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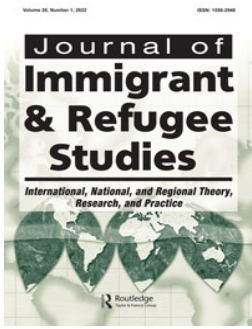**32** PUBLICATIONS   **418** CITATIONS

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Camp-Life and Social Integration: Case of the Displaced *Biharis* in Khulna, Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine how the spatialities of the camp affect a permanent displaced population's acculturation and social integration. Using the case of the largest *Bihari* camps in Khulna, Bangladesh, it found that *Biharis'* many cultural customs and practices have been compromised by internal and external reasons despite their best efforts to retain them. Ill-maintained civic facilities, encroachment of public infrastructures, and the political use of out-of-context religious practices/infrastructures have also affected their social relations. The camp's physical setting has played the double role of an instrument and a stage, while its exceptionalities negatively influenced their overall social integration.

1. Introduction

UNHCR underscores three alternatives for refugee rehabilitation—repatriation, resettlement, and integration (Fielden, 2008). In many cases, repatriation to the country of origin becomes impossible due to different external and internal political forces, while resettlement in any third-world country involves lengthy multilateral negotiation. Hence, the temporary space of the refugee camp, where the displaced receive humanitarian aid and protection from the host country until a viable political solution (Ramadan, 2013), develops into their permanent home (Turner, 2016). Social integration thus turns out to be the most realistic solution for, at least theoretically, it safeguards the refugees' minimal cultural identity/practices while ensuring their participation in the host society. Yet as many refugees integrate and access social services through acculturation, others remain outside for various social, economic, cultural, and political constraints (Dryden-Peterson & Hovil, 2004).

About 0.4 million *Bihari* refugees live in the 116 camps of Bangladesh (Rafe, 2019), lacking socio-political identity and opportunities. These non-*Bangali* Muslim people were initially displaced from India to then East Pakistan (presently Bangladesh) during the 1947 partition of the Indian subcontinent. Communal riots, especially the "Great Calcutta Killings" and "Communal Violence in the Indian State of Bihar," played a crucial role in this (Haider, 2018). *Bihari* leaders' pro-Islamic rhetoric and campaigns further influenced their exodus from a Hindu-majority India to neighboring East Pakistan (Farzana, 2009; Haider, 2018). This *Urdu*-speaking population openly sided with the quasi-military regime of Pakistan in the post-independence political conflict between East Pakistani *Bangalis* and West Pakistani rulers from 1947 to 1971 (Sen, 1999). They later collaborated with the Pakistan Army in their atrocities against the *Bangalis* during

the 1971 Liberation War (Haider, 2018). As the *Bangalis* won the war, the *Biharis* faced vengeance. Thousands were massacred while the remaining were evicted from their properties.

Stripped off from their citizen status, most *Biharis* have lived in these confined camp-spaces ever since, and at least two of their generations have experienced post-liberation war displacement. Despite this, the younger generation, born and raised in Bangladesh, identify these camps as their homes and simultaneously recognize the social stigma of being a *Bihari*. They also realize that their past has produced an enduring antagonistic mentality among the *Bangalis*.

Biharis are no longer "Stranded Pakistanis" as they have been granted the status of Urdu-speaking Bangladeshi under the Citizenship Act 1951 and the Bangladesh Citizenship Order 1972 by the Supreme Court on 18 May 2008 (Haider, 2016). Presently, most of them hold Bangladeshi national identity (NID) cards (Bhattacharjee, 2018), which gives them equal rights/opportunities to integrate with host Bangladeshi society while upholding their own cultural identity. But while the *Biharis* perform their particular cultural activities within camps, research on Bangladesh's largest *Bihari* camp (the Geneva camp, Dhaka) shows that, despite the recognition, many prefer to conceal their *Bihari* identity and camp address as they travel/work outside (Bhattacharjee, 2018). This concealment proves their unmet social integration in the acculturation process.

