the 1951 Convention remains the dominant definition, regional human rights treaties have since modified the definition of a refugee in response to displacement crises not covered by the 1951 Convention. The 1951 Convention does not, however, make any reference to the term durable solutions, but Article 34 does make reference to local integration;

> *[t]he Contracting States shall as far as possible facilitate the assimilation and naturalization of refugees.*

Significantly, the 1951 Convention has evolved to prioritise the preservation of cultural rights by replacing the term *'assimilation'* with *'local integration'* in Article 34. This strategic linguistic shift aims to uphold refugees' cultural heritage and differences during their integration, emphasising the importance of peaceful coexistence. While the convention mentions resettlement concerning the transfer of refugees' assets upon admission to a third country (1951 Convention, Article 30), there is no explicit legal provision for a 'durable solution' beyond the recommendation of Article 34 and local integration. The absence of a legal right to durable solutions may contribute to the dearth of implemented long-term strategies for displaced populations.

Initially, the definition of a *"refugee"* in the 1951 Convention applied to those compelled to flee events occurring before January 1, 1951. States, in reality, had the option to restrict the convention's scope to Europe alone. However, the 1967 Protocol to the Status of Refugees, commonly known as the 1967 Protocol, played a crucial role in universalising the 1951 Convention (Zieck, 2010). This extension of the convention's applicability beyond its original temporal and geographic constraints signifies a global commitment to addressing refugee issues. It highlights the evolving nature of international responses to displacement. Today, UNHCR's current narrative concerning refugees covers;

all persons who are refugees within the meaning of the 1951 Convention [that focuses on fear of persecution] as well as those who are outside their country of origin or habitual residence and unable to return there owing to serious and indiscriminate threats to life, physical integrity or freedom re- resulting from generalized violence or events seriously disturbing public order and who, as a result, require international protection"

The definition of a refugee remains ambiguous, particularly when considering terms such as *"persecution."* Persecution, often perceived as a threat to life or freedom, extends to encompass the denial of basic rights like work or education. The UNHCR, responsible for overseeing the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol, emphasises that persecution generally emanates from government sources or forces that a government cannot or will not control. This includes circumstances where insurgent forces operate beyond government control (UNHCR, 2017).

Beyond geographic limitations, challenges persist due to the disparity between states that have signed the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol and those actually hosting refugees. Notably, in South and Southeast Asia, only Afghanistan, Cambodia, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste are signatories (Venugopal, 2018). This legal gap complicates matters for humanitarian agencies, as non-signatory countries remain obligated under international law to protect refugees on their soil. However, enforcing this duty of care has proven to be challenging, exemplified by Bangladesh, hosting 860,000 refugees in Cox's Bazar alone, yet not acceding to the 1951 Convention or its 1967 Protocol. The absence of a national legal framework in Bangladesh leaves refugee rights and protection unregulated, leading to reported instances of abuse, exploitation, domestic violence, and sexual and gender-based violence (Murray, 2019).

One of the most pressing challenges for refugees today is finding a durable solution to their displacement. The principle of non-refoulement, where the host state commits to protecting refugees and preventing their return to a perilous situation, is a cornerstone of refugee protection (Harold et al., 2015). Beyond physical hardships, refugees encounter various challenges throughout their displacement journey, ranging from documentation of refugee status to vital records related to births, deaths, marriages, or education. Despite the majority of refugees being victims of conflict and persecution, they face a global bias perpetuated by negatively skewed media exposure, leading to stereotypical attitudes towards ethnic minorities, refugees, or immigrants (De Poli et al., 2017; Facchini, Mayda, Publisi, 2009). Research suggests that presenting displaced individuals positively in news stories can mitigate xenophobic attitudes (Schemer, 2014).

Recent academic focus on how refugee identity is shaped sheds light on the gauntlet of unfamiliar social attention and action encountered by refugees. Long (1993) emphasises the unique construction of the "Refugee Camp" as a space where refugees access key memories, contributing to individual interpretations of their experiences (Long, 1993).

Statelessness

The issue of statelessness remains a shadowed reality affecting "millions" worldwide (UNHCR, 2022). However, the exact number of stateless individuals is a puzzle yet to be fully unravelled, resulting in profound consequences. Denial of nationality leads to a cascade of impediments, barring access to education, healthcare, employment, banking services, property ownership, and even legal marriage. A substantial portion of the global stateless population comprises the Rohingya people, underscoring the urgency of understanding and addressing this complex challenge (Kyaw, 2017; Parashar, & Alam, 2019).

Statelessness, defined in Article 15 of the Declaration of Human Rights, starkly contradicts the universal right to nationality. While various displaced groups grapple with distinct challenges in seeking protection, those without a state or citizenship face the most formidable obstacles (Foster and Lambert, 2016).

Historically, the humanitarian discourse has overwhelmingly focused on refugees, overshadowing the intertwined fate of refugees and stateless individuals (Guy Goodwin-Gill, 1994). Goodwin-Gill highlights that being stateless or a refugee post-World War I was virtually synonymous. The aftermath of World War II aimed to establish a singular convention protecting both stateless persons and refugees. In 1950, a proposal even suggested referring to refugees and stateless individuals as "Unprotected Persons." However, the subsequent drafting of the 1951 Refugee Convention inadvertently diverted attention away from statelessness (Foster and Lambert, 2016).[15] Notably, Hannah Arendt's *"The Origins of Totalitarianism"* in 1951 vividly captured the struggles of statelessness, terming stateless persons as *"denationalized people"* (Arendt, 2004).

The legal response to statelessness emerged with the development of the Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons in 1954, followed by the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness in 1961.[16] These conventions, various United Nations human rights treaties, and regional conventions form the cornerstone of the international legal framework addressing statelessness (Foster and Lambert, 2019). However, the intricate relationship between the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1954 Convention has been surprisingly underexplored, leaving a gap in scholarly analysis (Foster and Lambert, 2019).

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[15] British delegate's suggestion for the definition of refugee and stateless persons to simply refer to 'unprotected persons': Ad Hoc Committee on Statelessness and Related Problems, 'United Kingdom: Draft Proposal for Article 1' (17 January 1950) UN Doc E/AC.32/L.2.

[16] Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, New York, 28 September 1954, in force 6 June 1960, 360 UNTS 117. he Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons has been ratified by eighty states parties as at 1 June 2014.

Article 1 of the 1954 Convention referred to Stateless people as *de jure stateless* but in contrast, the term *de facto statelessness* has emerged to describe individuals holding nationality, which is ineffective in some way. For instance, de facto statelessness applies to individuals outside their country of nationality who are either unable or unwilling, for valid reasons, to avail themselves of their country's protection (Nonnenmacher and Cholewinski, 2014).

According to the 1954 Convention on Statelessness, a stateless person is someone *"not considered a national by any State under the operation of its laws."* This could result from not acquiring nationality at birth, the unlawful removal of nationality, or a State denying nationality under its Citizenship law, exemplified by the Rohingya ethnic minority in Myanmar (Chowdhory and Mohanty, 2020). UNHCR data collection focuses on individuals without *"another reportable status,"* distinct from refugees, IDPs, or asylum seekers (ISI, 2018). Despite these legal definitions, statelessness remains a multifaceted challenge, demanding comprehensive solutions to ensure the protection and inclusion of those caught in its complex web.[17]

In recent years it has been pointed out that the relationship between the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1954 Convention has undergone little analysis of actual stateless persons who are also refugees (Fullerton, 2015; Foster and Lambert, 2016). In fact, the definition of "Refugee" (Article 1A (2)) of the 1951 Refugee Convention does not refer to a nationality. Article 1A (2) of the 1951 Refugee Convention implies that a refugee can be a person with or without nationality. The country of reference for those without a State or nationality becomes

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[17] UNHCR estimates there to be at least 10 million stateless people around the world. This is a figure which remains unchanged from previous years' statistical reporting. Of this number, at the end of 2017, only 3.9 million stateless people were "captured" in the data published by UNHCR. Measuring the true scale of statelessness remains a challenge, both methodologically and politically – a fact which this most recent Global Trends report once again acknowledges, recalling that improving quantitative and qualitative data on stateless populations is one of the actions of UNHCR's Global Action Plan to End Statelessness (GAP). The estimate of 10 million stateless persons globally does not account for all persons who meet the definition of a stateless person under international law.

the former habitual residence. Thus, stateless persons who are refugees are fully entitled to protection as refugees under international law.

The 1954 Convention on Statelessness does not impose any obligation on a state to offer its nationality to stateless persons. However, it does propose that they facilitate the naturalisation of stateless persons as quickly and efficiently as possible (Dobric, 2019). While states have sovereignty over offering nationality, international agencies have been highly limited in their impact on global Statelessness. However, since 2006 the UNHCR has strengthened their mandate on Statelessness through Resolution 61/137. In 2006 the General Assembly endorsed Executive Committee Conclusion 106 centred on four key areas of UNHCR responsibility. These included the identification, prevention and reduction of Statelessness and the protection of stateless persons. Within these themes, 106 comprise of twenty-four operative paragraphs focusing on research on Statelessness in countries where numbers are unknown; supporting states in developing citizenship campaigns; and supporting stateless persons through programme development to protect and assist stateless persons mainly through legal aid (UNHCR, 2014).

The international approach to Statelessness is soft, and citizenship is undoubtedly a highly charged area that UNHCR, IOM and other international agencies have been reluctant to engage with unless requested. Alternatively, even when they meet the definition under the 1954 Convention, stateless persons often find themselves in a country that is not bound by this treaty. For stateless communities, a lack of legal protection means they are constantly threatened by extorsion or arrest; therefore, they are forced to keep a low profile (Farhat and Ali, 2014). Numerous documented cases reveal the cultural challenges faced by stateless people in developing an identity (Perks and Chickera, 2009). The same is true for the elderly or those with disabilities that challenge their ability to communicate. Despite the International

Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and its UN Human Rights Committee interpretation, women and girls are disproportionately affected by Statelessness.

The inquiry into statelessness and gender; how statelessness impacts women differently from men, is a critical question within the field of gender studies and international human rights but appears largely under-researched in relationship to ICH. The 2011 initiative by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to convene an international discussion focusing specifically on women from the Middle East regarding statelessness highlights the intersectionality of gender, legal identity, and statelessness (Govil and Edwards, 2015). This dialogue underscores the unique challenges faced by women in contexts where nationality laws are intertwined with patriarchal norms, often leaving women dependent on male relatives for their legal identity. This dependency not only marginalises women but also perpetuates a cycle of statelessness among their offspring, as the inability to confer nationality to their children due to gender-discriminatory laws results in successive generations without a state.

Gender plays a pivotal role in the study of statelessness and intangible cultural heritage, as it intersects with issues of identity, rights, and cultural transmission. Understanding the gendered dimensions of statelessness is crucial, as women and men experience statelessness differently due to societal roles, legal biases, and cultural practices. Women, often primary carriers of cultural knowledge and practices, face unique challenges in transmitting ICH, especially when displaced or rendered stateless. This is exacerbated by gender-discriminatory laws that impact their ability to confer nationality, access rights, and participate fully in cultural life. Gender-sensitive approaches in research and policymaking are essential to address these disparities and ensure the preservation of cultural heritage, as well as to uphold the rights and dignity of stateless individuals. The inclusion of a gender perspective enriches the understanding of how statelessness affects cultural continuity and community resilience, highlighting the need for

interventions that empower women and ensure their active participation in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (UNHCR, 2015).

In exploring the intersections of Gender, Statelessness, and Intangible Cultural Heritage, resources from UNESCO (UNESCO, 2014) highlight the nuanced role of gender in shaping cultural practices and identities. Documents such as "Intangible cultural heritage and gender" and "Gender Equality, Heritage and Creativity" provide insights into how gender relations influence the creation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage, underscoring the importance of integrating gender perspectives in safeguarding cultural practices. These resources, while not directly addressing statelessness, offer a foundational understanding of the gendered dimensions of cultural heritage, essential for any comprehensive analysis of statelessness and its impact on cultural continuity and identity (UNESCO, 2014).

The entanglement of gender discrimination and nationality laws in as many as sixty countries, as documented by Govil and Edwards (2015), illuminates a pervasive issue within international law where women's rights are subordinated to patriarchal structures embedded within legal frameworks. These discriminatory provisions starkly contrast with the global strides made in other areas of human rights, revealing a gap that specifically affects women and, by extension, their children. The repercussions of such gender-biased laws extend beyond the immediate lack of nationality documentation, affecting access to education, healthcare, employment, and the ability to move freely, all of which are fundamental human rights.

Further complicating the issue of statelessness is the sparse literature connecting it to cultural heritage and identity, particularly concerning children born into statelessness. The alarming statistic from UNHCR estimating that a child is born into statelessness every ten minutes (UNHCR, 2015) signals a pressing global issue. The principles of *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis*, which govern the criteria for citizenship based on place of birth and family descent

respectively, are crucial in this context. Kohki's (2010) examination of these principles and their application within the sovereign authority of states highlights the complexity of citizenship laws and their impact on individuals, especially when displaced. Displaced children, and particularly unaccompanied minors, face significant hurdles in asserting their nationality or heritage, further exacerbated by the trauma of conflict and displacement.

This multifaceted problem of statelessness, especially in its intersection with gender, calls for a nuanced understanding and approach that considers the specific vulnerabilities and challenges faced by women and children. The legal frameworks governing nationality and citizenship must be scrutinised and reformed to ensure they uphold the principles of equality and non-discrimination. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort from international bodies, national governments, civil society, and communities to ensure that the rights of the most vulnerable, particularly stateless women and children, are protected and promoted.

Statelessness casts a formidable shadow on international freedom of movement, impinging on fundamental rights such as the right to enter, re-enter, return, remain, or leave a country (Edwards and van Waas, 2014). The causes of statelessness, prevalent in various regions globally, often stem from the discriminatory denial of citizenship and the failure to acquire nationality at birth (Nonnenmacher and Cholewinski, 2014). The Human Rights Committee, as the supervisory body of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), refrains from recognising the right of aliens to enter or reside in the territory of a state party.

Addressing forced displacement becomes an intricate challenge for UN agencies when confronted with a state unwilling to allow entry, even for humanitarian reasons, particularly for stateless individuals. The argument often hinges on the lack of assurance that the individual could be removed, given the absence of a state to send them onward to. The decision of who

can enter and remain within a state's territory lies solely with that state (Nonnenmacher and Cholewinski, 2014).

A poignant illustration of this challenge unfolds in Pakistan, where approximately 3.5 million Bihari, Bengali, and Rohingya people are officially recorded as stateless residents in Karachi. This population constitutes around 15% of Karachi's greater population and is vital to Pakistan's economy (NDRA, 2005). Statelessness in Pakistan is a politically and socially sensitive matter stemming from the partition between Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh in 1947. Despite the significant impact of statelessness on the populace, little information is available about its nature and magnitude in Pakistan. NDRA (2005) highlights that 68.5% of the stateless population consists of individuals born in Pakistan for two or three generations. Despite legal advancements and efforts to address challenges related to statelessness, it persists as a growing international problem, prompting critical questions about the personal identity of stateless populations and their contributions to the development of their host country.

The implications of statelessness extend beyond restricted movement, delving into issues of personal identity and societal contribution. These challenges resonate with established international principles, including the right of every individual to a nationality (Article 9(1) of the ICCPR), the right of women to equal treatment with men regarding nationality (Article 9 of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women), and the right of every child to a nationality (Article 24(3) of the ICCPR and Article 7(1) of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child). Addressing statelessness demands not only legal considerations but a holistic understanding of its pervasive impact on individuals and society at large.

Here the literature on human, cultural and minority rights is examined in the context of displacement and cultural heritage. Much of the Western focus on Rights and Culture begins with The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Article 27.1,

> *Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.*

Coupled with this, we see the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966 (Article 15.1.a), that states;

> *the need for States Parties to take steps to seek the conservation, development, and diffusion of science and culture (Article 15.2), and the responsibility —to respect the freedom indispensable for scientific research and creative activity (Article 15.3)* (OHCHR, 1966).

The UNHCR have minimal research concerning culture and heritage and the rights of the displaced. It appears they are limited to one study dating back to 2011 titled "Positive Energy, A review of the Role of Artistic Activities in Refugee *camps* (UNHCR, 2011).

> *This study presents strong anecdotal evidence indicating the promise of artistic activity as a means of achieving humanitarian ends in order to encourage the development of humanitarian policies which directly support or indirectly enable artistic activity. However, due to its introductory character and the unsystematic nature of the data on which it is based, this study can do no more than provide a broad framework and suggest possible avenues for future study* (UNHCR 2011; P3).

Rather than seeing refugees' activities as their way of life and livelihoods and unique to their cultural, spiritual links and identity, the UNHCR approaches these components of life as "Art." UNHCR further note that their understanding of refugee and IDP activities is minimal as they have no data on such activities stating,

> *...the original intention of the study was to include IDP camps, but as there was relatively little data available, it seemed best to limit the study primarily to refugee camps.*

(UNHCR, 2011, P4).

The intricate relationship between Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and human rights is gaining recognition, although Logan (2012) underscores the prevailing lack of understanding among contemporary heritage professionals. Often, heritage and conservation work are viewed through a predominantly technical lens, side-lining the social-cultural dimensions in favour of political and economic considerations (Logan, 2012). In humanitarian responses, culture is frequently treated merely as a sensitivity to be acknowledged rather than a valuable resource to be harnessed. Tošovská (2016) emphasises the necessity for humanitarian organisations operating in diverse cultural landscapes to integrate local traditions, customs, and behaviours into their practices, a consideration often overlooked in the broader humanitarian sector.

While cultural sensitivity is extensively documented in health studies within foreign environments, its incorporation into broader humanitarian principles remains inadequate (Abramowitz, 2010; Norton, 2014; Schuster-Wallace, 2021). This deficiency is particularly conspicuous in engagements with spiritual or religious groups, where cultural dynamics are often neglected in humanitarian responses (Wilkinson, 2019).

In the realm of philosophical discourse, Dworkin (1977) and others have debated the balance between individual choice and autonomy versus communal socialisation centred on culture and the broader community good (Sandel, 1982; Raz, 1986; Taylor, 1994). Kymlicka's (1989) seminal work, *"Liberalism, Community and Culture,"* expanded these discussions to encompass liberal Western values vis-à-vis minority rights, immigrant cultural traditions, and non-Western perspectives (cited by May, Madood, and Squires, 2004). Yetman (1991) characterised "minority" as synonymous with subordinate and majority as synonymous with dominant, a view later nuanced by Kymlicka (1996) in his concept of "Multicultural Citizenship," distinguishing between national minorities and ethnic groups based on cultural rights and integration considerations.

Waterton and Smith (2010) draw attention to the misuse of keywords like 'identity,' 'community,' and 'culture' within social science. While seemingly unassailable, these terms, when applied to cultural heritage discussions, may carry restrictive assumptions linked to nostalgia, consensus, and homogeneity, significantly impacting community groups seeking alternative interpretations of heritage and their legal rights.

Vrdoljak (2014) contends that cultural heritage has occupied the legal domain for over a century, rooted in the protection of minorities and the assertion of cultural rights. The intertwined rise and fall of cultural heritage and minorities in international law are indicative of their shared significance in achieving global stability and prosperity. Thornberry (1991) notes that the protection of minorities, dating back to the early twentieth century, laid the groundwork for articulating cultural rights and the safeguarding of cultural heritage as property rights in international law. Despite its historical flaws, the principles embedded in early minority protection continue to echo through contemporary multilateral instruments covering minorities, cultural rights, diversity, and cultural heritage. These phases in the development of

minority protection have shaped our understanding of cultural diversity and its integral role in fostering peace and progress, reinforcing the interconnectedness of human rights, cultural heritage, and the well-being of diverse communities.

Secondly, we see the post-1945 minorities and the human rights framework, including the UDHR 1948

> *The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 remains the first pillar of international human rights law and practice. The UDHR proclaims: 'Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits' (www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights).*

On October 6, 2016, the Human Rights Council unanimously passed a resolution urging all states to uphold, promote, and safeguard the right of every individual to participate in cultural life, including accessing and enjoying cultural heritage. However, this shift toward cultural heritage seemed to divert attention from individual cultural rights, pushing cultural heritage into the legal realms of intellectual property rights.

The third phase, post-1989, witnessed a re-evaluation of minority protection to address the limitations identified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). This reconsideration occurred against the backdrop of renewed inter-ethnic and religious conflicts in Europe during the 1990s. Larkin (2014) aptly describes how universal human rights face a 'tension test' amid the escalating flows of refugees driven by military conflicts, climate change, civil wars, and political persecution.

In response to Hanna Arendt's critique of the UDHR and the right to have rights, policymakers embraced the concept of 'human security.' This perspective centres on individuals in distress due to unrecognised human rights (Oman, 2010). However, critics argue that human security primarily serves humanitarian interests rather than fostering a genuine intercultural basis for human rights (Oman, 2010). Larking (2014) encapsulates the plight of the displaced by asserting that those without nationality or forced to flee their homelands *"are also people without a legal personality."* Equality, he contends, only comes with establishing a contract (citizenship) with the state.

Anthropologist Asad (2000) questions the power dynamics within human rights, highlighting the Western-centric focus on human rights violations outside the Western world. He unveils the hypocrisy of Western powers and underscores how behind-the-scenes negotiations often prioritise economic and political strategies over human rights. The debate over minority rights and their protection for ethnic minorities and cultural identity has been fervent. Silverstein (1980) argues for a liberal integrationist approach, emphasising constitutional principles and individual rights. In Myanmar, U Nu, the first prime minister, championed individual rights, fostering interethnic cooperation (Silverstein, 1980).

Contrastingly, advocates like Young (1990), Taylor (1992), and Kymlicka (1996) stress the importance of group rights for minorities to prevent cultural disadvantages. This approach promotes the conservation of diverse cultures, requiring bilingualism in schools, support for festivals, and the elimination of laws disadvantaging certain ethnic minorities.

Official policies toward minorities vary by country, depending on historical relationships with Indigenous, native, or immigrant populations. Kymlicka (1996) notes distinctions between *'national minorities*' and *'polyethnic minorities,'* impacting citizenship rights and national

identity. In Myanmar, the Citizenship Law of 1982 differentiates citizens based on cultural groups, with implications for rights and access to services.

The connection between citizenship and rights, especially regarding House, Land, and Property (HLP) rights, is evident in Myanmar. Ethnic groups with lesser citizenship face vulnerability due to land laws, exacerbated by the Vacant, Fallow, and Virgin Land Management Law of 2018. This law challenges communities to register customary lands, leading to forced displacement threats.

Myanmar's response to ethnic issues involves the establishment of National Race Affairs Ministers (NRAMs). These ministers mediate armed conflicts, preserve cultural literature, advocate for welfare, and intervene in broader development issues. However, disputes arise over the recognition of ethnic groups, making resolutions challenging.

The complex interplay between minority and cultural rights unfolds against a backdrop of evolving international perspectives, historical contexts, and contested national policies. The multifaceted challenges faced by minorities demand nuanced approaches that balance individual and collective rights, cultural preservation, and inclusive citizenship practices. Berger (1981) notes that there was no representation from Islam or Indigenous communities when the UDHR was developed. The contrast between the individual, the American approach to rights and the collective or community, such as the Asian relationship with rights, is stark. The most challenging and well-documented paragraph explaining the diverse views on the UDHR no doubt comes from the American Anthropological Association in 1947 as they argue,

> *Standards and values are relative to the culture from which they derive . . . [such] that what is held to be a human right in one society may be re-guarded as antisocial by another people . . . If the [Universal] Declaration must be of worldwide applicability,*

it must embrace and recognise the validity of many different ways of life . . . The rights of man in the Twentieth Century cannot be circumscribed by the standard of any single culture or be dictated by the aspirations of any single people.

Despite the existential threat faced by minorities, there remains a glaring absence of a universal definition for what constitutes a minority. The UNHCR operates under its definition, which characterises a minority as an ethnic, religious, and linguistic group numerically fewer than the rest of the population, whose members share a common identity (UNHCR, 2020). However, this definition falls short in capturing the nuances of power dynamics within society. Sociologists argue that the UNHCR definition is flawed as it neglects to identify subordinated groups lacking power despite making up a majority in numbers.

Minorities, by definition, are groups bound by shared language, religious beliefs, and customs that may set them apart from others. Alternatively, these differences may be perceived solely by the group itself, while to outsiders, they may appear to share a common ethnicity with others (Little, 2016).

In delving into discussions surrounding human, cultural, or minority rights, it becomes imperative to inquire about the practical implications of these rights in everyday life. How are these rights perceived, acknowledged, and utilised by humanitarian sectors, activists, political leaders, or academics? The dynamics of these rights are crucial, particularly in contexts where conflicts result in violence and displacement, constituting a fundamental violation of human rights. Understanding these practical dimensions is essential for crafting effective strategies to protect and promote minority rights in the face of adversity.

4.4   Humanitarian Assistance

Humanitarian assistance has a longstanding history rooted in compassion and solidarity, evident in various forms throughout human existence. In the 19th Century, a significant milestone occurred with the recognition of humanitarian principles in international law through the 1864 Geneva Convention, notably prompted by Henry Dunant's actions at the Battle of Solferino, emphasising the humane aspects of the Laws of War. Contemporary perspectives on war and its responses have evolved, eliciting support and critique.

Belloni (2007) asserts that humanitarian action signifies progress towards human freedom, justifying intervention in sovereign states lacking adequate protection for their citizens. This aligns with the idea that humanitarian responses mirror collective human values. However, the prioritisation of interventions is a subject of debate, with critics highlighting potential adverse effects such as the misuse of aid and the conceptual and practical limitations of framing human emancipation in terms of human rights.

Slim (2015) metaphorically describes "humanitarianism" as an ecological system that springs to life in crises, but he also notes the propensity for failure due to the grassroots nature of humanitarian agencies. Smirl (2008) emphasises the political nature of post-crisis responses, challenging the idealised notion of responses being apolitical.

The objective of humanitarian response sparks questions about whether it is solely lifesaving or extends to protecting the culture, language, and subjective well-being of the affected population. Should humanitarian efforts go beyond preserving life and ensure the displaced can maintain their way of life? Is there an obligation to distinguish between "modern" and "western" and prevent the return of displaced minorities to poverty? Should the aim be to

empower each person to realise their potential? These questions reflect the multifaceted nature of humanitarian response. While these are questions worthy of a thesis in themselves in the case of this thesis, we can see theoretically there are numerous discussions in response.

For instance, the evolving objectives of humanitarian response increasingly recognise the importance of not only preserving life but also safeguarding the cultural, linguistic, and psychological well-being of affected populations. This holistic approach acknowledges that human dignity encompasses more than mere survival, emphasising the need to maintain the cultural and social fabric of communities in crisis. The protection of intangible cultural heritage, as advocated by UNESCO, plays a crucial role in this, ensuring that displaced populations can maintain their way of life, traditions, and sense of identity, which are essential for psychological resilience and community cohesion.

In considering, the distinction between "modern" and "western" concepts within humanitarian efforts is critical in addressing the needs of displaced minorities. The goal is to facilitate sustainable recovery that respects diverse cultural contexts and prevents the homogenisation of aid responses. This entails designing and implementing humanitarian interventions that are sensitive to the cultural, social, and economic realities of affected communities, thereby preventing the return of displaced minorities to conditions of poverty. Such efforts should be informed by inclusive policies that promote cultural pluralism and respect for local traditions and knowledge systems, aligning with broader development goals (Fassin, 2010).

Walker and Maxwell (2009) argue that empowerment is a key objective in transitioning from immediate humanitarian relief to sustainable development. Humanitarian responses should aim to empower individuals by providing access to education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities, enabling them to realise their potential and contribute to the rebuilding of their communities. This approach aligns with the principles of Early Recovery and Development in

humanitarian action, which emphasise building resilience and laying the foundations for long-term development even in the acute phase of a crisis. By focusing on empowerment, humanitarian efforts can help individuals and communities to transition from dependency on aid to self-sufficiency and active participation in their recovery and development.

Efforts to support emergencies with detailed cultural analyses (Greene et al., 2017) or focus on cultural conflicts in humanitarian response (Rodon et al., 2012) exist, yet the effectiveness of guidance distribution and utilisation in the field remains questionable. Henry Dunant's influence on humanitarian policy, particularly through the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), has shifted from a traditional Dunantist paradigm to one of localism and resilience (Hilhorst, 2018). Resilience, according to Hihorst (2018), has become the dominant model, balancing support, and abandonment, enabling self-reliance while ensuring basic protection and opportunities for development. This evolution reflects the dynamic nature of humanitarian approaches in responding to crises.

The humanitarian principles established by Dunant, as outlined by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC, 1965), form the foundation of humanitarian approaches. However, the ICRC's Code of Conduct expands on these principles, encompassing aspects such as "participation," "respect for culture and customs," and "accountability" (Bagshaw, 2012). [18] While the four core principles remain pivotal in life-saving situations, the landscape of displacement has shifted towards protracted scenarios, necessitating a broader focus on international development (Landry and Huang, 2019).

The concept of self-reliance, particularly through the use of Refugee-Led Organisations (RLOs), has been explored in various contexts. Betts et al. (2021) examined RLOs as primary

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[18] These are humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality. See the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, proclaimed in Vienna in 1965 by the 20th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

and final responders during the Covid pandemic, while Sahin (2021) assessed their effectiveness and limitations, emphasising their role in alleviating suffering and empowering communities, as evidenced by Syrian refugees in Turkey. Despite these positive aspects, Viloria et al. (2018) caution that RLOs may be co-opted to implement agendas without adequate representation of refugee voices.

Hilhorst's (2018) discussion on the evolving humanitarian paradigm, transitioning from response to development interventions amid unresolved protracted displacement, offers valuable insights. This shift is observed in the changing dynamic of aid delivery with host states, especially in cases of displacement across borders (Cunningham, 2017). The power dynamics are transitioning from United Nations agency-led responses to government-led initiatives, as noted in the Rohingya response (Landry and Huang, 2019). The life-saving humanitarian approach proves insufficient in the face of prolonged displacement, necessitating long-term development strategies to improve lives.

The situation in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, exemplifies the challenges, with 75 percent of refugees and 33 percent of the host community living well below the poverty line (Landry and Huang, 2019). Funding struggles, as indicated by the Joint Response Plan (JRP) targets, underscore the urgency to re-evaluate humanitarian approaches. The global context of conflict and displacement introduces professional humanitarians as crucial actors. Caron (2019) notes the increasing role of professionals from diverse organisations, and Slim (2015) emphasises the emergence of formal humanitarian agencies linked to Western colonialism, raising concerns about neo-colonial interests. The significant expansion of humanitarian action aligns with the pathways of European colonialism.

In post-colonial countries, nation-building often gives rise to identity-based conflicts, contributing to the current surge in displacement, affecting approximately one percent of the

world's population (UNHCR, 2020). Limited UN funds exacerbate the challenges, with former UN Human Rights Commissioner Zeid Raad Al Hussein criticising the organisation for bowing down to states and being overly concerned with funding (Al Hussein, 2017). The UN's reluctance to use its power to defend the rights of the poor, minorities, and displaced populations raises questions about its commitment to human rights principles.

Sovereignty becomes a pretext for human rights violations, with Guterres calling for action while progress on human rights protection remains limited within the UN (OHCHR, 2008). Counter-terrorism efforts are criticised for enabling human rights abuses, undermining the established human rights framework. This underscores the need for the UN to prioritise principled action over mere symbolic gestures and donor funding.

But where does the humanitarian approach meet cultural heritage, and where do they overlap? The term "Humanitarian" can be applied to all areas of altruistic and philanthropic support to others in need; however, within the discussion on humanitarian approaches and displacement, there is a more nuanced view that humanitarian response as an ideology that began with a central movement in the nineteenth century (Davies, 2012). Academics, from International Development, Humanitarian Response to Migration Studies to Economics and Anthropology, have engaged and debated extensively in the area of conflict, refugees, IDPs, migration and poverty and the most practical and beneficial ways to assist people forced to flee their homes over the short and long term (Crisp and Long, 2016; Sachs, 2016: Harrell-Bond and Voutira, 1992). Oddly, these time-bound schools have formed two different approaches, complete with their own donor programmes and budgets and implementation frameworks, despite there being no practical reason for this lack of consilience in the delivery of aid (Benthal, 2018).

The humanitarian response is intricately intertwined with cultural heritage, reflecting a societal commitment to intervening not only in the face of the suffering of distant strangers but also in

response to the potential destruction or loss of their cultural artifacts and institutions. The Roerich Pact of 1935, often referred to as the *"Red Cross of Culture,"* was the first treaty designed to protect cultural property during times of conflict. This pact centred on the identification and safeguarding of immovable monuments through recognised flags, proposing the neutrality of cultural sites, such as museums and educational institutions, in times of war (Roerich, 2018).

The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, established in 1954, expanded on the Roerich Pact's principles and gained widespread international adoption. This convention not only focused on protecting cultural heritage during war but also introduced the concept of *"Common Heritage,"* broadening its appeal on the global stage (UNESCO, 1954). In 1996, the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) was established by four key organisations, actively engaging in the protection of cultural heritage during conflicts and humanitarian emergencies worldwide, adopting the emblem of the 1954 Hague Convention to symbolise its mission (ICBS, 2020).

Shimmon (2014) underscores the challenges faced by the ICBS, including funding limitations and dependence on partnerships, volunteers, and UNESCO for operational sustainability. The critical link between heritage and identity, integral to civilisation, is emphasised, reinforcing the ICBS's humanitarian focus on physical assets, property, and museums. However, humanitarian interventions face multifaceted challenges, ranging from the commercialisation of *"humanitarian"* and *"cultural heritage"* responses to the inadequate funding of crucial areas aimed at alleviating human suffering (Belloni, 2005; Weiss and Hoffman, 2007). Despite the appeal of emergency response, little consideration is often given to the role of humanitarian agencies in potentially prolonging emergencies through their involvement. The question arises: Is there room to enhance the focus on cultural heritage in humanitarian response?

While acknowledging that the primary function of humanitarian agencies, as proposed by Belloni (2005), might be border protection and limiting cross-border consequences, the international humanitarian response may also exist for selfish security reasons. However, this focus often overlooks the cultural approaches of affected populations, as exemplified by the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis Covid 19 Response Plan 2020, where cultural considerations were lacking. Currion (2014) questions whether UN agencies, INGOs, and NGOs are suitable organisations to meet the needs of future conflict-displaced communities, emphasising the importance of defining their purpose in the modern era. The tendency to focus on the next emergency rather than addressing the current one, along with the short-term presence of high-cost crisis response teams, raises concerns about the sustained effectiveness of humanitarian efforts. The delineation of roles, particularly during the initial stages with Emergency Response Teams (ERT) and subsequent phases, necessitates scrutiny to ensure an adaptive and contextually relevant approach to aid provision.

4.5   Conclusion

In this chapter, I have delved into the terminology and legal context shaping the lives of those living in displacement, offering a understanding through definitions, frameworks, and discussions on Refugees and Statelessness. These foundational concepts set the stage for examining humanitarian approaches, particularly in the context of the Rohingya Muslim population. The unique position of the Rohingya within the protective scope of refugee definitions raises pertinent questions about awareness of their rights and the practical

implications of these legal frameworks. Foster and Lambert's (2019) observation on the underexplored relationship between the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1954 Convention underscores the complexity surrounding the understanding and application of rights among displaced communities. The intricate web of terms related to treatment, rights, and responsibilities leaves the displaced bewildered about their status and the paths available to them, further compounded by the legal recognition of these frameworks by the host State. Notably, the Rohingya's legal status complexities emanate from the absence of host countries as signatories to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol.

A significant issue arising is the disproportionate burden placed on impoverished countries hosting the majority of the world's displaced populations, such as Bangladesh and Pakistan. Internal economic challenges, poverty, internal displacements, and corruption within these host nations present formidable barriers to demanding a standard of living and rights for Stateless individuals. The international community's imposition of policies and the duty to protect on these poorer states also raises ethical considerations.

The exploration of policies and guiding documents on Human, Cultural, and Minority Rights reveals a nuanced distinction between cultural and minority rights. National minorities are entitled to rights and representation in displacement, while cultural rights are often overlooked within the humanitarian system. The relevance of cultural rights becomes crucial, as they intertwine with citizenship, national identity, and integration, subsequently impacting land ownership and property rights—an aspect deserving more attention.

Moving to the narratives surrounding humanitarian assistance, there is a critical needs as we see with the inception of life saving humanitarianism but I also reveal criticism and commendation for the politicising of humanitarian objectives. The primary function of humanitarian interventions and development objectives, as debated in the literature, raises

pertinent questions, especially within the Rohingya response. There is a notable shift from the traditional 'Dunantist' life-saving approach towards a more nuanced stance between abandonment and self-reliance. This shift has implications for the millions experiencing the limits of human endurance. In the research, I delve into the reality of self-reliance within the Rohingya communities and whether it aligns with the focus of the humanitarian system, or if abandonment remains a prevalent concern. This exploration will contribute to a nuanced understanding of the evolving dynamics within humanitarian responses and their impact on displaced populations.

4.6   Conclusion to the Thematic Chapters

Throughout my exploration of the thematic literature for this thesis, I have delved deeply into the complex interplay between intangible cultural heritage (ICH), displacement, and the historical literature relative to the Rohingya community. These topics, from cultural heritage as the way of life for a group; displacement as a growing global challenge, and the Rohingya who sit precariously under the status of refugees, illegal migrants, stateless peoples, and resettled refugees, guided my thinking around the research questions, broadened my understanding of the topics and shaped the trajectory of my field-based research. My approach within the literature has been expansive, aiming to understand themes that reveal gaps in our knowledge, thereby enhancing our overall grasp of ICH's role within displaced communities.

It was crucial for me to first comprehend the relevant history of the region particularly Arakan and the literature on the Rohingya's origins. In this regard, I have drawn upon the insights of

key theorists such as Aye Chan, Michael W. Charney, Jacques P. Leider, and Francis Buchanan. Buchanan's listing of the Rohingya as a distinct ethnic group within Arakan has been particularly foundational within all historic literature. These scholars predominantly characterise the Rohingya through scattered Muslim origin stories, frequently framing them as an ethno-religious group, or Burmese Muslims rather than a distinct ethnicity. This perspective has opened up new avenues for inquiry in my research, especially in terms of the self-identification and belonging of the Rohingya as an ethnic group and the continued unification of the Rohingya may challenge the established previous narratives.

In probing the reasons behind the marginalisation of the Rohingya within Arakan, numerous factors have emerged, from the ethnic Burman leadership to historical alliances with the British during the Burma War and, the religious dynamics of a growing Muslim population in Buddhist Myanmar, Rakhine State. However, the role of caste and its implications for the Rohingya's social status stood out as a significant yet underexplored area. I see within the literature, theorists like Islam (2018) have underscored the necessity of considering Burma's cultural context within a broader regional perspective, intersecting with Bangladesh and India, where the influence of Indian heritage, Castes, Baradari and social stratification systems are engrained in the cultural fabric. This insight has led me to seek out if the Rohingya's social status might be more closely linked to the Indian subcontinent's caste or the Muslim Baradari systems through the field research.

Further enriching this exploration, theorists like Subedi (2016), who views caste as a mechanism of power and a vital element in shaping collective identity, have been instrumental in my thinking. Fearon et al. (2000) expand on this by discussing the reinforcement of social identity through violence. This led me to Girard's Mimetic theory, which suggests that the inherent human tendency to imitate others leads to desire, rivalry, and conflict, often resolved

through the construction of myths that unite groups against a common enemy thus resulting in scapegoating. This narrative framework has encouraged me to view the Rohingya through the lens of caste, aiming for a nuanced understanding of their societal position, persecution, and displacement and subsequent scapegoating.

These themes not only provide context for the Rohingya's current situation but also tie into the core theme of ICH itself. Leading theorists in ICH, such as Sara Jane Smith, Teodora Konach, and Lourdes Arizpe, have steered me away from merely listing ICH items in a UNESCO fashion towards a focus on the value and power of ICH, as discussed by John Carman. Consequently, in my empirical research, my focus will be centred on the value ICH brings to the Rohingya and to those around them, which theoretically should bring value to humanitarian agencies or host communities. It is also evident within the literature that there are issues with the term "Intangible Heritage" as a tautology, asserting that it introduces complexities in negotiating heritage value and exacerbates the dichotomy between tangible and intangible heritage concepts. This leads me further to explore Rohingya ideas of ICH and spatial thinking and planning around it in the displacement context.

Another key topic that emerged from the historical context within the literature were the Rohingya language. Firstly, I find consistently within the literature that the Rohingya Language is often side-lined and referred to as Chittagonian thus seen as a spill-over from Bangladeshi culture. This has led me to think and probe more deeply about the Rohingya language and its value not only to the Rohingya but also to humanitarian agencies. While outsiders draw this conclusion, how do Rohingya view their language and the various bridging language of humanitarians and hosts? The literature on ICH and language, with theorists like Hou & Beiser (2006) underscoring the crucial role of language in societal integration, has guided me to consider how language shapes broader cultural narratives.

On the religious front, I explored ICH through the areas of spiritual heritage, primarily contrasting and comparing Buddhist and Islam in their core development. The literature proposes that ancient and mystical aesthetic practices intertwine with cultural heritage, shaping identity, fostering peace, or becoming focal points of conflict. In the research on displacement there are clear questions around the roles sacred heritage play in the communities affected by conflict and displacement, and how ICH contributes to community, or peace-building through religious practices.

As I navigated through the topics surrounding ICH and the Rohingya I moved to the other core topics on displacement. Here, along with UNHCR documents, writers such as Linda Bartolomei, Liisa Malkki and the insightful writings of Hannah Arendt have guided and enriched my understanding and thus focus towards displacement status. From the literature, I see that ICH needs to be viewed in the field research through this status lens, as this will no doubt affect the use and view of a community. Within displacement, theorists such as Will Kymlicka, and others influence the research opening up questions around minorities and rights, again finding a very blurred line around the ideas of status, often more dependent on the host country context than on the displaced individuals themselves. This gives rise to the exploration around the dynamics of displacement status and ICH use.

