

Foucauldian analysis of biopolitics and state failure in the Rohingya crisis

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to reconceptualize the Rohingya crisis beyond the conventional paradigm of state failure. It employs Michel Foucault's theory of biopolitics, extended by Giorgio Agamben's state of exception and Achille Mbembe's necropolitics, to argue that the persecution of the Rohingya is not a sign of a weak or failing state. Instead, it posits that the Myanmar government's actions – including legal exclusion, movement restrictions and military violence – represent a deliberate and successful strategy of population management, revealing a form of statecraft that governs through the calculated control, exposure and elimination of a specific population.

Design/methodology/approach – The study is a systematic qualitative review of existing academic literature, legal documents and humanitarian reports. A thematic synthesis approach was used to analyze the material, first by inductively coding for themes like legal exclusion and spatial confinement, and then by deductively interpreting these themes through the integrated theoretical lens of Foucault, Agamben and Mbembe. This method allows for the connection of abstract concepts of biopower and necropolitics to the concrete, empirical realities of the Rohingya crisis, building a coherent analytical narrative that reinterprets state behavior in Rakhine State.

Findings – The analysis finds that the Rohingya crisis is a systematic, three-stage process of state-engineered exclusion. First, the 1982 Citizenship Law acts as a biopolitical tool to render the Rohingya stateless. Second, subsequent regulations on movement, marriage and healthcare create conditions of “bare life” within a de facto state of exception. Finally, the 2017 “clearance operations” mark a necropolitical shift, using mass violence not as a breakdown of order, but as a deliberate strategy to expel the population. This demonstrates that the state is not failing, but actively and effectively executing a calculated plan of demographic and ethnic cleansing.

Research limitations/implications – As a literature-based review, this study relies on secondary sources and does not include primary empirical data from the affected communities. Its focus on state-level strategies, while analytically valuable, means it does not deeply explore the lived experiences and agency of the Rohingya people. Future research should address this gap through ethnographic studies that capture subjective experiences under biopolitical governance. Furthermore, comparative studies with other instances of state-engineered exclusion are needed to identify global patterns and refine theoretical understandings of how modern power operates through the creation of disposable populations.

Practical implications – The findings imply that humanitarian aid alone is an insufficient response to the Rohingya crisis, as it addresses symptoms rather than the underlying political causes. Effective policy and advocacy must shift focus toward dismantling the biopolitical logic embedded in Myanmar's state institutions. This requires challenging the 1982 Citizenship Law, advocating for the restoration of Rohingya citizenship and pursuing legal accountability for crimes against humanity through international courts. International actors must

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move beyond symptom-oriented relief and confront the sovereign political decisions that legally and physically sustain the exclusion of the Rohingya population.

Social implications – The crisis demonstrates how biopolitical governance extends beyond national borders, creating significant social upheaval in host countries like Bangladesh. The mass displacement has generated resource competition and local tensions in communities such as Cox's Bazar, illustrating how state-engineered marginalization in one country can destabilize social fabrics in another. The prolonged statelessness of the Rohingya fosters a generation living in legal limbo, deprived of dignity, security and a future. This creates a protracted social crisis where basic human needs are overshadowed by geopolitical inertia, leaving communities in a state of deep uncertainty and vulnerability.

Originality/value – This paper offers a unique theoretical contribution by systematically integrating Foucault's biopolitics with Agamben's state of exception and Mbembe's necropolitics to analyze the Rohingya crisis as a unified process. It moves beyond simple narratives of ethnic conflict or state failure to reveal a calculated strategy of population governance. By framing the crisis as a form of successful statecraft rather than institutional breakdown, the analysis provides a powerful critical lens for scholars, policymakers and activists. It demonstrates how abstract concepts of power operate in brutal, concrete ways, highlighting the intersection of legislation, bureaucracy and sovereign violence in modern ethnic conflict.

Keywords Biopolitics, Rohingya, State failure, Myanmar, Foucault

Paper type Research article

1. Introduction

The systematic persecution and mass displacement of the Rohingya minority from Myanmar's Rakhine State, culminating in the 2017 military operations that forced over 750,000 people into Bangladesh, constitutes one of the most severe humanitarian and political crises of the 21st century (UNHRC, 2018). While extensive scholarship has examined the Rohingya plight through legal, historical and humanitarian lenses, a significant theoretical gap remains. This paper suggests that the critical theories of Michel Foucault, Achille Mbembe and Giorgio Agamben offer a useful framework for understanding the crisis as a possible state strategy of population control, rather than merely as a straightforward case of governance failure. According to Ali and Medhekar (2022), the Rohingya crisis has impeded BIMSTEC's effectiveness as a regional organization, highlighting the broader regional implications of the conflict (see Figure 1).