However, integration involves social participation and cultural identity (Berry, 1997), while the camp shapes dwellers' socio-political lives. The combination of displaced peoples' cultural orientation with external socio-economic-political forces molds the camps' physical environment and dweller behavior. The camp becomes an assemblage of people, institutions, organizations, built environments, and relations that produce particular values and practices. The general law is often denied in the camp as a "space of exception" (Agamben, 2005). Camps have also been spaces where refugees' social formations are reassembled and sustained in exile, while their cultures and traditions are recreated and performed (Ramadan, 2013). The camps' poor economic-physical environment influences these values as their physical configuration is molded by resource limitation, conditional rights (Sigona, 2015), exception and exclusion (Agier, 2014), and supports (Diken, 2004). These highlight political-economic deprivations in camp-life that bring dissatisfaction to displaced dwellers' present lives than their past or an imaginary better life. Consequently, dwellers struggle to consider themselves part of their spatio-physical surroundings.

Against this backdrop, this research asks about the role of various spatialities of the camp in the displaced *Biharis*' social integration and acculturation process. Based on cases from Khulna, Bangladesh, the nature and extent of *Bihari* dwellers' social integration with *Bangali* communities were explored, emphasizing possible reasons and cultural-spatial practices by the *Biharis*. Focus remains on camps' spatio-physical environment and community interfaces shaping these cultural practices and social interactions. The specific objectives aim to,

1. Investigate the nature and extent of *Biharis*' negotiated/compromised/transformed cultural practices while living as refugees within a predominantly *Bangali* setting.
2. Identify *Biharis*' social interaction/exchanges with the neighboring *Bangali* community.

2. Conceptualizing camp life, culture, and social integration

2.1. The camp and its spatialities

The camp, for Agamben (2005), is a political construct. His proposed "political philosophy places the *camp* and the *homo sacer* (a person banned from society and denied of all rights) at the center of the workings of modern politics—"a space and a body included in the political order by being excluded" (Ramadan, 2013, p. 67). He further emphasizes the permanent character of exceptionality by addressing the camp as *nomos* of our time (Turner, 2016). Agamben's

commentaries begin with the Nazi concentration camps and continue to Guantanamo Bay via various asylum reception centers (Sigona, 2015). His "capture of life in law" (Agamben, 2005) indicates camp as the site of immobilization, scarcity, and deprivation of human rights where specific people live a stuck life. In the camp, citizenship and individual rights questions are diminished, superseded, and rejected, while the sovereign claims extension of its power (Sigona, 2015). Camp is a "crucial spatial formation" in the struggles over territories, borders, and identities and develops into an exception as a "state of exception" (Ramadan, 2013).

In its spatio-physical manifestation, the camp is a confined area/space (Sigona, 2015) with myriad unhealthiness (Ramadan, 2013). Displaced people take shelter to save themselves from impending violence and death within its temporary space. In most cases, as camps emerge suddenly, the host communities experience severe difficulty managing even basic living facilities for the newcomers. Although camps begin as temporary shelters, ample global evidence shows how they often become permanent. Often displaced peoples' repatriation becomes impossible for lengthy/delayed formal political agreement with governments/authorities of the country of origin. In such a situation, accepting the human life in the camp as a permanent place of shelter remains the only option, leading to a "permanent temporariness" (Hyndman, 2013).

Three uniquenesses characterize the camp: (i) extraterritoriality—the camp is detached from its surrounding; (ii) exception—the camp falls outside of the host state's legal system; and (iii) exclusion—the camp symbolizes the distinction between the country's original inhabitants and the outsiders (Agier, 2014). These three qualities are also related to the assumed "sense of insecurity" among camp dwellers (Ramadan, 2013). The political setting introduces the camp also as a "space of discipline" (Ramadan, 2013) by imposing "conditional rights" (Sigona, 2015). Therefore, the camp transforms into a spatial ground with typical physical parameters as non-physical forces defining its unlikeness/uniqueness.