Another pivotal theme that surfaced in my exploration is the nuanced role of humanitarian assistance, with a particular focus on UNESCO's engagement in the field of ICH amidst displacement. The prevailing assumption of UNESCO's active involvement in humanitarian initiatives is met with diverse critiques within the literature, especially regarding their understanding and handling of ICH in displacement contexts. The intersection of ICH with the plight of the Rohingya has emerged as being notably significant in two areas identified in the scholarly discourse. The first pertains to the heritage of Mrauk-U in Myanmar, a site

emblematic of the rich Burmese historical narrative, yet also a testament to the deep-seated Muslim heritage and migratory tales intrinsic to the Arakan Kingdom. Equally important is the aspect of Thanaka, a traditional cosmetic and cultural practice among Burmese women, which could serve as a poignant symbol linking Rohingya women to their Arakanese roots and heritage. Thanaka emphasises the imperative for UNESCO to elevate the visibility of Rohingya women's heritage, particularly practices like Thanaka, ensuring that their stories and cultural expressions are recognised alongside those of other ethnic groups within Myanmar. These reflections call for a more profound examination of ICH that authentically represent and preserve the intricate heritage and historical narratives of displaced communities such as the Rohingya.

My research, while concentrating on intangible cultural heritage (ICH), and displacement inherently encompasses gender as a pervasive theme throughout. David Wengrow's assertion in 2010 serves as a poignant reminder of how the contributions of women to the creation of civilization are often marginalised or ignored entirely. This observation is particularly relevant in the context of displacement where women are disproportionately vulnerable, often becoming prey to those in positions of power due to their entrenched societal status. Despite Myanmar's commitment to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), this commitment falls short in offering tangible protection or recognition to Rohingya women, revealing a stark disparity between legal frameworks and the lived realities of women in marginalised communities. This gap underscores the critical need for a nuanced exploration of gender dynamics within the study of ICH and displacement, particularly in the context of the Rohingya, where women's heritage and experiences offer vital insights into resilience, identity, and cultural continuity amidst adversity.
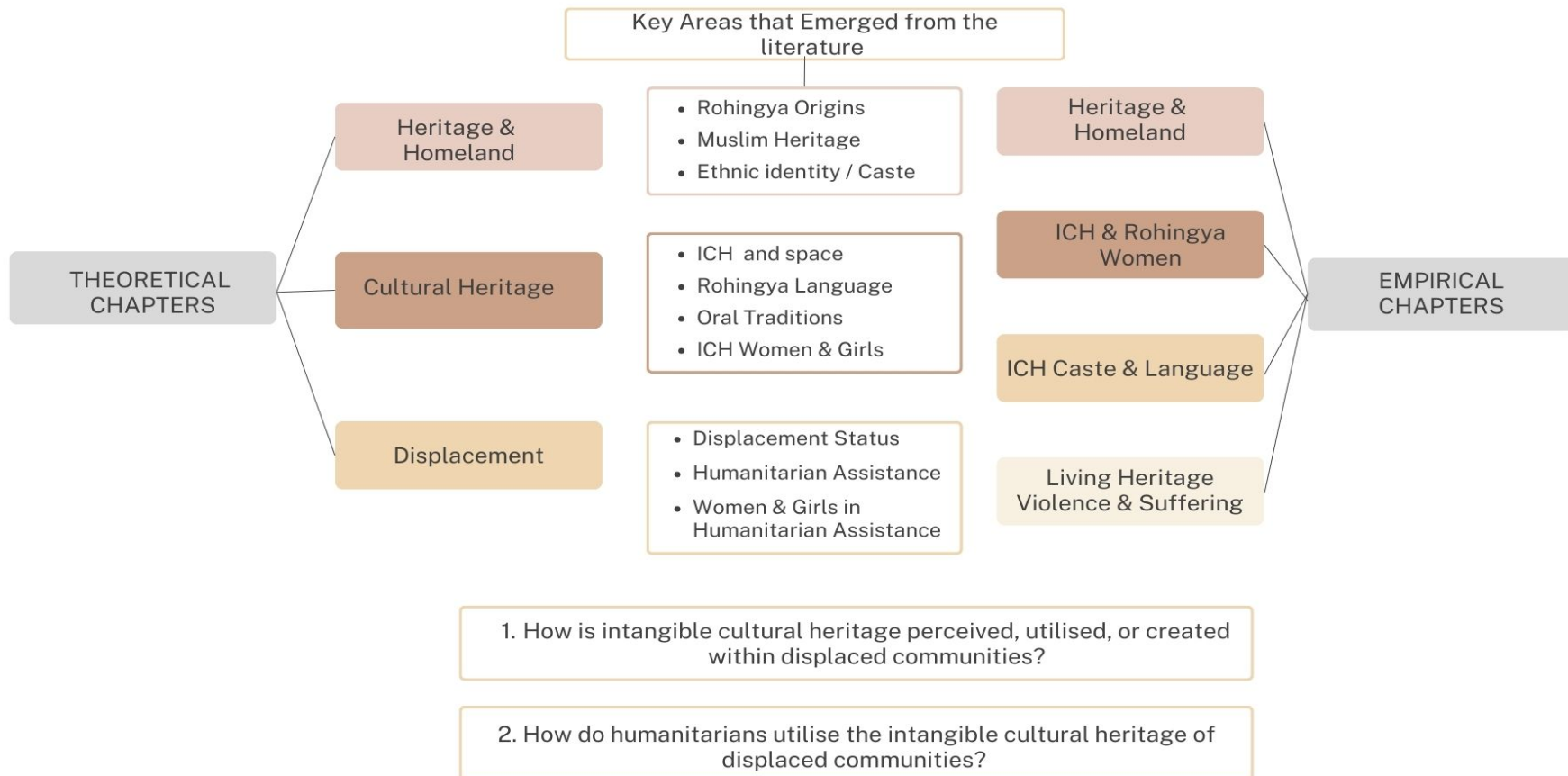
Revisiting the literature of ICH, language, and oral traditions, it's clear that there's a significant gap in how researchers engage with societies that predominantly rely on oral transmission of knowledge and culture. My exploration, informed by scholars like Hess, Braithwaite, Butts, Huffman, Watson, and many others, has revealed a widespread lack of understanding regarding the ways in which oral societies perpetuate their ICH and, consequently, their invaluable knowledge across generations. Hess (2015) succinctly encapsulates this challenge, emphasising the necessity of engaging with oral traditions on their own terms and gaining insights directly from the custodians of these traditions. Hess invokes the words of the renowned oral traditionalist Kabir, who poignantly states, "I talk of what I've seen with my own eyes, you talk of what's written on paper. How can your mind and mine ever get together?" This profound statement (as cited by Hess, 2015) underscores the fundamental disconnect between written documentation and the lived, experiential knowledge of oral societies.

This realisation about the intrinsic value and unique nature of oral traditions has led me to adopt Yarning as a pivotal method in my field research, especially when working with the Rohingya community. Yarning, as a method of storytelling and knowledge sharing, that has its roots in the seafarer traditions aligns perfectly with the oral traditions of the Rohingya, facilitating a deeper, more authentic engagement with their cultural heritage and narratives. This approach not only respects the oral nature of their society but also provides a meaningful framework through which their rich heritage can be explored and understood in the context of displacement and preservation of their cultural identity.

The literature review has laid a solid groundwork for my forthcoming empirical investigation, providing me with a definitive path to delve into the nuances of ICH within communities like the Rohingya, who are characterised by displacement, their Sufi Muslim roots as seafarers and oral traditionalists. As I embark on these next chapters of my research, there is little doubt that

the theoretical exploration will guide me in unearthing profound insights into how cultural heritage is preserved and adapted in displacement and resettlement, particularly examining the intangible and spatial dimensions of living heritage in the context of displacement. This exploration aims to shed light on the cultural resilience of the Rohingya, offering a deeper understanding of their enduring connection to heritage despite the many challenges. My goal is to not only enrich the academic dialogue surrounding ICH and displacement but also to capture a critical snapshot of the Rohingya's ICH at a pivotal moment in their journey across the three research sites.

Flow of the Theoretical Chapters to the Empirical Chapters

Key Areas that Emerged from the literature

Heritage & Homeland
- Rohingya Origins
- Muslim Heritage
- Ethnic identity / Caste

Cultural Heritage
- ICH and space
- Rohingya Language
- Oral Traditions
- ICH Women & Girls

Displacement
- Displacement Status
- Humanitarian Assistance
- Women & Girls in Humanitarian Assistance

THEORETICAL CHAPTERS

EMPIRICAL CHAPTERS

Heritage & Homeland

ICH & Rohingya Women

ICH Caste & Language

Living Heritage Violence & Suffering

1. How is intangible cultural heritage perceived, utilised, or created within displaced communities?

2. How do humanitarians utilise the intangible cultural heritage of displaced communities?

5   Chapter Five: The Field Research

Chapter 5 of this thesis delves into the methodology employed to explore the lived experiences of the Rohingya communities across diverse locales—Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, Karachi in Pakistan, and Carlow Town in Ireland. This chapter stands pivotal in the thesis, serving as the cornerstone that elucidates the ethnographic approach tailored to grasp the nuanced realities of these displaced communities, through the broad and diverse lens of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH).

Rooted in the rich traditions of ethnography, this chapter outlines a methodological framework that extends beyond mere observation to embrace the deeply narrative-driven and participatory method of Yarning, alongside key informant interviews and observations. This approach is instrumental in capturing the complex diversity of cultural practices, beliefs, and the socio-political dynamics within the Rohingya community. It underscores the adaptability and resilience of their cultural identity amidst the profound challenges of displacement and resettlement.

As the Chapter progresses it will bring a meticulous elaboration on the utilisation of Yarning—a culturally sensitive dialogue that fosters authentic exchanges, revealing insights into the community's intricate dimensions of experience and the role of ICH in their lives. This method, in synergy with observations and interview techniques, allows for a profound exploration of the community's cultural nuances, facilitating discussions on sensitive topics such as displacement, the past, and the varied groups within the Rohingya community.

Moreover, the chapter navigates through the research questions designed to probe the perception, utilisation, and creation of ICH within displaced communities, and how humanitarian actors

incorporate this heritage into their initiatives. These inquiries guide the exploration into the active engagement and evolution of ICH within the cultural fabric of displaced communities, offering a nuanced perspective on the dynamic interplay between cultural heritage and the process of displacement and resettlement.

This chapter unfolds it details the rigorous data collection processes and interactions across diverse locations. It delves into the intricate fabric of yarns, interviews, and meetings, each meticulously catalogued by location and participant, laying the providing a deeper understanding of the cultural contexts encountered. The narrative then transitions into an immersive overview of the research settings within Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Ireland, painting a vivid picture of the landscapes that form the backdrop to this study.

As the chapter progresses, it offers a reflective account of the challenges and serendipities that shaped the research journey, from unforeseen commitments to pivotal moments that redirected the course of inquiry. This introspective section provides a window into the dynamic nature of ethnographic work, where the unexpected becomes part of the rich experience.

The discussion deepens as it turns to the poignant mental health challenges observed within the Rohingya communities, shedding light on the profound impacts of displacement and the resilience that emerges in the face of adversity. This leads into an exploration of the support networks and coping mechanisms that knit these communities together, even as they navigate the landscape of fear and uncertainty that pervades their daily lives.

Ethical considerations are then brought to the fore, reflecting on the delicate balance between research objectives and the ethical imperatives that guide the responsible conduct of ethnographic work. This section underscores the critical importance of approaching sensitive topics with

empathy and respect, ensuring that the voices of the participants are honoured and their dignity upheld.

The chapter culminates in a reflective section titled "A First and Lasting Impression," where initial perceptions are revisited and the transformative impact of the research journey is acknowledged. This introspective conclusion not only encapsulates the personal growth of the researcher but also highlights the indelible impressions left by the stories and experiences shared by the Rohingya communities.

The significance of this chapter cannot be overstated. It not only lays the groundwork for the research methodology but also positions the study within the broader academic discourse surrounding ICH, oral traditionalists, and displacement contexts. By articulating the methodological choices and the rationale behind them, this chapter provides a clear roadmap for the research, highlighting its contribution to bridging existing knowledge gaps and enhancing the understanding of cultural dynamics within displaced communities.

5.2   Methodology

The chosen methodology for this research is rooted in Ethnography, a method that delves into the study of social interactions, behaviours, and perceptions within groups, teams, organisations, and communities. Ethnographic approaches, originating from anthropology, traditionally focused on small and often remote societies. In this research, the application of ethnography is designed to leverage existing literature, incorporating methods such as observations, Yarning, and key informant interviews. Ethnography is particularly well-suited for understanding specific cultural

communities (Reeves et al., 2008). It is an ideal choice for this study given its focus on the Rohingya community and associated populations. This methodological approach proves valuable for its strength in exploring cultural nuances and engaging in discussions on sensitive topics such as. displacement, the past, understanding diverse groups within the Rohingya community, and assessing the value of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) within the context of displacement and oral traditional groups. Additionally, it is worth noting that there is limited existing knowledge on the study topic, particularly concerning ICH in the context of displacement, underlining the significance of employing an exploratory and in-depth methodological approach.

The core methods utilised in this research include traditional Yarning and observations strategically positioned at the centre of the investigative process. Through deep ethnographic engagements and analysis, these methods aim to unearth insights that go beyond surface-level observations. The approach is designed to reveal a comprehensive system of values, beliefs, symbols, and behaviours within the cultural context of the Rohingya community. The utilisation of Yarning, a unique and culturally sensitive method, aligns with the objective of fostering open and authentic dialogues, allowing for a richer understanding of the intricate dimensions of the community's experiences and the role of ICH in their lives.

Furthermore, this methodology aims to contribute not only to the understanding of the Rohingya community but also to the broader academic discourse surrounding ICH and oral traditionalists in displacement contexts. By combining established ethnographic methods with a focus on delicate and understudied topics, this research seeks to bridge existing knowledge gaps and provide a nuanced perspective on the cultural dynamics within displaced communities. The approach

emphasises the importance of context-specific methodologies in exploring the complexities of ICH, ensuring the research findings are both rigorous and culturally informed.

5.3   Research Questions

Throughout the development of the research concept note, numerous questions and sub-questions have crossed my mind, with some evolving and others dissipating as the study progressed. Chapter One (1.3) provides insights into the evolution of these questions and acknowledges the contributions of other lead authors to the existing knowledge base. Research Questions:

1. *How is intangible cultural heritage perceived, utilised, or created within displaced communities?*

2. *How do humanitarians utilise the intangible cultural heritage of displaced communities?*

The research questions are carefully designed to explore the multifaceted dynamics surrounding intangible cultural heritage within the context of displacement. The first question delves into the subjective experiences and perspectives of the displaced communities themselves, shedding light on how they view, engage with, and potentially contribute to their ICH. The second question shifts the focus to the role of humanitarian actors, aiming to understand their approaches and strategies in considering or integrating ICH into their initiatives.

Additionally, these questions are framed with a recognition of the complexity and richness of ICH in oral communities, acknowledging that it goes beyond mere preservation and involves active engagement, creation, and utilisation within the cultural fabric of displaced communities. The Buddhist concept of "Mu" serves as a reminder to continually refine and reassess these questions, ensuring that they remain attuned to the evolving dynamics of ICH in the context of displacement.

5.4   Methods

The research methods employed in this study are rooted in ethnography and used to develop a comprehensive examination of the everyday practices and lives designed to generate detailed descriptions of studied groups within a specific time and geographic location, acknowledging the dynamic nature of these groups over time. Following the principles articulated by Geertz (1973), the approach involves thick description, providing a nuanced interpretation of the Rohingya communities in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Ireland and the narratives of humanitarian responders.

Thick description, as employed in this study, elucidates the behaviours and cultural activities of the groups while contextualising these activities within a broader socio-cultural framework. Drawing from the well-established tradition of ethnographic methodologies, this research introduces the innovative method of Yarning (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010). Taking its name from the Yarn or story telling of the ancient seafarers, Yarning has been limited to health research within oral speech communities of Australia's indigenous peoples. Yarning is strategically employed to enrich the understanding of the oral communities and their way of passing on knowledge such as the Rohingya.

Data collection during coordination meetings involved meticulous note-taking, offering valuable insights into the discussions and comments of humanitarians working across the entire camp and representatives from the Government of Bangladesh. Coordination meetings in Bangladesh provided a structured environment for probing questions related to the research topics, while in Pakistan, interactions with humanitarians occurred in more informal settings.

The research employed semi-structured and unstructured interviews with individual humanitarian workers, often integrated with Yarning sessions when engaging with national staff and Rohingya communities. The focus of these interactions was on comprehending the communities within their social context, generating valid data to address the research questions. Given the central role of ICH in this study, particular attention was directed towards understanding the communities' societal structure of Caste, Baradari or other hierarchical systems. The research concurrently addresses three interconnected areas; Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), displacement, and humanitarian response.

As the research evolved, the methodology drew on critical areas of the literature, aligning with the dynamic nature of the study's objectives and contributing to the evolving discourse within cultural heritage studies, displacement studies, gender, and the field of humanitarian response.

Observations

The observational method employed in this study aligns with what Angrosino and dePerez (2000) categorise as focused observation. This method emphasises a symbiotic relationship between observation and interviews, where participants' insights guide the observer's decisions about what

to focus on. Marshall and Rossman (1989:79) define observation as "the systematic description of events, behaviours, and artefacts in the social setting of the study."

Observations serve as a powerful tool for capturing the essence of situations through sensory experiences, providing a comprehensive and well-documented account of the studied context (Erlandson et al., 1993). Commencing in January 2019 and persisting throughout the field-based components of the research, field observations are integral to gaining a profound understanding of the intricate relationship between displaced populations, humanitarian sectors, and the enduring values of cultural heritage in the delivery of durable solutions.

The intent behind these observations is to witness and document the interactions of displaced communities within the constructed settings and constraints of refugee camps, informal settlements, and resettled environments in Ireland. The ongoing observations aim to capture changes to cultural heritage in these new environments. Aligning with Bernard's (1994) perspective on participant observation, the research team and I employ a process of building trust and rapport within the communities, integrating into their day-to-day activities. Subsequently, a deliberate removal from the setting facilitates the immersion in collected data, enabling a thorough understanding of the observed phenomena for subsequent analysis and documentation. The observational process encompasses natural conversations, interviews, and unobtrusive data collection methods (Bernard, 1994).

The primary objective of the observational approach is to amass data that contributes to addressing the research questions. Given the extensive history of displacement experienced by the Rohingya population, the anticipation is that ICH may manifest differently in various camps and country settings. Observations also serve as the foundation for open-ended Yarning sessions during

interviews or humanitarian meetings, fostering a more profound understanding of the cultural dynamics at play within the studied communities.

Interviews

In the area of ICH research, interviews stand as a pivotal tool for delving into individual and collective perceptions of the past and the complex ways these perceptions are constructed and evolve over time. This study harnesses the power of interviewing, drawing on the methodological insights of Sorensen and Carmen (2009), to illuminate the nuanced attitudes toward cultural heritage within the Rohingya community. By adopting an approach that prioritises empathetic listening and minimises researcher bias, inspired by Rubin and Rubin's (1995) conception of interviews as the 'art of hearing data,' this research endeavours to capture the authentic voices and lived experiences of the participants.

The semi-structured format of the interviews, tailored to engage humanitarian workers from both the United Nations and various Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), fosters a conversational space that encourages open and honest dialogue. This format is imbued with a spirit of inquiry and flexibility, echoing Gillian's (1982) advocacy for an inquisitive stance that seeks to understand the underlying logic and sentiments shaping participants' narratives. Stig Sørensen's (2009) call for methodological adaptability further guides this approach, ensuring that the interviews are not confined by rigid structures but are responsive to the dynamic and evolving contexts of the discussions.

This methodological framework aims to create an environment where participants feel valued and heard, enabling them to articulate their perspectives on their cultural heritage and experiences of displacement with authenticity and depth. Through this process, the research aspires to uncover

the intricate layers of meaning that cultural heritage holds for displaced communities, contributing to a richer, more complex understanding of how past experiences and memories shape present identities and future aspirations.

Interviews in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh: Between January 2nd and August 4th 2019

28 Individual UNHCR:

My role as a Senior Staff member within UNHCR significantly facilitated the process of engaging with both senior and local personnel for interviews. This insider position not only granted me a unique vantage point but also ensured that all relevant UNHCR staff were well-acquainted with the objectives of my research. Leveraging the regularity of weekly meetings, I was able to seamlessly integrate semi-structured interviews into the existing schedule, providing a structured yet flexible platform to delve into the diverse experiences and viewpoints of UNHCR staff regarding the study's focal themes. This approach proved instrumental in enriching the research with a breadth of perspectives, directly from those at the forefront of humanitarian operations.

6 Individual IOM:

My established connections with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the rapport developed with its staff from previous humanitarian missions were instrumental in facilitating semi-structured interviews focused on Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and the humanitarian response in Bangladesh. IOM's pivotal role in leading the Shelter Sector provided an invaluable context for these discussions, allowing for an in-depth exploration of ICH within the

broader humanitarian coordination frameworks. These dialogues were further enriched by the involvement with the Cultural Memory Centre (CMC), a project that evolved during my tenure in the camp and beyond, under the stewardship of IOM curator David Palazon and site planner Ms. Ghada Barakat. This engagement with key IOM figures not only deepened the research insights into the interplay of cultural heritage and humanitarian practices but also highlighted the critical contributions of specific individuals in shaping the discourse around cultural preservation in displacement contexts..

11 Individual INGO:

My engagement with international NGO personnel from a diverse array of organisations, including DRC, NRC, GOAL, BRAC, WV, and CARE, was a constant throughout my fieldwork in the camps and during coordination meetings. These interactions revealed a notable depth of understanding among NGO staff regarding the Rohingya's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), coupled with a palpable enthusiasm for its integration and preservation within the camp settings. The dialogues around these crucial themes were facilitated under the endorsement of the senior Technical Coordinator, Oscar Sanchez Pineiro, ensuring that the discussions were both authorised and aligned with the broader objectives of the humanitarian response efforts. This collaborative environment fostered a rich exchange of ideas and insights, significantly enriching the research narrative with diverse perspectives on the role and significance of ICH in enhancing the quality of life and resilience among the displaced Rohingya communities..

6 Individual Local NGO staff:

Collaborations with local NGO staff from Bangladesh, who are integral to registered non-governmental organisations, yielded profound insights into the Rohingya's Intangible Cultural

Heritage (ICH) within the camp contexts. These staff members, proficient in both English and the Rohingya language due to their native Chittagonian, facilitated smooth dialogues, notwithstanding occasional challenges in comprehending certain Rohingya dialects. Their linguistic prowess, particularly in translation, was a key factor in their employment, enabling effective participation in coordination meetings led by international bodies and the Government of Bangladesh. This linguistic bridge not only enhanced communication efficiency but also enriched the research with nuanced local perspectives on the preservation and significance of ICH among the Rohingya communities in the displacement settings.

2 Individual GoB:

My engagement with two key figures, each holding the critical role of Camp In Charge (CiC) and responsible for overseeing distinct segments of the camp, culminated in a pair of formal interview sessions. Despite the recurrent nature of our interactions, a discernible reticence to delve into the intricacies of Rohingya ICH and spatial dynamics within the camps was evident. This cautious approach to sharing detailed insights might have been shaped, in part, by my association with UNHCR as a Shelter Officer, a position that inherently intersects with the operational and policy frameworks of the camps. Given the delicate nature of discussions surrounding government policies and strategies concerning the Rohingya, confidentiality is paramount; hence, in my research documentation, I have chosen to anonymise the identities of these government officials, referring to them collectively as CiCs. This measure ensures the preservation of their privacy while allowing for a candid exploration of the complex governance and administrative challenges inherent in managing refugee camp settings..

I undertook the following interviews in Karachi, Pakistan: Between January 8th 2020 and May 2021.

- 5 Individual UNHCR:

The team from UNHCR in Karachi (Based in Islamabad) was comprised of a diverse group of professionals, including three Refugee Protection staff, one Deputy Representative, and a Coordinator, all of whom brought a wealth of experience from their work with displaced populations both internationally and within Pakistan. Despite their expertise, their direct engagement with the displaced populations in Karachi was somewhat constrained, primarily due to the organisation's reliance on a single partner agency to implement their projects in the city. This operational limitation, coupled with the politically sensitive nature of statelessness and the specific challenges faced by the Rohingya community in Pakistan, led to a cautious approach in addressing these issues directly. While UNHCR had initiated studies to explore the situation of stateless groups including the Rohingya, Bengali, and Bihari communities, the findings of these studies remained unpublished, reflecting the delicate balance the organisation had to maintain in navigating the complexities of statelessness within the context of its relationship with the Government of Pakistan.

- 2 Individuals from INGOs:

In the Karachi settlements, two remarkable women from international NGOs, Ms. Dea Haxhi of CARE International and Mrs. Huma Adnan of Craft Stories, Karachi, played pivotal roles in my research. Their contributions offered profound insights into the lives of female Rohingya refugees. Dea Haxhi's engagement was direct, working on the ground in Arikanabad with Rohingya women, providing an intimate glimpse into their daily challenges and triumphs. On the other hand, Huma,

as the CEO of Craft Stories, not only offered employment but also imparted valuable skills training to some of the Rohingya women, fostering a sense of empowerment and community. The experiences and perspectives shared by Dea Haxhi and Huma Adnan were instrumental in enriching the research narrative, shedding light on the nuanced dynamics within Karachi's informal settlements and the resilience of the Rohingya women therein..

- 4 Individuals NGO:

Staff from local non-governmental organisations operating within Karachi's settlements, particularly those associated with the Burmese Muslim Welfare Association (BMWA), played a crucial role in the community. These dedicated individuals, deeply entrenched in the day-to-day realities of the Rohingya and other ethnic groups from Myanmar residing in Karachi, contributed significantly to the welfare and support of these communities. Their grassroots involvement and first-hand experiences provided invaluable insights into the challenges and resilience of the displaced populations, enriching the broader understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics at play within these urban settlements.

- 7 Individuals Gov and Representative for UNESCO:

In the research, interviews were conducted with a central government official from Islamabad and five local government staff in Karachi, facilitated by the Burmese Muslim Welfare Association (BMWA). These local officials, primarily engaged in grassroots operations within lower council tiers, offered supportive narratives that enriched the contextual understanding of the Rohingya communities, albeit their direct comments were not explicitly cited in the study. Additionally, the involvement of Mrs. Patricia McPhillips, the Country Representative for UNESCO, brought a distinctive perspective to the research. Despite her limited direct experience with the Rohingya

situation, her discussions provided valuable insights into the role of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and its implications in displacement settings, viewed through the lens of UNESCO's global mandate and objectives. These engagements, both formal and informal, contributed to a multifaceted understanding of the complex dynamics at play in the regions studied.

- 4 Individuals Community:

Over a span of three months, facilitated by the Noor Hussain Arkani of the Burmese Muslim Welfare Association (BMWA), I engaged in in-depth interviews with a diverse array of community figures, including leaders from religious circles and representatives of various groups. This period of intensive interaction provided a broad spectrum of perspectives, enriching the research with deep insights into the community dynamics, leadership structures, and the cultural and religious underpinnings that influence the daily lives and resilience of the Rohingya in their current contexts.

I undertook the following interviews in Carlow, Ireland. Between August 2019 and January 2020 with a return visit in August 2020

- 4 Groups Rohingya:

In Carlow, a series of meetings were meticulously orchestrated by a respected Rohingya community leader, Mr. Rafiq, who facilitated gatherings with resettled families and extended family units. These sessions were thoughtfully arranged in the welcoming ambiance of my Bed & Breakfast's front sitting room, situated along the bustling main street of Carlow Town, courtesy of the accommodating establishment owners. The focus of these interactions was predominantly on

households led by women, offering a poignant insight into the familial structures and dynamics within the resettled Rohingya community. This setting provided a conducive environment for open, heartfelt discussions, shedding light on the experiences, challenges, and aspirations of these families as they navigate their new lives in Carlow.

- 14 Individuals Rohingya:

The research encompassed a series of individual meetings, strategically distributed across four distinct visits to ensure thorough engagement and depth of understanding. A significant portion of these interviews, numbering twelve, were conducted during a vibrant Rohingya cultural day, capturing the essence of their rich traditions and collective spirit. The remaining four interviews were thoughtfully spaced out over three separate occasions, allowing for more intimate, focused discussions. This structured approach facilitated a comprehensive exploration of individual narratives, enriching the research with diverse perspectives and personal stories that underscore the resilience and cultural vibrancy of the Rohingya community.

- 4 Individuals Cricket club:

The inception of the cricket club, a notable initiative within the Rohingya community, provided a unique lens through which to examine the nuances of cultural integration and community building. Interviews with four individuals instrumental in the club's establishment offered invaluable insights into the club's role as more than just a sporting endeavour—it emerged as a vital platform for fostering community cohesion and enhancing the Rohingya's integration into their new environment. These discussions, held during a cricket event and thus capturing the immediacy and vibrancy of the setting, complemented the broader narrative gleaned from previous interviews conducted with other Rohingya individuals. The focus on the cricket club highlighted the

transformative power of sports in bridging cultural divides and building a sense of belonging and collective identity among the displaced Rohingya community..

- 2 Individuals RAI:

The engagement with the local community through Rohingya Action Ireland (RAI) provided a pivotal avenue for understanding the dynamics of Rohingya integration and advocacy within Ireland. My participation in two community discussions hosted by RAI offered a first-hand glimpse into the collaborative efforts and dialogues shaping the support and empowerment of the Rohingya diaspora in Ireland. These interactions underscored the significance of community-led initiatives in fostering a supportive environment for the resettled Rohingya, highlighting the crucial role of RAI in mobilising resources, raising awareness, and advocating for the rights and well-being of the Rohingya community in their new homeland.

Meetings

My interactions with humanitarian organisations were primarily channelled through structured sector meetings and field visits, supplemented by numerous informal gatherings. These sector meetings served as vital forums for discussing the lived experiences, environments, and Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of the Rohingya community. The schedule for these discussions spanned various specialised groups, including Shelter and Site Planning, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Livelihood, Health, Protection, Durable Solutions, and Education sectors. In instances where nuanced issues required specialised knowledge, smaller working groups were established to facilitate consensus-building.

These meetings were instrumental in acquiring current data and sector-specific insights, though they also underscored a noticeable disengagement with the Rohingya's cultural life, with a predominant focus on the immediate delivery of humanitarian services. While initially beneficial, the repetitive and time-consuming nature of these meetings often resulted in a disconnect from on-the-ground realities, as staff members who frequently attended these sessions spent limited time in the field. In contrast, engagements within the camps themselves proved to be far more aligned with the research objectives, offering deeper insights into the challenges and needs faced by the Rohingya, and the practicalities of humanitarian aid delivery.

Meetings by Location

Over the span of six months in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, from January 2nd to August 4th 2019, I attended a structured series of meetings and workshops which were conducted to delve into various aspects of the humanitarian response and displaced Rohingya communities. The array of engagements included:

- Four mixed-focus workshops dedicated to critical topics such as site planning, shelter construction, and issues related to housing, land, and property rights (HLP), aiming to address the infrastructural challenges within the camps.

- A total of 39 UNHCR meetings, comprising 21 coordination meetings led by technical heads of units and an additional 12 regular internal coordination gatherings, facilitated comprehensive discussions on strategic planning and operational alignment.

- Fourteen mixed meetings brought together representatives from various UN agencies, international NGOs, and local NGOs, fostering a collaborative environment for sharing insights and strategies.

- Twelve coordination meetings organised by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) honed in on technical and policy-related issues, ensuring alignment with national frameworks and priorities.

- Six camp-based meetings convened by the Camp in Charge (CiC) and specifically attended by male participants, focusing on the unique challenges and considerations within the camp settings.

This methodical approach to gathering data through diverse meeting formats ensured a well-rounded and inclusive perspective on the challenges, strategies, and experiences shaping the humanitarian landscape and the preservation of cultural heritage among displaced populations in Cox's Bazar.

Yarning

Yarning, as a distinctive form of storytelling, plays a pivotal role in the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage within communities traditionally reliant on oral language (Atkinson, P., Baird, M., & Adams, K., 2021). This methodological approach to research leverages the oral tradition of storytelling as a means of cultural dissemination. Within these communities, the practice of Yarning facilitates a direct, person-to-person conveyance of cultural values and narratives, enriching our understanding and appreciation of their heritage. These oral traditions are

not only shared and received but are also critically interpreted and valued by the community, serving as a reflection of their collective moral and ethical framework (Klapproth, 2004).

In the context of Rohingya refugee populations, the selection of participants for Yarning sessions was strategically designed to represent a broad spectrum of the refugee community, thereby enabling a comprehensive exploration of their Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) (Denscombe, 2014). The primary aim of these Yarning sessions was to foster a sense of trust among the participants, my research team, and myself. To achieve this, I committed to regular visits to the sites, ventured on numerous activities and made consistent engagement with individuals, thereby nurturing the relationships essential for meaningful dialogue and exchange.

Yarning a Method for Oral Traditional Communications

The practice of Yarning traces its roots back to the seafarers of yesteryears, who relied on oral traditions to convey essential knowledge crucial for their voyages, from methods of oral navigation to identifying fruitful fishing grounds or anchorages. This tradition also found resonance among stockmen in colonial Australia, where travellers and locals would exchange stories, or "Yarns," by the fireside or while working. Yarning, therefore, represents a vital form of oral communication, deeply embedded in various traditional lifestyles, serving as a vehicle for preserving and transmitting knowledge through generations within the framework of myths and stories, especially in environments conducive to storytelling.

Acknowledging that not everyone is predisposed to written forms of communication, this research emphasises the significant role of oral traditions in disseminating ideas, knowledge, history, and heritage. Oral communities, more widespread than commonly perceived, exist even within predominantly literate societies, often in smaller, distinct groups. In this research I have adopted

the method of yarning to understand the perspectives of the oral-based Rohingya communities, exploring the mechanisms through which knowledge is safeguarded and passed down through generations. It posits that meaningful engagement with these communities should respect their communicative norms, allowing them to shape the narrative framework of their Yarns, thus granting them autonomy over their stories.

This research distinguishes between 'heritage stories' and 'history,' where the former is understood as a non-linear narrative inclusive of myths, thereby not strictly adhering to factual events but offering value in understanding ICH. This distinction underlines the importance of viewing Yarning not merely as a method of recounting oral histories but as a nuanced approach to exploring the interconnectedness of experience, knowledge, and relationships, as noted by Atkinson et al. (2021).

Adopting Yarning as a research methodology involves a culturally informed process of collaboration between myself as the researcher and participants, fostering a shared space for knowledge exchange. This method extends beyond passive observation, requiring the me to actively engage with the community's practices, crafts, and biocultural activities. This active engagement—encompassing listening, observing, and feeling aims to enrich my understanding of the community's knowledge transmission processes.

Through the introduction of three field-based examples of active Yarning, this research illustrates the profound impact of engaging with oral-based communities through the sensory experience. Actively Yarning with groups and individuals transcends traditional data collection methods, promoting a more immersive understanding of communication and knowledge sharing within oral traditions, thereby broadening our comprehension of these intricate processes.

Yarning

Yarning unfolds as a vibrant engagement with oral-based communities, weaving through the realms of craftsmanship, artisanal practices, and biocultural traditions. This method transcends conventional storytelling, transforming it into a dynamic interaction that encompasses skill-sharing and the exchange of lived experiences. It introduces a novel approach to narrative exploration, where stories emerge organically through informal dialogues, collaborative work, and other communal activities.

My fieldwork within traditional oral communities has underscored the value of active participation, a cornerstone of the Yarning method. This immersive engagement has been instrumental in fostering deep bonds and trust within these communities. Yarning cultivates a reciprocal learning environment, where the roles of teacher and learner fluidly interchange. As the learner, I, the researcher, immerse myself in the tangible aspects of their cultural practices. This hands-on experience, coupled with attentive listening and curious inquiry about the research theme, unveils the rich tapestry of stories that underpin the community's activities and ethos.

Yarning through crafts

Yarning, when interwoven with crafts, transforms into a deeply participatory and immersive process where learning, teaching, dialogue, and the exchange of knowledge and ideas flourish. This multifaceted approach to Yarning encompasses a wide array of activities, including weaving, sewing, drawing, knitting, jewellery crafting, colour blending, and the creation of foods, tools, or objects imbued with traditional significance. Within these creative sessions, the researcher,

whether individually engaged or as part of a collective, actively intertwines knowledge with the tactile experience of crafting.

This craft-centric Yarning breathes life into the objects being created, turning them into conduits of cultural expression and historical narrative. The crafting process becomes a journey not just through the physical creation of an item but also through an exploration of its cultural roots and the techniques used in its making. Guided by the hands the community, the researcher delves into the rich backdrop from which these crafts emerge, gaining insights into their significance and the stories they hold.

As the crafting unfolds, the Yarning naturally evolves, weaving together tales from the past or moulding visions of what lies ahead. Craft Yarning thus transcends mere conversation; it becomes an experiential journey shared between the participants, where the act of creation and the stories it inspires are equally cherished. This shared, informal, and dynamic process fosters a lived experience that enriches both the researcher and the community, binding them in a journey of shared heritage and mutual learning.

Yarning with Artisans

Artisanal Yarning creates a nuanced distinction between the swift learning curve associated with 'Craft' activities and the profound, generational mastery required for 'Artisanal' pursuits. This distinction is evident when comparing, for instance, the relatively quick-to-learn craft of basket weaving with the intricate, time-honoured artisanal skill of timber boat building. When Yarning with artisans we delve far beyond mere craftwork, necessitating that the researcher bring a foundational knowledge and skill set to the table in order to meaningfully engage.

Within the realm of Artisanal Yarning, the narrative journey explores the intricate layers of artisanal education, shedding light on the reasons certain techniques stand the test of time. Discussions extend to the origins of materials, the craftsmen behind the tools, and the legacy of projects brought to fruition. Similar to its craft counterpart, Artisanal Yarning also emphasises the tactile connection with the tools and materials, fostering an intuitive understanding of their manipulation. However, it uniquely encompasses the wisdom found in cautionary tales—sharing not only the 'how-to' but also the 'what-not-to,' including narratives of mishaps and lessons learned from incidents and accidents.

This deeper engagement with artisanal traditions offers a rich tapestry of stories and insights, where every tool mark and material choice becomes a chapter in a larger story of heritage, skill, and the passage of time. Through Yarning, the artisans and the research, myself, embark on a shared journey that celebrates the complexity and depth of traditional skills, enriching the understanding of both the tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage.

Yarning through Nature and Culture

Yarning in nature (Biocultural journeys into the environment) emerges as a dynamic and participatory approach to exploring and narrating the intricate layers of relationships between nature and culture. This method proves invaluable in delving into the symbiotic connections that exist between a community's cultural practices and the biological environment that sustains them. The richness of cultural diversity within a community is often a reflection of the local ecology and the natural resources it offers.

For indigenous and traditional communities, the bond with their surrounding environment is profound and pivotal to their way of life. Yarning in biocultural environments is about immersing oneself in these communities to actively learn and experience their unique interactions with nature. This could encompass a wide range of activities, from understanding marine ecosystems and fishing practices to foraging for edible plants in the forest, tracking wildlife, or collecting other natural resources essential for their daily needs and cultural rituals.

Through biocultural Yarning, researchers and participants engage in a shared journey of discovery, uncovering the knowledge and practices that have enabled these communities to thrive in harmony with their environment. This method fosters a deeper appreciation of the ways in which cultural identities and biodiversity are interlinked, highlighting the importance of preserving these connections for future generations.

Further Discussion on Yarning within the Research

In my ethnographic research, I deliberately integrated Yarning alongside traditional research methods such as observations and interviews to overcome the constraints typically associated with structured focus group discussions. I chose to move away from focus groups, which are often overused in Rohingya (displaced) communities and broader humanitarian settings, in favour of Yarning. This method, rooted in oral traditional methodologies, fosters a two-way, narrative-driven dialogue, enabling a deeper and more culturally resonant connection with participants.

My research strategy demanded an immersive engagement with the daily lives and cultural practices of the communities I studied. This ranged from assisting in shelter construction and participating in traditional crafts to becoming part of the socio-economic landscape through interactions with local businesses, religious groups, and civil society organisations. In Pakistan, my involvement extended to joining Rohingya fishermen in their daily routines and cultural rituals, from observing Ramadan fasts to participating in local celebrations, thus deepening my connection with the community.

Yarning proved to be an invaluable tool in this research, facilitating meaningful conversations and allowing the research to be guided by the participants themselves. It enabled me to form informal yet profound connections with community leaders and members, offering deeper insights into the communal dynamics and leadership challenges faced by displaced and stateless populations. This approach allowed me to critically examine the humanitarian sector's view of traditional leaders as 'gatekeepers,' revealing a more complex picture of leadership and community cohesion.

Through Yarning, I uncovered the critical role of intangible cultural heritage in maintaining the fabric of community life, resonating with Davis's (2007) concept of culture as the societal "glue", a statement commonly repeated to me by Rohingya participants. The participatory observations and first-hand experiences gained through Yarning were instrumental in understanding the complexities of leadership and keeping community together in the face of the chronic stresses endured by displaced communities. This method highlighted the significance of engaging in real-life scenarios actively and contributively, enriching the research with perspectives and findings that might have remained elusive through more conventional methods.

The extensive use of Yarning in my study not only deepened my engagement with the Rohingya community but also shed light on the intricate ways these displaced populations manage their lives amid uncertainty. By embedding myself within their daily routines and cultural practices, I not only gained first-hand insights into the resilience and ingenuity that define their communal cohesion and survival strategies, but I brought minimal disruption to their days, blending into their work routines and breaks rather than organising fixed times as we usually find with methods such as focus groups.

The Yarning sessions, held in various informal settings from shelters to communal areas within the camps, yielded rich narrative-driven insights that traditional research methods might fail to capture. These conversations laid bare the intricate discussions of hope, fear, resilience, and aspiration that characterises the community's experience of displacement and resettlement. The challenge with Yarning at time is often that information gathered is not always directly related to the research topic.

Yarning however, did evolve into a participatory engagement where I could offer practical assistance to the community's needs, moving beyond mere conversation. This reciprocal exchange of knowledge and help challenged the traditional hierarchy between researcher and participant, underscoring the collaborative nature of ethnographic research. It demonstrated how ethnographic endeavours could transcend observation, becoming a conduit for meaningful, impactful involvement in the lives of study subjects.