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) – comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand – was established to promote regional connectivity, economic integration and security cooperation across South and Southeast Asia. The Rohingya crisis has exposed



Figure 1. Global map showing the location of Rakhine State, Myanmar and Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Source: Reproduced from Islam *et al.* (2021)

structural limitations within this framework, as competing national interests and sovereignty concerns have constrained coordinated regional responses. As a result, the issue highlights the challenges of translating regional institutional commitments into collective humanitarian and political action (Ali and Medhekar, 2022). Situating BIMSTEC within the analysis underscores how biopolitical governance and refugee management operate not only at the level of national policy but also within regional diplomatic structures. The regional and international dimensions of the crisis further demonstrate that governance of the Rohingya issue extends beyond national sovereignty. Studies of international–domestic linkages show how refugee management involves interactions between humanitarian actors, regional diplomacy and domestic political interests, thereby embedding biopolitical practices within broader geopolitical processes rather than limiting them to state-centered frameworks (Chowdhury, 2019). Recognizing these dynamics helps situate the theoretical analysis within a wider field of transnational governance and political negotiation. These layered governance dynamics suggest that the Rohingya crisis cannot be understood solely through humanitarian or legal frameworks but requires a theoretical perspective capable of analyzing how power operates simultaneously across institutional, legal and geopolitical scales.

While many interpretations depict the state's responsibility as declining, this study proposes that the Myanmar state's actions in Rakhine State – including the use of violence, legal neglect and displacement – can be interpreted as a deliberate exercise of authority over certain populations. To illustrate this point, a theoretical framework is used that traces the contemporary state's authority over life and death, starting with Foucault's biopolitics and moving through Agamben's state of exception and Mbembe's necropolitics. From this perspective, the Rohingya crisis can be seen as a manifestation of contemporary power, in which the state's systematic marginalization and failure to protect certain populations operate as interconnected dynamics.

1.1 Historical context and genealogy of the crisis

Understanding the Rohingya crisis requires situating contemporary events within a longer historical trajectory shaped by colonial legacies, nationalist politics and evolving citizenship regimes. During British colonial rule, patterns of migration and administrative categorization contributed to ethnic divisions that later informed postcolonial nation-building projects. The emergence of exclusivist nationalism in Myanmar gradually constructed the Rohingya as an “un-imagined community,” excluded from dominant narratives of national identity (Roy Chowdhury, 2020).

Subsequent political developments reinforced this exclusionary trajectory. Military operations such as Operation Nagamin of the 1978, periodic waves of displacement and the enactment of the 1982 Citizenship Law institutionalized statelessness by denying the Rohingya formal recognition within Myanmar's ethnic classification system (Leider, 2018; Ibrahim, 2018). Episodes of communal violence in 2012 intensified spatial segregation and restrictions on movement (Human Rights Watch, 2013), while the 2016–2017 military campaigns marked a decisive escalation, combining legal exclusion, spatial confinement and large-scale forced displacement (UNHRC, 2018; Amnesty International, 2017). Taken together, these developments illustrate how historical processes, legal frameworks and security practices converged over time, producing the conditions analyzed in this study.

Hence, this paper asks the following question: **How does a biopolitical analysis, extended by Agamben and Mbembe, reconceptualize the Rohingya crisis beyond the paradigm of classic state failure?** In order to address this question, we integrate this theoretical framework with pragmatic results through a methodical qualitative literature study. Therefore, the aim of the study is to:

- (1) Apply Foucault's notions of biopolitics as a central analytical lens.
- (2) Examine the transition from control to violence by incorporating Agamben's “state of exception” and Mbembe's “necropolitics.”

- (3) Explore how Myanmar's policies may reflect deliberate population management strategies rather than unintended governance failures.
- (4) Integrate empirical evidence from existing literature to support this theoretical analysis.