2.2. Acculturation and social integration

Acculturation involves the process of "cultural and psychological change" that occurs when different cultural groups long interact with each other (Berry, 2005). This process brings about the transformation of social structure and institutions, cultural practice, and an individual's behavioral repertoire (Berry, 2005). Earlier, Berry's (1997) conceptual framework on immigrants' acculturation to the host society delineated four strategies. These were: (i) *Assimilation*—individuals not wishing to maintain their own cultural identity and to seek daily interaction with other cultures; (ii) *Separation*—individuals holding on to original culture and wishing to avoid interaction with others; (iii) *Marginalization*—little cultural maintenance or relationships with others; and (iv) *Integration*—maintaining own culture while engaging in daily interactions with others. Among these, integration is defined as a two-way process and can only be successfully pursued by the displaced when the host society is open to cultural diversities. Further, *Refugee Convention* uses assimilation alongside "legal integration" as a process of naturalization (Weis, 1995), while UNHCR emphasizes "local integration" (Fielden, 2008), as the most viable of solutions, particularly in protracted refugee situations where repatriation or resettlement became impossible (Fielden, 2008).

In plural societies under both dominant and non-dominant conditions, cultural groups must deal with the issue of *acculturation* and work out two critical problems in their everyday encounter with the host community. These are *cultural maintenance* (to what extent is cultural identity considered necessary, and its maintenance strived for), and *contact and participation* (to what extent should groups involve with other cultural groups or remain separated) (Berry, 1997). Esser (2009) focused on the divided and confused social and cultural ties with the receiving society and society of origin (Adler Zwahlen et al., 2018). He differentiated between four extents of social integration: *culturation*, *interaction*, *placement*, and *identification* (Esser, 2009). Here, *culturation* indicates knowledge acquisition and cultural practices for meaningful and fruitful societal actions, while *placement* refers to positions and rights and their adoption within

particular societal structures. *Interaction* describes the interethnic functioning of social relationships in the private domain, participation in public and political life, and the development of social acceptance, while *identification* refers to the sense of affiliation and emotional connection to the receiving community. Esser's *culturation* and *identification* are like Berry's *cultural maintenance*, while the other two—*placement* and *interaction*, refer to the displaced people's *participation* in the host society.

2.2.1. Cultural maintenance

Understanding spatialities of camp life require the exploration of culture-determined spatial practices around the camp area. Here, culture may be understood as a function of both inherent and evident foundations. Most studies recognize these foundations in behavior, values, norms, and basic assumptions (Groseschl & Doherty, 2000). Here, culture is defined in social norms, education, economic scheme, and religious customs. *Social norms* are cultural elements that characterize individuals' understanding of morals and attitudes (Spencer-Oatey, 2012), human nature and internal relationship with each other (Maznevski et al., 2002), and the basic assumptions on what certain groups should or should not do (Groseschl & Doherty, 2000). *Education* is the process of facilitating learning and the acquisition of knowledge (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). With their very own way of learning, every social group learns about traditional art and artifacts (Spencer-Oatey, 2012) and language (Triandis, 2004) through a spontaneous process conducted by different social institutions like family and neighbors. An economic system is essential for any culture (Triandis, 2004), where the *economic scheme* covers the pattern (Spencer-Oatey, 2012) of income generation of any community. *Religion* provides a collective philosophical foundation for a cultural group, expressed in various customs (Triandis, 2004), as different religions have different physical appearances like costumes, house ornamentation, symbols (Spencer-Oatey, 2012), festivals, and food habits.

2.2.2. Social participation

Participation is a social process where a specific group living in a particular geographic location shares power/control over identifying their everyday needs, making decisions, and establishing mechanisms to meet these needs (Ndekha et al., 2003). *Participation* entails all members' involvement in group activities, as interaction furthers these possibilities. Social interaction allows people to be part of a more significant entity where they learn to "live beyond personal constraints" (McClurg, 2003). "Access to information" determines proper participation too. Lack of adequate information lead to misunderstanding, mistakes, and deviation of directions (Tesha et al., 2016). Despite top-down information sharing remaining an effective way of ensuring successful public performance, a strong correlation binds political will and community *participation* (Tesha et al., 2016). It tells that people's informed enthusiasm is necessary alongside their access to information. Overall *participation* process can be viewed as the combination of influences and shared control over priority setting, policy-making, resource allocations, and access to public goods and services (Tikare et al., 2001), where decision-making power is essential in every layer. Overall, "citizen participation is about how citizens exercise influence and have control over the decisions that affect them" (Devas & Grant, 2003).

