
Hijrat and Statelessness: Reimagining Agamben's 'Bare Life' through Islamic Migration Theology in Contemporary Asia

Jamil Akhtar

University of the Punjab, Pakistan

Email: jamil.uei@pu.edu.pk

Keywords:

Bare Life; Islamic Hijrat; Migration Theology; Neoliberal Capitalism; Statelessness; Xenophobia

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the intersection between statelessness, forced migration, and Islamic migration theology (hijrat) through the theoretical lens of Giorgio Agamben's concept of bare life. The background of this research is rooted in the increasing global prevalence of forced displacement, particularly in Asia, where refugees such as the Rohingya in Bangladesh and Afghan migrants in Pakistan experience prolonged legal ambiguity and socio-political exclusion. The objective of this study is to analyse how juridico-political exclusion interacts with ethical-religious meaning systems in shaping refugee experiences and survival strategies. The method employed is a qualitative research design with a critical interpretivist approach, relying on systematic literature review and document analysis of peer-reviewed journals, policy reports, and academic databases such as Scopus and Google Scholar. The analysis employs thematic and critical discourse analysis to identify patterns of sovereign exclusion, ethical resilience, and religious interpretation within forced migration contexts. The results show that while Agamben's framework effectively explains structural exclusion and the production of "bare life," it does not fully capture the moral and theological agency present in displaced communities. Islamic concepts such as hijrat, ṣabr, and tawakkul function as ethical frameworks that sustain dignity and social cohesion under conditions of prolonged displacement. In conclusion, forced migration is not only a political condition but also an ethical and spiritual experience. The integration of Agambenian theory with Islamic migration theology provides a more comprehensive understanding of statelessness, highlighting both structural violence and moral resilience in contemporary refugee contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Statelessness and forced displacement have become defining features of political existence in modern Asia (Khan et al., 2023), particularly among Muslim populations targeted by exclusionary citizenship policies, securitisation, and humanitarian confinement (Hughes, 2025). Displaced communities such as the Rohingya in Bangladesh (Bhattacharjee, 2024; Ansari et al., 2024; Ahn, 2025) and Afghan refugees in Pakistan (Ambreen et al., 2025; Durrani et al., 2025) are not only deprived of territorial belonging but are also subjected increasingly to geographic restrictions, temporary protection programmes, and legal ambiguity (Gul et al., 2025). These circumstances reflect what may be described as a generalised erosion of sovereignty in the era of contemporary nationalism and neoliberal state structures (Saimum, 2025), whereby populations have become administratively visible yet politically expendable.

One of the most influential frameworks for comprehending this transformation is Giorgio Agamben's theory of bare life (*zoē*). According to Agamben, in both *Homo Sacer* (1998) and *State of Exception* (2005), modern sovereignty produces lives that are included within the legal order precisely through the exclusion of their political rights (*bios*). This logic finds its paradigmatic space not in the refugee as such, but in the camp — a spatial-juridical structure where law is suspended so that it may be maintained. Within this space, individuals are subjected to violence, authority, and desolation without access to legal recourse (Gul et al., 2025), thereby exemplifying what Agamben identifies as a constitutive paradox of the modern political order. Although Agamben's framework has been extensively utilised in refugee literature, it has also been criticised for its perceived abstraction and its limited engagement with the cultural, ethical, and religious meaning-making of displaced peoples. This study does not claim that Agamben's framework fails to explain non-Western situations; rather, it contributes to an expanding literature that situates Agambenian ideas within Islamic and Asian contexts, demonstrating how religious interpretations of displacement, ethical agency, and communal solidarity coexist with sovereign exclusion (Trinka, 2025).

Within this analytical horizon, the study shifts its focus to Islamic migration theology (*hijrat*) — not as a political alternative to sovereignty (Shahimi et al., 2024), but as a theological-ethical framework within which forced displacement is understood, experienced, and given moral meaning. The emergence of *hijrat* in Islamic tradition is not the product of sovereign command but a response to persecution. The migration of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina was neither a juridical exclusion nor an act of state power, but a communal decision to preserve dignity, faith, and life under oppressive conditions. This distinction is significant: *hijrat* is better understood as a response to authority rather than its instrument.

At the same time, Islamic sources do not romanticise displacement. Qur'ānic verses addressing migration — such as Q. 4:97 — situate *hijrat* within a specific context of moral responsibility, placing an obligation upon those capable of leaving conditions of severe oppression. Classical exegetes explain that this warning targets individuals who were able to migrate yet remained complicit in injustice. This verse cannot, however, be interpreted as a universal requirement in contemporary forced migration contexts, where borders, documentation systems, and securitised mobility severely restrict individual choice. Rather, it reflects the Qur'ān's broader concern with resistance to systematic degradation and the preservation of human dignity (Q. 17:70).

Forced displacement and statelessness have emerged as among the most persistent humanitarian and political crises in the contemporary global order. Across regions marked by conflict, securitisation, and unequal citizenship regimes, millions of individuals are placed in conditions where legal recognition, political agency, and stable belonging are systematically eroded. According to global humanitarian assessments, the number of forcibly displaced persons worldwide has exceeded tens of millions, reflecting not only episodic conflict but also structural inequalities embedded in modern state systems. In this context, displacement is no longer an exceptional condition but a recurring feature of global governance, whereby populations are increasingly managed through administrative containment rather than durable integration.

