



Securitization and Nationalism in the Narrative of Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh

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Abstract

This paper analyzes how the security narrative regarding Rohingya refugees is shaped by the Bangladeshi government through the process of securitization. Initially, the government's response to the influx of Rohingya refugees, following the 2017 ethnic cleansing in Myanmar, was dominated by a humanitarian narrative. However, as the refugee numbers exceeded 1.2 million, this phenomenon led to increasing domestic pressures related to socio-economic burdens, resource competition, and social tension, the narrative shifted towards national security concerns. This paper uses the Copenhagen School's securitization theory and a qualitative case study method with discourse analysis in order to find how the Bangladeshi government, as the securitizing actor, uses specific speech acts such as framing refugees as a 'burden' and 'regional threat' to elevate the issue from a humanitarian crisis to a national security threat. This process is amplified by exclusive nationalism in the media, creating an 'us vs them' dichotomy that isolates refugees. The successful securitization has legitimized restrictive policies, including mobility restrictions and relocation to Bhasan Char Island. This demonstrates that securitization serves as a political tool to reshape policy and public perception in the name of national security

Keyword: Securitization, Rohingya, Refugees, Bangladesh, Nationalism, Media Framing

Abstrak (in Bahasa Indonesia)

Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana narasi keamanan terkait pengungsi Rohingya dibentuk oleh pemerintah Bangladesh melalui proses sekuritisasi. Awalnya, respons pemerintah terhadap kedatangan pengungsi Rohingya, setelah pembersihan etnis di Myanmar pada 2017, didominasi oleh narasi kemanusiaan. Namun, seiring dengan jumlah pengungsi yang melebihi 1,2 juta, fenomena ini menyebabkan tekanan domestik yang meningkat terkait beban sosial-ekonomi, persaingan sumber daya dan ketegangan sosial, narasi tersebut bergeser ke arah kekhawatiran keamanan nasional. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori sekuritisasi Sekolah Kopenhagen dan metode studi kasus kualitatif dengan analisis wacana untuk menemukan bagaimana pemerintah Bangladesh, sebagai aktor sekuritisasi, menggunakan *speech act* spesifik seperti menggambarkan pengungsi sebagai 'beban' dan 'ancaman regional' untuk mengangkat isu dari krisis kemanusiaan menjadi ancaman keamanan nasional. Proses ini diperkuat oleh nasionalisme eksklusif di media, menciptakan dikotomi 'kita versus mereka' yang mengisolasi pengungsi. Sekuritisasi yang berhasil telah melegitimasi kebijakan pembatasan, termasuk pembatasan mobilitas dan relokasi ke Pulau Bhasan Char. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa sekuritisasi berfungsi sebagai alat politik untuk membentuk ulang kebijakan dan persepsi publik atas nama keamanan nasional.





Kata kunci: Sekuritisasi, Rohingya, Pengungsi, Bangladesh, Nasionalisme, *Media Framing*

Introduction

Over the past decade, the refugee issue has become one of the main problems in global governance. Refugees are forced to leave their homes for various reasons, ranging from natural disasters and conflicts to political crises. This is not only a humanitarian challenge, but also a challenge in terms of security and national identity. The increasing number of refugees has caused countries to face a dilemma between the principle of international solidarity and domestic pressure. According to data reported by the UNHCR (2024), there were more than 122.6 million refugees scattered throughout the world in the middle of last year. The Rohingya issue in Bangladesh itself is one of the most complex refugee crises that is still ongoing today.

The Rohingya are a Muslim minority group in Myanmar's Rakhine State. Nowadays, the Rohingya are considered as the largest stateless population in the world. Since Myanmar's independence in 1948, the Myanmar government has not recognized the existence of the Rohingya. For centuries, the Rohingya people have faced structural discrimination in their own homeland (Ullah, 2011; Sohel, 2017). Labeled as illegal immigrants by the Myanmar government, the Rohingya ethnic group are denied their basic rights, including education and health care. These so-called systematic attacks continue to be carried out against the Rohingya ethnic group. In 2012, thousands of people were forced to live in camps that de facto resembled concentration camps with very limited access.