Reflecting on the broader implications of Yarning within humanitarian research, it is evident that this approach provides a valuable lens for understanding the multifaceted challenges of displacement and resettlement. By encouraging open, narrative-based exchanges, researchers can

delve into the cultural, social, and psychological underpinnings that shape displaced communities' adaptation and integration efforts. This method, emphasising mutual respect, understanding, and collaboration, advocates for research methodologies that respect and amplify the voices, experiences, and agency of displaced populations.

Furthermore, Yarning embodies a reciprocal dialogue where the flow of inquiry is not unidirectional; questions are often mirrored back with equal curiosity. The learning I derived from the responses was as profound as the insights gained from the questions posed. For instance, the dialogue evolved from technical inquiries about methods and practices; I was asked,

"How do you manage this bamboo connection in your country?"

To which I replied,

"Bamboo isn't a material we typically use in construction in Europe."

This prompted a follow-up from my interlocutor,

"Why not?"

I explained,

"In Europe, our construction predominantly relies on masonry and timber, and we secure structures with metal fastenings."

This exchange not only highlighted the differences in material use but also opened a window into understanding the rationale and cultural underpinnings behind construction practices in different parts of the world.

This question highlights a recurring theme in my fieldwork from March 20 to May 2, 2019, at Camp 20 in Cox's Bazar, where I engaged in Yarning sessions with approximately 30+ Rohingya shelter workers consistently. These workers were part of an innovative project I spearheaded, supported by CARE International, aimed at developing new shelter designs incorporating bamboo and steel materials chosen for their local availability and sustainability. Over six weeks, these collaborative Yarning sessions offered profound insights into how traditional building methods can be integrated with modern engineering solutions, showcasing the community's capacity for adaptation and resilience. This interaction underscored the Rohingya's active role in enhancing their living conditions, reflecting a commendable commitment to self-help and community betterment amidst the challenges of refugee camp life..

This line of inquiry evolved from technical discussions about housing and construction into richer, more expansive conversations that encompassed family life, children, and aspects of culture, heritage, ancestry, hobbies, and beliefs. As our dialogues deepened over time, the Rohingya participants began to proactively suggest enhancements that could significantly improve their living conditions. These suggestions ranged from innovative shelter designs and more efficient layouts to optimising access routes to essential services like health clinics and markets, as well as the strategic placement of mosques. They also proposed ingenious solutions for vertical expansion of shelters as a means to alleviate the pervasive issue of congestion within the camp. This shift in conversation not only illuminated their immediate needs and practical concerns but also opened a window into the broader aspirations and resourcefulness of the community, highlighting their active engagement in shaping a more liveable environment amidst the complexities of refugee camp life.

Reflecting on the Complexities of Yarning

In the process of Yarning, an essential element is the establishment of trust, and a common ground between the researcher and the participants, fostered by the shared experience of immersion within the displaced community. However, I observed that this connection did not always emerge as seamlessly as anticipated. There were instances where the dynamic between myself and the participants stagnated at a superficial level of interaction, characterised merely by an exchange of questions and answers.

Crucially, through these experiences, I came to understand that not everyone is inclined to divulge their personal narratives, be it their past or present circumstances. Despite my efforts to clarify the intent of the research and my role within it, it became evident that some members of the Rohingya community were either unwilling or unable to share their cultural stories. Recognising the ethical boundaries of my research, I acknowledged that it would be inappropriate to press for information when individuals were reticent.

Furthermore, I encountered the inherent challenge within Yarning of needing to cultivate deep relationships, with the success of the method hinging on the organic development of trust between the researcher and the participant. Reflecting on this, I realised that the formation of trust is often contingent upon the perceived benefit to the participant, introducing a layer of complexity when engaging with vulnerable groups. This aspect of Yarning underscores the delicate balance required in ethical research practices, especially when working with communities facing adversity.

Grasping the nuances of ICH is pivotal, given its philosophically structured nature, where information is articulated and disseminated in myriad ways, contingent upon the narrator. Regrettably, for oral language communities, documentation predominantly comes from external sources. Despite the global dispersion of the Rohingya, facilitating diverse linguistic documentation of their lives and memories, the heart of the population in Bangladesh and Pakistan remains anchored in oral traditions. I was acutely conscious of this, recognising that the valuation of cultural heritage by external documentarians significantly influences the social fabric of oral language communities. Moreover, I noted the varied agendas among Rohingya groups across different locales, often resulting in narratives that might support, contest, or complement each other depending on their agenda at the time.

A fundamental hurdle in discussing language and heritage was the very concept of "Cultural Heritage." The literature underscores that heritage, a concept deeply rooted in Western thought, often finds little resonance in the Asian context. Language emerged as an initial barrier in my research. Working with the Rohingya field team, we navigated through the meanings of terms like culture (rawsom), tradition (raywas), and knowledge (Elom). However, 'heritage' proved elusive, embodying a distinctly Western notion with no direct equivalent in their language.

In delving into Rohingya ICH, it became apparent that while the archaeology of physical remnants offers one narrative avenue, the intangible aspects of their cultural heritage, such as dress, cuisine, songs, and traditional practices, Henna, and Thanaka present a rich tapestry for exploration. Initially, similarities with Bengali ICH seemed apparent, but these perceived overlaps gradually

diminished as I began to discern a distinct "Rohingya-ness" among my participants. They were keen to underscore differences from their host communities, which, though sometimes subtle to me in the early days, were significant to them, highlighting the importance of perspective in valuing cultural nuances.

In all research locations, I started by elucidating the concepts of "Culture" (to cultivate, to grow) and "Heritage" (inherited or passed down). The Rohingya participants expressed their understanding of cultural heritage in terms of family and community belonging, extending to ancestral lands, Islamic traditions, and livelihoods. Given the linguistic gap, much of our discussions revolved around 'traditional knowledge' or "raywase shekka" (although there is no actual agreed spelling) in Rohingya, encompassing their lifestyle practices, from Islamic teachings to their livelihood activities.

In Pakistan, the British Colonial legacy had introduced the Rohingya to the concept of cultural heritage, or 'saqafati virsa' in Urdu, with men, in particular, showing familiarity due to their interactions in communal activities like fishing. The ethnic and religious identity struggles, notably during the Partition, also influenced their cultural self-perception, as noted by leaders like Mohammad Noor in Karachi, who emphasised their Islamic faith and heritage.

The literature portrays the Rohingya as embodying a blend of Muslim cultures, primarily Sunni-Sufi, distinct from their Bengali neighbours. This Sufi heritage, celebrated by some through artistic expressions, was also discreetly preserved by others, especially in Karachi, where mystic traditions were shared with me. Efforts to assimilate into Pakistani and even Irish cultures were evident, with the Irish Rohingya in Carlow forming a unique bond with the local Catholic Church, which had

supported their resettlement and integration. This intercultural engagement underscored the valued uniqueness of their Rohingya identity.

Lastly, the exclusion of Rohingya cultural heritage in Bangladesh and Pakistan has profoundly impacted them, yet they've found ways to maintain their traditions despite spatial constraints. The literature suggests that cultural heritage plays a critical role in the inclusion or exclusion of communities, but the implications, especially in long-term resettlement, remain largely underexplored.

Research Location Selection

For my fieldwork, I strategically selected Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Ireland, recognising the unique stages of displacement and cultural integration experienced by the Rohingya populations within these diverse settings. This variety in geographic and cultural contexts offered a rich comparative perspective on how displacement influences the Rohingya's cultural heritage and identity. Each location presented a distinct narrative of displacement, allowing me to explore the multifaceted impact of new environments on a single ethnic group's ICH and the critical role ICH plays in the displacement continuum.

In Bangladesh, my focus was on the cohort displaced in 2017, numbering over 700,000 individuals. Despite the Government of Bangladesh's (GoB) reluctance to formally recognise the Rohingya's displacement status, this group benefitted from the full spectrum of support, rights, and assistance typically extended to refugees under the auspices of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. This setting provided a lens into the immediate and ongoing challenges faced

by newly displaced populations and their efforts to maintain and adapt their cultural heritage in the face of profound upheaval.

The second site in Karachi, Pakistan, contrasted with Bangladesh's recent displacement narrative. The Rohingya community here, having migrated in waves during the 1970s and 1980s following unrest in Burma, remains largely stateless, embedded within a mosaic of informal settlements alongside other marginalised groups. This long-term displacement context in Pakistan offered insights into the enduring aspects of Rohingya cultural heritage amidst protracted statelessness and intermingling with a predominantly Sunni Sufi cultural milieu.

Ireland, the third research location, presented a unique resettlement scenario where the Rohingya have transitioned to citizenship status. Importantly, I note here that first-generation resettled refugees remain "displaced from their homeland" and while resettlement offers great opportunity it is rarely the first option for refugees. Resettled in 2009, this community's experience in Ireland—a stark contrast to their origin in terms of religion, language, climate, and societal structures—offered a distinctive vantage point on the adaptation and preservation of cultural heritage within a completely different cultural and national framework.

Through these three meticulously chosen sites, my research aimed to dissect the nuanced dynamics of cultural heritage within the broader context of displacement, examining how the Rohingya navigate their identities amidst varying degrees of acceptance, integration, and citizenship.

Bangladesh Cox's Bazar

Firstly, I explored the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, January 2nd and August 4th 2019. I had a unique vantage point, courtesy of my temporary role as a Senior Shelter

Officer with UNHCR. This position was distinct because it was categorised as an "External Roster Position," financially supported by Irish Aid, thereby incurring no cost to UNHCR. My primary role during this tenure was to provide support to Mr. Halfdan Kjetland, who, with his extensive experience and prior year-long service in the Cox's Bazar Sub-Office during a critical emergency phase, was well-integrated into the operations but was awaiting formalisation of his appointment as the Senior Shelter Officer. This interim arrangement lasted for about six months until Mr. Kjetland's official recruitment process was concluded.

This unique setup allowed me an exceptional degree of flexibility and autonomy in my research endeavours. Although I was officially designated as a Senior Shelter Officer, the operational responsibilities were primarily managed by Mr Kjetland, given his imminent official appointment to the role. This arrangement afforded me the liberty to dedicate a significant portion of my time to on-ground research within the camps, fostering meaningful interactions and yarning sessions with the Rohingya refugees. My position enabled me to navigate the camps relatively freely, engage with various stakeholders, and participate selectively in meetings that were pertinent to my research or supportive of the transitional phase for the incoming Senior Shelter Officer, Mr. Kjetland.

Thus, my association with UNHCR, underpinned by this temporary but strategic role, was instrumental in facilitating my research. It provided a dual advantage: ensuring the continuity of the Senior Shelter Officer's responsibilities while simultaneously enriching my research with invaluable insights and direct engagements with the refugee community and the operational dynamics within the camps. I engaged Rohingya translators to bridge communication gaps, attended critical coordination meetings, and gained access to sometimes sensitive internal

communications. These experiences enriched my understanding of the Rohingya's living conditions, their interactions with aid workers, and the overarching humanitarian framework.

My tenure in Cox's Bazar was not just observational; it was immersive, allowing me to establish meaningful connections with Rohingya community leaders and refugees actively involved in camp management. These relationships were instrumental in understanding the nuanced dynamics of camp life and the decision-making processes affecting the refugees' welfare. The first-hand experiences and direct engagement with the camp's operational aspects provided a robust foundation for my research.

However, I acknowledge the inherent biases this immersive approach might have introduced, echoing Jorge Ferrer's (2011) notion of the "multiplicity of shores" in understanding complex human situations. My background in humanitarian work predisposed me to view the scenario through a lens of rights and justice, potentially creating blind spots in my analysis. This reflexivity is crucial in interpreting my findings within the broader discourse on the Rohingya crisis, characterised by successive waves of displacement, notably in 1978, 1992, and the significant influx in 2017, each leaving indelible marks on Bangladesh's socio-political landscape and the lives of the Rohingya community.

**Pakistan, Karachi**

In my ethnographic study within Karachi, Pakistan, my engagement with the Rohingya community was established independently, without affiliations to any organisation. This approach contrasted with the experiences in Bangladesh, where humanitarian networks often facilitate access to the Rohingya. In Karachi, my outsider status neither hindered nor benefited my interactions with the

Rohingya, who initially were hesitant to engage due to their vulnerable position as stateless individuals facing discrimination and harassment. Over time, specifically after a month of diligent community engagement efforts, I built a rapport with a key community leader, Mohamad Noor, who became instrumental in granting me deeper access to the community. This relationship allowed for a nuanced understanding of the community's dynamics, including insights from both male and female members.
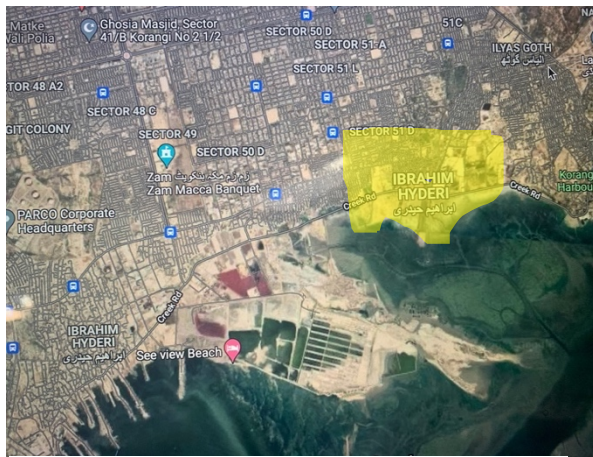
Map 1. Ibrahim Hyderi
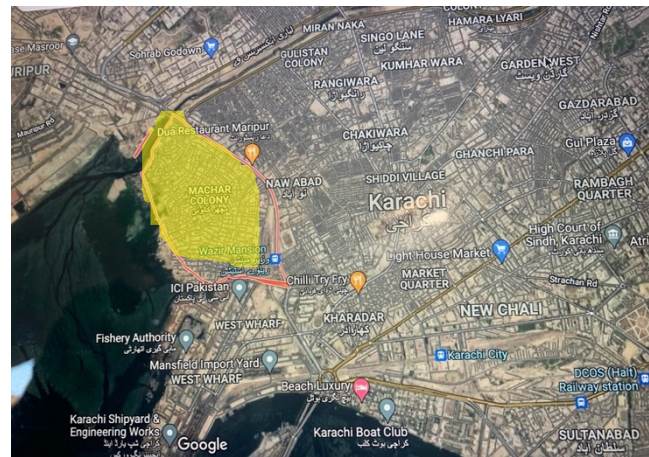
Map 2. Machar Colony

Karachi's demographic landscape has undergone significant transformation since the 1947 partition, swelling from a population of 0.7 million to an estimated 22 to 25 million today, marking a dramatic sixtyfold increase. This exponential growth has placed immense pressure on the city's infrastructure, struggling to accommodate a diverse and multi-ethnic population. The city's expansion has given rise to numerous informal settlements, among them the Rohingya enclaves, which remain marginalised and largely overlooked by mainstream discourse and policy planning. My research focused on two such locales, the fishing communities of Machar Colony and Ibrahim

Hyderi, which epitomise the challenges and resilience of Karachi's stateless and impoverished populations.

The fishing communities of Machar Colony and Ibrahim Hyderi, in particular, stand as microcosms of larger global issues of displacement, statelessness, and urban marginalisation. These areas, characterised by their informal settlement status, lack of basic services, and vulnerability to environmental and socio-political stresses, serve as critical sites for examining the intersection of urban development and human rights. The Rohingya in these enclaves, while physically distant from their homeland, carry with them narratives that are emblematic of broader themes of migration, identity, and belonging in a globalised world.

This ethnographic exploration sheds light on the complex socio-political fabric of Karachi, offering a lens into the lives of its Rohingya inhabitants. Their experiences, set against the backdrop of the city's rapid growth and infrastructural lag, provide critical insights into the realities of statelessness and marginalisation in urban settings.

Ireland, Carlow Town

Carlow Town, located roughly 90 kilometres from Dublin, the capital of Ireland, serves as an intriguing case study for examining the resettlement and integration of the Rohingya community into Irish society. With a modest population of 24,272, Carlow became the new home for 64 members of the Rohingya community in June 2009, marking a significant transition for these individuals from their lives as refugees to becoming Irish citizens. This group, consisting of 13 families, included a diverse demographic of 23 adult females, 14 teenagers, and 27 children or infants, presenting a microcosm for studying the dynamics of cultural preservation, adaptation,

and integration within a distinctly different host community and a comparison on intangible cultural heritage of the Rohingya post displacement.

The resettlement approach in Ireland, which generally disperses refugee families across the nation to prevent the formation of enclaves, makes the concentrated resettlement of the Rohingya in Carlow particularly noteworthy as this population remained together. This deviation from the norm offers a unique lens to explore the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of the Rohingya amidst the backdrop of change and assimilation into Irish society. The juxtaposition of the Rohingya's cultural heritage against the Irish way of life provides fertile ground for understanding the complexities of cultural identity, preservation, and transformation in the context of resettlement.

My personal connection to Irish society, coupled with my academic and professional engagements with development groups, facilitated my access to and interaction with the Rohingya community and their support networks in Carlow. Over the decade following their resettlement, the narrative of the Rohingya in Carlow has been one of significant progress and adaptation. Many of the children who arrived as part of the resettlement initiative have pursued higher education, some have embarked on new family lives, and the community's population has grown to exceed 100 individuals. This evolution reflects not only the individual journeys of the Rohingya community members but also the broader story of refugee integration within a society that is markedly different from their origin.

The examination of the Rohingya community in Carlow contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented by resettlement and integration processes. It sheds light on the ways in which displaced communities navigate new social landscapes, form new identities, and contribute to the cultural tapestry of their host countries. This case study underscores the

importance of supportive policies and community networks in facilitating successful resettlement outcomes and highlights the resilience and adaptability of the Rohingya people in the face of profound change..

In the context of my ethnographic exploration in Carlow, I had the opportunity to engage with various facets of the Rohingya community's experiences through participation in community presentations that delineated the progress of the Rohingya over a decade, the unveiling of a comprehensive ten-year report, and numerous cultural gatherings and memorial events. These occasions not only celebrated a decade of resettlement but also solemnly remembered the victims of the tragic 2017 conflicts in Myanmar, which led to significant casualties and the displacement of over a million individuals. The setting of Carlow facilitated intimate and informal interactions with members of the Rohingya community, enabling discussions in a range of informal settings, from my own accommodation to local coffee shops. These meetings, initially coordinated by the community leader Mr. Rafique and subsequently by several youths with whom I developed a rapport, enriched my understanding of the community's integration and adaptation processes within the Irish sociocultural landscape.

5.6   Challenges to the Research

Reflection On Other Commitments and Unforeseen Happenings

Committing to my PhD research full-time, I temporarily set aside humanitarian engagements, mindful of the unpredictable nature of emergency responses that could pre-empt planned activities. Such an unforeseen event occurred in August 2020 with the devastating Beirut Port Blast amid the

global COVID-19 pandemic. Residing in Pakistan at the time, my expertise in emergency coordination and reconstruction placed me among the few poised to respond to this catastrophe. The mission in Lebanon, however, culminated in a personal health crisis when I contracted COVID-19, enduring significant health repercussions well into 2021. A subsequent bout of COVID-19 in Pakistan further impeded my recovery.

Despite these health challenges, I continued with my thesis analysis and writing. In June 2021, amidst ongoing pandemic uncertainties, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) sought my assistance for a mission in Afghanistan, a country where I had substantial prior experience. Given the absence of COVID-19 travel restrictions to Afghanistan from Pakistan, I embarked on what was intended to be a brief mission. However, the sudden withdrawal of US and NATO forces precipitated a rapid change in the country's governance, compelling me to prioritise the safety of my inexperienced international team amid the ensuing turmoil. We managed a timely evacuation to Kazakhstan, shortly after which I travelled to Tajikistan to establish an NRC hub for staff relocation from Afghanistan.

Returning to Afghanistan to aid in the NRC Country Programme's reconstruction, I spent two additional months before concluding my mission in January 2022 and returning to Pakistan. Subsequently, I moved back to Europe, having completed my vaccination regimen. The compounded challenges of COVID-19, the Beirut blast, and the tumultuous situation in Afghanistan not only extended my PhD timeline but in some ways enriched my understanding of ICH and displacement, providing valuable insights that, I believe, have enhanced the depth and relevance of my knowledge.

Mental Health and Support Within the Rohingya Communities

Mental health is an underreported and under-discussed area of human displacement and humanitarian response. The mental health situation of the communities, particularly the long-term displaced, significantly impacted the research activities. There is disturbing depression, mental anguish, and fear in both camps and slum settings. This trauma was also visible within the first-generation Rohingya community resettled in Ireland, and how could it not be, considering the experiences of their parents.

Mental health issues impact the daily activities of the Rohingya and their cultural way of life, as it does with many displaced populations. For the Rohingya, this mental anguish comes not only through the conflict and oppression of life in Myanmar but also through living behind fences in a heavily overcrowded camp environment and with statelessness on Karachi's margins.

Rohingya describe "statelessness" as a denial of their freedom to exist, a sadness that comes with not being accepted as human. Statelessness, many participants said, is to see that the rest of the world does not accept them as humans. A significant contributor is the treatment the Rohingya continue to endure by all other communities in allowing statelessness to be acceptable.

Humanitarian policy today is moving towards services to support mental health termed "psychosocial support". Within the Rohingya camps, well-established women's groups regularly provide psychosocial support to women in many areas of the camps at their own cost. These groups received little to no support from outside groups, and on many occasions, I provided them with small funds to ensure the groups had Chai or some basics for craft activities. The challenge for the international humanitarian system is that it cannot provide direct funding to self-help groups

despite Rohingya women arguably being the best support that other Rohingya women could avail.

As all participants highlighted, the camps and camp community, structures and systems of Cox's Bazar bear no resemblance to Rohingya life in Myanmar. The camps exceed the international minimum standards in every aspect but particularly in space per person across the camps which should, in theory, exceed 45 square meters per person. Within this, each person should have 3.5 square meters per person of internal shelter living space. While all shelters across the camps are overcrowded, today's most challenging areas are the old camps of Kutupalong and Nayapara. Residents of these two officially registered camps have permanently been restricted, although the population was low compared to today at 34,000 refugees before the 2017 influx. Despite the growth in the population, the footprint has not changed since 1992. Today families of 10 or more occupants live within a single shelter.

> *We are four brothers, each with our wives and children occupying one shelter* (12 meters square). *We have barely one space each for sleeping. We hear each other having sex, our neighbours, and everyone is fighting, coughing or snoring. I feel I can never sleep. Sometimes I try to sleep during the day to have some space, but usually, our home is full of people or smoke from cooking.*

> Rohimullah, a Rohingya poet and photographer from Kutupalong camps, captured the essence of life in displacement through his artistic lens on 10th March 2019.

The stress of living in an overcrowded environment was a constant discussion; there was no escape from groups of people. Rohimullah was born in the camp at Kutupalong, and he explains that life

is never settled; he does not know what home is. He had applied for resettlement and was awaiting an interview when the 2017 influx happened. His interview for resettlement was cancelled, and now he fears he will live out his life in the camps of Cox's Bazar. He is not hopeful of receiving humanitarian assistance, he noted the constant coming and going of international humanitarians that promise him assistance, yet it never arrived.

Overcrowding also affected the Rohingya in many other ways. One well-known and respected Rohingya musician explained the challenge of playing his instrument anywhere in the camp setting. He suffers increasing harassment from religious leaders. He notes that the religious leaders of the camps have a newfound power that they could not excerpt in Myanmar. He also links this to the Bangladesh Muslim culture, which he and many others noted less in line with Rohingya Muslim tradition.

Mullahs from the community regularly threaten MAQM and announce that music is evil and not acceptable in Islam. MAQM discussed the lack of space to practice or perform. In Myanmar, he remembers how his musical group practised regularly and performed at weddings and festivities, but there was no space to practice in the camps. Likewise, the same situation was actual for the Rohingya musicians in Karachi. At the same time, space is less of an issue, and there is a similar conflict with the Muslim beliefs of their neighbours.

> ; *they practice in his home next to the Christian community, proposing that anyone who hears will think they are Christians.*

> A statement by Komal, a Rohingya Musician and fisher man noted during a yarning session at the RMWA room over a meal: 12th February 2020.

The discussion in Karachi was similar, and while many Rohingya had managed to build a lockable shelter of masonry blocks, many continue to live under plastic and hessian cloth.

The most vulnerable, widowed women depended on community assistance to survive and live together. Women, in particular, noted the overcrowded shelter, but they often linked this to security, sleeping with other women, mothers and children. Many had spent their lives sleeping on the floor, never having access to a bed. Crowding also became a common area of discussion in Ireland. Rafique, discussed the crowded situation in his house;

> *We have our mother, wife, and children, plus another family who could not afford rent. We applied to bring our grandmother from Cox's Bazar to live with us, but our request was denied. They told us we did not have enough space in our house for another person.*

Rafique shared insights into the challenges faced by the Rohingya in Ireland, highlighting that despite resettlement, economic hardships persist, underscoring a generational journey towards improved living conditions – 28th September 2019.

Rohingya in Ireland still face daily employment and education challenges and reported some racist incidents. However, even with their new challenges in the liberal environment, they were pleased with their current life situation and ability to contribute. They noted the security they feel from having citizenship and Irish friends and support networks to help them reconcile with their past.

For the Rohingya in each location, they described weddings are much the same as the ritual, the bride's family providing the dresses to the new bride along with jewellery, the dancing, singing and celebration. The ritual return of the bride and groom to the woman's home still takes place one week following the wedding, and food and drink would be abundant. The woman explained that

the girl returns as a woman, which is a time to end the worry over losing a daughter. Traditional sweet foods are always preferred, and the women in Ireland explained that they do their best to find the ingredients.

Living in Fear

The Rohingya stated many times the fear they felt in Myanmar and the continued fear they felt in the camps. Humanitarian responders regularly discussed the violent nature of the Rohingya in coordination meetings. The regular weekly process was to meet in the weekly UNHCR Senior management meeting, where all senior managers report on their sector, the past week's activities and coming activities. This was a random order but always concluded with a presentation by the UNHCR Security Officer. The report was primarily focused on incidents as this was the primary indicator.

While walking to visit a few artisans, we had one occasion when we saw people lining up for water. Despite the severe rainy season, some camp areas have severe water shortages, and water supplies are limited to specific times in the day.

Fayyaz A, discussed the water issue, noting that;

there is no water, and people are too scared to complain for many days.

We took a detour to a dried-up swamp where young girls had dug a hole and were slowly filling their buckets with dirty water. Fayyaz A said,

When you ask what we miss about our way of life in Myanmar, today we will say water, tomorrow something else. It is hard to think about the questions when we do not have the basics.

In the early stages of my fieldwork within the Teknaf camps of Cox's Bazar, I had the privilege of engaging with Fayyaz, a key informant whose insights proved invaluable throughout my research. Our conversations, which spanned various contexts from casual interactions during camp surveys to more formal discussions in shelter meetings with local women, offered a rich tapestry of perspectives on the lived experiences of the camp's inhabitants. Notably, on the 12th of February 2019, a particularly enlightening discussion with Fayyaz was documented, which encapsulates the complexities and nuances of the Rohingya refugee crisis as observed first-hand. This interaction, among others, significantly informed the ethnographic narrative presented in this thesis, providing a grounded understanding of the challenges and resilience characterizing the community's day-to-day life.

Fayyaz, a key figure within the community, underscored the precarious position of those who dare to voice grievances, expressing concerns over potential reprisals from law enforcement authorities or humanitarians. This atmosphere of apprehension underscores the complex landscape within which the Rohingya navigate daily life in the camps. Unlike the systematic categorisation of camp areas by humanitarian organisations, the Rohingya community employs its own spatial logic, delineating zones based on considerations of safety and survival, particularly emphasising the protection of women.

The pervasive sense of fear among the Rohingya, amplified by the constant threat of violence and exploitation by those in positions of power, was a recurring theme in my interactions with Rohingya research assistants in both Bangladesh and Pakistan. These discussions highlighted the endemic stress associated with living under such constraints, a sentiment echoed by the World Health Organisation's 2020 report, which indicates a significant prevalence of mental health issues,

including depression, anxiety, PTSD, and schizophrenia, among up to 22% of the Rohingya population. This figure likely underestimates the actual extent of mental health challenges, exacerbated by the constricted living conditions in places like Cox's Bazar, Karachi, and the newly established Basan Char Island Camp.

For the Rohingya who have been resettled in Ireland, now naturalised as Irish citizens, a semblance of normalcy and freedom is palpable as they witness the growth and development of their younger population. Yet, the scars of past traumas and ongoing afflictions remain, with many women hesitant to relay even positive experiences to their offspring, tethered as they are to their harrowing pasts. While they may have discovered a measure of peace in their new lives, the elusive nature of justice remains a poignant question, prompting reflection on the relationship between peace and justice in the context of enduring human rights challenges.

This brief but nuanced discussion of the Rohingya experience, from the intricacies of camp life to the broader implications of resettlement and integration, provides a comprehensive overview of the community's resilience and ongoing struggles in the face of profound adversity.

5.7   Ethical Reflections

In the process of obtaining ethical approval for this dissertation, I confronted the complexities of data collection during crises, a time when individuals are markedly vulnerable yet paradoxically harbour a sense of hope. I became acutely aware of the researcher's potential to inadvertently foster false hope, a concern I conscientiously navigated throughout my engagement. To mitigate any

undue imposition on the participants' time or well-being, I adopted a more conversational and less formal method of inquiry, specifically Yarning, which aligned with ethical considerations and offered a less intrusive approach.

This method stood in contrast to the more conventional data collection techniques, such as structured interviews and focus groups, commonly employed by UN bodies, NGOs, and other sectors, which can contribute to participant fatigue. By adopting Yarning, I aimed to provide a space where participants could share their stories in a more relaxed and enjoyable manner, thereby reducing the potential for research fatigue.

Operating in sensitive environments like Bangladesh and Pakistan, I was mindful of the potential for my presence to attract unwanted attention, including from local authorities or other influential groups. Despite my extensive experience in working with marginalised communities, the depth of trauma encountered in these settings presented a profound challenge, underscoring the importance of approaching such topics with sensitivity and care.

Throughout this research, I maintained a commitment to ethical principles, including the protection of participant anonymity as stipulated in my ethical approval, and a deep respect for the cultural contexts and norms of the communities involved. This balanced approach aimed to bridge the gap between formal academic rigor and the empathetic, respectful engagement critical to ethnographic research in crisis settings.

5.8   A First and Lasting Impression

During my research, I immersed myself in the daily lives of the Rohingya community, engaging in profound conversations that spanned the spectrum of their experiences living on the margins in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Ireland. Unravelling the intricate web of their heritage narratives was a gradual process, revealing the profound depths of loss and resilience but also in my learning. The Rohingya had been abruptly divested of their homes, lands, and the very essence of their identity—stripped of tangible assets and the intangible threads of connection to their ancestry and land. Yet, amidst this cataclysmic upheaval, their collective memory and cultural identity—what we in the Western context refer to as Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)—remained somewhat intact and ready to emerge wherever possible.

A poignant reflection from a research assistant in Cox's Bazar encapsulated this sentiment, highlighting the profound disconnect between the military's perception of ownership and the intrinsic bond the Rohingya people share with their land—a bond steeped in spiritual and ancestral significance. To them, their land was not just a physical space but the cradle of their identity, culture, and spirituality, nurturing their way of life and sustaining their ecological and communal bonds. This profound connection to their land, viewed as a divine stewardship, underscored the intangible heritage that transcended mere physical ownership. The land, from crops, villages and rice fields with unfenced corridors teeming with life, was a testament to their harmonious coexistence with nature, a legacy they believed would endure within their families and communities through generations.

However, the displacement brought about a loss far beyond the economic sphere, manifesting as a profound disconnection from their land, community, and spiritual roots. This loss, while not quantifiable in monetary terms, precipitated a cascading effect of social and economic hardships, compelling the community to adopt survival strategies that often had detrimental consequences.

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In the makeshift settlements of Cox's Bazar and the Karachi Settlements, the undercurrents of crime and violence served as a stark reminder of the societal and cultural disintegration that can ensue in the wake of such profound displacement. The rise in criminal activities, including drug trafficking and human trafficking, was not merely a symptom of economic desperation but also indicative of the erosion of cultural and ethical moorings within the community. In navigating this complex group, I was mindful of the diverse perspectives and narratives surrounding the Rohingya's intangible cultural heritage. My methodological approach, anchored in the practice of Yarning, facilitated a deeper, more nuanced, less formal engagement with the community's narratives, allowing me to witness first-hand the cultural transformations unfolding within the Rohingya diaspora. This approach underscored the dynamic nature of culture, particularly the challenges faced by the Rohingya in exercising agency over their cultural identity and heritage amidst the tumult of displacement and change.

Before setting foot in Bangladesh, my understanding of the Rohingya community was primarily theoretical, shaped by official reports and briefings rather than personal encounters. The preliminary insights I received were through formal communications such as Situation Reports and strategy meetings. An induction briefing by the head of the UNHCR's Shelter & Settlements Section in Geneva painted a picture not of the Rohingya plight but of an internal discord between UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), further complicated by the Bangladesh government's stance on the Rohingya as illegal migrants due to non-adherence to the 1951 Convention or 1967 Protocol. This bureaucratic rift had tangible repercussions on the ground, affecting both the Rohingya community and the operational dynamics of NGOs and INGOs involved.

Upon arrival, my induction continued with briefings from senior UNHCR staff across various sectors, yet these sessions offered scant insights into the Rohingya's cultural fabric or their immediate needs, focusing instead on logistical and political challenges. The human aspect seemed obscured by a web of operational hurdles and institutional conflicts. The gap between the humanitarian teams and the Rohingya was palpable from the outset. Language and cultural barriers significantly impeded meaningful interaction, a challenge not unique to this mission but exacerbated here by the limited linguistic skills within the team, particularly in understanding the Rohingya language and the distinct cultural nuances of the female community members.

My initial foray into the Rohingya camps of Cox's Bazar was eye-opening, laying bare the stark realities of overcrowding and the desperate need for space and privacy. This experience was crucial in shaping my approach to assembling a Rohingya research team, especially considering the additional challenges in engaging with female participants due to language barriers and cultural sensitivities.

Karachi presented a different context but similar challenges. The informal settlements of Machar Colony and Ibrahim Hyderi were a stark departure from my previous experiences. Machar Colony, in particular, felt like a step back in time, yet burdened with the contemporary challenges of overcrowding, inadequate healthcare, and a lack of basic amenities. This environment, while daunting, was pivotal in understanding the diverse experiences of the Rohingya diaspora and the complex tapestry of their cultural heritage and daily struggles. This phase of my research journey underscored the importance of going beyond the surface-level narratives presented in official briefings and reports, delving deeper into the lived experiences of the Rohingya people to truly grasp the breadth of their cultural heritage and the profound impact of displacement on their lives.

In Ibrahim Hyderi, (Arakanabad) the challenges were akin to those in Machar Colony, albeit with a slightly less oppressive atmosphere. This fishing community, built atop the detritus of Karachi, presented a stark contrast in its living conditions. Despite the omnipresent odours of refuse and decay, the Rohingya here, known in their enclave as Arakanabad, demonstrated remarkable resilience, carving out livelihoods from the very waste that defines their surroundings.

The narrative took a dramatically different turn in Ireland, where I encountered the resettled Rohingya community in Carlow town. A decade on from their resettlement, the older Rohingya women had notably preserved their cultural identity, while the community as a whole maintained a tight-knit cohesion. Their integration into the local fabric was nuanced; they had found a kinship with the local Catholic community, revitalised a dormant cricket club with their passion for the sport, and the younger generation, especially the girls, were dynamically weaving new threads into the cultural diversity, blending traditional Rohingya elements with aspects of their new Irish identity.

The linguistic landscape varied significantly across these contexts. In Pakistan, the transition to Urdu facilitated communication, yet social barriers emerged, particularly in interactions led by my academically inclined Pakistani research team. Their formal approach often failed to resonate with the Rohingya, highlighting a disconnect that was bridged by our driver, Wajid. His informal, empathetic style of communication fostered a more genuine and productive dialogue with the community conducive to Yarning methods, underscoring the importance of adaptability and cultural sensitivity in ethnographic research.

This journey, spanning the congested settlements of Karachi to the resettled community in Ireland, underscored the complex interplay of cultural preservation and adaptation among the Rohingya. It

highlighted the enduring strength of their cultural identity, even as they navigate the myriad challenges of displacement and integration into new societies. Through this exploration, the resilience of the Rohingya spirit emerged as a central theme, illustrating their capacity to maintain a sense of community and cultural continuity against the backdrop of profound upheaval and change.

5.9   Conclusion

Chapter Five of this thesis presents the field research that delves deeply into the lived experiences of the Rohingya communities across Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Ireland. Through a meticulous ethnographic approach, the research navigates the complex terrains of ICH amidst displacement, leveraging the unique method of Yarning to engage with oral traditional communities in a manner that is both culturally sensitive and deeply informative but also not as intrusive and structured as many research methods undertaken in displacement settings.

The chapter begins by setting the stage with a comprehensive empirical analysis, introducing the research methodology that underpins the study. It highlights the choice of Ethnography as a method well-suited for exploring the nuances of cultural communities, especially those facing the adversities of displacement. The use of Yarning, observations, and key informant interviews as core methods facilitates a profound engagement with the Rohingya communities, allowing for an exploration of their ICH in the contexts of their displacement and resettlement.

The research questions posed in this study probe into the perceptions, utilisation, and creation of ICH within displaced communities and the integration of such heritage in humanitarian initiatives. These questions guide the inquiry into a realm that transcends mere preservation, delving into the active engagement and evolution of ICH within the fabric of displaced communities.

The methodology section elucidates the ethnographic approach employed, emphasising the role of thick description in providing a nuanced understanding of the Rohingya's experiences. The introduction of Yarning as a methodological innovation enriches the research, enabling a form of engagement that honours the oral traditions of the community and facilitates a deeper understanding of their cultural expressions and narratives.

The detailed accounts of field observations and interviews across the various research locations bring to light the diverse challenges and experiences of the Rohingya communities. From the cramped conditions in Cox's Bazar and Karachi to the contrasting resettlement experience in Carlow, Ireland, the research navigates through the complexities of displacement, cultural adaptation, and the enduring significance of ICH.

One of the most compelling aspects of this research is the emphasis on the challenges encountered, particularly the mental health issues exacerbated by displacement and the struggle for cultural preservation amidst changing environments. The reflections on these challenges, coupled with the ethical considerations of conducting research in sensitive contexts, underscore the depth and rigor of the ethnographic approach.

In conclusion, this chapter offers a profound insight into the resilience of the Rohingya communities through the lens of their intangible cultural heritage. The use of Yarning stands out as a methodological hallmark, fostering a form of engagement that not only respects the oral

traditions of the community but also opens new avenues for understanding the dynamic interplay of culture, identity, and displacement. The research illuminates the ways in which displaced communities navigate their cultural continuities and transformations, contributing significantly to the broader academic discourse on ICH, displacement, and resilience. The detailed exploration of the Rohingya's experiences across diverse geographic and cultural landscapes highlights the adaptability and resilience of their cultural identity. Despite the profound losses and challenges of displacement, the enduring strength of their intangible cultural heritage emerges as a source of continuity, identity, and hope. This research not only contributes to a deeper understanding of the Rohingya community but also offers valuable insights into the role of ICH in sustaining communities through the trials of displacement and resettlement, marking a significant contribution to the fields of cultural heritage studies, displacement studies, and ethnography.

6   Chapter Six: The Rohingya, No Place Like Home

Chapter 6 of the thesis offers a poignant reflection on the complex interplay between displacement, longing for home, and the preservation and transformation of cultural identity among forcibly displaced populations. It sets the stage for an in-depth exploration of how the Rohingya, particularly those with little prospect of returning to Myanmar or resettling in a third country, navigate the challenges of maintaining a sense of home and identity within the confines of displacement settings.

The chapter provides a rich narrative drawn from the Yarning sessions with the Rohingya, providing insights into their deep-seated connection to their homeland, Arakan, and how this connection is sustained and expressed through their oral traditions and cultural practices. The mention of Yarning with newly displaced individuals and those born into displacement highlights the varying perspectives within the community, from the tangible memories of the older generation to the abstract concept of home for the younger generation born in camps or informal settlements.

The following is drawn from active engagement in the daily lives and cultural practices of the Rohingya—be it through participating in crafts and artisanal activities, accompanying fishermen, or delving into the spiritual depths of Sufi culture—underscores the ethnographic depth of the research. This immersive approach not only enriches the understanding of Rohingya cultural expressions, such as Tarana poetry and its role in peaceful protest but also provides a tangible sense of the community's resilience and adaptability.

The focus on the ritual of burial towards the end of the chapter is particularly noteworthy, as it signifies the intersection of ICH with the practical realities of life in displacement, such as site

planning in refugee camps. This aspect of the research highlights the importance of considering cultural practices in humanitarian responses and camp management, ensuring that the dignity and traditions of displaced communities are respected even in death.

This Chapter sets the expectation for subsequent chapters to unravel the multifaceted dimensions of Rohingya identity and cultural heritage across different locations, aiming to construct a cohesive understanding of what it means to be Rohingya in the face of displacement. The emphasis on exploring various elements of ICH, from crafts to rituals, highlights how broad ICH is and suggests a comprehensive approach to examining the cultural fabric of the Rohingya people, underscoring the potential of each cultural element each of which warrant further academic inquiry.

This introduction effectively frames the ensuing discussion by positioning ICH as a critical lens through which to explore the experiences, challenges, and resilience of the Rohingya in displacement. It provides a nuanced exploration of how displaced communities cling to, adapt, and reinvent their cultural heritage as a means of coping with the loss of home and the uncertainties of life in exile.

6.2   A Rohingya "Muslim "Heritage

In my research, I have come to understand a fundamental truth: when a community does not document its own history, it must rely on the narratives constructed by others. This is particularly poignant for the Rohingya, who, much like other societies rooted in oral traditions, have geomythology woven into the fabric of their heritage. These heritage stories, often relegated to the realm of archaeology, are subject to the field's inherent limitations and biases, as I have noted in

my review of the literature. The discourse surrounding the origins of the Rohingya is not only deeply political but has also gained international attention, manifesting in media coverage, legal battles, and even the conflict engulfing Myanmar. Furthermore, as I will delve into later, humanitarian narratives play a significant role in shaping identities, adding another layer to this complex topic.