In the Asian context, these dynamics are particularly visible in protracted refugee situations such as those of the Rohingya in Bangladesh and Afghan refugees in Pakistan. These

populations experience long-term confinement within camps, informal settlements, and precarious urban spaces where legal ambiguity becomes a defining condition of life. As recent scholarship has highlighted, such communities are simultaneously included within humanitarian regimes yet excluded from full political membership, producing a condition of "managed precarity" and extended displacement. This situation illustrates how contemporary migration is shaped not only by cross-border movement but also by enduring immobilisation within spaces of exception.

The theoretical foundation of this study draws on Giorgio Agamben's concept of bare life, which explains how sovereign power produces subjects who are legally visible yet politically disposable. In Agamben's framework, the "camp" becomes the paradigmatic space of modern governance — a space where law is suspended yet fully operative in the regulation of life. This condition produces a paradox in which individuals are reduced to biological existence while remaining subject to political control. The framework has been widely applied to the analysis of refugee governance, detention regimes, and humanitarian infrastructures across global contexts.

Previous studies have significantly extended Agamben's framework by applying it to refugee crises in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Research has shown that refugee camps function not only as spaces of exclusion but also as sites of humanitarian governance where life is managed through aid, surveillance, and institutional control. However, while these studies effectively capture structural exclusion, they often remain limited in their capacity to explain how displaced populations sustain moral agency, social belonging, and ethical meaning under prolonged conditions of exception. This limitation has been consistently noted in critical migration scholarship, which calls for more context-sensitive and culturally grounded approaches.

Within this gap, existing literature has increasingly criticised purely juridico-political frameworks for their failure to account for the religious and ethical dimensions of displacement. Many analyses of forced migration do not adequately address how cultural and spiritual systems shape refugee resilience and identity formation — an omission that is particularly significant in non-Western contexts where religion plays a central role in structuring moral life and collective survival strategies. There is therefore a growing need to integrate ethical-theological perspectives into structural analyses of statelessness.

Islamic migration theology, and particularly the concept of hijrat, offers an important interpretive lens in this regard. Hijrat historically refers to the Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina as a response to persecution, constituting a foundational narrative of moral resistance and communal survival. Contemporary scholarship has reinterpreted hijrat not as a literal migration model but as an ethical framework emphasising dignity, responsibility, and moral endurance under oppression. This theological perspective highlights how displacement is not only a spatial or legal condition but also a morally interpreted experience shaped by faith-based meaning systems.

Despite growing attention to Islamic ethical frameworks, a conceptual gap remains in integrating hijrat with structural theories of sovereignty such as Agamben's bare life. Most studies treat these frameworks separately, focusing either on political exclusion or religious meaning without systematically bridging the two. This separation limits the analytical capacity to understand how displaced Muslim communities simultaneously experience juridical

abandonment and ethical continuity. A more integrated approach is therefore required to capture the dual structure of survival under contemporary regimes of displacement.

The urgency of this research is reinforced by the persistence and expansion of forced migration crises across Asia, where refugee populations continue to grow under increasingly restrictive border regimes and securitised governance systems. In such contexts, displacement is not temporary but protracted, often spanning generations within camps and informal settlements. This condition intensifies the need for analytical frameworks capable of explaining both structural vulnerability and moral resilience, particularly in environments where formal citizenship is unattainable and humanitarian assistance functions as a long-term governance mechanism.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative framework, which connects Agamben's theory of bare life with the Islamic migration theology of hijrat to reinterpret statelessness as both a juridico-political and ethical-religious condition. By positioning hijrat as an interpretive ethical response within spaces of exception, the study moves beyond binary explanations of victimhood and agency. The purpose of this research is to critically examine how displaced communities construct meaning, dignity, and moral continuity within systems of sovereign exclusion, while remaining structurally constrained by them.

In terms of contribution, this study advances theoretical debates in migration studies, political theory, and religious ethics by offering a multidimensional understanding of statelessness in contemporary Asia. It contributes empirically grounded insights from refugee contexts while also expanding conceptual dialogue between Western critical theory and Islamic intellectual traditions. Practically, the findings are expected to provide policy-relevant implications for more ethically informed approaches to refugee governance, emphasising the importance of dignity-centred frameworks in humanitarian practice and supporting more inclusive understandings of belonging, resilience, and human agency under conditions of forced displacement.

METHOD

Research Type and Design

A qualitative comparative case study design is used in this study. Qualitative methodology works well for the aim of understanding how populations in distress, because they are deprived of their nation-state, experience, interpret and react to statelessness in a certain socio-political context. The comparative case study approach allows for systematic comparison of two different refugee/IDN groups, Rohingya in Bangladesh and Afghan refugees in Pakistan, thereby distinguishing patterns and understandings of sovereign exclusion as well as its contextualization within two different sets of Islamic moral landscapes in coping with the experience of displacement.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were gathered using a systematic secondary review of texts and documents from key sectors such as political theory, migration studies, Islamic studies, policy reports from UNHCR and Mixed Migration Centre as well as ethnographic studies of Rohingya and Afghan refugee communities, legal studies focusing on citizenship regime in Myanmar, Bangladesh and Pakistan and classical and contemporary Islam scriptural or theological texts.