The peak of this persecution occurred in 2017, while Myanmar was under military regime rule, the government launched an 'ethnic cleansing' military operation that completely destroyed their homes. Military forces burned houses, schools, mosques, and killed up to 9,000 Rohingya residents. As a result of the genocidal attacks, more than 700,000 Rohingya residents fled to Bangladesh in search of protection. Meanwhile, many of them recklessly set sail to escape to other countries, such as Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia (Wilken, 2023). As a neighboring country that also has historical ties with the Rohingya ethnic group, Bangladesh welcomed the Rohingya with open arms.

Bangladesh provides various forms of humanitarian aid, ranging from food, clothing, and medicine to the construction of temporary shelters. However, as time goes by, the number of Rohingya refugees arriving continues to increase. To date, there are more than 1.2 million Rohingya refugees living in the Cox's Bazar area. This has led to a change in attitude by the Bangladeshi government. This country, which is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, is beginning to face domestic pressure due to the increasing socio-economic burden, competition for resources, and concerns about rising social tensions. This dynamic has led to a shift in narrative





within Bangladesh's policy discourse. The humanitarian approach that previously dominated now tends to frame the Rohingya refugee issue as a matter of national security. Narratives related to potential criminality, social instability, and economic burdens are becoming increasingly prevalent in the public sphere and government policy.

Therefore, this paper aims to analyze how the security narrative regarding Rohingya refugees is shaped by the Bangladeshi government through the process of securitization. Using securitization theory as the main analytical framework, this paper seeks to examine how these discursive practices contribute to changes in the state's policy approach to handling this crisis. By doing so, this paper contributes to International Relations theory by expanding the application of securitization theory the context of the Global South. It demonstrates how post-colonial states employ non-traditional security threats, such as forced migration, to cement national identity and justify the transition from humanitarian-based to security-led domestic policies.

Literature Review

Securitization Process and Dynamics

Rooted in the thinking of the Copenhagen School, the theory of securitization became a key concept in critical security studies developed in the late 20th century. Thinkers such as Buzan, Waever, and Wilde (1998) challenged the traditional concept of security rooted in the classical realist perspective and centered on the state. The theory of securitization believes that security issues are not limited to military aspects, but also include other equally important aspects, namely political, environmental, social, and economic aspects (Buzan et al., 1998: 7-8). They emphasize that security is not objective, but rather constructive and intersubjective. An issue can become a security problem when a particular actor constructs it through discursive practices.

There are four important elements in the securitization process, namely the securitizing actor, the referent object, the audience, and the speech act. In his book "The Arms Dynamic in World Politics," Buzan (1998) defines actors as "*those who securitize issues by declaring something—a referent object—essentially threatened.*" Thus, it can be understood that securitizing actors are individuals or groups who mobilize resources and use discourse to frame an issue as an existential threat that requires extraordinary efforts. Generally, these actors include governments, institutions, political leaders, pressure groups, or influential individuals (Buzan et al., 1998: 34-43).

In some cases, it is difficult to distinguish between securitizing actors and referent objects. However, we can identify them by considering the context in which they are written. Securitizing actors are actors who express security discourse, while referent objects are entities that are 'claimed' to be threatened and in need of protection from security issues as stated by securitizing actors. For example, "*The United States government declares climate change a national security*





threat." Here, the US government is the securitizing actor and national security is the referent object. Although in certain cases, both roles are played by the same actor, we can still analyze them by focusing on the context and specific discursive actions.

The securitization process is carried out through speech acts, which are acts of conveying discourse that declares an issue to be a serious threat. Speech acts not only declare the existence of a problem, but also performative acts that attempt to elevate the issue to the realm of security, which includes specific procedures and responses. The success rate of securitization depends on whether the audience accepts the security discourse presented (Buzan et al., 1998: 151). The audience itself can include the public, institutions, or the international community.