In this regard, the poem "My Refugee Life" by [Hasan \(2022\)](#) brilliantly conveys the terrible experience of being evacuated and the immense feeling of loss that comes with being a refugee. The poem uses rich imagery with striking contrasts to depict the speaker's everyday hardships while confined beneath a "tarpauline shelter," creating a sense of restlessness and imprisonment similar to "ants in a hole." [Appendix I](#) contains the whole poem.

The map displays a network of political negotiations and economic interests that contribute to the continuity of the Rohingya crisis. The immediate burden falls on Bangladesh, while the regional powers deal with Myanmar strategically, disregarding human rights. Because of geopolitical rivalry and non-interference regulations, regional forums such as ASEAN and BIMSTEC have not been effective. Consequently, the crisis lingers as a decaying regional problem with diplomatic, security and humanitarian characteristics, highlighting the disconnection between regional economic cooperation and the capacity to take synchronized political-humanitarian action. [Appendix I](#) has details.

2. Theoretical framework

This analysis adopts a critical genealogical approach to modern power in order to understand the Rohingya crisis, focusing on the transition from population management to legal exclusion and organized violence.

2.1 Foucault: biopolitics and population governance

Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics provides the theoretical foundation for this analysis. [Foucault \(1977, 1978\)](#) conceptualized biopolitics as a form of governance aimed at managing and optimizing populations while simultaneously identifying and regulating perceived internal threats through mechanisms of state racism. It changes the attention of critique from what a state fails to achieve to what it actively does by categorizing, controlling and regulating bodies through methods like legislation, monitoring and restrictions on movement, reproduction and health.

In Foucault's book *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008), he further analyzes how modern states use economic and social logic to govern people. The point of this work is that state power is not limited to coercion or by force; rather, it shapes people's lives, behavior and activities through economic and political structures. Within this framework, individuals become both subjects and objects of governance.

2.2 Agamben and beyond: state of exception and amphibian life

Giorgio [Agamben \(1998\)](#) extends Foucauldian biopolitics through the concepts of *bare life* (homo sacer) and the *state of exception*, suggesting that sovereign authority may operate through the suspension of legal norms, thereby exposing certain populations to forms of control and exclusion without full political recognition. Stateless communities often exemplify this condition, occupying ambiguous legal positions where rights are formally acknowledged yet practically denied. While Agamben's concept of the state of exception offers a valuable analytical lens, critics argue that its universal application risks overlooking historical specificity and institutional variation. In response to these debates, this study employs Agamben's framework cautiously, situating Myanmar's policies within their concrete political and bureaucratic context rather than treating exceptionalism as a universal condition.

Recent scholarship has sought to move beyond the limitations of the “bare life” paradigm. Roy Chowdhury and Abid (2022) propose the concept of “amphibian life” to capture how Rohingya communities navigate shifting boundaries between legality and illegality, mobility and restriction and recognition and exclusion. Unlike interpretations that portray stateless populations solely as passive victims, the notion of amphibian life foregrounds adaptive practices and negotiated forms of agency within constrained environments. Integrating this perspective refines Agamben’s insights by connecting theoretical analysis more closely with empirical realities, particularly in understanding how biopolitical regulation and necropolitical exposure operate simultaneously in the Rohingya context.

While theoretical frameworks such as Agamben’s *bare life* and Mbembe’s *necropolitics* emphasize sovereign power and structural exclusion, recent research highlights the agency of Rohingya communities themselves. Civil society activism among stateless Rohingya populations demonstrates efforts to contest unjust legal frameworks through advocacy networks, grassroots mobilization and transnational engagement (Chowdhury, 2021). Incorporating these perspectives complicates purely top-down interpretations by framing the crisis as a dialectical process in which structures of domination coexist with practices of resistance and negotiation.

2.3 Mbembe: from “letting die” to “making die” – necropolitics

Subsequently, Achille Mbembe (2003) challenges and radicalizes Foucauldian biopolitics through the concept of “necropolitics.” He argues that the ultimate expression of sovereign power lies in the capacity to determine who may live and who must die, thereby producing “death-worlds” in which populations are subjected to conditions of social and physical death. This perspective marks a critical transformation from the biopolitical logic of “letting die” toward an active sovereign capacity to “make die,” emphasizing violence, abandonment and exposure to lethal conditions as instruments of governance.