There was a three-phase process in analysing the data. Recurring patterns in sovereignty's institutionalisation of exclusion were discerned using thematic analysis. Comparative analysis involved looking at areas of likeness and difference in terms of citizenship status, spatial governance, education, ethics and conflict negotiation. Theoretical integration produced an analysis of the relationship between empirical phenomena and the line of thought of Agamben and Islamic migration theology, as well as the problems they posed and extended. All of which had been done with reflexive attention, so that theoretical categories were not imposed on empirical complexity throughout the analysis. Limitations are the use of secondary data, cases not necessarily generalizable to other contexts, and a theoretical emphasis that may underestimate feminist and postcolonial approaches to the study.

Theoretical Framework: From Bare Life to Sacred Mobility

Theory provides a framework within which the analysis of sovereign power is situated in the context of Islamic migration theology, without obscuring the distinction between their respective logics. Agamben's framework illuminates juridico-political vulnerability, while Islamic migration theology articulates ethical responses to vulnerability within conditions of exclusion.

In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben (1998) theorises bare life (*zoē*) as a life stripped of political qualification through a paradoxical inclusion-exclusion that rescinds the political status (*bios*) of the subject. The sovereign does not simply expel life from the legal order; rather, life is already captured within the very process of suspension (Spengler et al., 2021). The material expression of this logic is the camp itself, which Agamben identifies as the paradigmatic figure of modern political modernity — a space in which the state of exception is instituted as the normal mode of governance. Crucially, bare life is not a claim about passivity or a description of passive lives, but a diagnostic statement about the structure of modern power — specifically, about which lives are rendered killable and perpetually precarious (Owens, 2010). Drawing on Carl Schmitt's proposition that sovereignty is defined by the capacity to decide on the exception, Agamben demonstrates how modern state regimes deploy the outside of the law to govern populations deemed hopeless or problematic (Spengler et al., 2022). Refugees thus become paradigmatic figures not because migration is itself an expression of bare life, but because displacement functions as a mechanism of population control that officially maintains their exclusion (Hossain et al., 2021).

Islamic migration theology (*hijrat*) engages with this framework not as an alternative logic of sovereignty but as a moral grammar for thinking about migration. The Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina exemplifies a situation in which Muslims were compelled to leave in order to preserve dignity and practise worship free from persecution — it was not a juridical banishment. In classical Islamic thought, separation (*hijrat*) is conceptually linked to reunion or return (*waṣl*), whether through physical return, the restoration of justice, or moral renewal. This temporality stands in contrast to the potential "permanence" of the state of exception as theorised by Agamben (Ferdoush, 2025), thereby raising questions about the moral existence of the displaced subject and their inhabitation of spaces of exception (Owens, 2010).

This analysis is further enabled by recent extensions of Agamben's work, such as the concept of "amphibian life," which reveals how refugee movements traverse legal boundaries while remaining within sovereign structures (Everuss, 2023). Islamic moral narratives centred

on ṣabr (patient endurance), tawakkul (trust in God), and social responsibility ensure that moral agency is not entirely extinguished, even as structural vulnerability persists. This study therefore proposes that hijrat illuminates a form of ethical life that exists within — rather than outside — juridico-political abandonment; not to suggest that such ethical life is unaffected by bare life, but to demonstrate that its relationship to it is complex and irreducible.

An Integrated Analytical Framework for Stateless Muslim Refugees in Contemporary Asia

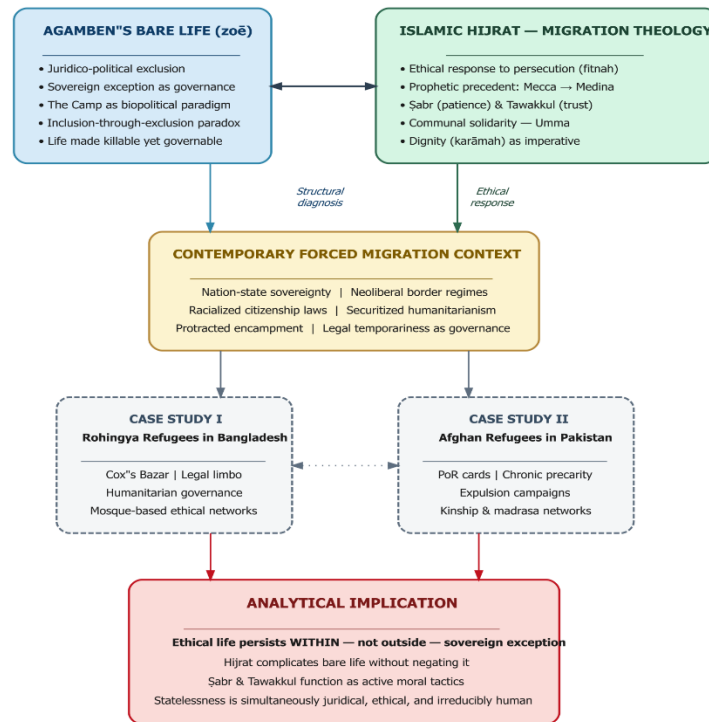


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework — Bare Life, Hijrat, and Forced Displacement

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Comparative Case Analysis

As the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh and the Afghan refugee crisis in Pakistan illustrate, the current dynamics of displacement in Asia are defined by containment rather than mobility. In both cases, the refugee emerges as a juridico-political construction of bare life — one that exists within, and cannot escape, spaces of exception — while ethical, religious, and social resources are mobilised within those same spaces, to whatever extent they are available.

Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh: The Rohingya crisis offers a compelling illustration of displacement produced through an exclusionary form of nationalism (Howlader et al., 2025). Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law systematically excluded the Rohingya on the basis of racialised and religious constructions of citizenship rather than rights (Frensch & Akesson, 2025). Approximately one million Rohingya now reside in Bangladesh following large-scale forced expulsions; they are not accorded formal refugee status but are instead subject to ad hoc humanitarian regimes. The Cox's Bazar camps function as zones of exception, where law is quasi-suspended, mobility is curtailed, and rights are selectively granted (Siddiqi & Khan, 2025). Yet these camps are not without social life. Empirically grounded research reveals that the Rohingya sustain their moral selves through what has been described as an "amphibian" mode of living (Noyori-Corbett et al., 2024). Mosque networks, transnational Islamic charitable organisations, and informal educational structures are central to daily survival

(Nilsen et al., 2023). This moral life, however, is not without its contradictions; non-formal education can simultaneously reinforce stratified futures and structural dependency. The relationship between refugee and host communities further complicates notions of solidarity. While Bangladeshi host communities initially responded to the Rohingya through a framework of Islamic hospitality and generosity, prolonged displacement has given rise to competition over living space, water, and employment (Hasan et al., 2024; Khan & Wara, 2025).

Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: The situation of Afghan refugees presents a parallel form of exclusion, albeit with distinct characteristics. Despite decades of presence, most Afghan refugees remain in a state of legal limbo, reliant on temporary documentation systems that are highly susceptible to arbitrary cancellation (Kazmi, 2024; Noor et al., 2025). Regular deportation campaigns and shifting policy frameworks serve as instruments of sovereign power over life. Two Islamic concepts frequently invoked by Afghan refugees in navigating statelessness are *ṣabr* and *tawakkul*. These dispositions function as "moral tactics" — not as quietist resignation but as active means of preserving dignity within conditions of legal abandonment. The state partially delegates responsibilities for housing, employment, and education to religious institutions, mosques, seminaries, and kinship-based networks, which are nonetheless subject to ongoing surveillance, thereby exposing the clear limitations of moral agency within a sovereign framework (Khan & Ahmed, 2025; Rehman et al., 2023).

Crucially, these cases do not represent an opposition between bare life and Islamic morality. Refugees are structurally integrated into systems of rightlessness through the very absence of legal recognition. Islamic migration theology does not dissolve this condition, but illuminates how displaced communities nonetheless sustain moral worlds within juridico-political abandonment. In these contexts, *hijrat* signifies not a physical movement but a moral condition — one of endurance, negotiation, refusal of complicity in injustice, and the maintenance of moral selfhood in exile.

Table 1. Comparative Case Analysis Statelessness, Sovereign Exclusion, and Ethical Agency in Asia

Dimension	Rohingya in Bangladesh	Afghan Refugees in Pakistan	Agambenian Insight	Islamic Migration Theology
Legal Status	Stateless under Myanmar 1982 law; temporary protection	PoR cards; revocable; many undocumented	Bare life through juridico-political exclusion	Hijrat as moral response to unjust exclusion
Space of Exception	Cox’s Bazar camps; humanitarian governance	Urban settlements; expulsion campaigns	Camp as biopolitical paradigm	Ethical survival within constrained space
Social Networks	Mosque-based education; transnational charities	Mosque/madrassa networks; kinship	Underexplored in Agamben	Umma as solidarity network

Education Access	Non-formal schooling; unrecognized credentials	Informal schools; vocational training	Reproduces exclusion through inclusion	Forward temporality of hijrat
Ethical Practices	Ṣabr; communal solidarity	Tawakkul; patient endurance	Moral agency underexplored	Active moral tactics, not quietism
Conflict Dynamics	Resource disputes with hosts	Competition for housing/employment	Sovereign shapes relations	Limits of ethics under scarcity
Agency Outcome	Cross-border advocacy; partial autonomy	Urban integration; transnational networks	Challenges passive model	Negotiated agency under exclusion

Sources: UNHCR (2024); Uddin (2021); Fayyaz and Siddiqui (2023); Nilsen et al. (2023); Kazmi (2024); Durrani et al. (2025).

This comparative table (Table 1) systematically maps statelessness within Rohingya and Afghan refugee experiences, including along juridical, spatial, social, ethical and agency lines. It illustrates the fact that survival strategies and ethics are different in both groups depending on the context in which they exist: spaces of exception of limited rights. The paper’s integrative argument is supported by bare life analysis in the light of Islamic concepts of migration and the role of law: exclusion coexists with, as well as is partly mitigated by, other ethical and communal resources.