According to Buzan et al (1998), the success of securitization is also determined by rhetorical strategies and discursive power. The choice of language is important, especially to reinforce the sense of urgency in the discourse, such as framing 'migration' as an 'invasion' to gain public legitimacy. Drawing on this foundation, Karyotis et al (2025) argue that successful securitization is achieved when the security logic becomes so dominant that it reshapes the policy landscape and the relational dynamics between the state and the 'referent subject.' This transition allows the state to move beyond normal political constraints by securing audience acceptance and implementing measures that prioritize the survival of the referent object.

Podgórzajska (2019) describes how the process of securitization works in the context of Eastern Europe, particularly in relation to the refugee issue in Poland. Her findings show that the securitization of refugees is driven by statements from political actors and nationalist parties who often link threats to national security, cultural identity, and social stability to the presence of refugees. Ultimately, this process helps legitimize increasingly restrictive policies and politics towards migration. Thus, securitization is not merely a rhetorical process, but a political tool that can be used to shape policy agendas and direct public opinion. In this case, understanding the process of securitization means understanding how threats are constructed, distributed, and received in the public sphere, as well as their impact on national and international policies.

Nationalism

Although the use of these terms is often associated with each other, the concepts of nation and nationalism are different. Nation refers to a group of people who share characteristics such as language, culture, history, ethnicity, or territory. A nation is a social or political entity that represents a community with a sense of belonging and shared identity. Meanwhile, nationalism is an ideological or political belief that emphasizes the interests, culture, and identity of a nation (Ariely, 2012). Nationalism involves pride in the nation, which can motivate a political movement to mobilize or strengthen national unity, but it also has the potential to give rise to exclusivism and





even conflict. In short, a nation is the community or group itself, while nationalism is an attitude or movement that demonstrates loyalty and pride in that group.

According to the primordialist view, nationalism is not a new social construct or a purely modern phenomenon. On the contrary, Smith (1995) argues that nationalism represents the importance of identity and a sense of belonging that is deeply rooted in the history of society in contrast with the claims of the modernist approach. In the face of globalization, through his book "Nationalism in a Global Era," Smith (2007:30) states, "*self-reflective and self-celebrating communities, nations, and nationalism are still very much alive.*" This confirms that global culture will not be able to replace nationalism. Even though the arrival of waves of immigrants with diverse cultures has reshaped the meaning of national identity, this process has actually encouraged the nation to reflect on and strengthen the meaning and function of their national identity.

Nationalism can be expressed in two main forms (Jones & Smith, 2001; Kunovich, 2009): civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism. Civic nationalism promotes national unification based on a shared identity, meanwhile ethnic nationalism prioritizes ethnicity or hereditary characteristics which tends to create boundaries between 'us' and 'them,' and often leads to discrimination or conflict. Therefore, civic nationalism can also be described as inclusive nationalism, while ethnic nationalism is more exclusive in nature.

In contemporary political practice, the narrative of nationalism is often used as an effective tool to legitimize policies, especially when the country is in a state of instability. Dukalskis and Lee (2020) note that in authoritarian countries, nationalism is often used to promote the authority of leaders and repressive policies, by linking national identity with loyalty and obedience to the state. In times of crisis, nationalism can be used as a symbolic and political defense mechanism. Governments use the narrative of nationalism to strengthen public support, justify protective policies, and restrict the arrival of outside groups such as immigrants (Eriksen, 1991; Jenne, 2021).

By emphasizing the importance of preserving the integrity and identity of the nation from *others*, nationalistic narratives enable the state to justify its policies. The framing creates an "*us versus them*" dichotomy, which can reinforce the public's perception of outside entities as a threat to the country's culture, identity, and even security. This occurs when 'foreign' groups, such as immigrants or refugees, are perceived as a burden on the state or a disruption to the social order. This then increases the likelihood of marginalization of minority or immigrant groups (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008).