In delving into the origins of the Rohingya, I encountered a stark dichotomy in historical narratives. One perspective traces the roots of the Rohingya to a diverse influx of Muslims—Bengalis, Persians, Pathans, Turks, and Mughals—merging into Arakan before the 19th century, creating a melting pot of cultures. In contrast, another narrative positions the Rohingya as descendants of Bengali Chittagonian migrants who came to the region during the British colonial era. This multifaceted debate underscores the challenges in piecing together the Rohingya's past, a task complicated by the interplay of politics, culture, and the inherent gaps in our historical understanding.

Undoubtedly, the colonial era marked a significant increase in the Muslim population in Arakan, posing a challenge to the Buddhist majority's dominance in the region. Delving into the Rohingya's oral narratives, through Yarns, I encountered a rich tapestry of stories that painted a complex picture of their origins, a narrative far more nuanced than the binary perspectives often presented in historical discourse. My intention in engaging with these Yarns was not to validate any specific historical claim or to pinpoint a precise moment in a timeline. Rather, my goal was to embrace the multitude of viewpoints and understand the intricate web of ethnic identity as perceived by the Rohingya themselves.

The literature confirms that even before Burma's independence in 1948, the region was no stranger to unrest, displacement, and conflict, themes that are recurrent in the Yarns shared by the Rohingya. These narratives passed down through generations, reveal a community more often living under the spectre of potential conflict and political tension than in actual strife. Regular mentions of migration and trade, especially by fisherfolk and traders across the Naff River and beyond, highlighted a community in constant motion, often in pursuit of better work opportunities. From the stories shared with me, it became evident that the concept of fixed boundaries held little significance for many within the Rohingya community, pointing to a historical fluidity of movement and a deep-seated resilience in the face of geopolitical constraints.

In my conversations with Rohingya fisherfolk during my time in Bangladesh, a recurring theme emerged about their historical migrations from what is now Bangladesh. They perceive the coastal regions as an intrinsic part of their cultural domain, particularly for fishing, showing a fluid understanding of borders that contrasts sharply with the rigid geopolitical lines drawn on maps. This lack of regard for land or sea borders was stark, highlighting a deep-seated connection to their maritime environment rather than the terrestrial confines that define modern nation-states. [19]

In Karachi, the narrative diverges significantly. Here, the Rohingya community weaves a complex historical web that doesn't solely rest on the notion of being "first Muslims" in Arakan with diverse origins. Initially, I was introduced to a seemingly uniform narrative of early Muslim settlers intermarrying with the local populace. However, as I delved deeper through Yarning sessions, it

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As discussed in detail within the literature from Jacques Leider the history Buddhist and Muslim people have shared a long and complex history in Arakan today Rakine with extensive ethno-religious challenges. Leider, J. (2002, 2004, 2006, 2015) "Competing Identities and the Hybridized History of the Rohingyas." In Metamorphosis: Studies in Social and Political Change in Myanmar edited by Renaud Egreteau and Francois Robinne, Singapore: NUS, 2015, 151-178. Yeager 2002

became evident that this was but the surface of a multifaceted collection of origin stories, each enriching the overarching narrative of Rohingya heritage.

Turning to the Rohingya resettled in Ireland, I noticed a similar emphasis on these historical narratives, particularly the significant role of early Muslims and their influence in Arakan. These narratives were not just stories; they were pivotal to their identity and struggle as a distinct ethnic group. Interestingly, the reference to Buchanan's mention of the Rohingya in 1799 resonated differently across generations. While it was a point of reference among the younger Rohingya, many elders in Cox's Bazar dismissed it, prioritising the oral histories that have sustained them over the reliance on external documentation. [20]

 To these elders, the ongoing disputes with the Burmese Government and the broader contention over their historical narrative seemed disconnected from the lived realities enshrined in their oral traditions. They viewed the engagement with written history, often seen through a Western lens, with a certain scepticism, affirming the enduring value they place on their rich oral heritage;

"Our ethnicity (Rohingya identity) is true only when others like you decide to write it."

Rohingya translator M, Zonaid in Cox's Bazar Feb 2 2019. This comment came in the early stages of my research when I was getting to know my team of three translators in the camp. M, Zonaid brought up this issue of ethnicity and foreign researchers several times. Over the course of the research, he noted that he appreciated this experience to learn about his own ethnic identity. I understood from the

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[20] From the historic literature Muslims have been present in Arakan, for centuries, (Azad & Jasmine, 2013; Leitich, 2014; Aye Chan, 2005; Leider, 2013, 2018; Yegar, 1972) when this Muslim population began to refer to themselves as Rohingya remains unknown. In 1799, Dr Francis Buchanan documented an Arakanese group he called Rooinga "Mohammedans (Muslims) while surveying the languages of Burma (Buchanan, 1799). There are a wide variety of documented Rohingya spellings since the 1950s and the Muslim movement for an independent state based on religion following Partition of India to Pakistan.

Navigating the stories of Rohingya heritage, I often encountered puzzled reactions regarding my deep dive into their ancestry, identity, and ethnicity. For many of the older Rohingya, especially those displaced, my quest seemed to spark a sense of engagement and vitality. Their eyes would light up during Yarning sessions as they delved into stories, eagerly sharing and absorbing narratives, all the while showcasing their craftsmanship. This act of storytelling was not just about recounting the past; it was a vibrant affirmation of their cultural identity and resilience.

Conversely, among the Rohingya youth across my research locations, there was a palpable hunger for historical knowledge and a keen interest in the milestones that have shaped their community's journey. They valued the exploration of their heritage and the uncovering of historical facts, often expressing a fervent curiosity about key events and stories from their past. Yet, this enthusiasm was tinged with a certain frustration, a frustration stemming from the gaps in their understanding of their own history, exacerbated by the limitations in their educational opportunities. These young individuals faced a unique challenge, grappling with a desire to connect with their roots while confronting the reality of their limited access to the wealth of knowledge about their heritage and history;

> *"How do we write our history when we do not write? Our school was outside; how do we write when we do not know whom to write to?" We discovered that we need our ancestor's stories to keep us alive today."*

ARJ is a Male, and a Director of the Rohingya Youth Development Network. These groups became

valuable ways to connect. I first met with ARJ through M, Zonaid in February 2019. I met with ARJ whenever I visited Rohingya Camp 1W.

Throughout my research, I stumbled upon a rich layer of myths woven into the Yarns, some of which echoed historical accounts, while others revealed a fascinating overlap across different locales. Delving into these 'Rohingya Yarns,' a vibrant collection of oral stories, I was drawn into the ancestral sagas of the Rohingya, which presented a stark contrast to the rigid timelines and narratives of conventional history. These stories often painted a picture of diverse origins, as much of the literature had noted, including Arabs, Persians, Moors, Turks, Mughals, and Bengali Muslims, weaving a narrative of intermarriage, local conversions to Islam, and a myriad of arrival stories through sea voyages, craftsmanship, missionary endeavours, and even tales of enslavement. A recurring theme was the enduring Muslim identity of the Rohingya, with every story placing their familial or ancestral roots in Arakan back many generations, well before Burma's independence in 1947, and even to the times of the Arakan Kingdom.

The Rohingya narratives did not lay claim to an indigenous status but rather highlighted their early Muslim presence in Arakan, yet the suggested a profound bond with the land and surrounding sea. It is important to note that while my focus was on Muslim Rohingyas, the community's narrative is rarely divorced from its Islamic ties. Islamic roots were always embedded somewhere within the stories in Bangladesh. A significant shift in identity perception became apparent during my time in Karachi. Initially, the Rohingya community there embraced the label 'Burmese Muslims', a designation that endured for decades and was encapsulated in the title of their NGO, 'The Burmese Muslim Welfare Organisation (BMWO)'. This preference stemmed from the relative

obscurity of the 'Rohingya' term in Karachi during their early years. Yet, as global awareness of their plight grew, there was a palpable shift towards a stronger emphasis on their Rohingya identity, often correcting those who might label them merely as 'Burmese' or 'Muslim'. This evolution of self-identification became a notable theme in my fieldwork, with discussions about renaming their NGO often met with laughter, underscoring a newfound pride in their Rohingya heritage. Intriguingly, the community was still occasionally dubbed 'Burma people' by some Bengalis and even my Pakistani driver, hinting at the complex layers of identity perception that envelop the Rohingya narrative. [21]

"In the diverse landscape of Karachi's fishing communities, the Rohingya fisherfolk stand out. They have adeptly navigated a trilingual environment, blending Urdu, Bengali, and Rohingya, fostering close ties with Bangladeshi and Pakistani fishermen. Central to their camaraderie is their shared Muslim faith, which they often cited as a unifying force in their maritime endeavours. Despite this bond, many Rohingya fisherfolk were keen to express their distinct connection to Myanmar and their unique position within Pakistan's complex social hierarchy, often referred to as the Baradari system, a Caste structure.

Remarkably, the Rohingya fishing boat, known locally as *'Arkanor Naw'*, transcends being a mere vessel. For many, it represents a floating microcosm of their cultural heritage, a symbol of their identity that connects them to the vast expanse of the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. These boats are not just a means of livelihood but a critical link to their ancestral past, with each vessel carrying as many heritage stories as the individuals aboard them.

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[21] For example Cook (1990), saw significant problems with putting oral societies in a European box. Harris (1995) also saw oral and written text-based societies as antithetic with more differences than similarities in ways of seeing the world.

The narrative shifts when focusing on Rohingya women in Karachi. The thread of ancestral knowledge seems thinner here, as many women, often married at a young age, find themselves distanced from their familial and community connections due to displacement. Living with their husbands' families, they frequently express a limited understanding of their spouses' heritage. Yet, the connection to the sea persists in their narratives. Many women reminisced about their childhood roles in the fishing community - mending their father's nets, cleaning, and cooking fish. Fish, a staple in their diet, serves as a lingering reminder of their roots and the life left behind."

"*all the fisherfolk have a long history connected to fishing, fathers to a son; they can count the generations perhaps but not the years. I remember my family fishing but then I lost them*"

"This quote was obtained from an elderly Rohingya woman in Karachi, who was part of a group engaged in net repair on Jan 23rd, 2020. My introduction to this group came through MN, a key contact from the Burmese Muslim Welfare Organisation (BMWO). Net repairing is a prevalent daily activity among Rohingya women and men in Karachi, serving not just as a cultural practice but also as a means of livelihood. The BMWO, recognising its significance, has utilised net repair as a method to provide income, especially for widowed Rohingya women. Accompanied by my translator, I had the opportunity to join these groups and participate in their craft. This hands-on experience, which I term 'craft Yarning,' allowed me to gain deeper insights into their daily lives and cultural practices. This practice of net repair is also a daily activity for the family members of Rohingya in Bangladesh who have managed to continue fishing.

During my interactions with a group of Rohingya net repairers in Karachi, I came across the term 'Magh,' frequently uttered by the women in the group. This was not the first time I had encountered this term; my research in Bangladesh had introduced me to it, where the locals translated 'Magh'

to mean 'foreigners.' Yet, this translation felt somewhat lacking, prompting me to seek a deeper understanding of its implications.

In pursuit of clarity, I turned up again as the women repaired nets and brought Mohammad Noor from the BMWO into the discussion. I was keen on grasping the term's significance from the perspective of the Rohingya fisherfolk in Karachi. Noor illuminated that 'Magh' was a derogatory label applied to the Rohingya back in their homeland, carrying a weight far beyond the simple notion of 'foreigner.' In the context of Arakan (Rakhine State), particularly within the fishing communities, 'Magh' was a term laden with connotations of otherness, marginalisation, lower caste and even piracy. This insight was pivotal, shedding light on the intricate layers of language and its translation in fieldwork. 'Magh' was not merely a word but a reflection of the socio-political undercurrents and biases the Rohingya endured in their native lands, emphasising the critical need to comprehend local terminologies within their distinct cultural and historical milieus.

This encounter underscored the inherent challenges of academic research, especially when it comes to translating terms imbued with profound cultural and political undertones. It became apparent that there is a risk of misinterpretation or oversimplification by researchers like myself or humanitarian workers, highlighting the indispensable role of nuanced and context-aware translation in scholarly endeavours.[22]

In Karachi, my conversations with the Rohingya fishermen often revolved around their ancestral connections to the sea and their fisherfolk heritage. However, these discussions occasionally

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[22] The oral heritage was often supported by documented evidence, in the form of journals of European traders, including the East Indian chronicle where Arakan Muslim pirates were said to capture people from southern Bengal, bringing them to Mrauk-U as enslaved people or artisans (Chowdary, 2006). Bengalis referred to these pirates as Magh's (Arakanese Muslim Pirates).

veered into tales of land-based migrations that contributed to the rich diversity within Rohingya history in Arakan. The fishermen, adept at Yarning, shared an array of diverse arrival stories, painting a vivid picture of the Rohingya's multifaceted heritage that spanned centuries.

One narrative that particularly captured my attention was the mention of an Afghan origin. This intriguing perspective was first shared with me by two elderly fishermen, cousins, who proudly traced their family roots back to Afghanistan. Their stories, rich in detail and historical depth, offered a unique lens through which to view the complex story of Rohingya ancestry.

> On March 25, 2020, I embarked on a two-day fishing expedition off the coast of Karachi, guided by skipper Shoukat and his cousin Ali, both of whom were seasoned fishing boat owners. It was during this voyage that they introduced me to the fascinating topic of their ancestral connections..

Initially, my thoughts connected the Afghan lineage mentioned by the fishermen to the prevalent narratives surrounding Afghan refugees in Karachi, especially against the backdrop of the Afghan Jihad during the Russian invasion in the late 1970s and 1980s. However, delving deeper into this matter, I stumbled upon a fascinating piece of research by Chowdhury in 2021 that supported an unexpected historical migration from the Ghor district in central Afghanistan.

Chowdhury's research introduced me to the 'Rohan' group, who migrated from Ghor and were later recognised in Arakan as 'Rohinga' or 'Roohin-Ghor'—hinting at the possibility that 'Roohin from Ghor' became the foundation for the name 'Rohingya.' This Afghan connection intrigued me immensely, offering a plausible narrative when considering the historical demand for skilled artisans during the construction of Buddhist monuments in Burma, Mrauk-U. The cultural

significance of Ghor, the ancestral land of this group, is underscored by historical marvels like Firozkoh, also known as the Turquoise Mountain, and its renowned Minaret of Jam.

The narrative surrounding the city of Firozkoh adds another layer to this complex history. The city was reportedly razed in 1223 following a siege by Tolui, Genghis Khan's son. Such a catastrophic event likely sparked significant migrations, particularly among Muslim communities. This historical juncture, intertwined with the stories of Rohingya ancestors, adds depth to the intricate mosaic of their origins, weaving together the threads of history, culture, and migration that form the essence of their collective identity.

Within the narrative I see that within Rohingya heritage, oppression often has a name, the term 'Magh' for example, emerged as a significant marker of identity, as explained by fisherfolk in Karachi. Initially perceived as denoting 'foreigner,' deeper discussions revealed its connotations of otherness and marginalisation within their native Arakan context, illustrating the complexities of language, identity and social structure in the Rohingya narrative. This term, laden with socio-political implications, underscored the nuanced challenges in translating and understanding cultural terminologies. Interestingly, the use of the term Burmese Muslim in Karachi, highlighted a transition from identifying as 'Burmese Muslims' to a more pronounced Rohingya identity, reflecting a dynamic evolution of self-perception amidst changing global awareness of their plight.

Another profound discovery was the ancestral link some Rohingya trace back to the 'Rohan' of Ghor, suggesting a rich tapestry of migrations that have shaped their identity over centuries. This narrative, coupled with the fluid borders and the historical ebb and flow of populations, paints a picture of a community deeply intertwined with the lands and seas of their heritage. However, in Karachi, the connection of Rohingya women to their homeland and heritage appeared diluted,

often overshadowed by their roles within the family and community. This disconnection raises questions about the transmission of cultural identity among displaced communities and the preservation of heritage amidst the challenges of migration, displacement and resettlement.

The Rohingya Muslim Yarns of the Kingdom of Mrauk-U

Migration brings skills from one place to another and even today, artisans are often migratory, going where their skills are in demand. Some Rohingya carpenters discussed the poignant loss of traditional skills such as masonry, pottery, and block printing, fading away with the restrictions in Myanmar. This led me to explore their historical roots further into artisanal crafts. The skills many Rohingya men discussed date back to the Wethali and Lemro Kingdoms and reflect a rich tapestry of Muslim craft that significantly contributed to the cultural diversity of these regions.

The city of Mrauk-U in the 15th century, much like the ancient city of Firozkoh, stands as a testament to the grandeur of Asian civilisations. The development of Mrauk-U likely attracted a multitude of migrant workers, artisans, and traders, mirroring the vibrant exchange of skills and cultures brought by land and sea. The stories of modern Rohingya youth poets in Cox's Bazar, frequently referencing Sufi Saints of Arakan, and the recollections of elders about the harmonious existence around Mrauk-U, reinforce these historical connections.

> This statement references discussions held on April 10th and April 18th with key figures ARJ Male of the Rohingya Youth Development Network (RYDN) and YR Female of the Rohingya Women's Development Forum (RWDF), respectively. In these separate Yarns – a term I use to describe the oral storytelling sessions integral to my research – they shared insights into their personal and community connections to the historical city of Mrauk-U. These narratives particularly focused on the traditional building skills passed down from their fathers, highlighting how these skills have become

increasingly restricted due to displacement and the changing socio-political landscape. The discussions underscored the impact of displacement on the preservation of the Rohingya's intangible cultural heritage.

While scholars like Chowdhury, Habibullah, and San Baw U have provided insights into these Muslim links, the full extent of this heritage remains partially unexplored. The remnants at Mrauk-U, with its wrestling styles in stone, Islamic tiles, and spiritual carvings, bear silent witness to the influence of Muslim artisans. In discussions with UNESCO about the potential listing of Mrauk-U as a World Heritage Site, I underscored the importance of acknowledging its multifaceted heritage. Recognising Mrauk-U not just as a Buddhist site but as a mosaic of human migration, skill exchange, and shared heritage can offer a more inclusive narrative that acknowledges the Rohingya's historical presence and contributions.

> During a discussion on March 13, 2021, with UNESCO Pakistan Representative Mrs. Patricia McPhillips in Islamabad, she provided in-depth insights into the criteria and process involved in obtaining UNESCO World Heritage Site status for Mrauk-U.

Through my research and interactions with Rohingya artisans and through my own work as a mason, I have come to understand that artisanal skills, embodying centuries of tradition, transcend religious boundaries. Thus, the story of Mrauk-U is not merely one of Buddhist magnificence but a narrative rich with the contributions of diverse communities, including the Muslim's of Arakan which likely include Rohingya heritage. This is integral to its historical fabric but also to the historical story of Burma/Myanmar. This understanding challenges simplistic narratives and advocates for a comprehensive appreciation of the Rohingya's place in the annals of history.[23]

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[23] Sittwe, a once predominant Rohingya town, is less than 60 kilometres from the heritage site of Mrauk-U.

In delving into the Rohingya narratives surrounding the Kingdom of Mrauk-U, I have uncovered a poignant story of migration, craftsmanship, and cultural interweaving that transcends centuries. The discussions with Rohingya carpenters revealed a challenging decline in traditional artisanal skills, a loss tied to the broader socio-political challenges faced in Myanmar. This led me to explore the historical significance of Mrauk-U, a city that stands as a testament to the grandeur of Asian civilisations and the melting pot of cultures it represented, much like the ancient city of Firozkoh. The insights from the Rohingya Youth Development Network and the Rohingya Women's Development Forum Yarns, further emphasised the deep-rooted connections to Mrauk-U, highlighting the enduring impact of displacement on the preservation of these cultural heritage. My conversations with UNESCO representatives underscored the potential for Mrauk-U to be recognised not just as a Buddhist heritage site but as a symbol of the rich diversity of human migration, skill exchange, and shared heritage, including the significant contributions of Muslim artisans that no doubt encompass Rohingya Muslim heritage. This journey through the Rohingya's historical ties to Mrauk-U advocates for a broader narrative that honours the complex interplay of ethnic and religious diversity in the shaping of cultural heritage, urging for a more inclusive recognition of the Rohingya's historical footprint in the annals of Myanmar's history.

6.3   Artisans, the Keepers, and Creators of ICH

> *"The techniques they use in building shelters with bamboo are so unique that you can tell a Rohingya family house simply from the way they shape a hinge on a door. They do it all with a machete."*

During a site visit to Camp 20's design area on April 20, 2019, IOM Shelter Officer/Site Planner Reihaneh Mozaffari shared her extensive experience in using bamboo as a primary building material in shelter design and construction, drawing on her previous work across Asia.

Continuing on with the artisanal journey and in exploring the intangible cultural heritage of the Rohingya refugees, I noted the diverse ways in which their built heritage is valued - through the stories it encapsulates, its unique cultural aesthetics, and the artisanal skills and techniques employed. My fieldwork revealed that Rohingya artisans possess distinctive methods in woodwork and bamboo construction, a skill set especially evident in the shelters of Cox's Bazar but also in the homes of the host community in Bangladesh. Their craftsmanship extends to boat building and net making, Pakistanis likened intricate knotting skills exhibited by women to potential in jewellery making.

In both Cox's Bazar and Karachi, the Rohingya community displayed remarkable enthusiasm and motivation in construction activities. They were constantly engaged in building or modifying their shelters, adding community structures like mosques and madrasas, often with guidance from various INGOs. However, the rapid pace of construction often outstripped formal planning, leading to a dynamic, albeit chaotic, development of the camps.

The vernacular architectural skills of the Rohingya, particularly in bamboo work, are noteworthy as highlighted by IOM staff. Their proficiency in weaving and connecting bamboo is not just functional but carries an artistic quality. This talent was equally evident in their boat-building and repair skills, which were highly sought after in Karachi. The port life dominated the existence of

many young Rohingya males, with boat building being a key trade passed down through generations.

In Karachi, particularly in Arakanabad, there has been a notable transition in the boat-building industry. From the traditional large timber vessels, the Rohingya community has shifted to constructing smaller, more economical timber and fibreglass boats. Mohammad Noor from the BMWO narrated the story of this transition, highlighting how the Rohingya adapted to the changing demands and resources. Their first community-owned boat, a fibreglass vessel, marked the beginning of a new era. This transition represented a shift in materials and opportunities as young Rohingya rapidly learned fibreglass repair techniques, establishing a potentially thriving industry around their fishing fleet.

This evolution from wood to fibreglass boats and the development of related industries reflect the Rohingya's remarkable adaptability and resilience. It underscores how, despite displacement and limited resources, they have managed to preserve and adapt their cultural heritage and skills, making significant contributions to their communities and host societies.

> *"Now with smaller boats we are back where we were in Burma, we have some independence. One boat can support all the widowed women in the community."*
>
> Noor shared insights during a yarning group with fishermen at Karachi Port on 3rd January 2021.

I discovered a profound sense of community solidarity within their fundraising practices. For example, the Burmese Muslim Welfare Organisation (BMWO), a cornerstone in their community, epitomised this solidarity and commitment to Rohingya people in Karachi and Bangladesh. Their

fundraising, a testament to the ethos of 'poor helping the poor,' was conducted primarily through their mosque networks and celebrations in the community. Each Rupee raised was a collective effort, pooling resources day by day, even among those with limited means.

This approach to fundraising is deeply embedded in the Rohingya's cultural and religious identity. Charity, or Zakat, is a fundamental aspect of their Islamic faith, and it extends beyond a religious obligation to a moral duty. It reflects a core value of their cultural heritage: a steadfast commitment to supporting the most vulnerable within their community and extending hospitality to strangers.

The mosque serves not just as a place of worship but as a central hub for community engagement and support. It plays a pivotal role in reinforcing these cultural values, acting as the primary venue for fundraising activities. Through these efforts, the mosque becomes a symbol of communal resilience and mutual aid, embodying the spirit of cooperation that is central to the Rohingya's way of life. However, this could be misunderstood as the Mosque is segregated and men visit at different times to women. There were not times where men and women share the space meaning it is not a gathering place for emergency purposes.

The concept of 'moral duty' as expressed by the Rohingya is deeply interwoven with their cultural identity. It goes beyond mere charity; it is an expression of their collective ethos, where helping one another, especially the less fortunate, is seen as an integral part of their communal responsibility. This practice of mutual support and giving, even among those who themselves have little, is a powerful testament to their commitment to upholding their cultural traditions, even in the face of displacement and hardship.

Through these actions, the Rohingya community demonstrates a remarkable resilience and adherence to their cultural heritage. Their collective efforts provide essential support within their

immediate circles but also preserve communities that, despite their own struggles, remains dedicated to supporting each other. This commitment to community welfare and solidarity not only provides essential support within their immediate circles but also preserves a crucial aspect of their intangible cultural heritage. It underscores a fundamental truth about the Rohingya: their resilience and communal spirit are as integral to their identity as their more tangible cultural practices.

In this section on Rohingya's artisanal heritage, it is evident that their skills in building, particularly with bamboo and wood, are not just acts of construction but are deeply imbued with cultural significance. These techniques, from the unique way they shape a door hinge to the construction of boats, are a testament to a rich heritage that has adapted over generations, even amidst the harsh realities of displacement. The transition from traditional timber vessels to smaller, fibreglass boats in Karachi, while a shift in materials, has kept the craft firmly within Rohingya hands, symbolising their adaptability and resilience. This evolution in craftsmanship, coupled with the communal efforts in building mosques and other community structures, highlights the profound link between preserving cultural heritage and fostering community cohesion. Such solidarity, especially evident in their fundraising practices for communal welfare, underscores the role of cultural values in sustaining the Rohingya's economic and social survival from family units to broader community networks.

What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?[24] In exploring the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) of the Rohingya refugees, it is crucial to recognise its symbiotic relationship with tangible cultural heritage. The value of a monument or artefact is significantly enhanced by the stories and practices associated with it, the intangible. For instance, a boat's significance is not tangible; it has a name and a story crafted by a builder managed by fishermen encapsulating their experiences and stories at sea. While my research centres on the 'intangible' – the stories, practices, crafts, and expressions – it is evident that ICH cannot exist in a vacuum. It requires a cultural space to manifest, whether for performance, art display, or the preservation of artefacts.

These cultural spaces are not neutral; they are shaped by various factors, including gender, age, and the group's diversity. These dynamics play a crucial role in how ICH is expressed and experienced within the Rohingya community. To illustrate this, I highlight two key aspects of Rohingya ICH in this chapter.

Firstly, I explore the 'Tarana,' a form of freestyle poetry recital with roots in Sufi mysticism. This practice, performed by new cultural heritage bearers, resonates across all the sites I visited. The Tarana is not just a performance; it is a vibrant expression of the Rohingya's spiritual and cultural identity, encapsulating their history, beliefs, and emotions. The way it is performed and received

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[24]   According to UNESCO: *The "ICH" means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This ICH, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. (UNESCO Definition of ICH)*

by different segments of the community – considering factors like age and gender – offers insights into the dynamic nature of their intangible heritage.

Secondly, I delve into the Rohingya burial practices, a poignant aspect of their cultural heritage that faced challenges in the context of humanitarian site planning. Initially assumed by planners to be a mere allocation of sacred space, these practices are deeply ingrained in the Rohingya's religious and cultural identity. The way in which burial practices have been adapted or preserved in displacement settings sheds light on the community's resilience and the importance of maintaining these traditions even in times of upheaval. The burial rites, often considered permanent occupation of a sacred site, reflect the community's connection to their ancestral land and their beliefs in the afterlife.

The handling of these practices in refugee camps and settlements has implications for the Rohingya's cultural continuity. It underscores the need for humanitarian planners and aid organisations to understand and respect these intangible elements, recognising them as integral to the Rohingya's identity and well-being.

The Tarana and the burial practices exemplify the rich tapestry of the Rohingya's intangible cultural heritage. These practices, deeply rooted in their history and identity, highlight the necessity of cultural spaces for the expression and preservation of ICH. They also reflect the complex interplay between tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage, especially in the context of displacement. Thus, this chapter aims to shed light on the resilience of the Rohingya community in maintaining their cultural heritage amidst challenges and the critical role of cultural spaces in safeguarding their unique traditions and practices.

Poetry of Tarana

As an oral ethnicity of Sunni-Sufi heritage, the first eye-opening Rohingya Muslim event to capture my imagination was the Rohingya Tarana, the art of poetry recital. I use an excerpt from my field notes to introduce and discuss some points relative to the research. (Cox's Bazar, Nyapara Camp, 20th February 2019)

> *Hemmed inside a shelter in Nayapara refugee camp. I have been invited into this space to hear a young refugee poet perform his art, a random event I believed at first was primarily for my benefit. The poet, Rasheed, is dressed in his clean silk longyi (sarong), colourful neatly pressed 'Buza' (shirt) and his head topped with a kufi cap, the traditional attire of the Rohingya people. I am told that this was a tradition that links many of the Rohingya to their Sufi-Islamic ancestry. Rasheed performs a 'Tarana', letting the words flow from memory to mouth and entering what appears to be a trance. The session runs for fifteen long, hot and humid minutes before we are forced to leave. I am told that the poem is a love story in keeping with Sufi tradition.*

The Tarana, a form of Rohingya poetry performance, emerged as a pivotal element of their intangible cultural heritage (ICH) during my fieldwork. Initially, I perceived this as a performance tailored for an outsider like myself, but I soon realised its deeper role in cultural transmission among the displaced Rohingya communities. The Tarana, previously present but uncommon in the camps, became a medium for cultural indoctrination, particularly for the youth and children who formed the majority of the audience. These onlookers were deeply engaged, experiencing the Rohingya Tarana, often for the first time, thereby learning about their heritage in a new setting.

My interactions with MZ one of my translators) during our Yarns revealed the challenge of organising public gatherings in the camps, often viewed as security threats by authorities and discouraged by religious leaders for non-religious content. Despite these obstacles, I observed a burgeoning interest in Tarana poetry, not just in Cox's Bazar but also among the Rohingya resettled community in Carlow, Ireland. For example, at a remembrance event in Carlow, a young Rohingya man recited a poem, marking the beginning of a cultural fusion event that included local music, films, dances, and a Rohingya flag hoisting. The integration of Rohingya culture into this Irish setting was evident, with the community enthusiastically showcasing their heritage through Henna painting, traditional foods, dances, and cricket - a sport adopted during their displacement in Bangladesh but now in Carlow recognised very much as a Rohingya sport.

Interestingly, the Tarana poetry performed in Ireland adapted to its new environment. The verses, recited in English, incorporated lines from Western songs, symbolising a unique cross-cultural adaptation of the Tarana. This evolution of the Tarana reflects the Rohingya's resilience and ability to integrate aspects of their new surroundings while preserving their cultural identity.

Furthermore, the limited physical space in the camps and other Rohingya communities has not hindered the younger generation from advancing their Tarana heritage. They have ingeniously extended their cultural expressions to the digital realm. The 'Rohingya Art Garden Project[25] stands as a testament to this adaptation, serving as an online repository and platform for Rohingya cultural heritage, including poetry, music, and proverbs. It connects over 200 Rohingya poets globally, transcending the confines of the camps to embrace digital spaces like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and dedicated online platforms. This expansion preserves their cultural heritage and

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[25] https://rohingyakhobor.com/the-rohingya-flag-was-raised-at-carlow-college-to-commemorate-rohingya-genocide-day/

facilitates peaceful protest and global community building, demonstrating the dynamic and evolving nature of the Rohingya's intangible cultural heritage.[26]

Rohingya Burial and Cultural Heritage Space

Understanding community space is a fundamental aspect of site or urban planning. In Cox's Bazar, where land for shelter is scarce and the population grows by five percent annually. Here, recognising the cultural heritage needs of the Rohingya is vital for effective land management and future planning. The practice of burial within the refugee camps not only give us knowledge of the Rohingya ICH but it underscores the importance of integrating cultural heritage considerations from the early stages of emergency response.

For the Rohingya, the Arabic term 'Janazah' is commonly used to refer to death, although some also use 'Milad Mahfil, [27] typically associated with the birth of the Prophet Mohammad. Burial is a significant cultural and religious event involving prayers and a celebration of life, reflecting unique aspects of Rohingya culture. Families and community members gather to pray for the departed soul, making attendance at funerals a frequent occurrence for anyone working in the camps or the settlements of Karachi. My fieldwork often intersected with these funeral activities, and I participated when invited. The Rohingya maintain a practice of praying to Allah during the funeral but do not pray at the graveside beyond this, as praying to anyone other than Allah is not permissible in their belief system. Graves are maintained but not used as sites for further prayer.

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[26] http://www.theartgardenrohingya.com
https://kenyonreview.org/kr-online-issue/literary-activism/selections/james-byrne-763879/
https://asia.nikkei.com/Life-Arts/Life/Myanmar-poets-speak-out-from-the-front-lines-of-protest
Ryan, John. (2019). Verses of Resistance: The Activist Poetry of Myanmar.

[27] *Milad originates from the Arabic word mawlid. Institutionally, it means the time, date or place of birth, or the celebration of the birthday of a person, especially of the Prophet Mohammed.*

This was first explained to me in a Yarning session with a group of Rohingya that I came across in Camp 8 led by Asif, a male Rohingya who digs graves within the camps - March 8th 2019.

The need for cultural spaces dedicated to burial is a critical consideration that should ideally be included in the initial plans of humanitarian site planners, alongside shelter sites, health centres, roads, and distribution points. However, in Cox's Bazar, there was initially a lack of understanding of how Rohingya burial practices functioned, leading to planning based on assumptions rather than an informed understanding of community needs.

During a survey with UNHCR site planners (Ms Rama Nimri and Mr Rashedul Islam) in several zones of the Cox's Bazar camps on (May 2, 2019) a hill dotted with grave mounds and small fences was identified. Originally earmarked for shelter construction, this hill had been quickly transformed into a cemetery by the Rohingya community, illustrating a critical oversight in the planners' understanding of land use priorities. The assumption that discussing burial would reduce the land available for shelter led to an initial avoidance of the topic.

Engaging directly with the community, especially during a visit to a funeral site, opened dialogues with grave diggers who I had met previously (Mr. Asif a Rohingya Grave Digger) and drastically shifted the planners' perception of land use. In Rohingya burial practice, graves are initially marked with simple wooden or wire surrounds to protect the shallow graves from animals and to mark the site. These sites are visited for two years, after which it is believed that the remains have decomposed, and the spirit has departed. This cultural insight revealed that burial sites could be repurposed after this period, transforming them into reusable land resources.

This newfound understanding allowed site planners to approach land allocation from a culturally informed perspective, recalculating land needs and exploring alternative land use strategies. This experience underscores the crucial need for humanitarian sectors, particularly those involved in shelter and site planning, to deeply understand the cultural heritage nuances of any community. Assumptions can lead to significant oversights, whereas cultural conversations can open new possibilities for respectful and efficient land use planning.

6.5   Conclusion

In the process of distilling the essence of this Chapter into a coherent conclusion, I highlight here the intricate interplay between ICH, displacement and the Rohingya way of life. I contribute here to the narrative with nuanced perspectives and themes that span Rohingya Muslim heritage, artisans in displacement to the way of life of the Rohingya from the Tarana poetry to the passing of life in refugee camps.

The profound resilience of the Rohingya, as revealed through their oral traditions, crafts, and daily practices, underscores the critical role of ICH in sustaining communities faced with the trauma of displacement. My research illuminates how ICH acts not merely as a repository of past traditions but as a dynamic force that fosters community cohesion, resilience, and identity reconstruction in the face of existential threats. It is also intricately linked to the economic fortune of the Rohingya. The adaptability of the Rohingya in preserving and transforming their cultural practices—whether through the innovative use of digital platforms for cultural expression or the adaptation of traditional crafts in refugee camps—challenges prevailing notions of ICH as static and bound to geographic locales i.e. displacement as life in limbo.

This chapter advances the discourse by demonstrating how the Rohingya have managed to maintain a sense of continuity and community through the creative adaptation of their cultural heritage. The Tarana poetry sessions, for instance, are not just artistic expressions but a form of cultural resilience, a way for the community to articulate their collective memory, grief, and hopes for the future. These sessions, and the stories they convey, are emblematic of the broader processes through which displaced communities navigate the complexities of preserving their identity while adapting to new realities.

Moreover, the chapter highlights the critical need for humanitarian responses and policies to integrate an understanding of ICH into their frameworks. The discussion on Rohingya burial practices and their significance within the community emphasises the importance of respecting and accommodating cultural practices in displacement settings. This insight adds a crucial dimension to the discourse on humanitarian planning and intervention, advocating for approaches that are not only sensitive to the immediate physical needs of displaced populations but also to their cultural and spiritual well-being.

Furthermore, my engagement with the Rohingya community reveals the importance of viewing displaced communities not as passive recipients of aid but as active agents in the preservation and adaptation of their cultural work practices, crafts, and traditional knowledge. This perspective challenges dominant narratives that often portray displaced populations as lacking agency and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which communities leverage their cultural practices as a source of strength and resilience.

In synthesising these insights, this chapter aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of ICH in the lives of displaced communities. It calls for a broader

recognition of the ways in which ICH can serve as a vital resource for resilience, community cohesion, and identity preservation amidst the dislocations of displacement. By weaving together, the threads of Rohingya cultural practices, this chapter enriches the academic discourse on ICH and displacement but also offers a testament to the enduring spirit of the Rohingya people and their unwavering commitment to preserving their way of life against all odds.

7   Chapter Seven: Women at the Centre of ICH

7.1   Overview of this Chapter

In weaving together, the rich narratives of Rohingya women's intangible cultural heritage (ICH), I am reminded of the archaeological theory of 'differential preservation,' which posits that while some elements of a site might endure, others decay, leaving behind gaps in the cultural narrative. This concept, as discussed by Beck and Head in 1990, resonates deeply with the challenges faced in documenting and preserving the ICH of women, particularly within displaced communities like the Rohingya. The cultural heritage of women, often characterised by its intangible nature, such as fabrics, crafts, and oral traditions, is at risk of being lost in the sands of time, not solely due to its ephemeral nature but also due to the historical bias in cultural documentation, which has predominantly been male-centric. This bias, as Wengrow (2010) suggests, has led to a significant gap in our understanding of women's contributions to civilizations and their cultural heritage.

In this chapter, my focus is squarely on the intangible cultural heritage of Rohingya women, exploring the unique ways in which they contribute to, preserve, and adapt their cultural heritage amidst the challenges of displacement. The discussion begins with a critical examination of the shortcomings in the humanitarian operation, particularly within UNHCR, in translating principles into practice at the field level. This includes a reflection on the gender biases and operational oversights that have historically marginalised women's cultural expressions and needs in humanitarian settings.

Central to this chapter is the exploration of women's gathering sites, which stand as vital cultural spaces for the transmission of traditional knowledge and the reinforcement of communal bonds among Rohingya women. These sites, often overshadowed by more formal structures like

mosques, offer a window into the rich tapestry of Rohingya women's cultural life, underscoring the importance of recognising and supporting such spaces in displacement settings.

In section 7.3, the narrative shifts to the significant yet often overlooked role of women in shelter construction and repair within the Rohingya community. This discussion not only highlights the practical skills and traditional knowledge that women bring to these tasks but also challenges the prevailing assumptions about gender roles in construction, revealing a gap in humanitarian shelter strategies that fail to consider women's cultural needs and capabilities.

The chapter then delves into the theme of Women Supporting Women, revealing the intrinsic role that Rohingya women play in providing psychosocial support to one another. This organic form of self-reliance, deeply embedded in their cultural practices, stands in stark contrast to the structured approaches of the humanitarian system, which often overlook the potential of community-driven support networks.

Finally, the discussion turns to the tangible expressions of Rohingya women's intangible cultural heritage, through traditional dress, Henna, and Thanaka. These cultural practices, rich in symbolism and meaning, are not only forms of artistic expression but also essential components of Rohingya women's identity and social fabric. This section underscores the resilience of Rohingya women in rebuilding and sharing their cultural heritage, despite the constraints of displacement and the lack of structured support.

Through this chapter, I aim to bridge the gap in our understanding of Rohingya women's intangible cultural heritage, highlighting its tangible impacts and the critical need for cultural spaces and support mechanisms that honor and facilitate the preservation and transmission of this rich

heritage. In doing so, I hope to contribute to a more inclusive and gender-sensitive discourse on cultural heritage preservation, particularly within the context of displacement.

7.2   Exploring the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Rohingya Women & Girls

In my research, I've delved into the complex interplay between gender, age, and diversity within the realm of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), particularly as it pertains to the Rohingya community. These factors significantly influence how host communities and humanitarian organisations perceive and engage with displaced groups, often shaping access to cultural rights and resources. My investigations have underscored a recurring issue: the considerable neglect of gender considerations in both historical and contemporary narratives of ICH, a trend that is not only prevalent in archaeological discourse but also in humanitarian interventions.

A conversation with a UNHCR female field assistant brought this issue into sharp relief. She candidly remarked,

> *'The focus is primarily on economic development through livelihoods*, *we don't have the resources or capacity to fill all the social needs, that's not our job'*

Nora, a UNHCR female field assistant, focused on livelihoods within the Rohingya camps, shared valuable insights on 25th March 2019.UNHCR female field assistant- 25th March 2019.

This statement, emblematic of a broader institutional stance, highlights a significant gap in humanitarian efforts—the underestimation of social and cultural needs in favour of economic priorities. The fact is, not all projects have to have a financial cost and such an approach overlooks

the intrinsic value of social connections and cultural practices, especially for women within displaced communities be it camps or informal settlements. During my fieldwork, I observed a tangible manifestation of this oversight. Women participating in Yarning craft groups often expressed a disinterest in the commercial aspect of their crafts, viewing these gatherings more as opportunities for social interaction, healing, and mutual support, as articulated by the leader of the Rohingya Women's Development Forum (RWDF). Yet, paradoxically, they remained open to any opportunity that could potentially lead to income, underscoring the complex interplay between economic necessity and cultural practice.

My access to women's groups across various displacement settings revealed a dichotomy between progressive gender policies and their practical implementation on the ground. [28] In Cox's Bazar, for instance, despite the purported advancements in gender-sensitive policies, real-world practices, such as gender mainstreaming, fell short, as evidenced by the predominance of male staff in key areas like shelter management, (*which I highlight in the next section*). This discrepancy points to a systemic issue within humanitarian operations, where gender considerations are often side-lined or inadequately addressed.