Rethinking Citizenship, Belonging, and Resistance

Lessons drawn from stateless peoples demonstrate that citizenship is not a guarantee but rather a techno-social mechanism of inclusion and exclusion in modern times. The refugee’s condition is one of exclusion enacted within spaces that do not fulfil the obligation of sustaining life — minimal zones of biological existence (*zoē*) from which political life (*bios*) is withheld (Beckett et al., 2022; Ullah, 2025). These conditions are nonetheless accompanied by ethical and communal practices that challenge the absolutism of sovereign power. Myanmar’s 1982 Citizenship Law denies legal recognition to the Rohingya, leaving them without a basis for protection (Bhattacharjee, 2024), while Afghan refugees remain subject to temporary protection regimes that can be withdrawn at any time. Such arrangements establish zones within which sovereign authority operates through complex legal-administrative structures.

Although the contexts of classical hijrat and contemporary forced migration differ significantly — the former being an institutionalised response to persecution, the latter occurring under nationalist and neoliberal state orders — a reinterpretation of Islamic migration theology in new social and political contexts is nonetheless warranted (Shahin & Hasan, 2023). In circumstances where the law ceases to offer recognisable protection, hijrat functions as a moral-ethical paradigm for action. In order to preserve dignity, refugees construct temporary social worlds and relationships through social networks, Islamic principles, and transnational connections (Fazal & Wah, 2023). The Rohingya rely on mosque-based education and cross-border Islamic social services (Kabir & Hasan, 2023), while Afghan refugees draw on informal education, employment networks, and religious guidance (Abbasi et al., 2022). These practices

do not seek to overcome statelessness as a legal condition; rather, they constitute moral regimes of belonging under conditions of sovereign exclusion. Resistance manifests at the level of everyday ethical conduct and survival — navigating the law, pursuing education, and sustaining moral transnational networks (Durrani et al., 2025). These represent a form of ethical sovereignty that grants partial autonomy without challenging the exclusionary structures of law (Gul et al., 2025). The limits of such resistance must nonetheless be acknowledged: educational initiatives are unevenly distributed, resource competition with host communities generates tensions (Myers et al., 2023; Baú, 2025), and Islamic values, while mobilised as moral resources, do not substitute for formal citizenship.

Table 2 illustrates the multidimensional experience of statelessness across seven analytical dimensions, combining juridical, spatial, social, and ethical perspectives to demonstrate that in the construction of refugee lives, sovereign exclusion and Islamic ethical responses coexist as simultaneous and mutually constitutive forces.

Table 2. Citizenship, Belonging, and Resistance Multidimensional Mapping of Stateless Experience in Contemporary Asia

Dimension	Rohingya in Bangladesh	Afghan Refugees in Pakistan	Agambenian Insight	Islamic Migration Theology (Hijrat)	Contemporary Implication
Legal Status & Citizenship	Stateless under Myanmar’s 1982 Law; temporary humanitarian protection without legal rights in Bangladesh	Temporarily documented under Proof of Registration (PoR) cards; chronically revocable; large undocumented population	Bare life produced through racialized juridico-political exclusion; citizenship as sovereign technology of selective inclusion	Hijrat as moral response to unjust legal denial; dignity (karāmah) preserved despite legal erasure	Citizenship regimes require legislative reform; ad hoc executive protection is structurally inadequate
Spaces of Exception	Cox’s Bazar mega-camp complex; fenced movement restrictions; selective law application; humanitarian governance	Urban informal settlements and camps; variable state enforcement; periodic mass expulsion campaigns	Camp as fundamental biopolitical paradigm; normalization of sovereign exception through humanitarian management	Hijrat conceptualizes moral survival within constrained space; ethical community sustained within camp boundaries	Spatial governance of refugees requires rights-based frameworks rather than purely security or humanitarian framing
Social Networks & Solidarity	Mosque-based education; kinship solidarity; transnational	Mosque and madrasa networks; kinship-based economic solidarities;	Bare life undertheorizes social networks as survival infrastructure; assumes	Umma (community) as ethical network; communal solidarity as	Humanitarian organizations should formally partner with — not marginalize — religious