In the context of refugee issues, nationalism is closely related to securitization, particularly in the context of constructing state narratives and policies. Nationalism shapes public perceptions of refugees, who are considered a potential threat to national identity or stability. Through the process of securitization, the refugee issue is elevated from a mere humanitarian concern to a national security threat that requires state policies to control, restrict, and even reject refugees. The





narrative is then reinforced by the media and political actors who often highlight aspects of terrorism, crime, or economic burdens associated with the presence of refugees, thereby triggering public sentiment and strengthening public support for protective policies (Gray & Frank, 2019).

Method

This paper uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to analyze the process of securitization of Rohingya refugees by the Bangladeshi government. This approach is considered suitable for gaining an in-depth understanding of how security narratives are constructed in specific socio-political contexts. This study will use secondary data in the form of policy documents, public officials' speeches, government media statements, as well as reports and news articles on the Rohingya refugee issue in Bangladesh since 2017. In addition, academic studies and reports from international institutions such as the UNHCR will also be used as supporting data.

The analytical technique used in this study is discourse analysis, which aims to discover how threat narratives are constructed and conveyed by political actors during the securitization process. The main focus of the analysis is directed at four key elements of securitization theory, namely the securitizing actor, the referent object, the audience, and the speech act. Using this approach, this study seeks to explore the discursive dynamics involved in the construction of security issues and how this impacts refugee policy, particularly in the context of Bangladesh as a non-signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Results and Discussion

Shifting Narratives: From Humanitarianism to Security

Ever since their independence declaration from British colonization in 1948, Myanmar has not recognized the Rohingya ethnic group as citizens, even though they have lived in the Rakhine region (formerly known as Arakan) for decades. This is officially stated in the Union Citizenship Act of 1948, which was later replaced by the 1982 Burma Citizenship Law or Myanmar Citizenship Law, in which the Rohingya are not included in the list of 135 ethnic groups recognized as Myanmar's 'national races', which requires citizens to prove their lineage as having settled in Myanmar before 1823. This law institutionalized the Rohingya as an ethnic group without citizenship, labeling them as 'Bengalis' or 'illegal immigrants' and revoking their citizenship rights (Haque, 2017).

Without citizenship cards, access to basic services such as health care, education, and employment is severely limited. Not only that, the Rohingya often face structural discrimination that clearly violates their human rights, including restrictions on their movement both inside and outside Rakhine State, persecution and violence, and being forced to live in camps resembling





concentration camps. The climax occurred in August 2017, when the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) launched attacks on several Myanmar police and military posts in Rakhine in response to ongoing oppression. In retaliation, Myanmar launched a military operation that was described by a number of international organizations, such as the United Nations and Human Rights Watch, as 'ethnic cleansing' that destroyed almost all Rohingya homes and claimed up to 9,000 lives. This act of genocide forced the Rohingya ethnic group to flee their homes. Around 700,000 Rohingya traveled by land to Bangladesh to seek protection. Meanwhile, some took the dangerous sea journey to other countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand (Wilken, 2023).

Bangladesh as a neighboring country that shares a border with Myanmar, openly welcomed the Rohingya on humanitarian grounds. In addition, the historical ties between the Rohingya ethnic group and Bangladesh were a contributing factor in the Bangladeshi government's decision to provide protection and temporary shelter. Furthermore, there is international pressure on Bangladesh to accept the arrival of refugees as a form of humanitarian solidarity. Bangladesh provides shelter for Rohingya refugees in the Kutupalong refugee camp in Cox's Bazar. Bangladesh, together with international humanitarian organizations, also provides various basic necessities, including access to health facilities and basic education.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said, "*We gave them [the Rohingya refugees] shelter in our country on humanitarian grounds. Our houses were also burnt down in 1971. Our people fled to India when they had nowhere to go. So, we are doing everything in our power to help the Rohingya... The refugees are being provided with food and shelter. We will fulfil our responsibilities as a neighbour*" (Dhaka Tribune, 2017). During her speech at the UN General Assembly, Prime Minister Hasina firmly stated, "*Myanmar must stop "ethnic cleansing" in Rakhine state, and "safe zones" should be created inside that country to protect all civilians, under the supervision of the United Nations*" (United Nations, 2017).