The cultural contributions of Rohingya women, particularly those outside Myanmar, such as in Ireland, where they have enriched the diaspora with cookbooks, music, and poetry, underscore the vibrancy and resilience of their intangible heritage. Yet, the recognition and documentation of

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[28] UNHCR has been actively promoting gender equality for nearly forty years. The proclamation of 1976-1985 as the 'United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace' prompted UNHCR to begin systematically addressing the specific protection risks faced by refugee women. Since that time, UNHCR's approach to gender equality has evolved considerably, from perceiving refugee women and girls as vulnerable to promoting their empowerment, from an isolated focus on women to gender mainstreaming, and from gender equality to an integrated age, gender and diversity (AGD) approach (UNHCR UNHCR, From 1975 to 2013: UNHCR's Gender Equality Chronology (Geneva: UNHCR, 2014), http://www.unhcr.org/543b90796.html

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these contributions remain limited. Within the displacement settings, traditional women's gathering spaces—crucial for cultural transmission and community bonding—were often overlooked or deemed unsafe, further restricting women's ability to engage with and sustain their cultural practices.

In Karachi's informal settlements and the camps of Bangladesh, the constraints on communal spaces for women starkly illustrate the challenges they face in maintaining cultural continuity. The utilisation of mosques as multipurpose community centres, without due consideration for women's specific needs for privacy and safety, underscores a glaring gap in the cultural planning and allocation of communal spaces within displaced settings.

This oversight became starkly apparent within the humanitarian shelter sector, predominantly led by engineers, who contemplated the structural reinforcement of mosques to double as communal cyclone shelters without engaging in dialogue with female refugees. My fieldwork interactions, particularly during Yarning sessions with Rohingya women, highlighted a significant cultural disconnect. They articulated that the proposed cohabitation of men and women in such communal spaces during emergencies was in direct conflict with their cultural norms regarding gender segregation. This insight from the women accentuates the indispensable need for incorporating their perspectives in the planning process, ensuring that the development of communal facilities is not only culturally sensitive but also inclusive. It's noteworthy that while Rohingya men supported the idea of reinforcing mosques for cyclone shelters, they overlooked the implications for women, underscoring a gap in community-wide consultation and consideration.

The imperative for a nuanced, gender-informed approach in humanitarian interventions and the preservation of cultural heritage is unmistakably clear. Integrating women's perspectives and

needs, especially within displacement contexts, is crucial for achieving a holistic understanding of intangible cultural heritage and its critical function in maintaining the identity and resilience of communities. Although the concept of community-wide consultation is well-established within humanitarian methodologies, the case of the Rohingya starkly reveals a significant oversight in effectively engaging with and understanding cultural nuances from a gendered lens. This gap underscores the urgent need for a more culturally attuned and gender-responsive approach in humanitarian practices, ensuring that the cultural dimensions of displaced communities are fully recognised and respected.

7.3 Women in Construction; Cultural Knowledge and Needs

In the anthropological examination of the Rohingya community's displacement settings, as outlined in Chapter Three, my fieldwork brought to light the complex interplay of gender roles, particularly in the realms of construction and shelter. A pivotal observation was the external perception of Rohingya women, shaped by broader stereotypes of women in Islamic societies as being confined to domestic spheres, thus presumably excluded from physical labor sectors such as construction. This reductive view, deeply entrenched in outsider perceptions, fails to capture the intricate realities and competencies of these women, particularly in the context of displacement.

This simplistic framing of gender roles by the humanitarian sector, often devoid of a nuanced understanding of Islamic cultural norms, has led to substantial oversight. It overlooks the historical involvement and expertise of Rohingya women in construction and shelter-building, a domain mistakenly presumed to be the exclusive purview of men. Through 'Yarning' sessions with various segments of the community, a methodological approach that fosters deep, narrative-driven

engagement, I uncovered the depth of Rohingya women's contributions to construction. Contrary to the prevalent outsider narrative, these women demonstrated proficiency in a range of construction techniques, notably the weaving of bamboo for shelter, a skill integral to their cultural heritage and indispensable for their survival in displacement settings.

The humanitarian sector's engineering-driven approach to shelter construction, prioritising structural efficiency over cultural and gender-specific design considerations, has often led to designs that fail to meet the actual needs of the occupants. A case in point is the design of shelter windows initially intended for airflow but later modified by Rohingya women to meet cultural standards of privacy—a critical adaptation made in the absence of their consultation. This scenario underscores the gap in incorporating women's voices and preferences in the design process, despite them being the primary users of these shelters.

The involvement of Rohingya women in construction, especially within female-headed households, showcases their adeptness at creating durable living spaces, from clay or concrete floors to bamboo partitions, tailored to their cultural needs for privacy. Their craftsmanship in bamboo weaving, a skill refined over generations, highlights a rich tradition of female craftsmanship unrecognised by the humanitarian sector until these ethnographic insights came to light.

Anthropologically, the inclusion of women in the construction process is not merely an act of inclusivity; it resonates with the cultural ethos of the Rohingya community, where gender norms necessitate separate spaces for men and women. This cultural dictate underscores the necessity for women to either possess construction skills or have access to a network of skilled women to ensure their shelters align with their needs and cultural practices. My findings advocate for a re-evaluation

of humanitarian shelter strategies, calling for a participatory approach that respects the dignity and cultural traditions of displaced communities. By fostering open dialogue and engaging with diverse community members, including women, humanitarian efforts can transcend stereotypes, harnessing the inherent strengths and knowledge of communities to forge more sustainable, culturally congruent, and effective responses to displacement.

During shelter sector meetings I participated in, which were orchestrated by IOM, the concept of gender-inclusive sheltering was broached only in the context of women being passive beneficiaries of shelter provisions. However, my research underscores the imperative of adopting a more nuanced, tripartite approach to gender considerations in shelter strategies. This approach recognises women not only as heads of households who are the primary recipients of shelters but also as critical stakeholders in the cultural utilisation of these spaces. This necessitates their involvement in the design process, ensuring that the layout, windows, doors, and other architectural elements cater to their cultural and daily living needs. Furthermore, it's essential to acknowledge women's roles in the construction and ongoing maintenance of shelters. This dual role empowers them to ensure the structural integrity and cultural appropriateness of their living spaces, transforming shelters into truly secure and private homes that resonate with the displaced women's realities and needs.

7.4   Rohingya Women Supporting Women

In the cultural timeline of Rohingya community life, the institution of marriage has seen profound shifts within the confines of displacement. During ethnographic yarns, the women shared that marriage, deeply rooted in their Muslim traditions, remains a pivotal rite of passage, imbued with joy and cultural significance. Yet, the altered landscape of camp life has precipitated notable

changes, with younger girls entering into marriage at increasingly tender ages, often to older men with multiple spouses. This disturbing trend, coupled with reports of girls being trafficked or married off to non-community members, has sown seeds of apprehension among the women regarding the safety and well-being of their young. This concern is not confined to the camps but extends to urban diasporas like Karachi, where the threat of abduction and trafficking looms large over the community's young women.

In response to these challenges, Rohingya women have taken a proactive stance, albeit with limited external support. A quintessential example of their initiative is the establishment of the Rohingya Women's Development Forum (RWDF) in Cox's Bazar's camps. This grassroots NGO emerged as a beacon of hope, aiming to provide psychosocial support to women grappling with the traumas of violence and to address pressing gender issues, including the scourge of child marriage. Despite their deep commitment and first-hand understanding of the community's needs, their efforts have been stymied by a lack of formal support and the challenge of being funded as a refugee group. By Mina,

> *Our group has no opportunity to receive funding because we are the refugees. We have asked many agencies but we are told it is not possible to support us formally. We did receive some small money from one friend, a women who work for INGOs. Now she has gone so we do not even have money to give our group tea or snacks when they come for workshops.*

Mina also noted,

> *We are the best people to give support to other Rohingya women; this is why we started our group. So many women have been raped, beaten, seen their children or husbands*

killed and burnt. We lost everything, and many women have to live with the shame. Shame is a very big issue for u. Once a woman is shamed in the community, it is hard to live…

It is our culture to help each other but we feel we cannot do it because no one will support us. … we are always told what to do, we never get asked what we can do to support you?

> During a field visit and yarning group session with the RWDF in Teknaf Camp on April 12th, a community leader known as Mina shared poignant insights, reflecting the depth of her experiences and the resilience of her community.

These narratives not only underscore a critical gap in the humanitarian ecosystem's engagement with displaced communities but also offer rich anthropological insights into the challenges faced by Rohingya women. As a researcher immersed in the community's dynamics, I closely observed the resilience and communal solidarity of the women, which provided invaluable perspectives on their experiences. Despite their expertise and agency, the lack of formal recognition and support hampers their ability to effect meaningful change, emphasising the urgent need for a more inclusive and responsive approach that amplifies their voices.

One poignant example of this struggle is embodied in Mina, the female Rohingya with the Women's Development Forum (RWDF) but also generally active in other groups around her camp. Mina frequently lamented the language barriers faced by many women, their reluctance to access healthcare services due to fear, and the imperative to preserve their cultural heritage within support systems. She also referred to their reluctance to come forward due to their lower place in Myanmar society.

The humanitarian sector's regulatory constraints and government policies in Bangladesh hinder the formal recognition and support of initiatives like the RWDF. Mina's arguments not only underscore the practical challenges faced by Rohingya women but also resonate with theoretical humanitarian principles of self-reliance, questioning the efficacy of foreign interventions compared to locally driven initiatives. Mina and the group described a type of caste heritage system where Rohingya , in particular, brought with them the same fear and lack of comfort in engaging with the outside system as they did the Government systems in Myanmar. This lower caste admission was also prominent in the Rohingya society in Karachi who noted the Baradari as a barrier to accessing services.

In Karachi, the dynamics of marriage among Rohingya women reflect broader socio-economic challenges and vulnerabilities. While instances of trafficking remain a grave concern, factors such as limited mobility, statelessness, and economic hardship deter women from marrying outside the community. The marriage ceremonies, albeit moments of celebration, often highlight the pervasive poverty within the community, placing undue financial burdens on low-income families, primarily women, to provide for traditional gatherings. The nexus between economic strain and gender-based violence becomes starkly evident as women recount how financial hardships exacerbate tensions within the household, leading to instances of domestic violence. In all six yarning sessions with women, this point of financial hardship was central and exacerbated by language challenges, lack of documentation and their lower place in society as Rohingya and as women.

The structural inequalities inherent in caste or baradari systems further compound the vulnerabilities faced by Rohingya women, particularly those in lower castes. Gender disparities in access to resources perpetuate cycles of violence and deprivation, as women's marginalised status restricts their access to medical assistance and economic opportunities.

The narratives of Rohingya women highlight the importance of community support networks and the preservation of cultural practices, particularly in healthcare and services settings. Despite the proliferation of health clinics in the camps, many women express anxiety about unfamiliar environments and advocate for culturally familiar practices such as home births attended by Rohingya midwives.

In essence, the experiences of Rohingya women underscore the complex intersections of gender, displacement, and structural inequalities. Their narratives not only illuminate the urgent need for inclusive and culturally sensitive interventions where Rohingya women are supported to help other women. Changing circumstances, have slowly altered perceptions, with increased trust in clinics noted among women, albeit with lingering anxieties. I discovered that this shift to using clinics was partially due to their shelters being so unliveable, unhygienic and crowded that they are often forced to revert to the clinics.

> *Our homes are getting worse, the plastic and poles break every time the wind blows, the rain comes in. For women without a husband, this is even worse. We have no money to fix anything, and we do not know where to get proper help. The clinics have become a small escape from our poor living conditions.*

> Asila, part of the Women's Shelter Group in Camp 12, yarning while undertaking shelter repair on the 6th June 2019. Notably Asila had a mid-level of English.

In this comparative research, it becomes evident that the experiences faced by women in Karachi and those within the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh are uniquely challenging, yet it is not entirely appropriate to juxtapose them directly. The research revealed that women in Karachi encounter an array of difficulties that, when viewed collectively, appear more daunting and stress-inducing than

the adversities faced by the Rohingya women in Bangladesh camps. Specifically, Rohingya women frequently expressed their struggles with self-care, which significantly hindered their ability to support one another. The absence of assistance from United Nations agencies, non-governmental organisations, or government entities due to their stateless status compounded their plight. They articulated a pronounced sense of helplessness in aiding their peers or their offspring, constrained further by cultural norms that restrict decision-making in the absence of male figures.

In the context of displacement, the narrative shared throughout the six women's Yarning groups in Karachi paints a stark picture of a profound loss of autonomy over their own lives. Rohingya women residing in Karachi reported a noticeable decline in their traditional skills, fearing the erosion of cultural heritage they could pass down to their daughters. This situation is further aggravated by the trend of daughters marrying at younger ages and consequently departing from their familial homes ill-equipped for the challenges of life ahead.

In further expanding the comparative analysis of Rohingya women's experiences in the informal settlements of Karachi and the camps in Bangladesh, it is crucial to acknowledge the significant adversities these groups face. However, within this research it is equally important to highlight the situation of the Irish Rohingya diaspora, where internal support networks and women's solidarity have fostered a more positive environment. While the focus has largely been on the challenges faced in camps and informal settlements, the narrative shifts positively when considering the Irish Rohingya community. Here, women have used those traditional supportive networks, offering a stark contrast to the isolation and lack of support observed elsewhere. In Ireland it clearly comes through broader networks of the host community who are highly accepting of this small but culturally different ethnic group.

The transformation within the Irish Rohingya community is particularly notable among the younger generation of girls who enjoy greater autonomy and opportunities. Thanks to citizenship rights, equality, and language proficiency, the barriers that once stifled their potential have been dismantled. This newfound agency stands in contrast to the experiences of their counterparts in Karachi and the camps in Bangladesh, where traditional skills are fading, and early marriages are prevalent. The Irish Rohingya women's ability to support one another and empower their daughters with skills and knowledge showcases the profound impact of community, rights, and access to resources on overcoming the challenges of displacement and building resilient Rohingya Muslim diaspora within a largely Christian community.

7.5   The Heritage Value of Rohingya Fashion, Henna and Thanaka

In this section, I delve into the visually striking manifestations of the Rohingya women's intangible cultural heritage, focusing on traditional fashion, henna, and Thanaka. These elements emerged as potent symbols of Rohingya identity in discussions about what it means to be Rohingya, transcending even their Islamic faith. The women recounted how, in Arakan, their fashion choices reflected a degree of autonomy rarely seen among women in Bangladesh or Pakistan, despite the inherent contradictions with their modest Islamic attire. The art of weaving, a skill deeply ingrained in the female domain in Myanmar, was highlighted for its central role in the cultural life of Rohingya women, yet remains underappreciated by outsiders. This craft is celebrated in Rohingya poetry, dance, songs, and intricate hand-woven textiles that narrate the lifecycle rites of passage from birth to death.

The discourse on traditional dress revealed that attire is age and marital status-specific among Rohingya women, with modern variations increasingly evident, particularly in the camps, signifying a gradual acculturation in Bangladesh. Despite this, the distinctiveness of Rohingya attire, compared to that of their Bangladeshi counterparts, was a point of pride. The transition from the pre-marital "zagara," "tebin kezzy," or "kessi basu" to the post-marital "emeshty" or "tity" underscores the cultural significance of fashion in delineating social status within the Rohingya community. The economic strain faced by young women was noted as a threat to the preservation of their fashion heritage.

Adapting to local textiles in the Cox's Bazar camps, driven by the scarcity of traditional materials and influenced by the conservative dressing pressures from the local Bangladeshi Muslim community, reflects a complex interplay of cultural preservation and adaptation. In contrast, the shift towards the full black "Abaya" in Pakistan was seen as a pragmatic choice to avoid unwanted attention while still cherishing traditional attire within the privacy of their homes. Meanwhile, the older generation in Ireland maintains traditional dress practices, albeit with modifications to accommodate the Irish climate, whereas the younger generation leans towards Western fashion, reserving traditional attire for cultural events.

The economic challenges related to the production and marketing of handcrafted items and traditional clothing were particularly emphasised. The difficulty in procuring raw materials within Bangladesh and the consequent price surge have significantly impacted women's ability to sustain their craft. Despite these challenges, the emergence of NGO-supported initiatives focusing on women's livelihoods and cooperatives marks a positive shift towards broader economic empowerment. However, the restricted mobility within the camps, compounded by security

concerns, continues to limit women's access to community networks and resources, thereby affecting their social and economic integration within their new environments.

The Islamic Heritage of Henna

In this comprehensive exploration, I delve into the intricate cultural, medicinal, and religious tapestry of henna within the Rohingya community, highlighting its profound significance beyond mere adornment. Known as "Mehendi" in Arabic, henna is deeply woven into the socio-cultural and religious fabric of the Rohingya, transcending geographical boundaries to remain a vibrant tradition among communities in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Ireland. This enduring practice distinguishes the Rohingya, reflecting unique cultural and medicinal values that set their henna traditions apart from those of their host communities.

Henna's application is deeply rooted in Islamic heritage, echoing Prophetic traditions that extol its virtues for both cosmetic and therapeutic purposes. The Prophet Muhammad's references to henna illuminate its dual role in Islamic tradition, not only enhancing beauty but also serving as a natural remedy for a spectrum of ailments, from minor wounds to fungal infections. This dual significance resonates within the Rohingya community, where henna is revered for its aesthetic appeal and its healing properties, showcasing an intimate knowledge of herbal remedies and a reliance on nature for health care—a practice in harmony with Islamic teachings on utilising Allah's creations for healing.

The cultural dimension of henna is vividly displayed in the context of weddings, where its application becomes a celebratory rite of passage. The pre-wedding ceremony, known as 'the

Mehndi,' transforms the bride's body into a canvas of intricate designs, symbolising joy, fertility, protection, and the transition to marital life. This art form is a communal endeavor, with women of all ages contributing to the creation of elaborate patterns, thereby ensuring the transmission of this shared heritage across generations.

Henna's use extends beyond weddings, integrating into the daily lives of women and girls who practice this art in communal spaces, thereby reinforcing social bonds and cultural continuity. Men, too, partake in this tradition, using henna to dye their hair in vibrant hues, a practice steeped in religious significance and reflective of their adherence to Prophetic traditions.

Field observations reveal the adaptive resilience of these traditions amid displacement. In Karachi, Rohingya weddings incorporate local Pakistani customs, showcasing more elaborate attire and celebration styles, while in Bangladesh, economic constraints necessitate more humble celebrations. Despite these variations, the central element of Mehndi remains a constant, emblematic of the Rohingya's cultural endurance and their capacity to preserve intangible heritage against the backdrop of adversity.

The diaspora context highlights the dynamic nature of henna traditions, serving as a tangible link to the homeland and a means of preserving Rohingya identity abroad. Amidst displacement challenges, such as the scarcity of traditional materials and the influence of host cultures, the Rohingya have ingeniously sustained this practice. Makeshift henna salons and informal gatherings in camps and urban settlements become vibrant spaces of cultural expression and community bonding, offering continuity and resistance to cultural erasure.

The adaptation of henna practices in the diaspora, influenced by local customs and the negotiation of new identities, leads to innovative designs and applications that blend traditional motifs with

new influences. This fusion underscores the fluidity of intangible cultural heritage and the ability of displaced communities to integrate aspects of their host culture while retaining core elements of their traditions.

The gendered dimensions of henna, associated with femininity and beauty, also deserve attention. In the displacement context, where traditional gender roles may be challenged, henna offers women a sense of agency and a platform for artistic expression, asserting their identity and autonomy while celebrating their cultural heritage in the face of adversity.

In conclusion, the practice of henna among the Rohingya vividly illustrates the resilience and adaptability of intangible cultural heritage. It embodies the interplay between tradition and innovation, individual and community, continuity and change, providing rich insights into how displaced communities navigate their identities and sustain their cultural practices amidst profound challenges.

"It is mentioned in so many of the times by Muhammad. We know it is good for use as our medicine, you mix with water and drink, but it also make us very beautiful, men and woman".

Abdur Rahman's vibrant commitment to maintaining traditional grooming practices was evident in his regular use of bright red henna to cover grey hair, a detail captured on 22nd May 2019.

Although Henna is not mentioned anywhere in the Koran it appears in the 7th century Hadith literature.

The Simplicity of Thanaka

Thanaka, a distinctive milky yellow paste derived from the bark of certain trees, stands as a vivid emblem of Rohingya women's heritage. Its use is widespread across Southeast Asia, yet for the Rohingya, particularly in the displacement camps of Bangladesh, Thanaka has transcended its traditional uses to become a potent symbol of identity. This transformation has been catalysed by the global exposure brought about by photographic essays and exhibitions from visiting journalists and photographers. Thanaka serves multifaceted roles within Rohingya culture: it is an insect repellent, a sunscreen, a component of beauty regimes, and an acne treatment. As Jasmine, articulated, "Thanaka is a Rohingya woman's best friend; it's feminine," underscoring its integral place in their daily lives and cultural practices.

> *Thanaka is traditional for us; we have used it since we are young girls, and every girl uses it in our village no matter what religion. I can tell the Rohingya woman from the way she wears on her face; it is our best friend as Rohingya women. I still wear it at my home but not when I go out as I cover my face instead.*

> *Jasmine, female youth leader, mother and wife: from Yarning group in Rohingya Camp 18 on June 12, 2019. On this occasion we were discussing Rohingya crafts and the new Rohingya Memory Centre which was in the early stages of planning and information Gathering.*

The origins of Thanaka within Rohingya culture trace back to the lush farm forests surrounding their ancestral villages in Rakhine, Myanmar. The traditional method of creating Thanaka paste, as demonstrated by Yasmine, involves grinding the bark of trees (*Limonia acidissima* (wood-apple or elephant apple) or roots from *Murraya paniculata* and *Hesperethusa crenulata,* on a flat stone slab known as *"kyauk pyin."* These trees, abundant in Myanmar and other parts of Asia, Australia, and the Pacific, were historically accessible to the Rohingya, either through collection or purchase in local markets (UNESCO, n.d.; Kyaw, 2017; Myint, 2018; Green, 2019).

In my discussions with Rohingya women, they knew little about the heritage value of Thanaka, yet it is profound, with historical references in Burmese literature dating back to the 14th century and archaeological findings of *kyauk pyin* stones that are over one thousand years old. This deep-rooted historical significance prompted Myanmar to propose Thanaka for inscription on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity in 2020, an initiative led by the Director General, Department of Archaeology and National Museum. Although the submission remains under review as of 2021, this endeavour highlights the broader recognition of Thanaka's cultural importance, potentially including its significance for the Rohingya as an ethnic minority within Myanmar.

'It was common to Myanmar for all girls, but in Bangladesh we see it is Rohingya practice. We can find it her in the camps because is it very important for many reasons. Our Thanaka connects us to our home.'

Wiwiek, female youth involved in local shelter group. :Comment from Yarning group in Rohingya Camp 18 on June 12, 2019. On this occasion we were discussing

Rohingya crafts and the new Rohingya Memory Centre which was in the early stages of planning and information Gathering.

For Rohingya women, Thanaka is more than a cosmetic or medicinal product; it is imbued with the fragrance of nostalgia, evoking cherished childhood memories. Its application, whether in simple or intricate designs, is a daily ritual for women and girls, serving both aesthetic and protective purposes. This practice, however, varies across diaspora communities. In Cox's Bazar, the ritual of making and applying Thanaka is a cherished communal activity that reinforces Rohingya cultural identity, distinguishing them from their Bangladeshi hosts. Conversely, in Karachi, the practice has waned among older Rohingya women, who, while nostalgic, refrain from its use to avoid standing out in their adopted Pakistani communities.

However, the use by the Rohingya underscores a bigger realisation. In the broader discourse on ICH, as delineated by entities like UNESCO, Thanaka emerges as a distinctly Burmese tradition, deeply embedded within the cultural practices of Myanmar's women, as I discussed within the literature chapters highlighted most recently by Myint, (2018) and Green, (2019). This tradition, with its roots entwined in the history and daily lives of the Myanmar populace, serves as a vivid marker of cultural identity. The use of Thanaka by Rohingya women, therefore, stands as a poignant testament to their intrinsic connection to Myanmar, affirming their place within the cultural diversity of the nation. Unlike their counterparts in Bangladesh, where Thanaka is not a customary practice, Rohingya women's adherence to this tradition distinctly sets them apart, highlighting their unique heritage and enduring ties to Myanmar. This distinction is not merely cosmetic; it is emblematic of the deeper cultural affiliations and ancestral bonds that link Rohingya

women to the land of Myanmar, the Bio-Cultural Diversity. Should UNESCO recognise Thanaka as an ICH of Myanmar, it would inadvertently underscore the Rohingya's integral role in the cultural fabric of the country. Such recognition would not only validate the cultural practices of Rohingya women but also reaffirm their identity as an indelible part of Myanmar's heritage, challenging narratives that seek to marginalise them from the nation's history and cultural legacy.

The case of Thanaka exemplifies the complex dynamics of cultural preservation and adaptation among displaced populations. It underscores how intangible cultural heritage like Thanaka can serve as a critical identifier for the Rohingya, linking them to their historical and cultural roots in Myanmar. Yet, its physical absence in diaspora settings like Karachi highlights the challenges of maintaining cultural practices far from their origins, relying instead on the preservation of memory and narrative to sustain cultural identity.

7.6   Conclusion

In conclusion, the research of Rohingya women's fashion, henna, and Thanaka within this chapter provides a profound insight into the resilience and adaptability of the Rohingya community through the lens of intangible cultural heritage in displacement. These cultural practices are not mere remnants of a past life but are vibrant, living expressions of identity, resistance, and community cohesion amidst the trials of displacement. Fashion serves as a narrative of personal and communal identity, henna as a bond that weaves through the fabric of Rohingya society, celebrating joy, health, and beauty, and Thanaka as a symbol of continuity and a tangible connection to the ancestral homeland, even in the face of profound dislocation.

This chapter is crucial for a greater understanding of intangible cultural heritage as it underscores the dynamic interplay between preservation and adaptation. It highlights how displaced communities like the Rohingya maintain their cultural identity while engaging with and adapting to new socio-cultural environments. The ritualistic and everyday use of fashion, henna, and Thanaka among Rohingya women not only serves as a means of cultural expression but also as a mechanism for coping with the loss and trauma associated with displacement, providing a sense of normalcy and belonging in unsettled circumstances.

Moreover, the potential UNESCO inscription of Thanaka underscores the global significance of recognising and protecting intangible cultural heritage, especially for marginalised and displaced communities. It emphasises the need for inclusive cultural heritage narratives that acknowledge the contributions of all groups, including ethnic minorities like the Rohingya, as it is emblematic of the deeper cultural affiliations and ancestral bonds that link Rohingya women to the land of Myanmar. This acknowledgement is not only a matter of cultural preservation but also of human rights, as it affirms the identity and dignity of displaced communities and thus should be facilitated by humanitarian systems. As noted and well worth reiterating, should UNESCO recognise Thanaka as an ICH of Myanmar, it would inadvertently underscore the Rohingya's integral role in the cultural fabric of the country.

Through the lens of Rohingya women's fashion, henna, and Thanaka, this chapter contributes to the broader discourse on displacement, cultural identity, and the resilience of the human spirit. It offers a nuanced understanding of how intangible cultural practices are central to the survival and vitality of communities in flux and highlights the critical role of women in sustaining these traditions. Ultimately, it enriches our comprehension of the Rohingya people, not just as victims

of displacement but as active agents in the preservation and evolution of their rich cultural heritage, asserting their place within Myanmar's diverse cultural landscape and the global community.

8   Chapter Eight: The Core of Intangible Cultural Heritage

8.1   Overview of the Chapter

In this chapter, titled, "The Core of Intangible Cultural Heritage" I delve into the profound complexities surrounding ICH amidst the experiences of displacement, with a lens on the Rohingya community. Here we see again how displaced communities, such as the Rohingya, navigate the preservation, adaptation, and sometimes concealment of their ICH in the face of displacement's profound challenges.

I explore the intricate social structures, caste, and baradari systems, and how these intersect with ethnicity and identity among the Rohingya. Through narratives from the Rohingya in various displacement contexts—from the camps in Cox's Bazar to the diaspora in Pakistan and Ireland—I illuminate the critical role of ICH in maintaining a sense of continuity and identity amidst upheaval. The discussions around the loss of homeland, the pursuit of citizenship, and the daily realities of life in displacement contexts reveal how ICH serves as a cornerstone for the Rohingya's resilience and sense of self.

In this Chapter, I highlights the complexities of language as a crucial element of ICH. I illustrate how the Rohingya language, with its unique words and intonations, acts as a vessel for carrying and conveying cultural heritage. The challenges and opportunities that language presents in different displacement settings—from education in refugee camps to integration in diaspora communities—underscore the dynamic nature of ICH in response to changing social and geographical landscapes.

In examining religion and the creation of a sacred heritage among the Rohingya, I further enrich the understanding of ICH. Here I navigate the intricacies of how spiritual beliefs and practices, deeply embedded in the Rohingya's cultural fabric, adapt and find expression in diverse contexts, from Sufi practices in Pakistan to integration experiences in Ireland. This aspect of my research reveals the layers of meaning and identity that ICH encompasses, transcending mere practices to embody deeply held beliefs and values.

This chapter is of significant importance to the overall context of the thesis for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners engaged with issues of ICH, displacement, and the Rohingya crisis. It offers invaluable insights into how ICH is not merely a set of traditions but a living, evolving framework through which displaced communities negotiate their identities, resist erasure, and foster resilience. My research underscores the need for culturally informed approaches in addressing the needs of displaced populations, recognising the intrinsic value of ICH in the healing, integration, and empowerment of communities like the Rohingya.

8.2   Social Structures a Caste a Baradari Systems and Ethnicity

Navigating the intricacies of social structures, caste, and baradari systems among the Rohingya has revealed profound insights into their intangible cultural heritage, especially against the backdrop of displacement. Accessing first-hand accounts from within the frontier region of Arakan has always posed challenges, yet the narratives emerging from the displaced Rohingya community are both illuminating and poignant. The emphasis on returning home and the quest for citizenship

recurrently surfaced as primary concerns among the Rohingya participants in this study, transcending the bounds of any specific discussion topic.

A young Rohingya male in Cox's Bazar poignantly articulated the existential limbo that defines their reality:

> *I do not know anywhere else only my home in Myanmar. We can return anytime, but without proper citizenship we will have violence and conflict again and again. We have no rights until they (the Myanmar government / army) recognise us. They don't even see us as humans.*

Rohingya Male youth in shelter group Yarning Camp 20 Cox's Bazar: One of the yarning sessions during the construction of bamboo shelter in Camp 20: 22 April 2019.

This statement not only underscores the longing for belonging but also highlights the perpetual cycle of violence and disenfranchisement faced without formal recognition. In stark contrast, the perspective of another young male, a translator born in Teknaf, encapsulates a different facet of the Rohingya identity crisis:

> *I was born in Teknaf, I don't know Myanmar only this place. If I can go anywhere, it is America or Europe. I learnt English so I can go. I was on the list to be interviewed for a scholarship, but it all ended when the big influx began (a reference to 2017).*

A young Rohingya male translator, part of my research team, contributed his linguistic skills to the 2019 study in the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh.

His narrative reflects the aspirations and altered sense of belonging among those born in the diaspora, further complicating the community's collective identity.

The predicament of envisaging a future amidst the uncertainty of displacement is a recurring theme, particularly poignant given that over 60 percent of the 'old Rohingya case load' from 1992 are now Bangladesh-born. This demographic shift has sparked ongoing dialogues within both the Rohingya community and the broader humanitarian sphere, as the population within the camps continues to grow, with an estimated 35,000 children born annually. The disconnection from their ancestral lands and the reality of a generation growing up in the confines of the camps underscore the profound impact of displacement on the intangible cultural heritage and identity of the Rohingya people.

Yarning groups in Bangladesh and Pakistan have consistently highlighted a pervasive lack of clarity regarding legal identity, stemming from limited documentation and an incomplete understanding of terms such as refugee, illegal immigrant, minority, and asylum seeker. This ambiguity, coupled with apprehensions about legal documentation and its implications, has left many feeling adrift in a sea of uncertainty. Despite this, there is a palpable sense of community and identity reinforcement within the camps, as expressed by a young man in a construction Yarning group:

> *"Rohingya are a minority, we have rights; Rohingya live in the World's biggest refugee camp; Rohingya is the biggest group of refugees in the World; Rohingya are stateless people from Arakan."*

> During a yarning session on April 22, 2019, in Camp 20, Cox's Bazar, a young Rohingya male discussed the community's efforts while constructing bamboo shelters, offering insights into their collaborative spirit and resilience.

This mantra, echoed by both male and female youth, signifies a collective grappling with their imposed identities and the rights they are entitled to, albeit often in abstraction. The narratives emerging from this research paint a vivid picture of the Rohingya's struggle for identity and recognition amidst the complexities of displacement. Their intangible cultural heritage, manifested through these shared stories and collective assertions of identity, offers a window into the resilience and adaptability of the Rohingya community as they navigate the turbulent waters of statelessness and displacement.

As the dialogue within the Rohingya community deepened, a palpable sense of confusion emerged around the terminology used to define their status and rights. "Rohingya are a minority, we have human rights," became a repeated assertion, reflecting a nascent understanding of their legal standing, albeit clouded by ambiguity. This confusion was further compounded by a prevalent belief, echoed across many discussion groups, that their lack of formal education somehow diminished their inherent human rights. The conflation of minority status with educational deficits, and by extension, a perceived reduction in their humanity, reveals a profound internalisation of social hierarchies, as one young participant poignantly questioned,

"Is this why the Bangladesh will not let us have education, they want us to be a minority?"

On June 12, 2019, Alom, a Rohingya youth and member of the photographic group OFS, known for his activism within the Rohingya community in Camp 14, shared his perspectives.

This internal struggle with identity and rights was exacerbated by the humanitarian narrative that often frames the Rohingya experience. The translation and ethical implications of English terms used to describe the Rohingya people have led to a complex interplay with their intangible cultural

heritage (ICH), with many Rohingya becoming unwitting participants in a narrative not of their making. This has, in some cases, transformed them into unreliable narrators of their own stories, influenced heavily by external characterisations.

A significant shift in the understanding and engagement with their ICH was noted among the Rohingya diaspora in Ireland. A male member of a cricket club highlighted that it was only upon resettlement that they began to grapple with their heritage, marking a departure from earlier understandings. He noted,

> *We do not have many Rohingya families here so culturally we will not push our girls to marry Rohingya, but we want them to marry a good Muslim man, because this is our culture but still it will be up to her. But it is good if he plays Cricket, it is our game.*

On August 27, 2019, during an interview at a coffee shop in Carlow town, Mohammad R, a passionate Rohingya cricketer and community leader in Carlow, Ireland, shared his experiences and insights.

This narrative underscores a nuanced negotiation of cultural traditions within the context of displacement, where community practices are adapted and redefined. The ability to travel freely with Irish citizenship has opened new horizons for the Rohingya in Ireland, contrasting sharply with the experiences of their counterparts in Karachi, where mobility is increasingly restricted. The narrative of the fishermen in Karachi, who observe that everyone in their community is a foreigner, not just us Rohingya, but they are Bahari, Bengali, and Tribal peoples' get the citizenship because of who they know (corruption) and the politics of Pakistan, underscores the

complex interplay of identity, politics, and corruption in shaping the lived experiences of displaced communities.

Life in Myanmar, as recalled by the Rohingya elders in Cox's Bazar, was marked by a degree of interethnic harmony, albeit now overshadowed by recent decades of increased segregation and hostility. The rise of Buddhist ethno-nationalism and restrictive policies, encapsulated in the "Laws on Protection of Race and Religion," have not only limited the Rohingya's freedoms but have also contributed to a stark increase in community tensions. The women's reflections on the rapid changes in their social environment, driven by these divisive policies, highlight the profound impact of governmental and societal shifts on the Rohingya's intangible cultural heritage and their very existence.

In synthesising these narratives, it becomes evident that the Rohingya's intangible cultural heritage, shaped by their social structures, caste systems, and ethnicity, is both a source of resilience and a point of vulnerability. The juxtaposition of their experiences across different contexts, from the camps in Cox's Bazar to the diaspora in Ireland and the constrained lives in Karachi, offers a rich insights into the ways in which displaced communities navigate, preserve, and adapt their cultural heritage in the face of systemic challenges and displacement.

An observation from a Rohingya musician in Karachi brought to light the nuanced interplay between cultural practices and perceptions of identity within the context of displacement.

> ;they practice in his home next to the Christian community, proposing that anyone who hears will think they are Christians.

> During a yarning session on February 12, 2020, in the RMWA room over a shared meal, Komal, a Rohingya

musician and fisherman, shared his insights, reflecting the intertwining of music, community, and daily life within the Rohingya culture.

This comment not only underscores the adaptability of the Rohingya in navigating their cultural and religious identity in a diverse environment but also hints at the underlying complexities of caste and social hierarchy prevalent in their host community. In the intricate social fabric of Pakistan, the term 'Baradari' is pivotal in understanding the layers of social hierarchy. The Rohingya, as noted in various Yarning sessions, find themselves in a unique position within this hierarchy, often perceived to be on a similar societal level as the Bengali and Bihari Muslim ethnic minorities, yet distinct due to their statelessness and displacement history as Burmese Muslims. This positioning is complex, as articulated by Mohammad A, a resident of the Machar colony in Karachi, who highlighted the diverse ethnic landscape the Rohingya navigate, which introduces a multifaceted system of hierarchy and power dynamics previously encountered in Burma and now recontextualised in their diasporic existence in Pakistan.[29]

The comparative analysis of the Rohingya's social standing with that of the Christian communities in Karachi reveals a layered understanding of caste and ethnicity's role in shaping community relations and individual identities. Christians, often regarded at a lower rung of the societal ladder in Pakistan, have carved out specific roles within the community, from nursing and veterinarian

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[29] In my doctoral research, the fieldwork conducted in Machar Colony, as compared to Arakanabad, presented a unique set of challenges and opportunities. Although initial connections in Machar Colony were promising, the logistical complexities of simultaneously engaging deeply in both locales proved to be a significant hurdle. This was compounded by the need to establish and nurture the intricate network of relationships essential for in-depth anthropological study. Consequently, my engagement in Machar Colony was more constrained than in Arakanabad.

The dynamics shifted favorably when the Burma Muslim Welfare Association (BMWA) extended their support, markedly enhancing the scope and depth of my research in Arakanabad. Their assistance was instrumental in facilitating access and engagement within the community, allowing for a more comprehensive exploration of the intricate cultural and social fabrics of the Rohingya diaspora in Karachi. This pivotal support from the BMWA not only enriched the empirical foundation of my study but also underscored the importance of local partnerships in conducting field-based anthropological research.

services to domestic work, roles that are emblematic of their social positioning yet indicative of the adaptive strategies employed by minority communities.

The musician Komal along with other comments from Mohammad Noor, offer a glimpse into the perceived empowerment of the Rohingya within Karachi's complex social hierarchy, especially in relation to their Christian neighbours and other foreign migrants. This perceived empowerment, however, is juxtaposed with the broader narrative of displacement, statelessness, and the ongoing quest for identity and belonging that defines the Rohingya experience.

The insights drawn from these narratives not only enrich the discourse on intangible cultural heritage and displacement but also highlight the intricate ways in which displaced communities like the Rohingya navigate, adapt, and sometimes reconfigure their cultural practices and identities in response to the social hierarchies and cultural dynamics of their host communities. This exploration sheds light on the resilience of the Rohingya in preserving their cultural heritage while adapting to the multifaceted challenges of displacement and integration into new social environments.

8.3   The Rohingya and Languages

In my exploration of the Rohingya's intangible cultural heritage, their language emerges as a profound symbol of identity and resilience. The Rohingya language, evolving from Chittagonian roots and infused with unique words and intonations akin to Burmese, stands as a distinct marker of their cultural heritage. This linguistic evolution highlights how language not only embodies the Rohingya identity but also acts as a dynamic medium for expressing and preserving their rich intangible cultural heritage across diverse settings.

Throughout my research, it became evident that the Rohingya's linguistic identity plays a pivotal role in their experiences of displacement, influencing processes of exclusion, assimilation, and integration in various host environments. This aspect of language as a critical component of refugee responses presents a considerable challenge that the humanitarian sector has grappled with for decades. Language is central to decision-making and communication, not only with refugees but also among humanitarians, governments, host communities, and media. In Bangladesh, the use of English as the primary language for humanitarian coordination inadvertently marginalises refugees and sometimes even government officials who prefer Bengali, thereby complicating communication efforts.

A significant challenge arises in the sector of education, where the Rohingya's limited access to formal schooling in Myanmar, often restricted to religious teachings, intersects with the linguistic demands of displacement settings. The dilemma of choosing between Burmese and Bengali for educational instruction in Bangladesh underscores the critical importance of aligning education with the Rohingya's linguistic heritage to foster community engagement and ensure the continuity of their cultural identity.

The Rohingya community's self-awareness of their linguistic diversity and adaptability was particularly striking. Despite facing numerous challenges, they seldom dwelled on the linguistic barriers until confronted with the realities of displacement. This adaptability is further reflected in the educational strategies adopted within the camps, where the introduction of Burmese and English in the curriculum, despite the questionable effectiveness, signifies ongoing efforts to bridge linguistic gaps. In Karachi, the initiative led by Mohammad Noor to educate Rohingya children in Urdu is a testament to the community's proactive approach to overcoming linguistic barriers and enhancing their prospects in Pakistan. Mohammad Noor's recollection of effortlessly

navigating multiple languages in his youth, and the pragmatic embrace of Urdu in the diaspora, exemplifies the strategic use of language as a tool for adaptation and survival.

> *"We spoke Rohingya at home but we used many words from other groups including Burmese and Bengali. On the street and in the boats we learnt many languages" We still do this in Pakistan, we can do much better if we know Urdu, Punjabi or some Bengali."*

> (Mohammad Noor, Community Leader, Arakanabad, Karachi: Noor was a critical contact within the Karachi community not only for my research information but his support allowed me freedom and protection within the informal settlements: Yarning on the fishing boats 26th March 2021).