	Islamic charities; cross-border advocacy networks	Islamic voluntary associations	structural isolation	Islamic obligation transcending state borders	community networks
Education Access	Non-formal schooling with uneven quality; unrecognized credentials; gender disparities in access	Informal schools; madrasa education; vocational training; restricted access to formal university pathways	Bare life neglects structured skill-building; humanitarian inclusion reproduces exclusion through credential denial	Education as ethical investment in future dignity; forward temporality of hijrat oriented toward restoration	Formalize and credential non-formal education; expand accredited university pathways for refugees
Ethical & Religious Practices	Ṣabr (patience); communal prayer and ritual observance; adherence to Islamic norms; religious identity preservation	Tawakkul (trust in God); patient endurance; mosque attendance; religious counsel; halal economic practices	Bare life emphasizes vulnerability; moral agency within exception remains analytically underexplored	Hijrat frames ethical survival under oppression; ṣabr and tawakkul as active moral tactics, not quietism	Psychosocial programming must be culturally grounded; engage Islamic ethical frameworks rather than treating them as auxiliary
Conflict & Negotiation	Resource disputes with host communities over land, water, forest, employment; growing host antagonism	Competition with Pakistani host communities for housing, informal employment, market access	Sovereign power shapes inter-community relational dynamics; exception produces scarcity conflicts	Hijrat informs ethical restraint in conflict; reveals limits of ethics under conditions of material scarcity	Joint livelihood programs and conflict-sensitive community dialogue can reduce tensions while recognizing mutual vulnerability
Resistance & Agency	Civil society formation; cross-border advocacy; legal challenges to Myanmar's citizenship law; cultural preservation through	Urban economic integration; transnational kinship networks; legal navigation strategies; community	Challenges purely passive model of bare life; "amphibian life" better captures the actual condition	Distributed ethical sovereignty; moral agency persists within — but does not transcend — sovereign exclusion	Refugee agency must be recognized and supported in protection programming; participatory approaches are essential

informal institutions	institution building
-----------------------	----------------------

Sources: Synthesized from UNHCR (2024); Uddin (2021); Fassin (2012); Fayyaz and Siddiqui (2023); Nilsen et al. (2023); Kazmi (2024); Noor et al. (2025); Hasan et al. (2024); Khan and Wara (2025); Durrani et al. (2025); Gul et al. (2025); Bhattacharjee (2024); Mohammed and Jureidini (2022); Pertek et al. (2025).

This table (Table 2) is a multidimensional mapping of the stateless refugee experience along seven analytical dimensions: legal, space of exception, social networks, education, ethical, conflict dynamic, and resistance, which intersect with both the Agambenian and Islamic migration theology for each dimension. Finally, the table shows that juridical exclusion and moral agency are not always two sequential processes in the production of refugee lives, as can be seen in the systematic comparisons between the two examples of the Rohingya and Afghan refugees. The last column attempts to render each analytical insight into tangible, present-day implications, revealing that doing the right thing about statelessness has to involve action in both the sovereign and moral order of refugee experiences.

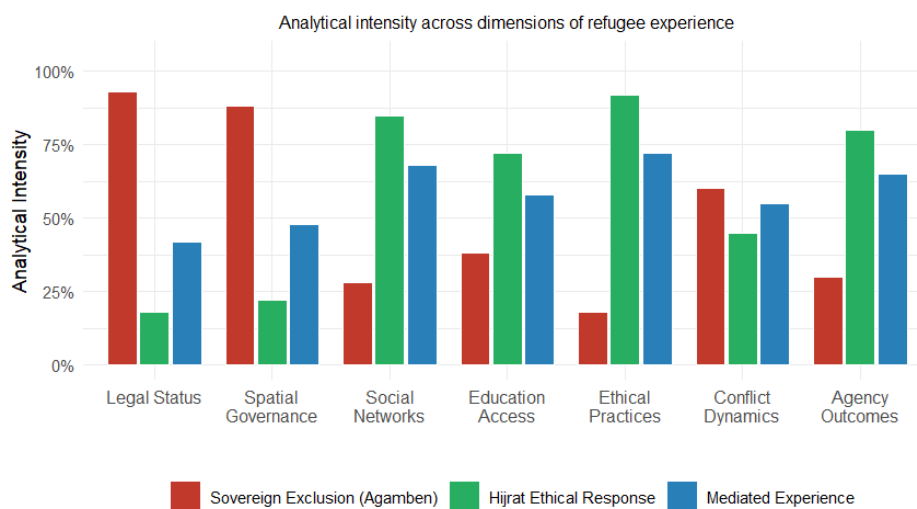


Figure 2. Ethical Mediation Between Sovereign Exclusion and Hijrat

This grouped bar chart (Figure 2) graphs the analytical salience of each dimension of refugee experience, both through a sovereign lens and through an Islamic lens of hijrat ethical response, and in mediated connection between these two lenses. Legal and spatial aspects are more related to sovereign exclusion, and the other aspects (social networks, ethics and agency outcomes) are more related to hijrat ethics. The mediated experience (blue bars) shows that neither framework entirely prevails, thus supporting the thesis of this paper, which is that moral life happens within and is made complicated, but does not dissolve sovereign exception.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that statelessness and forced displacement in contemporary Asia cannot be fully understood through a purely juridico-political lens — as proposed by Giorgio Agamben's concept of bare life — nor solely through structural migration frameworks. The

findings demonstrate that refugee experiences, particularly among the Rohingya in Bangladesh and Afghan refugees in Pakistan, are shaped by a dual condition: structural exclusion produced by sovereign power, and the continuous presence of ethical-religious meaning systems derived from Islamic migration theology (hijrat). While Agamben's framework effectively explains the production of vulnerable populations through states of exception, the empirical and theoretical analysis reveals that displaced communities are not reduced to passive biological existence. Rather, they actively construct moral agency, social solidarity, and dignity through religious practices such as *ṣabr* (patience), *tawakkul* (trust in God), and communal belonging. Hijrat thus functions as an interpretive ethical framework that coexists with, rather than negates, sovereign exclusion, offering a more nuanced understanding of survival under conditions of protracted displacement.