Based on these quotes, it is clear how Bangladesh's statements explicitly express its support for the Rohingya ethnic group and uphold humanitarian values. However, as the number of refugees has increased over time, the narrative centered on humanity has slowly shifted to one of security threats. While approximately 230,000 refugees had resided in the country since the 1990s, the most critical turning point occurred in late 2017. Following the military crackdown in Rakhine State, a massive influx of roughly 740,000 people crossed the border within a short period. By the end of 2025, the total number of registered Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh has reached 1,177,962 individuals living in Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char Island (UNHCR, 2026).

On several occasions, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has stated that Bangladesh feels burdened by the presence of Rohingya refugees living there. The escalating regional crisis, such as competition for resources, jobs, and crime, is often linked to the growing number of Rohingya





refugees. For example, the rapid expansion of camps has led to massive environmental degradation. Research indicates that approximately 5,650 acres of forest cover were cleared in the span of only five months to accommodate shelters—damaging reserve forests and disrupting wildlife corridors (Hassan et al., 2018). Furthermore, internal gang clashes between the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) within the camps have raised security concerns of the public. These conflicts have left refugees caught in the crossfire, with reports indicating that nearly 150 people were killed in the two years leading up to early 2025 due to such organized violence (Gamonet et al., 2025).

During her meeting with the German federal minister, Prime Minister Hasina said, *“Rohingyas are a huge burden for us and they’re creating social problems... So, Myanmar should take back its nationals from Bangladesh immediately”* (BSS Dhaka, 2020). Furthermore, at the 2019 Dhaka Global Dialogue forum, Hasina explained that in the context of regional security, the presence of more than 1.1 million Rohingya ethnic people poses a threat to security not only for Bangladesh, but also for the Southeast Asian region (Press Trust of India, 2019). In an interview with the Bengali service of Voice of America (VoA), she reiterated, *“They (Rohingyas) need to go back to their own country.... Bangladesh is a densely populated country and a prolonged stay of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh is like turning into a burden”* (Dhaka Tribune, 2022).

The repeated use of terms such as ‘burden’ and ‘threat’ highlights a shift in narrative, whereby the Rohingya are no longer portrayed as victims but rather as a burden and even a potential threat to the local community. Bangladesh, which initially welcomed the arrival of waves of Rohingya refugees with confidence, is now beginning to show resistance and hesitation in its response. On various occasions, Bangladeshi officials and the government have begun to voice concerns about the socio-economic impact of the refugees’ presence. This shift in narrative is part of a successful speech act in securitization theory—the public accepts the government’s protective policies toward refugees.

Actors and Strategies of Government Securitization in Bangladesh

The process of securitizing Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh was actively shaped and voiced by state political actors. In this situation, the Bangladeshi government, primarily through statements by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and other high-ranking officials, acted as the main actor (securitizing actor) who framed refugees as a threat to the country’s social, economic, and security stability. Through various national and international forums, these actors often emphasize the negative impact of the refugees’ presence on the local community. Not only does this strategy highlight concerns about the economic burden, it also raises concerns about regional security and national integrity.





In addition to relying on official statements from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the Bangladeshi government also mobilized other officials as securitizing actors. Among them, Chief Secretary Tofazzel Hossain Miah stated that the failure of the repatriation process could lead refugees to “*engage in illegal activities, which will pose a threat to regional security*,” during a meeting with a group of foreign diplomats and representatives who are stationed in Dhaka (Bangladesh Post, 2024). At the closing ceremony of the two-days World Peace Conference, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen also warned, “*As the crisis lingers, the desperation of these forcibly displaced people increases jeopardizing the peace and security of the region*” (UNB Dhaka, 2021)—expanding the refugee issue into a regional threat.