2.4 Synthesis for the Rohingya crisis

Here, the Rohingya problem can be analytically understood through this integrated theoretical framework as a systematic and sequential process:

- (1) **Biopolitics and State Racism (Foucault):** Myanmar’s classification of the Rohingya as “illegal immigrants,” alongside restrictions on mobility, marriage and access to healthcare, reflects biopolitical regulation and disciplinary governance targeting a population constructed as an internal security threat.
- (2) **State of Exception and Bare Life (Agamben):** The 1982 Citizenship Law institutionalizes Rohingya statelessness, positioning them within a legal vacuum that resembles Agamben’s notion of “bare life,” where legal protections are suspended.
- (3) **Necropolitics (Mbembe):** Forced displacement, relocation policies and the military “clearance operations” of 2017 demonstrate necropolitical dynamics by exposing the Rohingya to extreme precarity, violence and conditions of survival shaped by sovereign power.

Thus, the crisis can be interpreted not as administrative failure or anarchy, but as the necropolitical culmination of an extended biopolitical process enabled through a sovereign state of exception that renders the Rohingya structurally disposable.

3. Methodology

This study is grounded in a systematic qualitative review of scholarly literature, official reports, legal documents and selected analytical materials. The inclusion of poetic narrative

is methodologically justified within critical qualitative analysis as a form of interpretive representation. Rather than serving as empirical evidence, the poem functions as a reflective illustration that captures affective dimensions of displacement and complements theoretical interpretation. Sources were selected based on their relevance to biopolitical theory, state governance, population regulation and the Rohingya crisis. The dataset includes peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, human rights documentation and legal analyses. Publications from 1990 to 2025 were considered, with particular emphasis on works published after 2012 to reflect the intensification of the crisis and the expansion of related scholarship.

Rather than conducting a quantitative meta-analysis, this research aims to develop a coherent analytical framework through thematic synthesis of existing evidence (Snyder, 2019). The approach integrates empirical findings with theoretical perspectives drawn from Foucault, Agamben and Mbembe, enabling a structured reinterpretation of the relationship between state power, law and violence in Rakhine State.

3.1 Research questions and design

This review is guided by the following primary research question:

How do Agamben's and Mbembe's extensions of Foucauldian biopolitics provide an alternative framework for understanding state behavior in the Rohingya crisis?

Sub-themes explored include mechanisms of exclusion, the role of law in structuring political belonging and the transition from biopolitical regulation toward necropolitical forms of violence. The study adopts a qualitative interpretive design aimed at synthesizing theoretical and empirical insights rather than measuring causal relationships quantitatively.

3.2 Search strategy and selection criteria

A structured search strategy was conducted across major scholarly databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR and Google Scholar, as well as reports produced by international organizations such as the United Nations, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Search terms included combinations of "Rohingya," "Myanmar," "state failure," "biopolitics," "necropolitics," "citizenship," "statelessness," and "humanitarian crisis."

The temporal scope covered publications from 1990 to 2025, with priority given to works published after 2012 due to the escalation of violence and increased scholarly attention. Inclusion criteria required that sources directly address either the Rohingya crisis, state governance practices, or the application of relevant political theory. Following initial screening and relevance filtering, approximately 80 key sources were selected for detailed analysis.

3.3 Analytical process: thematic synthesis

The analysis follows a thematic synthesis approach (Thomas and Harden, 2008). First, selected texts were coded inductively to identify recurring themes such as legal exclusion, spatial confinement and militarized governance. Second, these themes were interpreted through a Foucauldian analytical lens and subsequently extended using Agamben's and Mbembe's conceptual frameworks. This process allows abstract theoretical concepts to be connected systematically with empirical case evidence, producing an analytical narrative that moves from general theoretical insights to context-specific application in Myanmar.

Rather than claiming methodological neutrality, the analysis acknowledges that theoretical interpretation inevitably shapes the selection and reading of sources; reflexivity is therefore maintained throughout the analytical process.

3.4 Limitations

As a literature-based review, this study relies on existing research rather than primary data collection. Its objective is to reinterpret available evidence through a coherent theoretical framework rather than generate new empirical findings. Although humanitarian consequences are acknowledged, the analysis prioritizes state-level strategies and governance practices rather than individual lived experiences of Rohingya communities. This represents a limitation and identifies an important direction for future research.