For future research, it is recommended that scholars expand empirical engagement through field-based ethnographic studies to complement the present conceptual and literature-based analysis, with particular attention to the lived experiences of refugees within camps and urban informal settlements. Further studies should also explore comparative religious frameworks beyond Islam to examine whether analogous ethical meaning systems exist among other displaced populations globally, thereby enabling the development of a broader theory of "ethical survival under exception." Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches combining political theory, anthropology, and religious studies should be strengthened to refine the integration between Agambenian sovereignty theory and indigenous moral epistemologies. Future research may also incorporate quantitative or mixed-method approaches to measure how ethical-religious practices influence psychosocial resilience, social integration, and long-term adaptation among displaced populations, thereby enriching both theoretical development and policy relevance in global migration governance.

REFERENCES

- Abbasi, A. N., Tariq, H. and Umair, N. (2022). Economic impact on host communities: A comparative study of Rohingya and Afghan exodus. *Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler ve Eğitim Dergisi – USBED*, 4(6), 229-252. <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/usbed>.
- Ahn K., Suh Y., Han S., Yang J., Taubenböck H, Cha M. (2025). Mapping reduced accessibility to WASH facilities in Rohingya refugee camps with sub-meter imagery. arXiv. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2511.07231>.
- Ambreen, R., Ullah, N., Rehman, T., Ullah, S., & Mengal, S. (2025). Exploring Afghan Women's Perspectives on Identity and Belonging: A Study Across Borders. *Qlantic Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(2), 82-92. <https://doi.org/10.55737/qjss.vi-ii.25346>
- Ansari M. B. (2024). Reconfiguring identity politics and social exclusion: The Rohingya in Bangladesh. Preprints.org. <https://www.preprints.org/manuscript/202410.0493/v1>.
- Azmi A. N. (2022). Islamic Humanitarian Principles and Migration: Reconstruction of Forced Migrant Rights in Islam. *Al-A'raf : Jurnal Pemikiran Islam Dan Filsafat*, 19(1), 101–135. <https://doi.org/10.22515/ajpif.v19i1.5312>.
- Beckett, L. K., Lu, F., and Sabati, S. (2022). Beyond Inclusion: Cultivating a Critical Sense of Belonging through Community-Engaged Research. *Social Sciences*, 11(3), 132. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11030132>.
- Bhattacharjee, M. (2024). Statelessness of an ethnic minority: The case of Rohingya. *Frontiers*

- in *Political Science*, 6, 1144493. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2024.1144493>.
- Durrani, N., Khan, M. Y., & Novelli, M. (2025). The contradictions of refugee inclusion policy in education: Teacher and student agency in Afghan refugee schools during language policy and curriculum transition in Pakistan. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 134, 102834. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2025.102834>
- Everuss, L. (2023). Everyday sovereign exclusion: conceptualising police violence and deaths in custody as a racial production of homo sacer. *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory*, 24(3), 383–404. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1600910X.2023.2220933>.
- Fassin, D. (2012). *Humanitarian reason: A moral history of the present* (Illustrated ed.). University of California Press.
- Fayyaz, S., & Siddiqui, T. (2023). Afghan refugees in Pakistan: Humanitarian and security challenges. *Clinical Social Work and Health Intervention*, 14(2), 25–34. https://doi.org/10.22359/cswhi_14_2_03
- Fazal, M. B., and Wah, L. K. (2023). The Rohingya Diaspora: A Narrative Inquiry into Identity. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 10(2), 203–226. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48728408>.
- Ferdoush, M. A. (2025). On the Example: The Need for a Complementary Contraposition to Giorgio Agamben’s Theorization of the Exception. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 115(6), 1248–1262. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2025.2481136>
- Frensch, K. M., and Akesson, B. (2025). A socio-spatial perspective on fostering a sense of belonging among refugee families resettled in Canadian small cities. *Wellbeing, Space and Society*, 8, 100267. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wss.2025.100267>.
- Gul, S., Allauddin, M. and Ahmad, F. (2025). The Crisis of Statelessness and Refugee Rights in International Law. *Indus Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(2), 660–673. <https://doi.org/10.59075/ijss.v3i2.1500>.
- Hasan, M. K., Hossain, F., and Atar, E. (2024). Implications of refugee crisis on public sector healthcare organizations: Empirical observation from Myanmar’s Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 37(3): 697–715. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feae062>.
- Hossain, A., Baten, R. B. A., Sultana, Z. Z., & et al. (2021). Predisplacement abuse and postdisplacement factors associated with mental health symptoms after forced migration among Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. *JAMA Network Open*, 4(3), e211801. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.1801>
- Howlader, M.R., Nesa, J. and Islam, M. The Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh: challenges and prospects. *Discov glob soc* 3, 103 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44282-025-00213-5>.
- Hughes, S. (2025). Examining the role of transnational solidarity beyond aid: A case study of the Rohingya. *The Grimshaw Review of International Affairs*, 2(1). <https://grimshawreview.lse.ac.uk/articles/29>.
- Jureidini, R., & Hassan, S. F. (Eds.) (2020). *Migration and Islamic Ethics: Issues of Residence, Naturalization and Citizenship*. Brill. <https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/isbn/9789004417342/html>.
- Kabir, M. S., and Hasan, M. (2023). The Rohingya refugee crisis: Political and humanitarian perspectives. *Southeast Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 23(3), 151–158. <https://www.emerald.com/insight/1819-5091.htm>.