The issue of rising crime rates was also raised by Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Huq during a meeting held at the Secretariat, “*Rohingyas were engaged in drug peddling through using Myanmar SIM cards. They are unruly and becoming threat to the law enforcement agencies. Our existing law is not enough to control them*” (Dhaka Tribune, 2023). Similarly, Obaidul Quader from the Ministry of Transportation in an interview with reporters, emphasized, “*They (Rohingyas) have already become a burden for us. Keeping Rohingya Muslims in Bangladesh has become a threat to our security, our law and order. It is creating a vulnerable situation for cross-border crime*” (Dawn, 2024). These statements reflect the systematic use of rhetorical speech acts to consolidate public support.

The use of dramatic and emotional terms such as ‘burden,’ ‘criminal,’ and ‘regional threat’ is one of the most common patterns used in the Bangladeshi government’s defense strategy. These terms do not appear by chance, but are deliberately used as part of a speech act that aims to create the perception that Rohingya refugees are not just a group in need of protection, but have developed into an entity that could threaten the stability of the country. In this situation, the narrative targets the domestic community as the main audience while pressuring the Myanmar government to repatriate refugees immediately. The success of this narrative can be seen in the increase in public opinion supporting restrictive policies towards refugees.

Recent research indicates that local communities in Cox’s Bazar, which were originally sympathetic, are now expressing growing ‘agitation’ and hostility due to economic constraints including competition for labor wages and the loss of livelihood for local residents (Khan, 2024; Palma, 2025). Reports that local residents feel like a minority in their own region support this occurrence, which has triggered anti-refugee sentiment and support for restrictions on refugee mobility, relocation to Bhasan Char Island, and stringent supervision of media access in refugee camps (Khan, 2024). In addition, the government’s narrative that the presence of refugees poses a genuine threat to public security has been validated by public worries about social disorder, such as the widespread distribution of the drug “Yaba,” identification document fraud, and armed combat between factions inside the camps.





Nationalism and the ‘Us VS Them’ Narrative

The process of securitizing Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh cannot be separated from the influence of nationalism, especially the type of exclusive nationalism that is rampant in public discourse. The government portrays the Rohingya as a burden amid increasing economic and social pressures. Not only that, they are also portrayed as outsiders or foreigners who threaten Bangladesh's national identity. In this situation, nationalism acts as an ideological structure that reinforces the differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’. ‘Us’ here refers to the local Bangladeshi community, while ‘them’ refers to the Rohingya refugees. This pattern is in line with the characteristics of ethnic nationalism, which focuses on the integrity of ethnicity, culture, and history as the basis of national identity and tends to reject groups that are not considered part of the national community (Jones & Smith, 2001; Kunovich, 2009).

National media, especially pro-government media, played an important role in reinforcing this narrative of exclusive nationalism. Articles from the Dhaka Tribune and Bdnews24.com, for example, often portrayed Rohingya refugees as the cause of social disruption, increased crime, and a threat to national stability. The Daily Star notes that media outlets that initially portrayed Rohingya refugees as unfortunate people, persecuted because of their ethnicity and religion, and in dire need of humanitarian aid, changed their narrative within a few months to focus on economic pressures and even portrayed them as a ‘security risk’ (Crisp et al., 2023).

In his study “Good Rohingyas, Bad Rohingyas,” Mushfique Wadud discusses how public narratives began to gradually shift from initial empathy for the victims to selective narratives that distinguished between refugees who ‘behaved well’ and those who ‘caused problems’ (Wadud, 2020). This framing then shaped a social construct that the Rohingya were unwanted and even contrary to national values. This illustrates how the media became part of a network of securitization actors while spreading nationalism that supported the assumption of Bangladesh's ‘us’ and distanced the ‘them’ group as a threat to the social and cultural integrity of the nation.