In Cox's Bazar, the language of the Rohingya was particularly rich, with many, especially women from rural backgrounds, speaking a dialect that wove together elements of Rohingya, Arakanese, and Burmese. This linguistic blending was a testament to the fluid nature of their intangible cultural heritage, as many in the craft and shelter groups openly shared their journey of language acquisition, continually absorbing new words from Rohingya, English, and Bangla. This dynamism in language was also mirrored in the challenges of communication within the ever-expanding camps, where the diverse accents and tonalities, particularly the high-pitched intonations characteristic of Burmese, marked the complex interplay of cultures and ethnicities.

Throughout my fieldwork, the centrality of language in shaping the Rohingya's sense of self and community was undeniable. Young Rohingya across all three countries underscored the transformative power of language, particularly English, in altering their trajectories. Mastery of

English often translated into enhanced trust and opportunities within NGO circles. Similarly, in Pakistan, proficiency in Urdu and Punjabi opened new societal avenues for the youth, distancing them from traditional livelihoods like fishing and integrating them more deeply into the local fabric. In Cox's Bazar, the ability to speak Bangla facilitated not just social integration but also economic and marital alliances with the host community, underscoring the multifaceted role of language in the process of displacement and resettlement.

The generational shifts in linguistic preferences were stark, especially in Karachi, where the younger Rohingya were drawn towards Urdu, the lingua franca, thereby gradually moving away from their native Rohingya language. This shift was not just a matter of convenience but a strategic adaptation to their environment, as articulated by my male Rohingya translator in Arakanabad, who emphasised the importance of maintaining Rohingya while acknowledging the pragmatic need to embrace Urdu for societal advancement.

The linguistic landscape in Cox's Bazar presented its own set of challenges, particularly with the misconception among humanitarian agencies regarding the intelligibility of Chittagonian and Rohingya. Despite the apparent overlaps, the subtle yet significant differences in expression, vocabulary, and tonality often led to miscommunication, highlighting the complexities of linguistic identity in displacement contexts. The influence of Burmese on the Rohingya language, with its distinct tonality and lexicon, further enriched the linguistic heritage of the community, even as it complicated their interactions with both the host community and humanitarian actors.

The language was not just a problem for women, many men struggled to make their way in the camps due to language barriers. Imran for example,

"I think I have missed many opportunities. People around me have many things but we (his family of 6) *have little, not even food sometimes. We are from a different community but in the camp, this is where we must live now. Some of the people do not understand us".* I try to explain to the NGO leaders, but it doesn't help.

(Imran is a Rohingya male, Shelter worker, Cox's Bazar Camp. Imran worked frequently with in the field with the NGO BRAC: Yarning in the field on the 10th of June 2019).

In my research of the Rohingya community's intangible cultural heritage, their indigenous systems of communication stood out as a poignant reflection of their resilience and adaptability. Within the overcrowded confines of Cox's Bazar, I observed an intricate web of informal messaging systems, often facilitated by work crews engaged in constructing shelters or paving roads. This grassroots network was crucial for disseminating vital information across the community, yet the linguistic diversity within the camps often posed significant challenges to clear and effective communication.

My research team and I frequently encountered these communication barriers, which were particularly pronounced when conveying essential messages related to health, food distribution, and security within the camps. The men involved in our shelter construction / Yarning sessions highlighted a rapid and efficient information relay system that connected various work sites to the broader community network, including women's groups, thereby ensuring the flow of crucial updates and announcements.

However, the quest for effective communication tools extended beyond the confines of the camps. The reliance on English, Bangladeshi, and Rohingya languages in written forms, such as signs and handouts, often fell short of bridging the linguistic divide. In response to these challenges, many Rohingya youth turned to digital platforms, crafting a hybrid language known as 'Rohing-lish' for texting—a testament to their ingenuity in overcoming communication barriers. Despite governmental restrictions on phone and internet access, this digital form of communication emerged as a potent tool for disseminating information within the community, augmenting the traditional oral messaging networks.

The situation in Karachi presented a different set of dynamics, where text messaging and WhatsApp became prevalent means of communication, particularly among men. The linguistic repertoire of the Rohingya in this urban diaspora included a mix of their native language, Urdu, and Bengali, reflecting their multifaceted identity. Yet, the gradual decline of the Rohingya language in this context underscored a broader trend of linguistic assimilation and the challenges it poses to preserving cultural heritage.

Through this lens, the communication practices of the Rohingya, from the oral traditions in Cox's Bazar to the digital conversations in Karachi, reveal a community in constant flux, navigating the complexities of displacement while striving to maintain a sense of cohesion and identity. The evolution of their messaging systems, from face-to-face exchanges to digital communications, illustrates the adaptive strategies employed by the Rohingya to sustain their community networks and cultural heritage in the face of adversity.

Language, within the context of my ethnographic study on the Rohingya, emerged as a pivotal element shaping not only communication but also mobility and opportunities within the

displacement milieu. The youth within the camps articulated a clear consensus: proficiency in English, Bangla, and Rohingya was not merely beneficial but essential for navigating the complex socio-economic landscape of displacement. This multilingual capability facilitated access to employment, leadership roles, and meaningful interactions with NGOs, UN agencies, and camp-in-charge officials (CiCs). My experience with the UNHCR team in the field further underscored this reality, where the linguistic gap between the staff and the Rohingya community often necessitated a constant search for effective translators, revealing the intricacies and occasional miscommunications inherent in cross-cultural aid efforts.

In Karachi, the linguistic challenges faced by Rohingya women, particularly in accessing healthcare, highlighted a broader issue of integration and inclusion. The inability to communicate effectively in Urdu not only limited their mobility but also posed significant risks to their health and that of their children. This barrier was compounded when medical documentation, provided in English, remained inaccessible to those without the requisite language skills.

Conversely, the situation for the Rohingya in Ireland painted a picture of language as a bridge to a new life and integration. The younger generation's fluency in English and Irish, alongside their native Rohingya, showcased a remarkable adaptability and eagerness to belong within their new community. The role of the Irish language, in particular, emerged as a unique cultural connector, enhancing social bonds and fostering a sense of belonging among the youth. This linguistic integration, however, contrasted with the experiences of older Rohingya women, who faced significant challenges due to limited English proficiency. These language barriers not only affected their health outcomes but also limited their ability to engage fully with the broader Irish society.

The reliance on traditional healing practices, alongside conventional medicine, underscored a continuity of cultural heritage amidst adaptation. The transport of traditional herbs from Bangladesh to Europe signified a tangible link to their homeland, a blend of the old and new as they navigated their lives in displacement.

Through this exploration, it became evident that language serves as a critical conduit for the Rohingya, influencing their access to services, social integration, and the preservation of cultural identity across diverse displacement contexts. The juxtaposition of experiences across Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Ireland highlights the multifaceted role of language in shaping the displacement journey of the Rohingya, underscoring the complexities of maintaining cultural heritage while striving for integration and acceptance in new environments.

8.4   Religion and the Creation of a Sacred Heritage

In the context of Rohingya intangible cultural heritage, religion and the creation of sacred heritage occupy a central place, woven with complex threads of language, tradition, and spirituality. The term *'raywase shekka,'* meaning traditional knowledge in the Rohingya language, became a key concept in my research, illuminating the depth of ancestral beliefs and spirituality within their cultural heritage. Elders in the community often spoke of *'sawlasoul,'* a term that encapsulates the collective beliefs, morals, and ethics inherited through generations, underscored by the reverence for *'fordada'* (grandfather) and *'fordafe'* (grandmother's mother), signifying the dual lineage of paternal and maternal ancestry.

This profound respect for elders and ancestors, while not manifesting as ancestor worship in the conventional anthropological sense, revealed a nuanced understanding of their role as moral and ethical guides. A prevalent belief among the Rohingya, especially noted during my discussions in Karachi, was the omnipresence of ancestors, overseeing the living and potentially influencing their fortunes based on adherence to ancestral paths. This belief, though seemingly at odds with certain Islamic teachings, harmonises with the Rohingya's traditional Sufi inclinations, suggesting a unique spiritual landscape where ancestral reverence and Islamic faith intertwine.

The youth, both in Bangladesh and Pakistan, expressed a keen awareness of their distinct spiritual practices compared to their Muslim neighbours. They navigated a delicate balance, conforming outwardly to the broader Islamic practices of their host communities while nurturing their unique spiritual identity rooted in Sufism. This duality was not just a matter of religious observance but a crucial aspect of their identity, offering solace and a sense of belonging within the global Ummah, yet with a distinct Rohingya essence.

My engagement deepened when I was welcomed into Sufi trance dance gatherings in Pakistan, events that transcended mere religious rituals to become communal expressions of faith and identity. Initially perceived as a fading tradition, these gatherings drew a diverse crowd, underscoring the universal appeal of Sufi practices among the Rohingya and beyond. However, the necessity for discretion in these spiritual practices highlighted the Rohingya's cautious navigation of their religious identity in a predominantly Muslim yet religiously diverse environment.

The Sufi gatherings, characterised by rhythmic dances, chants, and an aura of mysticism, offered a rare glimpse into the spiritual heart of the Rohingya community. The term 'Mystic,' derived from

'myein,' meaning *'to close the eyes'* in Greek, aptly described the transcendental experience of these events, where the physical act of closing one's eyes symbolised a deeper spiritual journey. The chant *'Chalo* or in Punjabi *chalen,'* meaning 'Let's go,' became a metaphorical call to release worldly ties and embrace spiritual liberation.

Through this immersive exploration, I gained profound insights into the sacred heritage of the Rohingya, a rich tapestry of beliefs, practices, and traditions that sustain their spirit and identity amidst the challenges of displacement. The interplay of ancestral reverence, Sufi mysticism, and Islamic faith revealed a vibrant spiritual landscape, offering a window into the resilience and adaptability of the Rohingya community as they navigate the complexities of preserving their intangible cultural heritage in diaspora.

> *"In Sufism, you see and travel within yourself; you are here, you travel everywhere, from your country but, maybe you do not take the most important travel, inside yourself."*

He further explained-

> *"It (Sufism) is a journey of stages where one purifies oneself. When you take this journey, there is no mystery anymore."*

> (Mohammad Noor local leader, Rohingya community elder invited me as a guest to numerous events within the community. This statement was documented the day after a Sufi ritual as he explained the process; 26th of March 2021)

Immersing myself in the spiritual world of the Rohingya, I encountered a world where mysticism intertwined with the tangible aspects of their daily lives, creating a complex tapestry of faith and tradition. The essence of their spiritual practices, especially those rooted in Sufism, transcended

the mere act of rituals to embody a deeper, more profound connection to the divine. The concepts of *"Fana,"* the dissolution of the ego, and *"Baka,"* the enduring presence with God, echoed the ultimate spiritual journey towards transcendence, reminiscent of the Buddhist pursuit of Nirvana. This spiritual path, less visible to the outsider, held a revered place within the broader Pakistani societal context, where Sufi traditions are celebrated for their depth and philosophical richness.

The Rohingya's engagement with Sufism, as explained by my translators, revealed a heritage that, while diminished in the diaspora, remained an integral part of their identity. This connection to Sufism, particularly among the older men, was portrayed as a lifeline, a beacon of hope amidst the uncertainty of displacement and the hardships of their precarious lives. The shift in religious practices observed among those who had found economic prosperity was particularly striking, suggesting a complex relationship between material wealth and spiritual engagement. A poignant reflection from several young Rohingya in Arakanabad highlighted a perceived dichotomy between adherence to traditional religious practices and pursuing education and personal development. This sentiment resonated with me as it underscored the internal conflicts within the community regarding the role of religion in their lives and aspirations.

My interactions with a family of Rohingya garbage pickers in Machar Colony and Arakanabad further deepened my understanding of the spiritual dimensions of their existence. Their perspective on life as a journey towards a spiritual awakening offered a unique lens through which they viewed their daily struggles and labour. This viewpoint, while bearing similarities to Buddhist philosophies of reincarnation and Nirvana, was imbued with their own cultural and religious interpretations. The distinction between their spiritual practices and those of the more integrated

Rohingya community, such as the fishermen who engaged in Sufi rituals, revealed underlying social stratifications and varying expressions of faith within the community.

These encounters, from the trance dances to the narratives of the garbage pickers, painted a vivid picture of a community where spirituality, in its many forms, served as a cornerstone of their resilience and identity. The stories, poems, and allegories shared within these circles were not just expressions of faith but also vehicles for preserving their rich cultural heritage, offering insights into the enduring spirit of the Rohingya people as they navigate the complexities of displacement and cultural preservation.

> *"Love of Allah makes us able to live with the suffering and even take pleasure in our suffering sometimes. It is a test in purifying the soul."*

> (Garbage picker, Fayyaz A, was regularly present where we parked in Machar Colony. He gave regular insights and we became familiar with him as he and his family watched out vehicle with no expectation: 2nd February 2022).

In Karachi, the lives of the Rohingya community were marked by a profound asceticism, a reflection of their deep-seated spiritual and cultural practices. This asceticism was not merely about austerity but was intricately linked to their teachings on self-discipline and coping with life's adversities. My conversations with Youth community leader Yusuf, often circled back to the intrinsic suffering and injustices faced by the Rohingya in Myanmar. Yusuf's perspective, that suffering was an integral part of life's journey, particularly for a community displaced and stateless, living on the margins of society through the fishing industry, was a recurring theme in our discussions.

The spiritual underpinnings of the Rohingya's intangible cultural heritage were evident in their ability to contextualise and endure hardship. This resilience was significantly supported by their rich myths and rituals, which I observed to hold a potent sway over their daily lives. The fishermen of the Rohingya community, in particular, stood out as custodians of these oral traditions, their lives intertwined with tales of the sea that blended the real with the mystical. These narratives were not just stories; they were a lifeline, imbued with superstitions and beliefs that necessitated divine interventions for safety and bounty from the sea. The fishermen's reliance on prayer and ritual before braving the waters was a testament to their profound faith. Mohamad Noor recounted, the sea's unpredictability was a constant companion, with numerous fishermen lost to its depths; their fates often left to the mercy of the elements or perhaps picked up by Indian authorities for crossing Territorial waters. The community's adage was always that Allah gives them fish but the sea can take them back if it chooses. The sea regularly takes Rohingya Fishermen, many in the community noted; if they do not have the respect and understanding for Allah and the sea. I felt that this encapsulated the intertwined respect for "nature and their God."

The rituals performed by the fishermen before setting sail, whether it was touching the bow of the boat and praying or performing ablutions, were not mere acts of tradition but a profound expression of their respect and fear of the sea's might. However, the community often highlighted how, today the fish are few and the boats go further for longer so the fear is perhaps greater. These practices, repeated with each journey, were a blend of hope and resignation to the sea's will, a poignant reflection of the Rohingya's enduring spirit and their deep connection to their cultural and spiritual heritage.

8.5   Conclusion

In synthesising the insights drawn from the chapter "The Core of Intangible Cultural Heritage" with the additional reflections on Muslim communities, social systems, and the Rohingya's place within these constructs, I delve deeper into the intricacies of displacement, identity, and intangible cultural heritage. The discussions underscore the pivotal role of ethnicity and social hierarchy in shaping the Rohingya's experiences of statelessness and displacement, particularly in the aftermath of British rule in Burma and the emergence of Burmese independence in 1947. The focus on ethnic identity as central to Burmese citizenship has marginalised the Rohingya, exacerbating their challenges in asserting their identity and rights within and beyond Myanmar's borders.

The exploration of the Rohingya's social positioning, both in Myanmar and as part of the diaspora, reveals a nuanced understanding of their cultural and spiritual heritage. In Karachi, their acceptance as Muslim outsiders at the lower end of society, and in contrast, their struggle with statelessness and the associated labels in displacement, highlight the complex interplay between social identity, cultural heritage, and the quest for belonging. This liminal existence not only impacts their day-to-day survival but also shapes their engagement with their intangible cultural heritage, be it through the revival of Sufi poetry, spiritual practices, or the oral traditions that have sustained them through generations of displacement.

The reconnection with their Sufi cultural heritage, especially among the youth, through poetry and the arts, serves as a powerful testament to the resilience of the Rohingya's intangible cultural heritage amidst adversity. This resurgence not only facilitates a peaceful form of protest and expression but also fosters a sense of continuity with their ancestral past, offering solace and a

means to articulate their rights and needs in their host communities and on global platforms. The spiritual practices of the Rohingya, particularly the senior women's reliance on their Islamic faith and the men's engagement with Sufi trance dance and chanting, underscore the significance of intangible cultural heritage as a source of comfort, community cohesion, and identity preservation.

The challenges and opportunities presented by language as a defining element of the Rohingya's cultural identity further illuminate the complexities of intangible cultural heritage in the context of displacement. The linguistic barriers encountered by the Rohingya, coupled with their strategic navigation of multiple languages, underscore the critical role of language in accessing rights, education, and integration into host societies. The commitment of the younger Rohingya generation in Ireland to maintain their native language, alongside their proficiency in English and Irish, reflects a nuanced negotiation of identity, belonging, and citizenship in their new home.

In contrasting and comparing the three research locations of Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, Karachi in Pakistan, and Ireland—the diverse experiences of the Rohingya community in each setting offer profound insights into the malleability and resilience of intangible cultural heritage amidst displacement. In Cox's Bazar, the Rohingya navigate a liminal existence, their intangible cultural heritage serving as both a lifeline to their past and a means to assert their identity in a space marked by uncertainty and transience. Their oral traditions, language, and spiritual practices are pivotal in maintaining community cohesion, yet they face significant barriers in accessing education and legal recognition, which impacts their ability to articulate and transmit their heritage.

Karachi presents a contrasting scenario where the Rohingya, albeit marginalised, find a place within the city's complex social web as Muslim outsiders. Here, their cultural heritage, particularly language and religion, plays a crucial role in their community life, enabling them to carve out a

space for themselves despite the challenges of statelessness and social stratification. The engagement with Sufi practices and the adaptation to local languages reflect a nuanced negotiation of identity and belonging in a context that is at once accepting and exclusionary.

Ireland again, represents a unique context where the Rohingya, endowed with citizenship, navigate the challenges and opportunities of integration into a new cultural milieu. The younger generation's commitment to maintaining their linguistic and cultural heritage, alongside their embrace of English and Irish, underscores a dynamic process of identity formation that bridges their past with their present and future. The contrast between the older and younger generations' experiences in Ireland highlights the transformative potential of intangible cultural heritage in fostering a sense of belonging and community in diaspora settings.

The comparative analysis of these three locations underscores the adaptive nature of intangible cultural heritage, revealing how displaced communities like the Rohingya reconfigure their traditions, languages, and spiritual practices in response to the distinct challenges and opportunities of each host environment. This adaptability not only ensures the survival of their cultural heritage but also enriches the cultural experience of their host societies, illustrating the intricate interplay between displacement, identity, and the power of intangible cultural heritage.

In conclusion, this chapter, enriched by the additional reflections, presents a snapshot of the Rohingya's intangible cultural heritage within the frameworks of displacement, social hierarchy, and statelessness. It reveals how the Rohingya navigate the complexities of identity, belonging, and cultural preservation against the backdrop of historical injustices, social marginalisation, and the ongoing challenges of displacement. The insights from this Chapter contribute significantly to the broader thesis on intangible cultural heritage, offering critical perspectives on the resilience,

adaptability, and agency of displaced communities in preserving their cultural identity and heritage amidst profound adversity.

9 Chapter Nine: As Many Heritage Stories as People to Tell Them

In Chapter Nine titled "As Many Heritage Stories as People to Tell Them," I delve into the complex web of narratives surrounding the Rohingya people, their intangible cultural heritage (ICH), and the diverse experiences of displacement. This chapter stands as a critical component of my broader investigation into the interplay between ICH, displacement, and the Rohingya, offering a nuanced exploration of how stories are crafted, told, and heard within various contexts.

The chapter opens with a poignant reflection on the power of individual stories in humanitarian advocacy, as highlighted by a UNHCR Regional Representative. This perspective sets the stage for the myriad of stories within the Rohingya community, each contributing to a collective yet fragmented narrative of identity, heritage, and displacement. I critically examine the role of humanitarian narratives in shaping public perceptions of the Rohingya, noting the simplification and homogenisation of diverse experiences into a singular, often tragic, storyline aimed at garnering global support and funding.

Drawing on my ethnographic fieldwork, I present first-hand insights into the storytelling practices within the Rohingya community in Cox's Bazar and Karachi. I highlight the tension between the humanitarian sector's need for compelling, singular narratives and the complex realities of the Rohingya people, whose stories span a spectrum of experiences, identities, and aspirations. This dichotomy raises important questions about the representation of displaced populations and the impact of these narratives on their sense of identity and heritage.

A significant focus of this chapter is the "Rohingya Cultural Memory Centre," initiated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). I critically assess the centre's objectives and its reception among the Rohingya, pondering the challenges of preserving and presenting cultural heritage in displacement contexts. The centre's efforts to document and celebrate Rohingya culture underscore the importance of cultural memory in maintaining a sense of identity amidst the dislocations of displacement, yet also reveal the complexities of representing a diverse community with a singular voice.

The chapter further delves into the lived experiences of violence, suffering, and self-reliance among the Rohingya, drawing attention to the ways in which cultural heritage and personal narratives intertwine with experiences of conflict and resilience. Through Yarning sessions, I uncover the diverse interpretations and coping mechanisms within the community, from the spiritual practices of Sufi groups to the pragmatic strategies of women and youth navigating the challenges of displacement in Cox's Bazar, Karachi, and beyond.

Concluding the chapter, I reflect on the resettlement experiences of the Rohingya in Ireland, offering a hopeful counterpoint to the narratives of suffering and displacement. This section highlights the transformative potential of resettlement, not only in providing safety and security but also in enabling the Rohingya to rebuild their lives and cultural identities in a new context. The stories of adaptation, education, and community building among the Rohingya in Ireland serve as a testament to the resilience and agency of displaced populations and the enduring significance of intangible cultural heritage in shaping their futures.

'The most effective way to get funds and support for a sector or project is to focus on the

story of one person… people like and relate to the story of one person; they don't respond

to the story of the entire group. We know this in UNHCR, and now we do more individual

stories really effectively.'

> Online regional meeting with UNHCR offices on March 22, 2019, UNHCR representative Nick Sore emphasised the power of individual storytelling in humanitarian advocacy, noting its effectiveness in engaging donors and the public compared to broader group narratives.

In the intricate journey of Rohingya narratives, each person tells a story as unique as the individual it belongs to. The quote from a UNHCR Regional Representative at the outset of this section underscores a poignant reality in the humanitarian narrative landscape: the power of a single story to capture hearts and mobilise resources. This strategy, while effective in the short term, often oversimplifies the complex mosaic of experiences that define the Rohingya community. It's a simplification that, through my ethnographic lens, I have come to see as both a necessity and a limitation in the broader humanitarian effort.

The term "Rohingya" itself, now a symbol laden with the weight of displacement and need, has been sculpted and disseminated through media channels closely tied to humanitarian narratives. These narratives, while crucial in garnering immediate support, tend to blur the rich diversity of heritage and history that defines this group. The complexity of humanitarian responses, underscored by UNOCHA's staggering statistics, reveals a vast, intricate operation that spans across borders and cultures, involving a multitude of professionals and a significant financial commitment. Yet, amidst this complexity, the narratives that emerge often lean towards simplicity,

focusing on immediate needs while the looming challenges of sustainability and long-term support are relegated to the background.

During my time in Cox's Bazar, I observed first-hand the dichotomy between the urgent focus of humanitarian efforts and the deeper, more enduring concerns of the Rohingya people themselves. Their gratitude for the assistance was palpable, yet so was their confusion and longing for a narrative that extended beyond their immediate plight—a narrative that included their skills, resilience, and potential contributions to a society beyond the confines of the camps. This longing was poignantly expressed by a groups of men that I spent many hours with as they laboured to construct shelters, walls and roads who questioned why their stories of hard work and capability were not being told to the wider world.

The transient nature of the humanitarian workforce, as candidly shared by a UNHCR external relations officer, further complicates this narrative challenge. The continuity of storytelling and the sustainability of funding become burdens shouldered by an ever-changing cast of characters, leaving the deeper, more enduring stories of the Rohingya people untold. This cycle of storytelling, focused on the immediate and tragic, while necessary for urgent fundraising, does little to address the long-term identity and heritage of the Rohingya people.

Through my ethnographic journey, it became evident that the Rohingya yearn for their narratives to be understood in their full complexity. They seek recognition not just as victims of circumstance but as individuals and communities rich in culture, history, and potential. As an academic deeply immersed in the study of intangible cultural heritage, displacement, and the Rohingya, I advocate for a more nuanced approach to storytelling—one that honours the multitude of voices and

experiences within the Rohingya community and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of their heritage, challenges, and aspirations for the future.

Within the mosaic of Rohingya narratives, there is no doubt that each story holds some truth, a slice of lived experience that cannot be encapsulated by a singular narrative. My conversations with the Rohingya, whether in the camps of Cox's Bazar or the bustling informal settlements of Karachi, unveiled a collective yearning for their voices to be heard in their entirety. They sought to convey not just their immediate needs but also their aspirations, their heritage, and the complex narrative of their true identities. In the camps of Cox's Bazar, the questions they posed to visiting dignitaries and donors about their future, were poignant reminders of their search for clarity and hope for the future, yet these inquiries often echoed unanswered, leaving a void of unresolved anticipation.

In Cox's Bazar, the Rohingya community experienced a steady influx of international attention, with donors and diplomats arriving to witness their plight first-hand. This global spotlight, while beneficial in some respects, often failed to capture the multifaceted nature of the Rohingya experience, focusing instead on immediate humanitarian needs. Contrastingly, in Karachi, the narrative diverged significantly. Encounters with journalists highlighted broader regional issues, such as the impact of foreign fishing fleets on local livelihoods, yet the Rohingya's own narrative remained largely in the shadows, shaped by political sensitivities around statelessness and the risk of further marginalisation.

My discussions with Rohingya leaders in Karachi, such as Mohammad Noor, revealed a profound desire to reshape their narrative from one of vulnerability to one of contribution and resilience. They questioned why their longstanding contributions to the local economy and society were not

highlighted, portraying a community that, despite statelessness, had woven itself into the fabric of Karachi's life through fishing, waste management, and community service. This positive self-perception starkly contrasted with the narratives often constructed by external entities, revealing a disconnect between the stories told about the Rohingya and the stories they wished to tell about themselves.

The diversity within the Rohingya community further complicates the narrative. Among them, I encountered not only Muslims but also Hindus, Christians, and individuals of animism, each with their unique identity yet united under the community banner. This diversity extends beyond religious and cultural lines, evolving as the community interacts with the wider world, learns new languages, and adapts to new environments. The Rohingya diaspora is not a monolith but a vibrant, dynamic collective of individuals, each carrying their own heritage stories, challenges, and dreams.

Through my ethnographic research lens, I observed a community striving to navigate the complexities of displacement, identity, and survival. The Rohingya narratives are as diverse as the people themselves, encompassing tales of hardship and resilience, loss and hope, tradition and change.

During a particularly insightful session with one of our Yarning groups in Cox's Bazar, an obvious but still striking observation was shared by my team: "Not all Rohingya are Rohingya. Many of the Rohingya, especially women from rural areas engaged in crafts, do not necessarily identify with the Rohingya label, though they are Muslim. They speak some Rohingya, but there is a linguistic distance. Perhaps their lineage was intertwined with Buddhist families before marrying into Rohingya communities. This nuanced insight into the complex tapestry of identities within

the Rohingya community underscored the inherent diversity and the fluid nature of cultural affiliations.

In the context of humanitarian work, the UNHCR field staff have developed a nuanced approach to sharing the experiences of displaced individuals, especially when engaging with donors who have specific interests in areas like Shelter, Health, or WASH. They tailor their presentations to align with the donors' interests, often by spotlighting a family whose experiences emblematically highlight the urgent needs within a particular sector. This approach aims to vividly illustrate the direct impact that prospective donations could have. For instance, in preparation for a donor visit focusing on shelter, the staff meticulously compile the latest statistics and plan to showcase the shelter conditions in Camp 21. They emphasise the potential achievements of the donor's support, such as the number of shelters that could be built and the families that would benefit. The selection of individuals whose stories will be shared with both the mission and the media is a critical step. By directly introducing the donors to the living conditions and sharing first-hand narratives, the staff hope to make a compelling case for support. The role of translators like Imran is crucial in these interactions, ensuring that the stories are conveyed with sensitivity and accuracy.

However, this strategic method of storytelling, while effective in securing necessary funds, tends to condense the richness of individual experiences into a more palatable single narrative. This reduction, while practical for fundraising purposes, risks oversimplifying the diverse and complex realities faced by the Rohingya community. As an ethnographer focused on the intricacies of intangible cultural heritage and the multifaceted nature of displacement, these instances of narrative simplification highlight the need for a more nuanced approach to storytelling. Such an approach should not only elevate the voices of the displaced but also honour and maintain the

complexity of their identities, histories, and aspirations, ensuring that the full spectrum of their experiences is acknowledged and preserved.

Collecting Artifacts and Memories

The endeavour to document and preserve the intangible cultural heritage of displaced communities is a complex, multifaceted process, deeply intertwined with the narratives of identity, memory, and resilience. My engagement with this topic was significantly deepened through the creation of a cultural memory centre initiated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This initiative, a pioneering effort in the context of displacement, aimed to create a repository of Rohingya cultural heritage, marking a crucial step towards acknowledging and safeguarding the intricate tapestry of their collective memory.

In my interactions with the centre's contributors, including an IOM-contracted artist, a cultural studies lecturer from a Spanish university, and a project coordinator from Spain, the multidisciplinary nature of this endeavour became evident. The centre was conceptualised as both an online platform and a physical space for interactive engagement with Rohingya cultural archives, a testament to the global commitment to preserving the nuanced legacies of displaced populations.

The artefacts displayed within the centre, crafted by refugees are meant to reflect life in Myanmar before displacement, yet that life is so diverse the concept can only tell a fraction of the true story. These items, emblematic of a life marked by scarcity and isolation, were not exactly remnants of

a bygone era but vibrant expressions life in a suppressed culture that was slow to evolve. The challenge lay in transcending the immediate context of survival to creating a centre of learning, creativity, and innovation, transforming thoughts of the past into hubs of cultural and intellectual exchange.

Despite the warm reception of the memory centre by the community, a recurring theme in my discussions was the centre's perceived disconnect from the forward trajectory of the Rohingya's collective journey. A young female participant, actively involved in women's groups, articulated a sentiment of disconnection, highlighting a gap between the centre's archival focus and the immediate, lived realities of the community members.

The establishment of the memory centre was a response to a palpable sense of cultural and identity erosion among the Rohingya, as evidenced by an IOM study conducted in the aftermath of the 2017 displacement. This sense of loss, compounded by the mental health crises prevalent within the camps, underscored the intricate linkages between cultural heritage and psychological well-being. The IOM's approach, grounded in the belief that cultural preservation could serve as a therapeutic intervention, sought to address the identity crisis at the heart of the Rohingya's distress.

Yet, the narratives emerging from my ethnographic engagements painted a more complex picture of the community's needs and aspirations. The discussions often circled back to more immediate concerns: the challenges of communication in a multilingual context, the quest for privacy and space amidst overcrowding, and the strain of navigating the dynamics with humanitarian actors and the host community. These conversations revealed a community grappling with the daily realities of displacement, striving for dignity and autonomy in the face of systemic constraints.

In contemplating the role of the Rohingya Cultural Memory Centre, it became apparent that while the initiative marked a significant stride towards cultural preservation, it also raised pertinent questions about the scope and direction of such efforts. The selection of memories for conservation, and the potential implications for the community's ongoing struggle with identity and belonging, warrant careful consideration. As we endeavour to honour and preserve the cultural heritage of displaced communities, we must remain attuned to the evolving diversity of their lives, ensuring that our efforts resonate with their aspirations and contribute meaningfully to their journey towards healing and self-determination. IOM propose that;

> *By providing the Rohingya community with the tools and platform to tell their story, the RCMC addresses the "identity crisis" named by three-quarters of the refugees as a key factor in their loss of well-being. The RCMC strives to function as a vehicle that preserves and enhances its rich culture, contributing towards strengthening the collective identity of the Rohingya population.*

This ambitious initiative aimed to weave a cohesive heritage narrative for all, yet the reality on the ground reflected a mosaic of individual memories and experiences, challenging the notion of a singular identity crisis. A local NGO worker, who I refer to as Jamal from the agency CARE, candidly referred to the centre as the "poverty centre," highlighting a potential disconnect between the centre's objectives and the community's perception of their own heritage, intertwined with their current lived experiences of hardship.

Despite such critiques, the enthusiasm among the Rohingya youth for the centre was palpable. The centre not only became a repository of their tangible heritage but also sparked conversations about self-perception and the external gaze—how the Rohingya perceive themselves and how they are

perceived by outsiders visiting the centre. During a session with a female craft group, in Camp 14 (22nd of May 2021 when the Centre was still in process) their bafflement at why a Memory Centre would be built was a true challenge to them, considering their recent memories of persecution and displacement. They also wondered why a would centre focused on preserving everyday items that, to them, were symbols of their ongoing struggle rather than their rich cultural heritage. This sentiment underscored the complexity of determining what constitutes cultural heritage, especially in a context of displacement where everyday survival often takes precedence. Later follow up found a positive acceptance for the Centre. Those directly involved in the centre's creation found joy and a sense of community in the collaborative process of crafting and curating their cultural artefacts. Some participants reflected on how this collective endeavour fostered humility and a deeper appreciation for their shared experiences and struggles.

The initiative was a significant step towards integrating cultural heritage thinking into the humanitarian response, providing a fresh perspective on the importance of cultural heritage in contexts of displacement. The literature reminds us of the profound losses in cultural heritage witnessed in recent decades across the globe, from Afghanistan to Syria, yet seldom does it address the subtle erasures and transformations of ICH in protracted conflicts and displacement scenarios like that of the Rohingya.

The centre's establishment did not go unnoticed by the powers that be; In January 2022, the Burmese junta publicly denounced the RCMC, challenging the authenticity of the narratives presented and questioning IOM's authority in matters of cultural heritage. This confrontation highlighted the contentious nature of cultural memory and heritage, especially when it intersects with issues of national identity and sovereignty.

Through this ethnographic exploration, it became evident that while the RCMC serves as a vital platform for preserving Rohingya culture, it also raises critical questions about the role of cultural memory in the construction of identity, the politics of heritage preservation, and the complex interplay between individual and collective memories in shaping the narrative of a displaced community.

9.3   Lived Environments of Violence, Suffering and Self-Reliance

In the intricate web of human experiences, the interplay of culture and conflict weaves a complex narrative that is both unique and universal. As I delve into the lived environments of violence, suffering, and self-reliance, I am continually struck by the resilience of the human spirit amidst the most harrowing circumstances. My ethnographic journey has led me to explore the nuanced realities of communities embroiled in conflict, where the vibrancy of cultural heritage stands in stark contrast to the shadows of violence and suffering.

My interactions with various communities, and in this instance the Rohingya, have illuminated the profound impact of violence as a cultural construct, deeply embedded in the social fabric of societies. The narratives that have unfolded before me are not just tales of despair but also of indomitable resilience and an unyielding quest for self-reliance. The concept of ICH has been a guiding framework in understanding how communities connect with their identity, memory, and diversity, but also how they navigate the dark waters of past traumas and sacrifices.

In my conversations with the Rohingya, the echoes of oppression are palpable in every story, in every voice that I hear. The intricate caste and baradari systems provide a lens through which power dynamics can be viewed, yet they fall short in explaining the visceral hostilities

encountered, particularly the violence meted out by Buddhists in Myanmar. A poignant revelation came from a yarning session with a Sufi group led by community elder, Mohammad Noor, who shed light on the existential threat perceived by Buddhist monastics towards the Rohingya. In his view, the survival of their monastic orders, deeply intertwined with the cultural heritage of Monkhood, hinges on their dominance over the religious and cultural landscape. This insight provided a stark reminder of how the preservation of cultural heritage can sometimes become a battleground, with devastating consequences for those caught in the crossfire.

The divergent narratives between Rohingya men and women further underscore the multifaceted nature of suffering and resilience. Men often perceive their trials through a theological lens, viewing suffering as a divine test and a means to spiritual growth. In contrast, women's narratives are steeped in the pragmatism of survival and healing, highlighting the social vices that perpetuate their suffering. The stark difference in perspectives between genders reveals the complexity of coping mechanisms and the search for meaning amidst chaos.

The concept of mimetic violence emerged as a recurring theme in my observations, highlighting the cyclical nature of violence and its replication within communities. Understanding violence merely as a physical act fails to capture its profound implications on dignity, self-worth, and the intricate web of victimhood. The humanitarian crises I witnessed, particularly in the Rohingya camps, laid bare the critical human needs for dignity and self-worth, often side-lined in traditional humanitarian responses focused on immediate physical needs.

The contrasts between the perceived safety in the informal settlements of Karachi and the lawlessness of certain Rohingya camps shed light on the importance of traditional leadership and community structures in mitigating violence and fostering a sense of security. These observations

challenge us to rethink our approaches to humanitarian aid and the importance of supporting not just physical survival but also the cultural and social fabric that binds communities together.

In the development of the camps, the Rohingya community navigate the seismic shift from the Murrobi leadership system in their homeland of Myanmar to the Majhi system in Bangladesh, introduced by the Bangladesh Government. This transition is not merely a change in governance but a profound transformation in the community's social fabric and sense of autonomy. The Murrobi, revered elders within the Rohingya society, once wielded moral authority and communal trust, anchoring the community in their cultural and spiritual heritage. Their displacement by the Majhi system, perceived as an extension of state power and marred by allegations of corruption, represents a rupture in the traditional leadership structures, eroding the foundational trust and cohesion that once united the community.

This shift in leadership dynamics is emblematic of the broader struggles faced by the Rohingya, particularly in their quest for self-reliance amidst displacement. A poignant reflection of this was captured in our yarns, where the community's engagements in everyday activities—be it crafting, shelter construction, or fishing—revealed a narrative of resilience and agency starkly contrasting the victimhood often ascribed to displaced populations. "However, in our Yarns, they did not frame themselves as victims in need of assistance, but they were more frustrated with the lack of freedom to solve their own problems. Their desire was clearly to solve their problems and change their present predicament," reflects the profound yearning for autonomy and self-determination within the community.

Despite formidable challenges, many Rohingya groups have endeavoured to create mutual support systems, embodying grassroots problem-solving and resilience. Yet, these self-led initiatives often

clash with the humanitarian system's constraints, reinforcing a dependency paradigm contrary to the community's autonomy aspirations. This dissonance underscores a significant gap in the humanitarian model, which, while providing crucial relief, frequently overlooks empowering displaced communities to shape their destinies. Jasmine, a community leader within the Rohingya Camps, poignantly captures this dynamic, stating that the shared trauma within the community acts as a social glue, compelling individuals to risk their safety for others' relief. This insight underscores the complex interplay between shared trauma and communal solidarity, highlighting the intrinsic strength and unity within the community despite external challenges.

> Jasmine, a pivotal women's NGO forum leader within the Rohingya Camps of Cox's Bazar, recorded on the 28th of May 2019.

This sentiment underscores the profound sense of shared identity and collective endurance that binds the Rohingya, transforming individual suffering into a powerful source of communal bonding. Yet, as Jasmine also notes, how this solidarity is under strain, with the community's capacity to support one another diminishing under the weight of ongoing challenges and resource constraints.

This ethnographic exploration underscores the intricate balance between suffering and resilience, autonomy and dependency, and the enduring spirit of a community striving to reclaim their sense of agency and self-reliance. The transition from the Murrobi to the Majhi system, the community's efforts to foster self-led support networks, and the poignant insights of individuals like Jasmine, all contribute to a deeper understanding of the Rohingya's ICH and the struggle for dignity and autonomy within the confines of displacement and systemic constraints. It is a compelling narrative that challenges the humanitarian sector to re-evaluate its approaches, prioritising

empowerment of these refugee led organisations that step forward and broader community-led initiatives as central pillars of support for displaced populations. [30] [31]

9.4   Resettlement, the Experience from Ireland

In the labyrinth of human experience, the journey of the Rohingya from the verdant landscapes of Myanmar and the crowded camps of Bangladesh to the serene green pastures of Carlow, Ireland unfolds as a poignant tale of resilience, adaptation, and the opportunity for a new beginning. My ethnographic exploration into the resettlement experiences of the Rohingya in Ireland, though focused on a relatively small cohort of 64 individuals across 13 families, reveals profound insights into the human capacity for hope and transformation amidst the most daunting of circumstances.

The transition to Ireland, a land so starkly different in its economic, environmental, linguistic, and cultural fabric, was in many ways akin to stepping into an inverse reality for the Rohingya. Despite the vast chasms of difference, Ireland extended the promise of safety—a sanctuary where the spectres of past persecutions could be laid to rest, at least for the new generation. The orchestration of their arrival, a collaborative effort by the Government of Ireland, UNHCR, and the welcoming arms of Carlow Town's community, set the stage for what would become a multifaceted journey of learning and integration for all involved.

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[30] Translators without boarders (2020). Majhi is a literal translation from Bangla to English meaning "boatman," Majhi role is to share official information, through a leadership role. Research by Translators without Borders shows, however, that the effectiveness of Majhis as Rohingya leaders and communicators is constrained by a lack of language resources.

[31] Human Rights Council, Forty second session **9–27 September 2019 Agenda item4** Human Rights situations that require the Council's attention. Sexual and gender-based violence in Myanmar and the gendered impact of its ethnic conflicts.

The initial hurdles faced by the Rohingya, from linguistic barriers to the simple act of using electricity or adapting to the quiet and spacious living conditions, were monumental. These challenges, once formidable obstacles to their integration, are now recounted with a semblance of humour, a testament to their journey of adaptation over the ten years of settling in and moving on. My learning amongst the Rohingya was aided by a number of talks, community gatherings and the network that had been developed around the Rohingya families by the Carlow community. It was also aided by the narratives captured by Margaret and Aideen Ward (2019), and the community development insights from Crawley et al. (2022), that supported a rich tapestry of this communal journey, highlighting the deep interconnections and mutual growth between the refugees and their Irish hosts.

One narrative that particularly resonates with me is that of an elderly Rohingya woman who shared a profound aspect of her cultural identity—her traditional method of timekeeping by observing the shadows cast by trees in Myanmar. Her reflection on the scarcity of shadows in Ireland, a land markedly different in its natural rhythm and landscape, underscored a deeper sense of dislocation and nostalgia. This poignant observation serves as a metaphor for the broader challenges of cultural adaptation, where even the most fundamental aspects of one's connection to the environment must be reinterpreted and renegotiated. The grandmother noted her deep longing for her homeland, while also acknowledging that today that life is just a memory.