4. Analysis: the Rohingya crisis through a Foucauldian lens

4.1 Manufacturing statelessness: the 1982 Citizenship Law as a biopolitical tool

The segregation of the Rohingya is constructed on the law. The 1982 Citizenship Law institutionalizes an ethnocentric origin of national belonging by recognizing only those “national races” regarded indigenous to Myanmar prior to 1823 (Cheesman, 2017). An archetypal biopolitical tactic is exercised to systematically shred the Rohingya of their statehood. The state transforms them from citizens with rights into a controllable population category by denying them legal personhood. This systematic denial has created a demographic and security issue. Furthermore, this legislative action, which has created a subpopulation that can be subject to particular rules without legal recourse, is a prolific exercise of power rather than an omission. It is a clear diagram of how biopolitics classifies life in order to establish its political worth. According to Cogan *et al.* (2025), since 1992, the Rohingya Muslim minority has been seen as a serious threat to both Bangladesh’s and Myanmar’s internal and external security, making them a chief issue in their bilateral relations. This paper observes how these connections have changed since the coup, with specific attention to the Rohingya crisis, China’s external pressures and its unsuccessful diplomatic tactics, which we recognize as refoulement policies cover as repatriation. Additionally, it argues that considering the roles of neighboring governments and non-state actors worsens the Rohingya’s uncertain future.

4.2 Discipline and control: the biopolitics of everyday life in Rakhine

Rohingya in Rakhine State is topic to a multifaceted network of biopolitical restrictions that controls the populace and disciplines individual bodies even before the massive outbursts of violence (Lewa, 2009). Their spatial life is controlled by movement limitations that keep them in townships and villages. State approval is needed for restrictions on marriage and procreation, that directly affect the community’s societal and biological reproduction. Conditions of debilitation are brought about by the renunciation of access to proper treatment and education. These are indicators of a state that is purposefully creating conditions of scarcity for a particular minority as a procedure of governance rather than a futile state incapable of providing provisions.

4.3 Spaces of exception: camps as zones of bare life

Human Rights Watch (2020) referred to the detention camps in Rakhine State as “open-air prisons,” which are typical Agambenian places of exception. The Rohingya survive there in a “bare life”. They are detained indeterminately despite not receiving a formal punishment. A strict regime of control is enforced (by both Myanmar authorities and, ironically, humanitarian NGOs), but the expected legal safeguards of citizenship are suspended. These camps are biopolitical laboratories where people are deprived of their political potential and future, lessened to nothing more than biological existence. This existence’s “temporary” character, which has lasted for decades, is a tool of control in and of itself (Ramadan, 2013).

4.4 From biopolitics to necropolitics: the 2017 “clearance operations”

The military campaigns of 2016–2017, documented by the United Nations as displaying “genocidal intent,” represent the terminal effect of this biopolitical logic, spotting a move

toward necropolitics (UNHRC, 2018). Village burnings, systematic rapes and mass murders are planned operations rather than chaotic breakdowns of law and order. They are undertaken not only to penalize but also to abolish and forcibly dislocate. This is a specimen of Mbembe's necropower in action. The sovereign chooses to turn Rakhine into a "death-world" where the Rohingya have no choice but to flee. The final necropolitical "solution" to the state's biopolitical handling of the Rohingya "problem" is mass killing and forced exile.

While necropolitical violence was primarily enacted at the level of sovereign state power, its consequences extended into regional political structures. Regional institutions such as BIMSTEC further illustrate how governance of the Rohingya crisis is embedded within geopolitical negotiation rather than solely national decision-making. Despite its mandate for regional cooperation, BIMSTEC has struggled to develop coordinated responses, reflecting tensions between humanitarian commitments and strategic interests among member states. This limitation reveals how biopolitical practices intersect with regional power dynamics, reinforcing the need to analyze sovereignty alongside multilateral governance structures.

4.5 Foucauldian analysis of biopolitics and state crisis

Michel Foucault's ideas of biopolitics and state racism provide a robust framework to understand the Rohingya crisis, which goes beyond simple racial conflict or refugee relocation. These concepts reveal the deliberate population control measures employed by the Myanmar state, often misinterpreted as "state failure" in regional and bilateral contexts.