In contrast to Agamben's vision of encampment, the case of *Bihari* camp dwellers' in Bangladesh presents a different socio-political integration while they are not "altogether divorced from the polity" (Redclift, 2013). Secondly, their pro-Islamist Pakistan ideology against the secular *Bangali* nationalist movement in Bangladesh creates several unconventional challenges in their acculturation compared with other examples throughout the world (Sabur, 2021). Thus, this case study aims to bring some unique insights to the "camp" and "acculturation" study in any post-displacement context.

Figure 1. (a) Khulna City in Bangladesh; (b) location of study camps within Khalishpur township, Khulna; (c) camp 01, 03, and 07 within their predominantly residential surroundings. Note: The image collage containing Figure 1a (Source: https://nn.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khulna#/media/Fil:Khulna_city.PNG), Figure 1b (Source: https://en.banglapedia.org/images/4/4e/KhulnaCityCorporation.jpg), and Figure 1c (Source: Khulna Metropolitan Area Land Use Map prepared by Khulna Development Authority) is illustrated by author.

3. Context and methods

Three study sites (camps) at Khalishpur, Khulna, were selected to comprehend the camp life of the displaced *Bihari* community. Khulna is the third-largest city in Bangladesh, known for its industrial concentration in pre-partition (Colonial) India and post-partition East Pakistan. Following the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 and due to its proximity to India, Khulna had historically absorbed influxes of *Bihari* and *Bangali* Muslim refugees from Bihar and West Bengal of India (Chowdhury, 2007). Khalishpur was initially developed as a planned township in 1965, where these *Biharis* were housed alongside the white-collar employees of surrounding industries (Chowdhury, 2007). During the Pakistan regime (1947–1971), this area became the country's economic engine, while the *Biharis* started living permanently as ordinary Pakistani citizens. They were employed in the railways and petty businesses across Khulna alongside the industries. During Bangladesh's Liberation War of 1971, *Biharis* naturally sided with the Muslim state of Pakistan and its military junta. Nevertheless, when East Pakistan parted from Pakistan and became independent Bangladesh, they immediately became the enemies of the state while their *Bangali* neighbors confiscated their homes and properties. The *Biharis* were facing near execution as International Red Cross intervened and rehabilitated them in makeshift tents, precisely at the locations of the campsites called camps no. 01, 03, and 07 (Figure 1).

These camps were never conducive for permanent human habitation, as the *Biharis* had constantly feared retaliation from the neighboring *Bangalis*. In addition to shelter, they faced severe food, drinking water, and medication deficiency. With time, INGOs and Khulna City Corporation (KCC) extended their services while Red Cross provided medical, food, clothing, and education support. As these contributed to normalizing dwellers' lives, in 1995, camp 01 was devastated by a massive fire. With the (re)occurrence of similar events, service and infrastructure development

kept improving in all camps. Although no camp area was increased, all camps got their internal roads paved and drainage system installed. Separate public baths and toilets for males and females were provided alongside drinking water sources, electricity lines were connected to every household, and even a small bio-gas plant was constructed at camp 1.

Among the three studied camps, camp 01 is the largest, where almost 400 families live presently. In camps 03 and 07, around 175 and 275 families live, respectively. The average area for these camps is 3.2, 1.33, and 1.63 acres, respectively. Most families have at least 05 members, while many have three generations living in a single house containing one or two rooms. Camp 01 periphery has several shops of varying sizes, which is the opposite of the other two camps. Both camps 03 and 07 are also entirely gated and inward-looking. All camps are governed by *Stranded Pakistani's General Rehabilitation Committee (SPGRC)*. Since this research is interested in understanding the correlation between camps' spatio-physical environment and dwellers' socio-cultural life, it opts for comparable cases with varying areas, populations, and physical interfaces with neighboring *Bangali* communities. Camps 01 and 03 were chosen as study cases for having these varieties.

Since social integration is subjective and depends on interpretation, a constructivist approach has been adopted to discover different camp-living *Biharis'* perspectives on cultural maintenance and social participation. This required an in-depth understanding of this unique socio-spatial-political setting, its associated phenomena, and especially on questions regarding "what people feel" about those phenomena and understanding the "patterns of values, behaviors, and beliefs" (Creswell, 2007). Due to *Bihari* camp dwellers' decades-long co-living, some historical events were also studied and analyzed—mostly conflicts. This case study approach, frequently supplemented by historical and spatial analysis of the camp's spatio-physical environment, helped identify its role in the social integration process between the two communities.