> This passage is part of the analysis taken from an insightful interview with a Rohingya Elder, facilitated by Mr. Rafique, on 28th August 2019.

One of the woman's granddaughters was present at the interview, and surprisingly much of her grandmothers story was new learning for her. The grandmother, also noted how she focused on

the positives of her Rohingya life, and her children. This was evident in her granddaughter, a fluent, Rohingya, English and Irish speaker with great aspirations for her future. The resilience and adaptability of the Rohingya community, shines brightly in the stories of the younger generation, who have embraced the opportunities afforded by their new homeland with remarkable enthusiasm. The transformation of these children, not having to face the restrictions, hardships and limitations of refugee camps, has allowed them to be into multilingual, well-educated individuals with lofty aspirations, which underscores the transformative power of education and opportunity. The challenges faced by some, particularly among the boys, in navigating their new identities as Irish citizens, reflect the complex interplay of assimilation and cultural preservation.

M Rafique's evolution from a crucial liaison to a prominent community leader and advocate for the Rohingya in Ireland exemplifies the potential for empowerment and leadership within diaspora communities. His journey from providing translation support to assuming leadership roles within local organisations, and clubs highlights the gradual shift towards self-reliance and community cohesion.

The enduring connection of the Rohingya to their cultural heritage, despite the physical and psychological distances from their homeland, is evident in their efforts to maintain traditional practices. The shared culinary traditions, the quest for Halal foods, and the continuation of traditional medical practices in Ireland are not mere acts of preservation but are acts of defiance against the erasure of identity. The poignant reflection of an elderly woman on the communal joy of sharing meals, and the challenges of replicating these traditions in a land where the flavours and economies of food diverge so vastly from their own, encapsulates the bittersweet nature of their resettlement journey.

As the Rohingya navigate their new lives in Ireland, their stories—imbued with the pain of past displacements and the continued hope of new beginnings with each new generation—offer profound insights into the complexities of resettlement, integration, and the indomitable spirit of a community in exile. Their experiences, a mosaic of loss, adaptation, and resilience, challenge us to reflect on the meaning of home, identity, and belonging in an ever-shifting world. The narratives of the Rohingya in Ireland, enriched by their struggles and triumphs, contribute a vital chapter to the broader ethnographic discourse on displacement and human resilience, reminding us of the profound capacity of the human spirit to find light amidst the shadows of time. [32]

9.5   Conclusion

Chapter Nine of this thesis, "As Many Heritage Stories as People to Tell Them," delves into the intricate narratives of the Rohingya people, their intangible cultural heritage (ICH), and the varied experiences of displacement, offering profound insights into the resilience and adaptability of human spirit amidst adversity. This chapter critically examines the complexities of storytelling within the Rohingya community, the role of humanitarian narratives, the efforts of cultural preservation through initiatives like the Rohingya Cultural Memory Centre, and the lived experiences of violence, resilience, and the quest for self-reliance, culminating in a hopeful narrative of resettlement in Ireland.

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[32] https://carlowdevelopment.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Ten-Years-of-Rohingya-Refugee-Resettlement-in-Carlow.pdf

The analysis begins with the acknowledgment of the power of individual stories in humanitarian advocacy, highlighting the tension between the need for compelling narratives to garner support and the risk of oversimplifying the diverse experiences of the Rohingya community. This dichotomy underscores the challenge of representing displaced populations, where singular, tragic storylines often overshadow the rich tapestry of heritage and identity that defines these communities.

The establishment of the Rohingya Cultural Memory Centre by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is a pivotal focus, signifying the importance of cultural memory in maintaining identity amidst displacement. However, this initiative also reveals the complexities of presenting a diverse community's heritage through a singular lens, raising questions about the representation and preservation of cultural heritage in displacement contexts; who's heritage is presented by who?

The chapter further explores the resilience and coping mechanisms within the Rohingya community, from the spiritual practices of Sufi groups to the pragmatic strategies of women and youth. These narratives highlight the intertwining of cultural heritage with experiences of conflict and resilience, offering a nuanced understanding of how displaced communities navigate their circumstances.

The resettlement experiences of the Rohingya in Ireland present a counterpoint to narratives of suffering, showcasing the transformative potential of resettlement in enabling the community to rebuild their lives and cultural identities. The stories of adaptation, education, and community building among the Rohingya in Ireland affirm the significance of intangible cultural heritage in shaping the futures of displaced populations.

This chapter addresses the overarching thesis questions by illuminating how intangible cultural heritage is both a source of resilience and a complex field of negotiation within displaced communities. It demonstrates that ICH is not merely preserved or transmitted but dynamically recreated in response to the challenges of displacement, conflict, and resettlement. The narratives of the Rohingya people, with their diversity and depth, reveal the multifaceted ways in which displaced communities use, view, and create their intangible cultural heritage as a means of maintaining identity, coping with adversity, and envisioning a future.

Furthermore, the discussions in this chapter shed light on the humanitarian sector's engagement with the ICH of displaced communities. While humanitarian narratives often focus on immediate needs and compelling stories to mobilise support, there is a growing recognition of the importance of cultural heritage in humanitarian responses as a positive tool. The Rohingya Cultural Memory Centre exemplifies an effort to integrate cultural heritage considerations into humanitarian work, albeit with challenges and learning curves.

In conclusion, Chapter Nine stands as a critical component of the thesis, offering insights into the role of intangible cultural heritage within displaced communities like the Rohingya. It underscores the need for a nuanced approach to storytelling and cultural preservation that honours the diversity of experiences and the agency of displaced communities. This chapter contributes significantly to the broader discourse on displacement, heritage, and resilience, highlighting the enduring importance of intangible cultural heritage in the lives of those navigating the complexities of displacement and also of resettlement.

10 Chapter Ten: Concluding the Cultural Heritage Journeys of Displacement

In the final chapter of my thesis, "Discovering, Sharing, Creating, and Hiding Intangible Cultural Heritage Throughout the Journey of Displacement," I have intertwined the diverse and profound experiences of the Rohingya community across Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Ireland, highlighting the pivotal role of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) amid the adversities of displacement. My research methodology was deliberately broad, designed to encompass the wide array of interpretations and practices associated with ICH among the Rohingya, despite the variances in their displacement situations and the geographical diversity of the research sites. This expansive approach was aimed at distilling a focused conclusion to address two pivotal questions. Through this lens, I've discerned that the notion of cultural ICH, while seemingly expansive and Eurocentric, aptly intersects with the multifaceted experiences of the Rohingya diaspora. From the world's largest refugee camp to a spectrum of displacement statuses, this comprehensive perspective has led me to a definitive conclusion: the Rohingya possess a distinct ethnic identity, deeply rooted in Burma, manifested through both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. This identity is vividly portrayed by the new generations of the Rohingya, who, amidst newfound global platforms, are sharing their rich cultural tapestry—from Tarana music and Thanaka painting to Henna designs, cricket, communal life, fishing traditions, and their ancient Sufi-Muslim heritage— underscoring their unique ethnic identity.

As we move through this conclusion, I start by addressing the research questions. I explore how ICH is perceived, utilised, or created within displaced communities and the ways humanitarians engage with the ICH of these communities. My analysis, segmented by country, sheds light on

notable findings within each context, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of ICH's role in displacement.

The focus of my findings revolves around five key areas, beginning with "Cultural Space", underscoring the challenges in categorising ICH when considering that all activities, from spiritual practices to poetry and music to sports such as cricket, necessitate physical space. This ties into the critical finding on "Psychosocial Support and Self-reliance, and ICH" revealing that Rohingya women have their own traditional support systems, yet the humanitarian system is reluctant to support and develop them. I highlight how, despite their deep understanding of ICH and shared language, these women's networks struggle for recognition and basic financial support. The findings also delve into the impact of legal status on maintaining ICH, illustrating how refugee status, Statelessness and citizenship profoundly affect displaced individuals' engagement with their cultural heritage. I also highlight "Cultural Expression and Language" in the findings as they emerge as vital themes, with practices such as the Rohingya Sufi poetry (Tarana) highlighting a vibrant means of cultural sharing, connection to the past, and peaceful protest. The Rohingya language, in particular, stands as a crucial element of ICH in transition. Throughout my research, there was also a central focus on Rohingya Women and Girls. Here, I highlight a persistent gap in field-level focus on gender mainstreaming despite policy advancements in humanitarian and development sectors. As noted in the beginning, Methodologically, the use of Yarning with oral traditional communities has proven effective, albeit with some challenges, in capturing the broad scope of ICH in displacement among the Rohingya. This approach has facilitated a deeper understanding of the nuanced and dynamic nature of ICH in the context of displacement.

In summary, my research underscores the adaptability and resilience of ICH in the face of displacement, illustrating how displaced communities like the Rohingya reconfigure their

traditions, languages, and spiritual practices in response to the unique challenges and opportunities of each host environment. This adaptability not only ensures the survival of their cultural heritage but also contributes to the rich cultural tapestry of their host societies, as we now see in Ireland. The findings highlight the intricate ways displaced communities navigate and reconstruct their ethnic identities through ICH amidst legal and existential uncertainties, emphasising the need for a more nuanced understanding and appreciation of ICH's role in fostering a sense of belonging and resilience among displaced populations.

How is intangible cultural heritage viewed, used or created within displaced communities?

In addressing the critical research question of how Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is viewed, utilised, or created within displaced communities, my ethnographic exploration delves into the heart of the Rohingya diaspora's lived experiences across diverse settings. This investigation reveals that ICH is not merely a vestige of the past but a vibrant, evolving practice that plays a pivotal role in the preservation of identity, fostering community bonds, and navigating the challenges of displacement.

In the confines of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, I observed how the Rohingya refugees cling to their ICH as a lifeline to their identity and past. Traditional oral forms like Tarana poetry have been revitalised, serving as a powerful medium of expression and unity. This oral tradition, once a quiet murmur of cultural identity, has blossomed into a vocal emblem of resilience and hope, with digital platforms offering a new stage for this ancient art form to echo far beyond the camp's boundaries.

Transitioning to Karachi, Pakistan, the narrative shifts as the economic and social landscapes mould the utilisation of ICH. The Rohingya's ancestral skills in fishing and boat-building emerge as vital economic assets, demonstrating the pragmatic application of ICH for livelihood sustenance. Yet, the women's engagement with ICH here is marked by a nuanced dance of preservation and discretion, reflective of the layered vulnerabilities accompanying their undocumented status.

In the contrasting backdrop of Ireland, the narrative of ICH unfolds with newfound freedoms afforded by citizenship. Here, the Rohingya community has not only preserved but also adapted their ICH, weaving new cultural expressions like cricket into the fabric of their diasporic identity. This adaptation illustrates the dynamic nature of ICH, showcasing its capacity to evolve and integrate within new cultural landscapes, thereby strengthening communal ties and promoting ethnic solidarity.

These ethnographic vignettes underscore the intrinsic value and dynamic nature of ICH within displaced communities. It emerges as a cornerstone of resilience, a pathway for integration, and a beacon for maintaining cultural identity amidst the disorienting tides of displacement. However, this journey also casts light on the multifaceted challenges inherent in safeguarding ICH, from gender disparities and legal ambiguities to linguistic hurdles, necessitating a nuanced, empathetic approach to cultural preservation.

Conclusively, my research elucidates the complex interplay between ICH and displacement, highlighting the indispensable role of ICH in sustaining the fabric of community identity and cohesion. It advocates for a more inclusive, culturally sensitive approach to the preservation and promotion of ICH among displaced populations, recognising its profound potential in aiding healing, fostering economic empowerment, and facilitating social integration. This research enriches the academic discourse on ICH and displacement and offers actionable insights for policymakers, cultural practitioners, and humanitarian actors dedicated to supporting displaced communities.

How do humanitarians utilise the intangible cultural heritage of displaced communities?

In exploring the critical question of how humanitarians utilise the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of displaced communities, my ethnographic journey has illuminated the multifaceted interactions between humanitarian practices and the rich array of ICH within the Rohingya diaspora. This inquiry sheds light on the nuanced ways in which ICH is both leveraged and overlooked within the humanitarian sector, revealing a complex landscape where cultural heritage intersects with the pragmatics of aid delivery.

In Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, the humanitarian response to the Rohingya crisis has been monumental, yet it reveals the inherent challenges of integrating ICH into the fabric of humanitarian work. The research highlights a notable gap in harnessing the power of ICH to promote refugee self-reliance. Cultural spaces crucial for communal life, such as mosques, and the active engagement of women in shelter construction, stand as poignant examples of overlooked opportunities. This oversight not only underscores the need for a broader interpretation of 'local capacity' but also calls for a more inclusive approach that truly encompasses the cultural dimensions of the refugee community.

The narrative shifts as we move to Karachi, Pakistan, where the complexities of illegal migration and statelessness paint a stark picture of the humanitarian sector's engagement with ICH. Despite the clear role of ICH in fostering community cohesion and resilience, as evidenced by the Rohingya's fishing-related activities, there exists a tangible disconnect between humanitarian actors and these cultural dynamics. The research advocates for a proactive engagement of humanitarian actors, and ICH is a positive entry point, particularly in supporting the socio-

economic integration of stateless communities, highlighting the untapped potential of cultural heritage in enhancing community resilience and social cohesion.

In Ireland, the resettlement of the Rohingya unveils the transformative potential of ICH in displacement contexts. The initial challenges of resettlement gradually gave way to a more harmonious integration of ICH, facilitated by local initiatives and community organisations. This experience underscores the evolving understanding of ICH as a bridge between displaced communities and host societies, fostering mutual understanding and integration. It also serves as a reminder of the valuable lesson's humanitarian actors can glean from the resettlement experiences of refugees, particularly in recognising ICH as a pivotal tool for integration and community building.

In answering the question, this thesis explored the role of ICH within humanitarian practices, revealing a landscape where cultural sensitivity often translates into cautious engagement with the 'messy' cultural dynamics of displaced communities. The findings from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Ireland collectively highlight the critical need for a more nuanced and inclusive approach to ICH within the humanitarian sector. By embracing the full spectrum of cultural heritage, humanitarian interventions can move beyond mere cultural sensitivity to actively empower displaced communities, leveraging their rich heritage as a foundation for resilience, self-reliance, and cohesive community building.

In my journey through this ethnographic exploration, I have come to understand the Rohingya not merely as a group of displaced individuals but as a cohesive ethnic community, whose identity transcends the boundaries of geography and the labels of self-identification. My investigation, stretching across the diverse landscapes of Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Ireland, delves deeper than the simplistic notion of them being "Muslims from Burma," uncovering the rich tapestry of cultural retention and adaptation that defines their collective identity amidst displacement.

Reflecting on my own narrative of maintaining an Irish identity shaped by an Australian upbringing, I had to admit that I see a parallel in the Rohingya cultural experience. It illustrates a dynamic intercultural exchange, where despite their dispersion, they cling to the core cultural tenets that anchor their ethnic identity. In Cox's Bazar, the women's gatherings highlight the indispensable role of communal spaces in their cultural preservation—a theme that resonates across the varied contexts of Pakistan and Ireland, where such gatherings underpin the social cohesion among Rohingya women.

My findings reveal that the Rohingya's religious practices, which navigate between Sunni and Sufi Islam, significantly contribute to their distinct ethnic identity. This unique religious synthesis, akin to the Sufi-infused Sunni traditions observed among the Rohingya and other groups like the Uyghur, underscores the complexity of their ethno-religious identity. This complexity challenges reductionist views and firmly establishes the Rohingya as a distinct ethnic group beyond mere subsets of Burmese Muslims or broader Muslim identities.

The connectivity of the Rohingya diaspora, as I have observed, further evidences their unified ethnic identity. Despite the changing tides of their lives, the thread of language preservation weaves through their cultural continuity. The adaptation of traditional livelihoods, such as fishing,

to new environments reflects their resilience. Moreover, the advent of traditional and digital media, especially social media platforms, has been instrumental in knitting the global Rohingya community closer. These platforms are not just venues for cultural expression and solidarity through the sharing of Tarana poetry and narratives but also serve as conduits for collective action and support across the diaspora.

In conclusion, my research journey has revealed the Rohingya as a distinct ethnic group, whose identity is intricately woven from the threads of cultural tradition, religious practice, and communal connectivity. This identity, vivid in the social structures, cultural practices, and shared narratives across Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Ireland, is a testament to the resilience of their ethnic identity. It affirms their distinct place within the global web of ethnic groups, showcasing their ability to maintain and adapt their rich heritage across borders and vast seas.

10.4 Main Findings

Cultural Spaces

A critical examination of cultural spaces reveals the complexities inherent in the categorisation of cultural heritage as 'intangible'. As I reveal, every form of heritage practice, be it craft, expression, sport, poetry, dance, or the rituals surrounding life's milestones such as weddings, births, and deaths, necessitates the availability of a physical space dedicated to cultur al expression. This is particularly pertinent in displacement contexts such as camps and informal settlements, where the

planning and allocation of space often overlook the requirements for cultural expression and practice.

My analysis points out a notable oversight in the planning of these spaces, which are predominantly designed by male planners and, on occasion, even when female planners are involved, fail to adequately address the specific needs for cultural spaces that cater to women. This oversight is critical, as mosques and similar structures, often considered default communal spaces, do not fulfil the role of inclusive cultural spaces that cater to the cultural and gendered dynamics of the entire community's needs.

It highlights a significant disparity in how ICH spaces are accessed and utilised, with a pronounced neglect of the cultural needs and expressions of women and girls. In contexts like Pakistan, where traditional male activities such as fishing are celebrated and integrated into the communal fabric, women find themselves disproportionately affected by statelessness and other displacement-related vulnerabilities. In this research I underscore the limited opportunities available to women for engaging with their ICH without facing potential repercussions, thus exacerbating the gender divide within displaced communities.

This gendered disparity extends to the utilisation of ICH as a means of survival and adaptation, where men and boys are more likely to leverage their cultural heritage for livelihoods, access to services, and overall well-being. In contrast, women and girls, despite constituting a significant portion of the population in displacement settings in countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan, find themselves marginalised from cultural spaces and expressions.

The thesis delves into the nuanced gendered dimensions of cultural practices among the Rohingya, underscoring the unique challenges and contributions of women and girls within the tapestry of

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). It unveils a critical gap in gender mainstreaming efforts within humanitarian interventions, highlighting a pronounced lack of nuanced understanding and effective action at the grassroots level. This research advocates for the empowerment of Rohingya women and girls, enabling them to express and maintain their cultural identities. These identities are not merely remnants of a bygone era but are vibrant, living embodiments of resilience, resistance, and community solidarity in the face of displacement.

Fashion, Henna, and Thanaka emerge as potent symbols within this cultural landscape, serving as tools for articulating personal and collective identities. These practices are more than aesthetic choices; they are narratives woven into the fabric of daily life, offering insights into individuality, community belonging, and the enduring connection to ancestral roots. Thanaka, in particular, is highlighted for its symbolic significance, representing continuity and a tangible link to the homeland. The potential UNESCO inscription of Thanaka is discussed, emphasising the imperative of global recognition and protection for such cultural elements, framing it as an issue of human rights that validates the identity and dignity of marginalised communities like the Rohingya. Moreover, as I have stated, the acknowledgement by UNESCO to recognise Thanaka as an ICH of Myanmar, would inadvertently underscore the Rohingya's integral role in the cultural fabric of the country of Myanmar and the Rohingya women's Burmese heritage.

Another important element of the thesis to understand is the obstacles Rohingya women face in accessing traditional communal spaces, which are crucial for cultural and spiritual engagement yet often become male-dominated during crises. This exclusion underscores the urgent need for inclusive cultural practices and the establishment of safe, accessible spaces where women can fully participate in the community's cultural and spiritual life beyond the basic washing facilities.

Psychosocial Support and Self-reliance

In the thesis I emphasised the critical need for humanitarian efforts to integrate and support the existing traditional psychosocial support systems, particularly those led by and for women within displaced communities like the Rohingya. I highlighted how these traditional support mechanisms, deeply rooted in ICH, play a vital role in the mental health and social cohesion of displaced populations. Traditional practices such as storytelling, communal rituals, and crafts serve not only as coping mechanisms but also as essential conduits for maintaining cultural identity, communicating cultural events and maintaining community bonds.

A significant insight from my research is the recognition of the robust, pre-existing networks of support among Rohingya women, which utilise traditional knowledge and practices to provide psychosocial care. These gender-sensitive support systems offer a tailored approach to addressing the unique challenges faced by women and girls in displacement settings, including trauma, loss, and the complexities of navigating new social environments.

I argued that humanitarian interventions should prioritise the reinforcement and expansion of these traditional support systems, rather than imposing external solutions. By collaborating with and empowering these existing networks, humanitarian actors can ensure that psychosocial support is culturally congruent, gender-sensitive, and more effectively meets the nuanced needs of the community. This approach not only enhances the sustainability and impact of psychosocial interventions but also respects and preserves the cultural heritage of displaced communities.

Furthermore, through this research, I advocate for the empowerment of displaced communities through self-reliance, emphasising the role of Refugee Led Organisations (RLOs), particularly those driven by women. These organisations are crucial for fostering community-led solutions and

sustainable development, as they are intimately familiar with the cultural dynamics and needs of their communities. Supporting RLOs, especially those that leverage traditional forms of knowledge and support, can enhance the resilience and agency of displaced individuals, promoting a shift from dependency to empowerment.

Displacement Status and ICH

I revealed how statelessness transcends mere legal identity, profoundly influencing social integration, cultural continuity, and access to fundamental human rights. Statelessness is portrayed not just as a legal anomaly but as a condition that erodes the fabric of community, ICH and individual identity, disproportionately impacting vulnerable groups such as women and children. The absence of legal nationality exacerbates risks of exploitation, discrimination, and exclusion, severely curtailing access to healthcare, education, employment, and legal protections, and deepening socio-economic vulnerabilities. Moreover, women's lack of legal identity restricts their access to essential services and formal economic participation, heightening their risk of gender-based violence and social marginalisation. This predicament underscores the critical role of ICH in sustaining community cohesion and providing psychosocial support amidst the challenges of statelessness.

While there are many positives in challenging environments of displacement, I continue to critique the current humanitarian response to statelessness, which often overlooks the crucial role of ICH in fostering resilience and maintaining cultural identity among stateless populations. It is clear that stateless individuals remain marginalised within international aid frameworks, leading to a lack of targeted interventions that leverage ICH for community strengthening and individual well-being.

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I emphasised the need for legal reforms, advocacy, and direct support in Pakistan that not only facilitate pathways to citizenship but also harness ICH and the humanitarian system to improve living conditions, ensure cultural continuity, and protect the rights of stateless individuals.

Empowering stateless communities through ICH involves engaging them in the creation and implementation of policies and programs, ensuring their cultural practices, traditions, and knowledge systems are respected and incorporated. This participatory approach fosters a sense of agency and belonging, enabling stateless individuals to contribute to and shape interventions that affect their lives.

Cultural Expression, and Language

I delved into the intricate role of language in both preserving cultural identity and facilitating integration for displaced communities, with a focused lens on the Rohingya. I highlight in this thesis how the Rohingya's oral traditions, such as Tarana poetry with its Sufi roots, dance, and music, are central to expressing and safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). These cultural practices, embodying forms of communication and peaceful protest, play a pivotal role in reinforcing community bonds and resilience amidst displacement.

A nuanced finding of the study is the variation in Rohingya language fluency, particularly among women from more remote areas, which impacts their ability to engage with their cultural heritage and access essential services. It is highly evident how language proficiency, especially in host community languages like Bengali in Bangladesh, Urdu in Pakistan, and English in Ireland is crucial for accessing services, notably health and education services. Women's language skills, or

the lack thereof, significantly influence their ability to navigate and integrate into new environments, directly affecting their well-being and social integration.

This disparity in language proficiency underscores the need for a balanced approach in displacement responses. While it is essential to preserve linguistic and cultural practices such as storytelling, poetry, and music for maintaining cultural identity and community cohesion, there is also a critical need to support language learning for integration and access to services. Within this thesis I emphasise the importance of understanding the diverse linguistic needs within displaced communities, advocating for interventions that both preserve cultural expressions and enhance language skills for broader social inclusion and access to essential services.

Methodological Insights: Yarning

Finally, I reflect on the use of Yarning as an effective research methodology for engaging with traditional oral communities, aligning with the storytelling nature of ICH. While acknowledging its time-consuming nature, Yarning is praised for its ability to foster a deep, empathetic engagement with participants, offering rich, nuanced insights into their experiences and perspectives. In the exploration of traditional oral communities like the Rohingya, the thesis highlights the adoption of Yarning as a pivotal research methodology, which is inherently aligned with the oral storytelling traditions central to the continuation of ICH. Yarning, rooted historically in seafarer traditions, emerged as particularly effective in this context, facilitating a form of engagement that is culturally resonant. This method allowed for a conversational approach where participants could share their experiences, beliefs, and cultural practices in a natural and flowing manner, mirroring the informal, narrative-driven communication styles inherent to their community.

Despite its time-intensive nature, the value of Yarning in this research was its ability to build trust and rapport with participants, fostering an environment where individuals felt comfortable and valued in sharing their narratives and skills. This method proved to be especially powerful in revealing the complex interplay between language, culture, artisanal practices, crafts, the environment and displacement, offering insights into how the Rohingya maintain their cultural heritage and navigate the challenges of their new environments.

10.5   Final Words

Here I have endeavoured to highlight the intricate layers between intangible cultural heritage, displacement, and the evolving identity of the Rohingya Muslim community across borders. By delving into the broad scope of ICH, this research has addressed pivotal questions pertaining to the lived experiences of the displaced and the operational frameworks of humanitarian efforts that intersect with their lives. The insights garnered contribute profoundly to a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities that pervade the fields of ICH, forced migration, refugee support, statelessness, resettlement, gender dynamics, cultural heritage, and identity formation.

Central to this thesis is the assertion that ICH is far from a passive or benign element within the cultural and social landscapes of displaced communities. Instead, it emerges as a dynamic force, shaping the narratives, rituals, and collective memories that underpin the essence of communal and individual identities. The empirical findings underscore the critical role of ICH in fostering resilience, enabling cultural continuity, and facilitating psychosocial support within contexts of upheaval and uncertainty.

A recurring theme in this narrative is the imperative of self-reliance and the empowerment of displaced communities to steer their own journey towards recovery and self-determination. The exploration of statelessness, particularly, casts a spotlight on the invisible burdens borne by those who dwell in the margins, often overlooked by the very societies that benefit from their presence and contributions.

Language and communication emerge as pivotal elements of ICH, transcending their functional roles to embody the core of identity and belonging. I continue to advocate for a heightened emphasis on linguistic and cultural inclusivity within humanitarian practices and policy formulations. Furthermore, this research contributes methodologically through the documentation and application of Yarning as an ethnographic tool, particularly suited to engaging with communities rooted in oral traditions. This methodological approach not only enriches the academic discourse on qualitative research methods but also offers practical pathways for more meaningful and respectful engagement with displaced communities.

Finally, it is imperative for humanitarian actors, policymakers, and scholars to recognise and engage with the fluidity and dynamism of ICH. Rather than perceiving cultural heritage as a static relic of the past, it is essential to acknowledge its evolving nature and its potential to bridge divides, connect disparate communities, and bring a richer understanding of human experience to those aiming to assist people living in displacement. Through the lens of ICH, this thesis not only charts the complex journeys of identity and displacement but also champions the power of narratives to connect us across vast divides and to embrace the diversity of stories that shape our world and to engage with them in ways that foster understanding, respect, and unity in the face of global challenges.

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12 ANNEX

12.1 Additions to the Methodology

In this research, I take both an 'Emic' and 'Etic' perspective. To uncover emic perspectives, I talk to people, observe what they do, and use active Yarning as a way to participate in activities with them. The emic perspectives are critical in my effort to obtain a broader understanding of the Rohingya people and their way of life. My objective is to avoid interpreting them through my own cultural lens. As noted by Spiro (1990), the idea is to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange. However, as the research is centred on cultural heritage and humanitarian concepts throughout this process, I also use an etic approach as I develop explanations for the behaviour of the Rohingya population, the humanitarians and the hosts through their interactions with the political and geographic environment based on theory and analysis. Both perspectives are highly crucial in this research. I also concede that it will be challenging to move my perspective back and forth between the two as I seek to uncover the political, cultural, environmental, religious and historical reasons behind the behaviours of the Rohingya groups while focusing on answering the research question. I endeavour to understand the Rohingya ICH. I will establish how their ICH is shaped by displacement and the humanitarian system as the Rohingya minorities attempt to engage with their sense of belonging and ability to pursue their traditional activities in each location.

Through these methods of enquiry, I engage with the past through the embodied presence of cultural heritage as a core understanding of identity, difference and alterity in the various states of displacement. The memory of home is posited as one effective tool for the co-constitution of embodied narratives but I also draw on traditional knowledge, stories, and daily activities relating to the Rohingya cultural heritage.

Epistemology

The underlying epistemology of this research is *'Cultural Relativism'*. Cultural relativism is the ability to understand a culture on its terms and not to make judgments using the standards of one's own culture (Millar, 2007). The goal is to promote an understanding of cultural practices that are not typically part of my own culture. Using the perspective of cultural relativism leads me to the view that no one culture is superior to another culture when compared to systems of morality, law, politics or in ways of knowing and seeing the world.

Due to the nature of this research, taking a cultural relativist stance will enable the theoretical perspective to match the methods and reveal essential issues relevant to the displaced minority communities and also to the humanitarian responders approach. In doing so, I seek to understand the Rohingya way of life and ask how the systems of displacement respond to the cultural reality of the displaced minorities. I then also apply this reasoning to the humanitarian, development and cultural heritage power brokers or what Agier (2011) refer to as "the Humanitarian Government" or a quasi-government.

Axiological Philosophical Approach

Of course, no researcher can be entirel y neutral and objective when engaging with culture and power. Analysis of observations and open discussions such as 'Yarns' require a constant processing of the data in the mind. As Stein (2017) notes, "one's cultural background, education and training will act as a filter or lens that colour's what are thought of as objective observations. Ethnocentrism is the way we use our society as a basis for interpreting and judging other societies (Stein and Stien, 2017). Words used to describe and categorise people in displacement and their heritage

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come from western philosophy and perspective that I will further analyse and elaborate on throughout the thesis.

Sampling

Convenience sampling was first applied to select participants and then snowballing took place, thus providing a broader sample of participants (Denscombe, 2014).

The following criteria were applied:

- Engage in local language using the research team.
- Interact in crafts, artisanal or biocultural heritage activities.
- The research team members were male and female and spoke fluent English and Rohingya in Bangladesh.
- In Pakistan, the research team spoke fluent English and Urdu.
- The team of two in each location were pre-selected and trained in the methodology.
- The participants were aged 18 and above, and there was no direct focus on child participants in this study. Although, given the nature of Rohingya refugee life, children were often present with women during data collection.
- Recruitment took place via well-established personal contacts within the study area.
- The research assistants were employed for the duration of the fieldwork

Justification

As highlighted by Chatelard and Hassan (2017) in their study of the ICH of refugee;

There is a need for further in-depth study to understand the importance and roles of ICH, particularly in situations of displacement. There is a need to gather knowledge on the role of communities in both safeguarding their ICH at risk in emergencies and mobilising it as a tool for resilience and reconciliation (UNESCO, 2020).

The research fills a gap in the knowledge regarding the value of ICH to the displaced. This research will contribute to a better understanding of ICH and how it contributes to the life, resilience, protection or other during the journey of displacement toward a durable solution. It will give an understanding of the impact of humanitarian and development interventions on displaced communities in a variety of different contexts.

Data Collection Methods

Participatory research, as noted by Spencer (2017), is where the participant is involved in the research process. The methods used in this study are common to ethnographic methodologies. Ethnography is the in-depth study of everyday practices and lives of a people. The focus of the ethnographic methods is to produce a detailed description of the studied groups in a particular time, and particular geographic location as the situation of all groups in this study will change over time. I use a thick description, in my interpretation of both the Rohingya and the humanitarian cultures within this research and writing (Geertz, 1973). The thick description explains the behaviour and related cultural activities of the groups but also the context in which it occurs.

The methods used are observations and photographic observations; Yarns, both Collaborative (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010) and Active Yarns. When engaging with the humanitarian

participants, I use structured interviews and participate in humanitarian meetings where I have the opportunity to ask questions relating to the research topic.
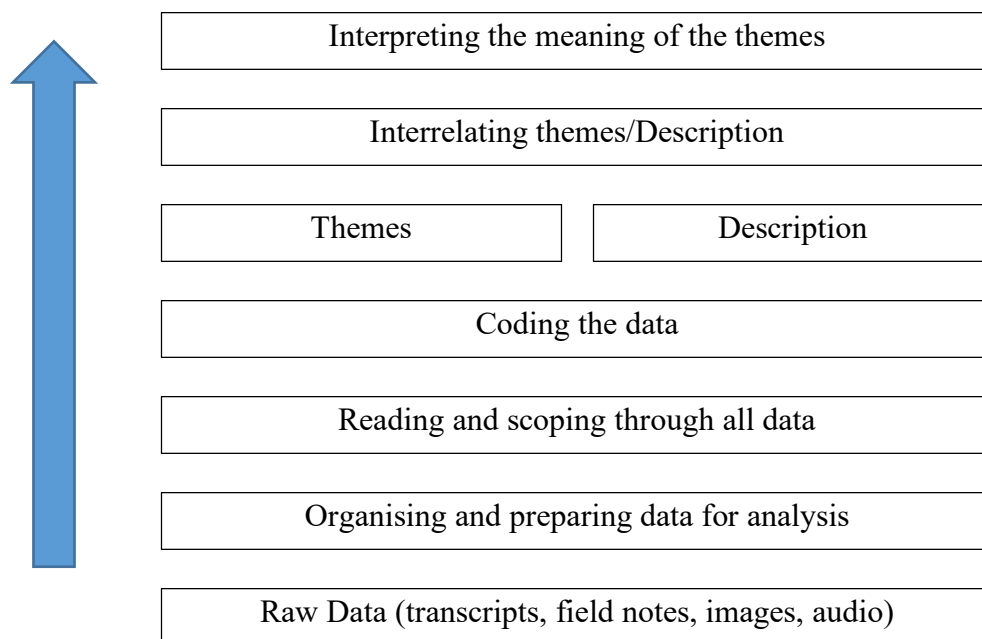
Handling Data

Translation and quotes

Language translation is a critical element of the research and a key element of forming identity. In each location, I engaged in local language learning initially to understand greetings and relationships. I develop an ear for the mood and expressions and in some cases, understand the translations of keywords and terms from the Rohingya participants. I was always dependent on the translation of recordings and notes from the field.

In Bangladesh, I began with four local research assistants which due to the translation challenges I reduced to two research assistants within the first weeks with both English and Rohingya language skills. In Pakistan, I engaged two local translators (male and female) with both Urdu and English skills. In Pakistan, I further engaged an older Urdu / English speaker to ensure better engagement with the older members of the community. The teams worked on the identification of keywords and developed techniques to ensure an understanding of their true meaning to the Rohingya research participants in each location. There is an inherent difficulty of translation to English. I have tried my utmost to avoid distorting the Rohingya participants models in the process of reporting in which they are customarily expressed (Scheffer, 1966). Even in Ireland when working directly with the Rohingya community all of whom have now undergone ten years of living within an English speaking society the home-based language for much of the population (particularly women) remains Rohingya. In numerous cases, I conducted interviews with older women in through younger women or male relatives.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis involved making sense out of the text, audio and image data and moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, or as Creswell (2009) states, it is akin to peeling back the layers of an onion. The analysis was a continual reflection about the data and the question(s) I am seeking to answer as a researcher. The data analysis began immediately and continued as an ongoing process throughout the research. The comprehensive note-taking recording and audio-visual techniques were analysed throughout the collection process. Notes from the team were translated and analysed immediately following each field trip. Taking from Greenbaum (1988), I summarised the "big ideas" or "themes" that were discussed. The team also include all observations throughout the process, including body language, tone, and opinion differences between the participants to ensure a deeper understanding on the study topic.

Interpreting the meaning of the themes
Interrelating themes/Description

Themes	Description

Coding the data
Reading and scoping through all data
Organising and preparing data for analysis
Raw Data (transcripts, field notes, images, audio)

Data analysis strategy steps (Creswell, 2009)

Data Coding

While data coding was my original intent, I found it best to use the initials of the interviewee followed by an M (male) or F (female).

Data Storage

- The principal researcher will be responsible for the storage of all data.

- All paper data collected, including the assistant's notes, will be kept in a locked cabinet.

- The electronic data will be stored in password-protected file space on the principal researchers Mac Book Pro computer.

- All data containing personal details that could lead to the identification of any participant such as phone number, site location expression of interest forms will be deleted at the earliest possible time. This does not apply to consent forms, which will be kept long term.

- All conversations from key informant interviews and focus groups will be recorded using a password operated encrypted voice recorder and assistants will take notes that will be analysed, and relevant data will be translated to electronic format.

- All field notes will be collected by hand but transferred to word documents and stored on folders along with all other data on a Mac Book Pro computer and password protected.

- Field notes taken by the research team throughout the study will include a time date coding system for all recorded information. DeMunck and Sobo (1998) suggest that coding is used to select and emphasise information that is important enough to record, enabling the researcher to weed out extraneous information and focus on the researcher's observations on the type of information needed for the study.

- All audio-visual files will be stored on the password-protected Mac Book Pro computer only accessible to the researcher. These will be code linked to consent forms or verbal consent recordings.

Long Term Data Storage

- Data will be saved in electronic format, (including consent forms or recordings). These will be scanned and saved.

- At this point, I will encrypt all the data in order that data not deleted can be transferred securely to the Research Coordinator. Files will be saved in password-protected file space on the university server

- The ethics form will state that all data will be transferred to an electronic format using a secure method and stored safely.

Descriptive and Casual Inference

It is active and participatory. This approach involves community participants and stakeholders in the qualitative phases of research. The multiple phases all address a common objective of assessing and refining my understanding of the topics specific to answering the research question.

This design will involve the engagement of Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar refugee camps and humanitarian's working alongside refugees in their daily work activities. The research will further engage the Rohingya community resettled to Ireland, now citizens of Ireland. The aim is to draw links between ICH, resilience and durable solutions and thus concluding the value of ICH in improving the lives of refugees.

Intended Research Contribution

Given the rapid rise in the number of Global displaced and the projected increase in refugees and IDPs living in protracted situations, this research; will aim to have practical, implementable findings that can improve the lives of displaced communities. It will aim to support humanitarian's when considering improving ways of approaching; livelihoods of different groups; shelter and site planning; Water, Sanitation & Hygiene; statelessness and community relevance of peoples ICH throughout the phases of a refugee displacement. This research will be significant as it will contribute to the current knowledge surrounding refugee populations and ICH and will stimulate academic and humanitarian debate on cultural value, cultural rights, resilience, durable solutions and the effectiveness of the humanitarian system. It presents a detailed picture of the approaches of agencies mandated to represent, support and assist refugees, documenting through the refugee framework and broader United Nations Agency mandates. It will improve the understanding of the refugee journey and the contribution of ICH to resilience toward a durable solution. This research is inclusive of the voices of the less powerful, vulnerable ethnic minorities within the refugee populations themselves.

Humanitarian assistance, be it under international law or more critically, born out of fundamental human values of preventing long term poverty and suffering, should go well beyond the current targets of meeting life-saving needs and minimum standards. Yet, in numerous case humanitarians struggle to meet the most basic needs of refugees, to maintain the necessary funding or find adequate resolutions to conflicts resulting in protracted states of crisis.

Number of Interviews by location

Number of Interview's in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

28	Individual	UNHCR	Interviews with senior staff and local UNHCR staff
6	Individual	IOM	IOM UN Agency staff working at the field and senior level
12	Individual	INGO	International staff from 8 different NGOs
6	Individual	NGO	Local NGO staff from Bangladesh working in the camps
2	Individual	GoB	

Number of Interview's in Karachi, Pakistan

5	Individual	UNHCR	5 Protection, 1 Deputy Rep, 1 Coordinator Karachi,
2	Individuals	INGOs	International NGO staff working in the Karachi settlement
4	Individuals	NGO	Local NGO staff working in the Karachi settlements
7	Individuals	Gov	1 Government official Dhaka 6 Local Government staff
12	Individuals	Community	Community leaders, religious leaders and group representatives

Number of Interview's in Carlow, Ireland

6	Groups	Rohingya	Families and extended families from resettled in Carlow
18	Individuals	Rohingya	Individual meetings on four separate visits
4	Individuals	Cric club	Individuals involved in the start-up of the cricket club
2	Individuals	RAI	Local community involved in Rohingya Action Ireland
16	Individuals	Community	Host community

Meetings by Location

Number of Meetings in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

4	Workshops	Mixed	The workshops were primarily focused on site planning and shelter but also included HLP
39	Meetings	UNHCR	21 of these coordination meetings were with technical leads (HoU) The other 18 were large weekly internal coordination meetings
14	Meetings	Mixed	Meetings with other UN agencies, INGOs and NGOs
12	Meetings	GoB	Coordination meetings hosted by the GoB focused on technical issues

6	Meetings	Male	Camp based GoB meetings hosted by the CiC (across camps)

As Yarning has had limited use in research outside of health research with oral traditional communities in Australia, during the writing of this thesis I developed a paper expanding on oral traditions which gives greater detail and reference to the need, use and specific ways that Yarning is used. I recorded the following number of Yarning sessions during data collection however I conducted numerous more informal sessions while building the initial relationships that also contributed to my conclusions.