4.5.1 Biopolitics: "making live and letting die". Foucault defines biopolitics as the state's authority over life, exercised through regulation, health policies, reproductive control and statistical governance to enhance the vitality of the national population.

4.5.2 In the Rohingya context. Myanmar's military (Tatmadaw) has pursued a policy of "letting die" rather than protecting Rohingya lives. This approach manifests in interconnected mechanisms:

- **Denial of Political Life:** The 1982 Citizenship Law deprives the Rohingya of citizenship, rendering them politically "dead."
- **Denial of Biological Life:** Restrictions on marriage, childbirth, healthcare and food security systematically undermine community reproduction.
- **Spatial Control:** Movement limitations confine the Rohingya to specific villages and camps, creating segregated zones that protect the "national body."

4.5.3 State racism: justification for elimination. Foucault argues that states legitimize selective killing by framing certain populations as biological threats. In Myanmar, the Rohingya are represented as "illegal Bengali immigrants" and a "perceived security threat" (Cogan *et al.*, 2025), rationalizing violent biopolitical practices and ethnic cleansing.

4.5.4 The performance of "state failure" and local impacts. While Myanmar's policies are primarily exercised at the state level, their effects reverberate regionally.

For Bangladesh: The unexpected arrival of a traumatized, stateless population in need of extensive humanitarian aid (food, shelter, health and security) has placed a significant burden on the nation. Beyond state policy, the Rohingya crisis has generated complex socio-political dynamics within host communities. Studies in Cox's Bazar indicate that competition over resources and aid has fueled local tensions and spurred political mobilization (Habib and Chowdhury, 2023). These interactions illustrate that biopolitical governance operates across multiple social scales, linking local disputes with national politics and broader regional geopolitics.

For Regional Governance (BIMSTEC): According to Ali and Medhekar (2022), the organization's inefficiency reflects a Foucauldian dynamic:

- (1) **Sovereignty vs. Biopolitics:** Non-interference reinforces Myanmar's control by framing the Rohingya crisis as an internal matter.
- (2) **Paralyzed by Biopolitical Divides:** Member states are divided between humanitarian pressures and respect for sovereignty, weakening collective action.

A Foucauldian lens thus reveals that the Rohingya crisis is not merely state failure, but a deliberate, multi-layered exercise of biopolitical and necropolitical strategies, extending from Myanmar's domestic policies to host communities in Bangladesh and regional forums like BIMSTEC. The "perceived security threat" is both manufactured internally and felt externally, illustrating the entanglement of domestic oppression and transnational political consequences.

5. Discussion: statecraft, not state failure

The Rohingya crisis challenges conventional understandings of "state failure." Traditional definitions of state failure focus on the inability to control violence, provide public goods, or maintain security (Rotberg, 2002). However, Myanmar's actions in Rakhine reveal a state that is neither incompetent nor passive. Instead, it demonstrates highly calculated statecraft, deliberately eliminating a segment of the population through biopolitical and necropolitical measures.

This approach reflects intentional abandonment rather than governance breakdown. The state's primary objectives – constructing a hierarchical ethnic order, maintaining segregation and employing sovereign violence – have been effectively executed. The Rohingya are never acknowledged as part of the national body politic; instead, they are constructed as a "dangerous anomaly" requiring strict control and marginalization. This underscores that what appears as state failure is, in reality, the deliberate application of power in line with Agamben's and Mbembe's frameworks.

5.1 Biopolitics, necropolitics and socio-economic logic

The crisis also intertwines with economic and demographic objectives:

- (1) **Accumulation by Dispossession:** By denying citizenship and political identity, the Rohingya are rendered "bare life" (homo sacer). Their displacement opens land for large-scale infrastructure and agricultural projects, such as the China–Myanmar Economic Corridor, revealing a strategic use of state violence to facilitate economic agendas.
- (2) **Production of "Surplus" Population:** Myanmar's policies deliberately exclude the Rohingya from education, healthcare and employment, producing a marginalized and unproductive population. Deportation and forced exile serve as mechanisms to remove this "surplus" group from the national economy, reflecting necropolitical governance.
- (3) **Homogeneous National Economy as Biopolitical Project:** The Rohingya are portrayed as a degenerative force threatening the Buddhist-Bamar national identity. Their exclusion is justified as a corrective measure to protect economic and cultural integrity, illustrating how ethno-religious ideology is interwoven with biopolitical objectives.
- (4) **Sovereign Exception as a Tool of Re-engineering:** Contrary to assumptions of legal collapse, Myanmar deliberately suspends law in Rakhine, using the "state of exception" as a tool for demographic and economic engineering. Similar patterns of exclusion have been observed in Rwanda (Mamdani, 2001). International humanitarian responses, focused solely on relief, fail to address these underlying political and legal mechanisms (Fassin, 2007).