- Kazmi, A. B. (2024). Pakistan's Judicial Engagement with International Refugee Law, *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 36(4), 397–418. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/eeaf001>.
- Khan, I., & Ahmed, Z. S. (2025). Borderland struggles: the consequences of the Afghan Taliban's takeover on Pakistan. *The Round Table*, 114(1), 34–51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2025.2466193>
- Khan, M. T., and Wara, U. (2025). A comparative analysis between the Rohingyas and Urdu-speaking population in Bangladesh: Repatriation or Statelessness? *Frontiers in Human Dynamics*, 7, 1603709. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fhumd.2025.1603709>
- Khan, R., Abbas, Z., Shah, S. F., & Khan, M. Z. (2023). International human rights and the plight of Rohingya in Myanmar. *Int. Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, 31(3), 445–463. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718115-bja10131>.
- Khanna, T. (2025). Paternalising Rohingya Refugees to Undermine Their Agency: An Analysis of UNHCR Field Mission in Bangladesh. In: Uddin, N. (eds) *Reshaping Rohingya Futures*. Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-3325-8_8.
- March, A. F. (2019). *The caliphate of man: Popular sovereignty in modern Islamic thought*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Mohammed, H., Jureidini, R. (2022). Umma and the nation-state: dilemmas in refuge ethics. *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 7, 17. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-022-00124-z>.
- Nilsen, M., Olney, J., Maung, K., Karim, L., Ahmad, S., Haque, N., Mubarak, H. R. (2023). Community-Led Education among Rohingya Refugees and the Politics of Refugee Education in Bangladesh, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 36(4): 712–735. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fead037>.
- Noor, S., Khan, D. M. B., Rizwan, M. and Shazli. (2025). Afghan Refugees in Pakistan – Navigating a Protracted Crisis. *ACADEMIA International Journal for Social Sciences*, 4(3), 1017-1029. <https://doi.org/10.63056/ACAD.004.03.0430>.
- Noyori-Corbett, C., Sharma, Y., Bhattacharjee, S., Harden, M., Ratcliffe, E. and Cahill A. W. (2024). Social Constructivist and Rights-Based Analysis of Global Governance of Statelessness: The Case of the Rohingya Crisis. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 9:171–184. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-023-00274-z>.
- Owens, P. (2010). Reclaiming 'Bare Life'?: Against Agamben on Refugees. *International Relations*, 23(4), 567-582. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117809350545>.
- Pertek S., Jawad H., Saleem A., and Kidwai S. (2025). Gender and Forced Displacement in Islam: Advancing a Protection Framework for Women, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdaf017>
- Rehman, A. U., Zakar, R., and Hani, U. (2023). Psychological Well-Being Assessment of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 7(3), 310–321. [https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2023\(7-III\)25](https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2023(7-III)25).
- Saimum, R. (2025). No Place to Call Home: Historical context, statelessness & security challenges of Rohingya refugee crisis. *BIMRAD Journal*, 3, 1-14. <https://bimradbd.org/journal/volume/bimrad-journal-31>.
- Shahimi, F., Block, K., & Alisic, E. (2024). Sense of identity among young people with refugee backgrounds: A scoping review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 157, 107378.

- <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2023.107378>.
- Shahin, K. and Hasan, M. (2023). "The Rohingya refugee crisis: political and humanitarian perspectives". *Southeast Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 23(3), 151–161. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SEAMJ-05-2023-0041>
- Siddiqi, B., & Khan, N. N. (2025). COVID-19 induced challenges in refugee management: Lessons learned from Rohingya camps in Bangladesh. *Frontiers in Human Dynamics*, 7, 1547030. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fhumd.2025.1547030>
- Spengler, B., Garrido, L. E., Mieszkowski, S., & Wewior, J. (2021). Introduction: Migrant Lives in a State of Exception. *Parallax*, 27(2), 115–158. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2021.1995949>.
- Spengler, B., Garrido, L. E., Mieszkowski, S., & Wewior, J. (2022). Migrant Lives in a State of Exception (II): Sovereignty, Mobility and Agency in a Globalised World. *Parallax*, 27(3), 241–249. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2022.2071202>.
- Trinka, E. M. (2025). Migration and Refugee Studies as Interpretive Heuristics for the Hebrew Bible: A Review of Recent Scholarship with Commentary. *Currents in Biblical Research*, 24(1), 6-54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476993X251371077>.
- Uddin, Nasir, *The Rohingya: An Ethnography of 'Subhuman' Life* (Delhi, 2021; online edn, Oxford Academic, 19 Nov. 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199489350.001.0001>, accessed 19 Dec. 2025.
- Ullah, AKM A. (2025). 'Citizenship as a Tool of Inclusion and Exclusion: A Constructivist Perspective', in Alexander C Diener, and Joshua Hagen (eds), *Oxford Intersections: Borders*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/9780198945222.003.0197>.