Number of Yarning Sessions in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

4	Group	Female	Shelter group
16	Individual	Male	Site; biocultural, resource discussions throughout camps – these related to site planning, environment and resource management
2	Individual	Male	Imam's Yarning on locations of Mosques; Madrasah; burial sites
4	Individual	Female	Site; biocultural, water points safe zones throughout camps
12	Group	Male	Shelter design and construction
3	Group	Male	Bamboo treatment plant
4	Group	Female	Graft workshops, making bamboo shelter panels etc.
3	Group	Male	Music groups practicing traditional music

Number of Yarning Sessions in Karachi, Pakistan

12	Group	Male	Fishermen fishing, net making, boat builders
6	Individual	Male	Fishermen, traditional medicine men
2	Individual	Male	Imam's Yarning on locations of Mosques; Madrasah
6	Individual	Female	Community events, fishing net repair, jewellery crafts
9	Group	Female	Graft workshops, jewellery, fishing net repair
2	Group	Male	Sufi mystics, Sufi practitioners

4	Group	Mixed	Festival, home visits, community centre
3	Individual	Male	General activities at cricket grounds, and community
4	Individual	Female	Festival, community gatherings, home visits, community centre

Title: Yarning as a research method for working with Oral Traditional Communities

Abstract:

We were not all born to write. While some people invest a lifetime of work into the written word, others pass-on their ideas, knowledge, history, and heritage through oral interactions. Oral-based communities are far more numerous than we may assume as they also exist in smaller pockets within highly literate societies. Here, we explore the world of oral-based communities and investigate the value of meaningful engagement with oral traditions, viewing ways in which knowledge is retained and passed on throughout the generations. I propose that the engagement with oral-based communities needs to be 'on their terms', giving participants greater control over the structure of the narrative. We introduce a method of investigation termed 'Active Yarning'. This participatory technique engages communities or individuals in sharing knowledge through the researcher actively learning their craft, artisanal or biocultural activities. We introduce three examples of Active Yarning from field-based research and conclude that; engaging with oral-based communities in Active Yarning, takes the research beyond hearing and seeing data, it extends to ways of physically feeling data.

1. Introduction

We were not all born to write. Writing is a learnt activity centred on putting our thoughts in an explainable order so that they can be presented to an unknown audience in an understandable way. As Pinker, (2014) explains, writing is complicated, and most people write poorly with reoccurring failure to explain what is happening, particularly if the experience is not their own. He posits that language is a human instinct, yet to write is not natural (Pinker, 2014). While some invest a lifetime of work and experience into the written word, others choose to pass-on their ideas, knowledge, history and heritage through oral interactions.

When communities are oral-based, their narrative and perceived heritage are documented by others. As history shows, foreigners to that culture regularly misinterpret subtle signs valuable to the moral and ethical meaning of that group's story (Nunn, 2018). Numerous methods of engagement based on western-centric scientific world views, often fail to capture the point of these oral-based community narratives and activities. They try to determine what is true and what is apocryphal when the intention is to represent a view of how the community functions and how it defines itself (Carman, 2011:494).

Watson (2020) writes of the mythology of technology that was introduced by the Westerners some three-centuries ago, that brought with it, humanism, colonialism, and racism resulting in a global system that ignores and isolates many due to their different way of life. Throughout time, people of deep oral traditions have been ridiculed and referred to as primitive and in need of development. Unfortunately, rapid transitions to western development often exclude ways of supporting and conserving the rich oral heritage of communities that should be the building block for living instead of being viewed as the mythology of lesser cultures. Traditional people that have not adapted to written ways of communicating are not failed attempts at being modern but richly diverse peoples with different ways of seeing the world (Davis, 2013).

In this paper we explore oral-based community knowledge and the value of engaging in traditional methods of expressing, seeing, and knowing the world. It is proposed that there is much to learn by improving our understanding of oral, traditional research engagement, doing research 'on their terms'. Oral based communities offer positive, meaningful methods of knowledge sharing and learning from the past, unique teaching tools have been developed over millenia (Nunn, 2018). Excluding their world view, is akin to what Corbin refers to as Mundus imaginalis: removing the spirit from matter, the sensation from intellection, subject from object, inner from an outer, myth from history, the individual from the divine (Corbin, 1976:3).

There is, in fact, a significant risk of losing more of the critical elements of both the biological and the cultural diversity of nature and humanity which makes up the human spirit. We explore the core of oral-based tradition, asking simply, what value does it contain? We then go on to investigate one critical method of indigenous or traditional oral-based knowledge sharing, a technique referred to as "Yarning". The research shows how "Yarning" can be used as a positive

way of engaging with oral traditions in a wide variety of communities particularly when gathering knowledge of the past, understanding of traditional forms of knowing, doing or seeing and ways of better understanding the biocultural world around us.

2. Oral-base Communities and Traditional Knowledge

In recent years concepts surrounding traditional knowledge and culture and heritage have broadened to engage in discussions of significant and socially complex, intangible manifestations of oral-based or traditional peoples' way of living and learning (Bouchenaki, 2003; Smith and Akagawa, 2009; Taylor and Lennon, 2012; Watson, 2020). There are now numerous ways of talking with and about oral-based societies, but primarily we can conclude that they make up the world's minorities. Of course, owning and directing the narrative of minorities is highly essential to the powerful, as it is used to either create or reconstruct society in what Jenkins (2014) referred to as the *"soft side"* of state-building. Ownership of the heritage stories of others, for example, contributes to the construction of the nation, allowing some community memories, stories and activities to flood the national identity and others not. It has in the past been easy for these oral-based minority groups to be discredited for not having written evidence of their past (Nunn, 2018)

Is it possible for those of a western world with its written mind-set to comprehend the meaning of stories transferred over generations within oral-based communities? Couch (1989) for example, suggests that the majority of students of orality would conclude, that oral technology is not capable of retaining precise and accurate information over time. Cooke (1990) draws a clear comparison between the education of the western scientific psyche, throughout the stages of life and the learning of the traditional Yolhu people, throughout their life in Northern Australia. Cooke posits that the western mathematical mind is taught to learn through a separation from nature and spirit, exploring in mathematically scientific constructed ways. Whereas, the Yolhu psyche teaches them to be part of the land, nature and the spirit world. The Yolhu people are always looking to learn from within, rather than exploring from outside. Their classroom is a moving living world that they interact with sharing it through stories, songs, yarns, and dances and more (Cooke, 1990). Folklorist and linguist, Gísli Sigurðsson (2004), proposes that perhaps students need to think again

and engage with new information gathered from living oral societies while also formulating new questions from limited oral resources.

Throughout the centuries, ethnographers from a western scientific origin have attempted to understand the oral traditional society or native other through various means of engagement (Vermeulen, 2008). However, the drivers of these efforts were not primarily to understand histories, heritage or ways of contributing to or improving the world, this was primarily to exploit the heritage of the other in the pursuit of empire-building, meeting the colonial desire to civilise the primitive other or more recently to fulfil an academic need, promote a media narrative or to develop the so-called 'underdeveloped' (Blue, Gregory, et al. 2001; Easterly, 2007). The exoticisation of many traditional peoples has resulted in the misinterpretation of what are often creative oral historical narratives of life events (Nunn and Reid, 2016) or teachings of traditional technologies embedded within the oral traditions of communities (Berry and de Ramírez, 2015).

Western societies have held a long history of rejecting the subtle communications and teachings of oral communities. Cathcart, reveals a stubborn breed of white imperialist with an evident inability to survive and understand the environment of the other in what he calls, "a land of plenty" (Cathcart, 2013:1). History is littered with numerous accounts of colonisers desperate to display their superior knowledge lacking attention to local culture and observations of traditional community practices (Blue, Gregory, et al. 2001). As stated by Berger (1972) "the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled,". There is a tendency to believe that things are either simple or complex, leaving us little feeling for depth, no sense of the positive realities of mystery and enigma (Cheetham, 2005). Today several scholars have attempted to bring some light to what we often perceive as fallacy or pure myth through such techniques as "geomythology (Picardi and Monti et al 2008). Mayor (2004) defines geomythology as;

> *the study of etiological oral traditions created by pre-scientific cultures to explain—in poetic metaphor and mythological imagery—geological phenomena such as volcanoes, earthquakes, floods, fossils, and other natural features of the landscape.*

In discussing the geological origins of the earth, Vitaliano (1973) noted, that scientific theories themselves are analogous to etiological geomyths in that both are efforts to explain mysterious

observed facts. Nunn and Reid (2016) for example, explored transgenerational knowledge from 21 coastal locations around the Australian coastline. The stories communities told were then empirically corroborated by geological surveys of a postglacial sea-level rise some 7000+ years earlier. They concluded that the evidence gives some indication of the extraordinary longevity of oral traditions, proposing that it is likely that this type of record also exists in similar cultures around the world (Nunn and Reid, 2016).

More broadly across the globe, resource manger's, researchers and governments are now engaging oral-based traditional communities and enlisting their knowledge in a variety of fields from ecology, waste and wildlife management to the management of fires or aquatic environments (Braithwaite, 1996; Butts, 2009; Huffman, 2013; Watson, 2020). Much of this oral knowledge does not exist in isolation but is often reinforced through a variety of activities and traditions. Exploring oral tradition captured in dance, for example, Helen Thomas, through a variety of cultural studies reveals how dancing constitutes a culturally developed form of knowledge that is articulated through the 'bodily endeavours' of dancing subjects and not through the power of the word" (Thomas, 2003:215). Nietzsche (1878) proposed, that the need for people to move in rhythm with others is even far older than the language itself. He simply asks; where are the books that teach us to dance? Quoting the philosopher Heraclitus, Nietzsche concludes of people in general that "we are unknown to ourselves," (Nietzsche, 1887).

According to Hess (2015), the only way to seriously engage with oral tradition is to meet it on its terms and to understand it directly through people who hold it. The bhakti traditional Indian oral poet Kabir, for example, was heard to say; listening, implies living engagement of the body, a wholehearted presence that is contrasted with the insubstantiality of mere words and ideas. In voicing his disapproval of people documenting his oral tradition, Kabir says;

> *I talk of what I've seen with my own eyes, you talk of what's written on paper. How can your mind and mine ever get together?* (cited by Hess, 2015)

Many of Kabir's fans and followers were of the Dalit caste, often referred to as the "untouchables", those without access to a formal education given their low caste treatment. While retaining a profound twist of social criticism, Kabir poetically describes his observations of life, the caste

prejudices, religious sectarianism, and hatred of the time but he also discussed the mind and body through oral means, all the while urging people to wake up and cultivate consciousness (Callewaert, et al. 2000).

It is also important to note, and perhaps anthropologists and folklorists may agree, even a light exploration amongst oral societies would indicate that rarely is a community purely oral or purely literate (Rosenberg, 1987). In essence, many ancient cultures have been shown to use a variety of written methods of passing on their knowledge. Marshack (1972) revealed how observational experience and symbols of the lunar cycles led to the creation of the calendar more than 30,000 years ago, referring to it as the cornerstone of complex social structures. While modern society sees this writing as mathematics, Cooke (1990) discusses the writing system of the Yolgnu communities as he explores, the message stick, used for communication across tribal boundaries. This symbol-laden stick enabled the messenger to journey from one community to another sharing information far and wide relating to coming events. While most early observers of this technique saw this too as basic mathematics amongst an oral traditional society, Michael Cook (1990:4) stated that;

> *It should be noted that by removing words, concepts, and structures from their Aboriginal context and putting them into a European box called 'mathematics', I have inevitably lost much of the full significance of their meaning and have certainly not done justice to the intricacy and complexity of the Yolngu world.*

Haris (1990) too, sees oral and written text-based societies as antithetic with more differences than similarities in ways of seeing the world. Of the same conclusion, Albert Bates Lord, a scholar of Folklore and Mythology once described the written text as a disease, noting that printed text introduces the notion of "fixed". He posits that, once writing takes over an oral society, its performances simply become reproductions rather than creations, stating that "*this means death to oral tradition*" (Lord, 1960:137 cited by Rosenberg, 1987).

As numerous authors agree, a significant juxtaposition appears in ways of seeing and interpreting the world separating the oral traditional communities and devaluing their oral- based knowledge in favour of text-based literate western societies and not only promotes an inequality but removes

a richness for all of our understanding of the heritage of humanity (Rosenberg, 1987; Cooke, 1990; Cheetham, 2005; Hess, 2015). While the idea of illiteracy is not promoted and efforts must continue to bring unwritten languages into the realms of modern education, it seems to be equally important to retain those skills and techniques oral-based communities have developed in knowing, seeing and sharing their world (Robinson and Erland, 2003).

Yarning, Oral-based Knowledge Sharing

The slang word, 'Yarning' is said to have its roots in the seafarer traditions of storytelling (O'Connor and Kellerman, 2015). It made its way into the vocabulary of early Australian settlers as it became a way to describe the oral-stories of Indigenous people. While Yarns were originally seen as children's stories, myths or tall tales, today it is recognised that Yarns contain a depth of traditional knowledge about the world that Aboriginal people occupied (Picardi and Monti et al 2008; Geia, et al. 2013; Nunn and Reid, 2016).

Yarns take a variety of forms, but primarily they are about sharing knowledge, as specific topics are discussed in groups or one-to-one. They are informal Yarning engagements where the knowledge and stories are shared as they come to mind based on the topic in the traditional way of ancestral learning or lived experience. Yarning is the person-to-person transmission of knowledge through stories that allows the message to be understood and socially evaluated and shared over time. While Yarns hold the knowledge of the past, Klapproth (2004), posits that Yarning is primarily concerned with the morality of the world that the group constructs and the culture and ethical space that society occupies.

Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) note that the challenge for researchers is, that Yarns may be focused on whatever element of their story the teller wishes to tell and parts may be left out. They note how the researchers' role may on occasion be to draw out the parts which relate to the research topic, yet primarily yarning involves sharing and deep listening (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010). Yarns become a matter of learning as the researcher needs to avoid influencing, biasing or leading the story and thus disrupting the natural flow (Sorensen and Carman, 2009). The researcher, in

part, undertakes an approach referred to by Rubin and Rubin (1995) as *'the art of hearing data'*. This requires a deep sense of curiosity while allowing the storyteller to Yarn in their expressive way (Gillian, 1982). In contrast to the western forms of narrative or scientific inquiry, Yarning is an informal and relaxed discussion and experience shared between the researcher and the participant(s). As explained by Bessarab & Ng'andu, (2010) Yarning is firstly about relationship building which allows the researcher and the participant to delve deeper into the topics together.

Berger and Luckmann (1966), refers to people of oral traditions as being connected in "the symbolic universe" where people, the land and the dreaming are combined in an all-encompassing universe. The body of Yarns that are distributed over the members of the culture contains socially valuable cultural knowledge. Therefore, a critical element noted in using Yarning methods by numerous researchers, is, that their voices in the research process should be directed towards an emancipatory research outcome for the community (Geia, Hayes, & Usher, 2011; Hunt & Geia, 2002; Miller, Spring, Goold, Turale, & Usher, 2005).

As Kovach (2009) points out early engagement is a key to building a relationship with the participants and building trust and understanding well before the data collection begins as this results in deeper and richer insights into the research topic. This lead-in time should be greater when a translator is required as they add another layer of engagement and new challenges to the research process. When working with translators or co-researchers, Berman and Vappu (2011) note how building a team makes the process more inclusive and promotes all members to take responsibility which makes the process not only inclusive but equitable.

Geia (2013), discusses the exceptional value Yarning brings to health-related research, as it allows the participant and researcher to interact in a culturally secure space and are free to tell their stories. Academic research techniques rarely consist of discussions on friendship building, but the evidence is that listening to the Yarns, prevents researchers from treating the participant as a number or statistic, a nameless face or as Geia states *"just another patient in the ward"* (Geia, et al 2013:16). For Bessarab and Ng'andu, (2010) when turning Yarning into something describable to the academic audience they compare it to a type of semi-structured interview, an informal and relaxed discussion through which both the researcher and participant journey together visiting places and topics of interest relevant or not to the researchers focus.

In 2008, Mary Terszack in her book, *"Orphaned by the Colour of My Skin"* discussed how writing about Yarning is a process of making meaning, communicating and passing on knowledge but also a special way of communicating with her culture. The analysis of various aspects of people's attitudes towards the past and their culture and how these are formed, constitute a major area of research. As Klapproth (2004), notes, the Yarns of oral communities are primarily concerned with the morality of the world they construct, the culture and ethical space that society occupies. Moreover, Yarns avoid a dominant point of view and do not involve debate to prove what or who is right and wrong.

It is important to strike for the right balance in understanding between, on one hand, traditional knowledge and experience and, on the other hand, the inclusion of stories that are designed to provide a moral and ethical compass for a community. Datta (2018) for example, points out that to her Indigenous community in Bangladesh, their oral-traditional stories are a reflection of their communities lived experience. In contrast, the Brahui desert communities of Baluchistan use rich folklore intending to express the strength of character and cultural morals throughout the community (Swidler, 1984). Importantly, if we are to engage with information in a useful way, we need to understand what the information is telling us (Bang & Firth, 2017).
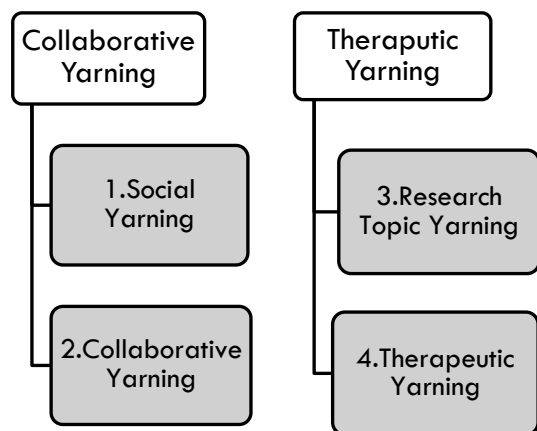
Guidance on Yarning from the literature

Bessarab and Ng'andu, (2010:40) discuss how there is a myriad of ways of Yarning that may include personal, academic, artistic, political, professional, religious or therapeutic. In each case, there are protocols and certain techniques that need to be followed. There are also different considerations of language, gender, cultural practices, traditional ways of doing, greeting or gathering and expressing emotions yet there are some common threads to Yarning that can be used as guiding principles. Dunleavy (2013) notes that the focus is always on inquiry and dialogue and not on "problem-solving". She also notes that the Yarning process should be rich in interactions, narratives, and dialogues.

Kovach (2009) discusses the need to take time to get to know the participants building the relationship before diving headlong into research. This is also noted by Geia, Hayes, and Usher

(2014). The team discusses the reciprocal nature of the researcher and participant engagement, building a respectful relationship and friendship is perhaps the most important step. The team primarily note that the relationship and a measured approach is at the core. They further remind researchers to be attentive, notice body language, tone of voice, the use of silence, and all the culturally significant signs.

There is a valuable trust-building period to go through with any community. Carlin, Atkinson, and Marley, (2019:3.3) state that, kindness and an ability to listen were highly valued when having a 'quiet word' with Aboriginal women. In "Therapeutic Yarning" they recommend that broad and gentle questions were more effective when it came to engaging women about their mental health and wellbeing. Culturally, it was discovered that women did not appreciate direct questions of relationships or for example discussions of childhood as these discussions are brought to the surface by women only once the researcher (in this case their health professional) was deemed truly trustworthy.

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Collaborative          Theraputic
Yarning                Yarning

  1.Social              3.Research
  Yarning               Topic Yarning

  2.Collaborative       4.Therapeutic
  Yarning               Yarning
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Participants may go on a meandering route to get to the point of a story. Willink (2006) sets out the story of how the researcher fails to hear what is being said until the story is retold many times, again highlighting how the researcher needs to enter the world of the oral-based participant, it is all about the journey, not the destination (Willink 2006, 505).

Bessarab and Ng'andu, (2010) stress, that the researcher must let the Yarn flow and avoid the urge to interrupt when you feel the discussion or story is off track. They point out that their propensity to interrupt has cost them in the past, as they often discovered later when reviewing recordings, that the Yarn was heading toward valuable information yet, they were so caught up in their academic concepts that they failed to hear what the participant was talking about.

(Types of Yarning as proposed by Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010)

Active Yarning

Expanding Yarning methods to Active Yarning: A Participatory Method

Many traditional ways of learning and sharing knowledge within oral-based communities go much deeper than storytelling in situ and require active participation linking the story to activities, objects and artefacts. Numerous examples of this active engagement and learning exist, for example, from crafts, such as weaving, carpet making or sewing to traditional dances, poetic recital, making and playing instruments to construction, collecting or managing building materials to engagements with the environment, collecting, hunting or gathering food. People are busy active creatures and engaging while doing can have many advantages. Engaging actively with these fragments of heritage evokes different memories, feelings and stories of the past that also connect communities to visions for the future.

I utilise a method of data collection I refer to as, 'Active Yarning'. It is participatory, action research requiring a hands-on physical approach. Active Yarning takes a new direction to the process of in-situ storytelling, and brings new questions and allows questions to be answered in different ways, (I cannot explain it but I can show you). From my research experience with oral-based communities, Active Yarning allows the researcher to build intimate connections and trust with a community more rapidly than is the case when it is a completely seated affair. When an Active Yarning approach is applied, researcher and participant work together as teacher and student where the student learns how something was originally learnt and physically done through the hands-on experience. The researcher not only listens to the story and inquisitively asks questions, but also feels the process, discovering the story behind the activity.

We know that memory and knowledge is captured in the hands of artisan's the movement of dancers, the fingers of musician's. We see the passion and intensity expressed in the crafting process and the beauty, taste, sound or functionality of and objects or a learnt movement. The crafting of these items is often situated within wider social and historical processes of the communities active learning. I propose that there are numerous environments where Active Yarning can bring new knowledge. In this section,
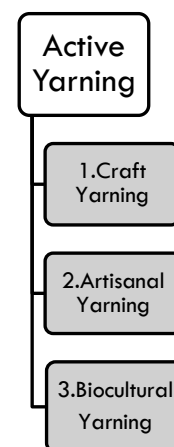
I briefly introduce three areas that I use this approach and give examples from the field of how Active Yarning is applied.

> *In theory, there is no difference between 'theory' and 'practice', while in practice there is* (Brewster 1882).

Craft Yarning is a participatory Yarning process of teaching, talking and sharing knowledge and ideas while engaging in traditional craft making activities. In these 'Craft Yarns' the researcher engages 'one-on-one' or in a 'group' by actively mixing and sharing knowledge and experiences around the craft. This type of Yarning brings craft objects to life as the origins of the crafted items and ways of crafting them are discussed. Craft Yarning involves methods of doing where the group are guided through weaving, sewing, drawing, knitting, jewellery, producing fishing nets, mixing colours, preparing or cooking foods, making tools, or objects that have traditional meaning, learnt knowledge. The researcher engages with individuals or communities while being guided through the creative process and thus learning the broader origins of the item or activity and the creator. Yarns develop to stories of the past or visions for the future. Craft Yarning is a shared informal process that is more than a discussion it is a lived experience where skills around the craft and craftsperson are learnt and understood.

Here I engage with a group of refugee women from the same community in Karachi, Pakistan. They share knowledge of the traditional craft of jewellery making. The Yarns begin with the material required for jewellery, and an introduction to some simple knots used in their style of crafting pieces. They Yarn about colours, size, stories of occasions where different jewellery is made, bought or worn. In this example, the group share Yarns of traditional jewellery from Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Yemen, blending materials, colours, ideas, and techniques with personal experiences. They discuss the value of different designs in stories of wedding, displacement. They sketch designs worn by their mothers, grandmothers and over time they submerge into deeper stories of their families, mothers, grandmothers and homeland as they build bonds and trust.

Artisanal Yarning, is a participatory hands-on active way of learning and sharing knowledge. Artisanal Yarning goes a step deeper than working with crafts. The researcher must already possess a degree of knowledge and skill around the subject in order to engage in this method. It allows the stories to be exchanged more technically and a deeper understanding to be developed. This is more commonly achieved one-on-one and requires asking detailed technical questions of the artisan. The Yarning journey will often go into the stories of artisanal training, teachers, communities of artisans who explore where why certain techniques are used, where materials are sourced, who or where tools are made, or what projects they have completed over a lifetime. Artisanal Yarns involve developing a feeling for objects and the artisan themselves. It is important to learn the movements of tools and materials but also the movement of oneself. Yarns are often splattered with humorous stories of learning what not to do, 'incidents and accident' as much as ways of doing.

In this example, I engage in 'Artisanal Yarning' with Rohingya refugees through the construction of bamboo shelters.. As a shelter specialist I am concerned with the traditional knowledge relating to methods and capabilities of the artisans as well as the cultural needs behind their shelter use. In this process, the artisan discusses the type of bamboo to use and how and where the skills were acquired and where. As I learned the limitations of the bamboo variety and the details of connections we also discuss the cost and configuration of the shelter within the context of the refugee camp environment. Building the relationship and respect is of great importance, particularly as artisans facilitate an intimate link with the community. Here the artisan describes his past life, weaving stories of work life with stories of family, homeland and heritage. The Rohingya language is primarily unwritten. While in part and more recently, it has transitioned to text the vast majority of Rohingya communication remains oral. Rohingya artisans, from builders to fishermen learn and impart knowledge-rich with stories through oral means.

Biocultural Yarning is an active participatory process of learning about people and their lived environment through active engagement. It is an effective research method for exploring the interwoven links between the biological and the cultural world. Biocultural Yarning can become

part of foraging, farming or any work activities that engage with nature, land or wildlife. I have used biocultural Yarning with land surveys in Indonesia, while developing community forest management systems in Tanzania and while learning patters of Tavy agriculture in Madagascar.

In this example, I join the community with daily activities ranging preparing seedling bags for the community plant nursery to walking the forest tracks to remote farm plots in a joint community survey. For centuries, these forest families have practiced 'Tavy' or slash and burn agriculture. The land use is determined by a complicated kinship system with the land lying fallow for a period of regeneration before being used again. This oral traditional knowledge is kept in the communal memory bank and discussed and agreed with the seasons. Yarn's in situ commonly relate to land, and land use, ownership and crops however, while actively moving through the forest yarns are by far the most informative; as each section of forest, and at times a single tree, can open a new story in the biocultural links to the forest management system. The members of the community explain the past and link it to current environmental problems which point to land change and impacts of deforestation from excessive Tavy. This biocultural evidence gathering through stories contributed to the native Suraka Moth Silk Programme with the response being the introduction of native tree species to the periphery of the forest to support biodiversity and sustainable economic activity for the communities.

Conclusion

I began by reminding us, that much of the story of mankind is held by oral-based communities, captured in a variety of forms beyond the written text. Unfortunately, there remains a divide between literate 'westernised' societies, who have become less conscious of the cognitive processes and the societies whose way of life and traditional knowledge remains embedded in oral forms. I set out how these oral ways of knowing and sharing knowledge go beyond the knowledge of indigenous communities, extending to a much wider population of minorities. These are populations that may not have a written language or they may have minimal engagement with text

as a way of communicating, learning, teaching and passing on their way of life. I emphasise, that there are numerous ways that oral-based communities learn, share and store complex traditions, practices, facts, events or moral threads of their culture. I then turn to researchers such as Nunn and Reid (2016) who continue to reveal the origins of oral-traditions that date back many thousands of years. They do this through scientific methods, that verify and unearth a history of a nation that was previously viewed as mythology. Of course, to the holders of these oral-traditions, these stories had always been true, as they always said they were.

In better understanding the way of life of oral-based communities, I discussed one effective research method, the practice of "Yarning" as a method of knowing, sharing and learning 'on their terms'. Both collaborative and therapeutic Yarning methods were clearly described by Bessarab and Ng'andu, (2010). These Yarning techniques continue to gain popularity with researchers working with oral-based communities particularly those in the area of public health. I propose that Yarning is a less intrusive investigation into minority community lives and is a method to be explored further in a variety of other disciplines. it is most relevant for example, when exploring the past, heritage, culture or human links to land and nature. I further propose that Yarning can be taken several steps further to what I refer to as 'Active Yarning'. Active Yarning being a way of sharing stories and knowledge while actively engaging in the process of craft 'doing' or 'making'; or in a more technical exploration around artisanal traditions or when exploring biocultural links between, culture, nature, land and language. It requires the researcher and participant(s) to actively Yarn while learning to make or do - thus seeing, hearing and feeling data.

We experience the oral style of knowledge sharing as a sensitive, slow-moving, multi-faceted web that takes time to untangle, yet through the engagement with people and their crafts, artisanal activities or biocultural activities, we can more quickly build bonds and mutual understanding through shared physical experiences. We know that memory and knowledge is captured in the hands of artisans which is seen in the passion and intensity expressed in the building processes or in the beauty, taste, sound or functionality of and objects or a learnt movement. In my experience the crafting of these items is often situated within the wider social and historical processes of the communities active learning and better demonstrated than explained.

Finally, the engagement with oral-based communities should not be viewed as theatrical, nor should it be a search to simply find fact from fiction in the stories of others. There is a myriad of ways that human societies are forced to make sense of the world. It is critical that engaging with oral-based communities is an active two-way process, and a philosophical stance in the pursuit of understanding and equality.

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Notes On: The Environmental Impact of Displacement

In past operations I have worked as an Environmental Adviser, tasked with developing strategies and leading projects focused on the impacts of large scale movement and settlement of populations in emergency situations. Reducing the immediate impact is one element of the environmental challenge but equally as important is the focus on recovery and stabilisation of the environment over time. Implementing environmental projects should always be inclusive of the host population and host government even when they themselves have a record of negative impacts. However, the Rohingya regularly highlighted their close links and dependence on the environment. Life in the camps of Cox's Bazar, the informal settlements of Karachi or Carlow in cold wet rural Ireland were a far cry from their traditional way of living. Perhaps understanding the way of life, needs and experience of the Rohingya communities could offer opportunities to actually create a sustainable living environment.

On arrival in Bangladesh I was aware of some of the impacts on the forests of Cox's Bazar as they had become televised globally on the news. Likewise, the informal settlements of Karachi often feature in urban planning discussions and development circles as some of the world's most densely populated and polluted slums of the World.

There are always be two key elements of any environmental strategy that humanitarian environmental specialists consider; the first is the mainstreaming of environmental best practice into each of the humanitarian sectors such as WASH, Shelter, Health, Protection, Livelihoods or food security. This is fundamentally an advisory role supporting each sector in making decisions within their own strategy to monitoring implementation, for example; choosing the appropriate water system and waste management system to selection and harvesting of materials for shelter to medical waste management and disposal. Secondly, there are the dedicated stand-alone

environmental projects which cover energy such projects as lighting, conservation, land management.

Mainstreaming the environment into emergencies has been a key objective for humanitarian sectors over the past decade, yet at the field level it is much easier said than done. Each displacement has new, differing challenges for both refugees, host communities and humanitarian sectors to cope with. The impacts differ significantly between remote rural camp environments, camps bordering host communities and urban displacements and then again based on the unique geographic factors that determine the carrying capacity of any area of land or urban environment. There are critical immediate impacts that if considered and acted upon, bring positive long term outcomes for the displaced, the host communities.

When the government of Bangladesh allocated land for camps it was known that this land was marginal land with known challenges or dedicated to wildlife. The land was sparsely occupied by the host community and therefore it had value to fewer people in the host community. It had challenges with the aquifer and surface water, and was impacted by frequent floods, landslides or tiddle storm surges. Ultimately, it was known to be land where the carry capacity exceeded the new population. Clearly the human impacts and limitations would need to be strategically managed. The Rohingya brought their own cultural environmental management systems, their own 'way of life' as they looked to establish their systems on arrival.

While the Rohingya, in the scramble to re-establish themselves, immediately impacted on the environment based on their sheer volume of numbers, the humanitarian sectors also set about creating enormous change with the development of roads, and temporary building to house the masses of equipment needed to maintain the population of an instant city.

Above left: Before arrival of Rohingya to Bangladesh. Typical of the Cox's Bazar landscape.

Above right: Following arrival of Rohingya to Bazar. This area was levelled by a humanitarian engineering group called SMEP (Site Maintenance and Engineering Project).

Reclaiming the Sea

The initial stages of displacement result in the newly occupied area of Cox's Bazar and a surrounding radius being stretched beyond its environmental carrying capacity. While the refugee camps of Cox's Bazar are dense coastal communities they are surrounded by forested land. In common the Rohingya sites of Karachi Pakistan, are highly dense urban coastal environment and both Karachi locations of Machar Colony and Ibrahim Hyderi sites are hemmed in by the host communities. In all cases their is no space to expand without reclamation of land from the sea. Machar Colony (my first research location of Karachi), covers an area of 4.5 square kilometres with an estimated population of 700 thousand to 1.2 million inhabitants. This makes it four to seven times more densely populated than any other area of Karachi. In both Machar Colony and Ibrahim Hyderi, land is constantly being reclaimed from the Arabian sea. The material used for reclamation is the refuse and building rubble that is trucked in from across greater Karachi thus the Rohingya in my research areas live on a floating pile of garbage. Moreover, all the waste from

the millions of people occupying the coastal areas goes directly to the estuaries and sea. Both areas the Rohingya occupy were formally mangroves. While Hyderi moved beyond the mangrove forests over a decade ago, Machar still has some mangrove forest areas but my observation was that these are being depleted as the community of fisher folk continue to expand and encroach. What has allowed the Rohingya populations of Karachi to survive is their connection to the sea, their fishing, net making and boatbuilding skills, their way of life. What has prevented them from thriving in their new environment is their lack of documentation, their statelessness. The Rohingya and other minorities are

Rohingya family living amongst the refuse, reclamation of land, Karachi 2019

largely ignored, unnoticed or unknown by the Pakistan hosts beyond their direct neighbours. To a large extent Karachi is a migrant city and since the arrival of the first groups of Rohingya the population has grown from approximately 5 million to more than 23 million people in the Karachi metropolitan area. When I discussed the Rohingya with Pakistan were often viewed positively due to their economic role in society however Karachi's local Pakistani populations did not see inward migration as a significant part of their heritage but did regularly discuss their outward migration and links to Great Britain.

My first interaction with UNHCR and displaced communities in Karachi was to support the only UNHCR Officer in Karachi to negotiate the release of fourteen refugees arrested for littering. It turned out that a new law on street littering was brought into effect in Karachi in 2019. The law is enforced through Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), it states that:

Anyone found violating Section 144 in this regard would be prosecuted under Section 188 of the Pakistan Penal Code, which relates to disobeying official orders issued by a public servant. The penalties range from the one month in jail and a fine of Rs200 to a maximum of six months imprisonment and a fine of Rs1,000, depending on the degree of violation.

While the law sounds completely feasible, in reality it poses significant issues for displaced, poor and vulnerable communities such as the Rohingya, many of whom depend on trash sorting and collecting to survive. The refugees arrested on this occasion were not the owners of the trash but as they were seen with the trash sorting through it for plastics and useful items, the arresting officer deemed it theirs. As noted in the literature, new laws result in new crimes and new criminals. For those at the bottom we could see immediately the cycle of poverty, statelessness, criminality and so on. The group we six women and girls, and eight men and boys, they were released following the argument from UNHCR but destined to be apprehended again. On discussion with the group translated by my UNHCR companion, they noted;

> *"We have no education or opportunity other than this. We will go back to the garbage and they (I assumed the police) will come looking for money. If we don't pay them, they will arrest us again.*

From the camps of Cox's Bazar I ventured regularly to surrounding communities with the team to engage with host population. Here we sat in local restaurants and houses and discussed the refugee situation, positives and negatives and explore their understanding of the cultural heritage of the Rohingya.

Bangladesh has experienced waves of Rohingya arrival and returns since the 1970's. Through this process the local conditions, socio-cultural and natural environment across the region have suffered degradation and decline. This negative impact is well documented, easily observed and commonly discussed by the host population throughout the region. From an environmental perspective, the entire area of Cox's bazar has historically supported smaller Bangladeshi population due to the instability of the land (high rainfall in monsoon resulting in flooding and landslides), the threat of cyclones which historically have destroyed infrastructure and taken many lives. Beyond this, the area supports a significant amount of biodiversity that local populations see as a significant part of their cultural heritage. The most commonly noted wildlife species being impacted was the Elephants through the loss of its habitat and its migration corridor. The Elephant migration became a regularly reported and discussed area of many humanitarian meetings in UNHCR.

On arrival I noted two groups impacting the natural environment in different ways. One was the Rohingya, in the scramble to re-establish themselves, their culture and find some normality in their new over-crowded conditions. The other group were the humanitarian sectors working through a joint project called the 'Site Maintenance and Engineering Project' (SMEP).

In discussion with the local population there are many signs of frustration and conflict as Rohingya populations impede on forest and farmland effecting local livelihoods of some host communities in negative ways particularly the rapid removal of trees for sites and fuel for cooking. This displacement and the location of the settlements has also disrupted an historic migration of Asian

The photographs illustrate a contrast between the undeveloped areas of Cox's Bazar and the area of up to 10,000 Acres or 4,000 Hectares of forest reserve. The removal of vegetation has also

increased the flow of sedimentation in local waterways which was also commonly discussed by local residents.

The change from wood to Liquified Petroleum Gas (LPG) has reduced the demand for wood that was previously quantified at around 5 thousand tonnes weekly. However, cooking with wood is part of the Rohingya cultural way of life. Wood as many Rohingya women noted give a taste to the food that is not there with the gas cooker. When discussing the health benefits of transitioning to LPG many liked the convenience of the but noted they would still use wood for some elements of their cooking. Women also noted (Women's group);

> *"My husband loved my cooking, we do not have much but I keep him from leaving us because I am a good wife and a good cook. I still use small amounts of wood to cook even though it is not allowed."*

One other noted (and the group agreed).

> *I have more time now we have the cooker. Before I could spend hours searching for wood so for now it is good that I have more time…. It took me a long time to learn to use the bottle, it is very dangerous and at first I broke the switch many times.*

For the UNHCR Environmental team this LPG project was also a crash course in engaging with cultural heritage. While they knew a transition of this scale was going to be challenging they had not factored in the cultural links to wood as fuel. I conducted many interviews with the environment team, particularly the lead international environmental officer. He noted, it was going to be extremely challenging culturally to transition the Rohingya form wood to LPG; to maintain the funding for LPG over time as the focus of the Rohingya crisis reduces.

For displaced Rohingya in Pakistan there was little to no access to wood for cooking beyond . Wood for cooking was sometimes used but it was bought from a local supplier and for most in my discussion groups cooking with wood was a luxury they remembered from childhood in Myanmar. Gas is an option if they commonly noted but the lack of money restricted its use. As rice is a staple of the Rohingya their challenge was that rice is slow cooking and requires a significant amount of fuel. The women regularly used plastic as fuel. In many households a supply of plastic was collected by the children and stockpiled for cooking. There was a clear lack of knowledge regarding the health issues caused for women and children from cooking with plastic in enclosed spaces.

Pictured here Rohingya boys learning the many crafts of fishing and boat building at the Port Arakanabad, Karachi Pakistan

Rohingya women are gathered at the BMWA for discussion about my research and ensuring consent.

Rohingya community leader in Karachi Arakanabad Mohammad Noor.

My research team yarning with community in a shop in Arakanabad

Rohingya community members working on a rubbish heap in Karachi.

Young Rohingya boy learning the bamboo connections in the camps of Cox's Bazar

At sea with Rohingya fishing crew, Karachi Pakistan

On board with Mohammad Noor, fishing and yarning, Karachi

Cox's Bazar with Rohingya man out in the fields collecting materials for roofing.

Rohingya elder weaving the bamboo connections in the camps of Cox's Bazar

Elder discussing different local foods in the camps of Cox's Bazar

Young Rohingya boy learning the modern masonry construction skills, bridge building in the camps of Cox's Bazar

Young Rohingya men supporting local fashion in the camps of Cox's Bazar

Letter from the Government of Bangladesh on Education

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner
Cox's Bazar
www.rrrc.gov.bd

No: 51.04.2200.005.00.029.21- 5125   Date: 13 December 2021

Sub: Regarding the implementation of the decisions of the meeting held on 08.12.21.

In reference to the above mentioned subject, the undersigned is directed to inform you that a meeting was held on 08.12.21 "Strengthening Collaboration and Coordination" between Camp-In-Charges and Education Sector. You are requested to take necessary action for the implementation of the decision taken at the meeting and following issues:

1. The approved list of items used in the learning center and the number of approved learning centers should be submitted to RRRC office.
2. Teachers and members of Rohingya Community involved in LCs cannot be given incentives more than 10,000/- (Ten thousand) BDT per month up to next decision.
3. LC should be used for learning activities only.
4. A teacher cannot teach in more than one LC and cannot teach other than his/her camp.
5. A student cannot be enrolled in more than one LC.
6. There should not be any post of Senior Burmese Language Instructor.
7. A complete ToR of camp focal should be submitted to RRRC.
8. Proposal for camp focal recruitment should be sent to RRRC office and CiCs should have the authority to select the focal in CiC co-ordination meeting.
9. The minimum age of enrollment should be 5+.
10. An organogram should be prepared and submitted to RRRC.
11. Home-based learning center will be closed.
12. Learning Facility Management Committee should be abolished and a new committee formed in consultation with RRRC office.
13. All private learning center must be shut down.
14. MCP activities should be operated in the existing learning centers, number of learning centers should not be increased.
15. Myanmar's National Anthem must be played daily on each shift at every learning center.
16. All the learners of the learning center need to be introduced to the culture of Myanmar. They should have a clear understanding that they are Myanmar Nationals and they have to preserve their own culture like their national flag, their anthem, their attire and their unique Myanmar lifestyle.
17. Teaching of anything related to Bangladeshi culture must be prohibited in the learning centers including ideas about how to draw the national flag of Bangladesh, how to write and speak in Bangla and most importantly the national culture of Bangladesh.
18. Teachers of Bangladesh should communicate in English only with the learners of the learning centers.
19. Every learning center should introduce the learners to rhymes, storybooks and poems which published in Burmese language.

Thank you for your continuous support.

Md. Shamsud Do 131221
Deputy Secretary
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Sharmila Pillai
Education Sector Coordinator
Cox's Bazar.

Copy for Information:
1. Camp-In-Charge (all), UkhiyaTeknaf, Cox's Bazar.
2. Principal Coordinator, ISCG, Cox's Bazar.
3. Chief of field office, UNICEF, Cox's Bazar.

"Displaced minorities truly live on the margins of society. They are survivors, utilising their cultural heritage stories in the most creative ways imaginable. While they are denied many fundamental rights from education, secure shelter, essential documentation, to practicing traditions, from sports, to dance, music and poetry, they possess a highly developed consciousness, enabling them to adapt to and exploit their situation whenever possible. In displacement, people express themselves in new, artistic, and creative ways without necessarily losing the old. They live on the edge economically, environmentally, and socially, walking a tightrope amongst their foreign hosts and dependent on the poorly equipped international humanitarian systems that do little to support their long-term cultural needs. Displaced people are always searching for what so many of us take for granted, "identity, freedom and home."

PhD Journal entry, March, 2019