5.2 Host society and multi-level politics

The crisis is not confined to Myanmar. For Bangladesh, the sudden arrival of a traumatized, stateless population has created a major humanitarian and political challenge. Competition over food, shelter and basic resources in Cox's Bazar has generated localized tensions and mobilization among host communities (Habib and Chowdhury, 2023). These dynamics illustrate that biopolitical governance operates across multiple scales, linking local disputes to national policy and regional geopolitics.

At the regional level, institutions like BIMSTEC highlight the intersection of biopolitics and international relations. Sovereignty principles often constrain collective action, as states prioritize non-interference over humanitarian intervention. Divergent national strategies – such as India's strategic caution versus Thailand's pragmatic stance – produce paralysis, leaving the Rohingya in a prolonged state of dispossession and vulnerability.

6. Conclusion

The Rohingya crisis can be more accurately understood as the outcome of contemporary biopolitical and necropolitical governance rather than as a conventional case of state failure. The Rohingya are legally rendered as stateless (biopolitical categorization), imperiled to spatial imprisonment and punitive controls (biopolitical regulation) and then the Myanmar state uses necropolitical violence to drive them out of the country through an interconnected sequence of legal exclusion, regulatory control and ultimately necropolitical violence. According to this theoretical perspective, the crisis is the radical application of a state plan with well-defined goals, methods and outcomes:

- (1) **Objective:** To establish a homogeneous national space aligned with a specific political and economic growth vision.
- (2) **Means:** The exercise of state racism, the suspension of legal norms (state of exception), punitive control measures and autonomous violence.
- (3) **Outcome:** From the perspective of the Myanmar state, these measures constitute a "successful" biopolitical cleansing – freeing land and resources while removing a population perceived as obstructive to national unity. Economically, the process represents an intentional appropriation of ethnic-national capital at the cost of human lives.

Theoretical Implications: This research demonstrates how abstract concepts of authority and governance operate in concrete, often brutal, ways. By connecting Foucault's notion of biopolitics with Agamben's "state of exception" and Mbembe's necropolitics, it provides a robust framework for analyzing modern ethnic conflicts. The study highlights how legislation, bureaucracy and sovereign violence intersect to marginalize entire populations while maintaining the appearance of formal governance.

Policy and Advocacy Implications: This model delivers a vital analysis for activists and politicians. Therefore, solutions required to go beyond refugee supervision and philanthropic aid.

Equally, the analysis highlights the role of Rohingya-led activism and transnational civil society networks that challenge exclusionary legal regimes, illustrating that the crisis involves ongoing struggles over political agency rather than unilateral domination (Roy Chowdhury and Abid, 2022).

Deconstructing the biopolitical judgment itself is obligatory for a sustained result by restoring citizenship, eliminating institutional discrimination and ensuring justice for crimes against humanity. It calls for a transformation from moving beyond symptom-oriented humanitarian responses toward confronting the sovereign political decisions that sustain exclusion. The Rohingya are trapped in a prolonged crisis where their basic humanitarian needs for security, dignity and a secured homeland are overshadowed by geopolitical contexts and a lack of political obligation for a long-term solution. These intersecting challenges leave the future of Rohingya communities deeply uncertain within existing geopolitical arrangements.

Future Research: The Rohingya catastrophe exemplifies how contemporary state authority can both sustain and suppress life. Understanding this duality is essential for building politics that protect everyone's right to belong. This review identifies three key research gaps: (1) Ethnographic studies that capture the subjective experiences of Rohingya populations under biopolitical governance; (2) Analyses of transnational and regional biopolitics, including the roles of humanitarian organizations, Bangladesh, ASEAN, BIMSTEC and broader international-domestic linkages in shaping refugee governance and political negotiation (Chowdhury, 2019); and (3) Comparative studies with other instances of biopolitical exclusion to illuminate global patterns of state-engineered marginalization and power.

Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

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