For data collection, 04 FGDs, 10 KIIs, and 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Detailed land-use maps for both camps were prepared for identifying their functional and spatio-physical components. Further, locations of 02 schools, 03 *Imambara*,[1] 06 internal roads, and 10 households and shops were also identified using non-participant observation and activity mapping for exploring the variety of use of the camp spaces.

Purposive sampling was used for determining three types of study subjects. First, both young and the most elderly were selected from among the present camp dwellers, assuming they could best respond to the present and past socio-cultural issues, respectively. Second, the former camp dwellers were also consulted, who gave insights on the reasons and consequences of leaving the camps. Finally, insights from *Biharis' Bangali* neighbors proved helpful in further verifying grounds for non-integration. Gender representation was ensured in all selections. Later, the qualitative and spatial data were simultaneously analyzed and reported under the two pre-selected themes of cultural maintenance and social integration. Relevant scholarly works were cited throughout the entire analysis section for external validation of camp-related data.

4. Findings

4.1. Cultural maintenance

Bihari camp dwellers' most notable cultural attribute is probably their overstated *Islamic* way of life that defines their spatial behavior and practices and determines social interactions. The *Biharis* considers themselves ardent Muslims—both racially and religiously "superior" to the *Bangali* Muslims. Their frequent referral to *Sunnah*,[2] overemphasis on *Purdah*,[3] and excessive use of *Kalima*[4] inscribed in Arabic on large signboards hung above camp entrances manifest this. The moral construction and maintenance of the out-of-context *Imamabaras*[5] also spoke in its favor. This is further reinforced by *Biharis'* mandatory post-*Maghrib*[6] gathering for *Quran*[7] recital and the calling their camp leader by the name of *Khalifa*.[8]

Since childhood, *Bihari* women were taught to be "good" Muslim women. For this, *Purdah* has been the number one prerequisite. However, for many, the strict maintenance of privacy

and distancing through *Purdah* need to be compromised, owing primarily to the camps' acute space scarcity. Respondent 03, an 18-year-old girl, expressed this dilemma while discussing her privacy.

> While living in the same two rooms of this tiny house alongside three adult males (including my father and two adult brothers), it is absurd to be satisfied with, or even discussing my privacy!

Most camp houses have an entrance door in front and a tiny kitchen, and a bath at the rear. This poor indoor environmental quality is owed primarily to blocked sides in the absence of any setback space between houses—prohibiting daylight and ventilation. Most houses had small openings, 10–16 ft^2 at best, on their street-front facade. This, to some extent, demonstrated the *Biharis'* privacy preference over indoor climatic comfort in a predominantly warm-humid setting like Khulna. Yet women were typically found at their doorsteps and queuing at different shared facilities (tube wells, toilets) at various times a day. The internal roads transformed completely into female social domains during the day as the male members went out. Women gathered, gossiped, watched over children, performed household chores like washing and drying clothes, sewing while sitting at the doorsteps, and even cooking with wooden stoves. To sustain in these camps, these women, since their childhood, had to learn to compromise privacy by stepping out of the indoors and compromising *Purdah*. The constrained spatialities certainly acted as a barrier to achieving their desired privacy and fulfilling intended cultural customs.

Besides Islamic ideals, *Urdu* as their mother language was widely used to emphasize a distinct *Bihari* identity within this *Bangali* land. But while the camp dwellers used *Urdu* for their primary verbal communication, it was strange not to find any *Urdu* signboards or wall writings/graffiti in any of the camps. The signboards installed at different camp locations were all in *Bangla* or English instead of *Urdu* except for the one hung over the main entrance. Moreover, the parents of the second and third generations were found more interested in allowing their children to learn *Bangla* for formal education and better coping with the *Bangali* society. Respondent 02 (22 years old female, teacher of OBAT pre-primary in camp 03) told us,

> The (Bihari) school-going children are more likely to speak in Bangla in their own community (now). Because their parents want them to do so.