Policy Implications and Public Sentiment

The narrative of securitization created by the media and the Bangladeshi government has successfully had a real policy impact on Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. These policies include granting refugees limited access to daily life, including the installation of CCTV cameras at several points in refugee camps, restricting access to the formal education system in Bangladesh, and restricting access to the internet and mobile networks. One of the most controversial policies issued was the relocation of Rohingya refugees from the Cox's Bazar area to Bhasan Char Island since 2020. Human Rights Watch dubbed this relocation site an ‘Island Jail in the Middle of the Sea,’ referring to the island's appalling conditions. It is noted that the refugees were relocated without





their full consent, with limited access to basic services, concerns about potential isolation, and the island's vulnerability to severe storms (Human Rights Watch, 2021). This policy reflects the implementation of securitization discourse, in which narratives of security threats are used to justify extraordinary measures such as detention and restrictions on movement.

Studies related to public reaction indicate that negative sentiment toward Rohingya refugees has developed in most Bangladeshi communities. Analysis conducted by Zaman & Rashid (2024) and Kamruzzaman et al (2024) found that the sympathy that initially arose in response to the arrival of the Rohingya has slowly turned into frustration and hostility. This is due to economic and social pressures, as well as perceptions of security threats. Reported from France24, Ayasur Rahman, spokesman of a local civil society group stated, *“They are bringing shame to Bangladesh. They should be sent to Myanmar immediately.”*

This response shifting has also been felt by the Rohingyas. Rohingya refugee Noor Kamal once found a sympathetic welcome in Bangladesh when he fled the soldiers rampaging through his village but years later, the hostility he now faces has left him pondering a dangerous return home, *“There is so much hatred among local people and the press here that I worry it may trigger violence at any time”* (France24, 2022). These quotes highlight how the general public has adopted the framing of threats spread through the media. This greatly strengthens the legitimacy of restrictive policies—the state considers that it has gained the support of its ‘audience’ to launch exclusive policies against Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. Thus, the impact of securitization and nationalism not only shapes public perception, but also becomes the basis for state policies that restrict the basic rights of refugees in the name of national security.

Conclusion

This study discusses how the securitization process carried out by the Bangladeshi government against Rohingya refugees is a form of discourse construction that cannot be separated from political strategies, domestic pressures, and the influence of nationalist ideology. Initially, humanitarian narratives dominated Bangladesh's initial response to the Rohingya crisis. However, as the number of refugees increased and the country faced growing socio-economic pressures, these narratives gradually shifted to narratives of threats to national security.

Using the Copenhagen School's securitization theory, it can be analyzed that the Bangladeshi government, together with other political actors, plays the role of a securitizing actor that actively frames refugees as a referent threat. This narrative of threat is conveyed through strong speech acts using terms such as ‘burden,’ ‘social problem,’ and ‘regional threat,’ which are then reinforced by the national media as a channel for reproducing discourse. Support from the audience—namely the domestic community and the international community—contributes to legitimizing the state's





protective policies towards refugees, including restrictions on mobility and relocation to Bhasan Char Island.

On the other hand, nationalism, especially in its exclusive form, has contributed to reinforcing the boundaries between 'us' (the Bangladeshi people) and 'them' (the Rohingya refugees). The framing used by the government and the media has created an identity dichotomy that amplifies sentiments of rejection towards refugee groups, while also making it easier for the state to implement restrictive policies. Thus, this paper argues that securitization is not only related to objective security, but is also a discursive tool that can be used to shape perceptions, direct policy, and reinforce the ideological dominance of the state.

Despite these finding, this study has several limitations. It focuses primarily on top-down discourse, specifically official government statements and mainstream media framing which may not fully capture the grassroot counter-narratives or the direct lived experiences of the Rohingya refugees themselves. Additionally, as a qualitative discourse analysis, the study identifies patterns of speech acts but does not quantitatively measure the reach or impact of these narratives across different demographics within Bangladeshi society.

For further research, it is recommended that scholars investigate the role of 'digital securitization,' particularly how social media and biometric surveillance technologies are used to reinforce the 'threat' narrative. Furthermore, as the internal conflict in Myanmar evolves with the territorial gains of the Arakan Army, future studies should analyze how these new geopolitical dynamics shift the security discourse compared to the initial 2017 humanitarian framework.

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