The young generation seemed conscious of the importance of formal education and the role of education in improving their socio-economic condition. Respondent 12, a tea-staller, barely skilled in reading and writing, spoke of his son,

> He is the only hope for our family now. All we want is his good prosperous life. We have no other option except educating him (here) so that he can manage a dignified occupation for himself.

During the pre-liberation Pakistan period, the *Biharis* enjoyed the honor of knowing *Urdu* since it was the official state language. But after the supreme court ruling in 2008 to bring all *Urdu*-speaking populations under voting and citizenship rights (Rahaman et al., 2020), an immense opportunity opened up for them to access/avail primary education (including secondary and tertiary). It is also supported by the National Education Policy 2010, guaranteeing education for all Bangladeshi children, including those from ethnic/minority communities (UNESCO, 2013). But this meant that the *Bihari* children would require to receive education in *Bangla* since it was the primary medium of instruction available. This education is also entirely free at the primary level, for girls up to higher secondary level, and highly subsidized at the tertiary level. Due to financial constraints, the camp dwellers did not have any other choice than availing of *Bangla*-medium government institutions. Some even showed concerns that learning *Bangla* would also erase their *Bihari* identity. Respondent 13 (now 70 years old lady), who was one of the few *Bihari* people proficient in *Urdu*, said,

> The present generation is not interested in learning to read and write Urdu…But we do not want our children to speak in fuzzy Bangla like we, the older ones, do. If they cannot speak Bangla properly, they will be easily recognized as a Bihari, which we do not certainly desire.

At the religious-cultural level, pro-Islamic *Bihari* dwellers' fondness for *Bangla* over *Urdu*—compromising their *Bihari-Islamic* self, appears initially as a decision made without much choice. However, in a country where millions of Bangladeshi Muslim children choose Madrasa (Islamic school) for all levels of education, *Biharis'* fondness for *Bangla*, even without claiming their rights to *Urdu* education (as an *Urdu*-speaking ethnic minority citizen of Bangladesh), appear somewhat strategic. Similar strategic surrendering of parts of their culture for more significant socio-political gains was reported earlier (Hakim & Ee Man, 2014).

Bihari dwellers' livelihoods in camps 01 and 03 did not reflect any unique cultural practices. This former (pre-displacement) agrarian group was involved in petty activities such as daily laboring, poultry rearing, rickshaw-pulling, vendoring, and running small shops. Unlike the *Geneva camp* in Dhaka, traditional "Muslim food" shops like *Biriyani*, *Kabab*, or *Tehari* were scarcely found. Among the shops, 46% were grocery, 27% tea stalls, 9% electronic servicing, 5% wood boards, 8% small restaurants, and 5% were pharmacies. These, however, are typical of any *Bangali* urban neighborhood.

4.2. Social participation

Bihari dwellers' social participation within the *Bangali* society had been affected by their living in these camps. Three particular reasons can be highlighted here. First, while space scarcity remained an obstacle in siting an essential building like the Mosque (for mandatory five-times congregational prayer a day for any *Muslim*), these camps could still manage to carve out some space from the cramped campsites for erecting at least one *Imambara* on each site. Strangely, this priority of *Muharram*[9] in the lives of the *Sunni*[10] *Biharis* appeared quite significant, which was arguably "in no sense a replica of the *Muharram* of "old Bihar," or indeed of *Sunni* belief in "the *Bihari* homeland" rather "an expression of collective identity against the overbearing *Sunni Bangalis*" (Jalais, 2015). The importance of *Imambara and Muharram* was narrated by Respondent 06 (a 16-year-old boy who work in an electrical workshop as labor):

> Brother, if I do not have Eid (Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha—the two most important Muslim religious festivals, especially the dominant Sunni), no problem. But I must have Muharram. It means a lot.

On the day of *Muharram*, the *Imambara* sites turned festive (Figure 2). Entire camps were also adorned with colorful flags, festoons, and glittery lighting. There are three *Imambaras* in camp 01 and one in camp 03. *Bihari* dwellers gathered here for special prayer, while each family arranged a feast at home. Young people met each other on the roads, played the drums, and danced. They also played *Urdu Ghazal*[11] and *Qawwali*[12] using loudspeakers. Some offered sweetened drinks to the passersby. Such cheerful and extravagant celebration on this day of mourning is not particularly liked by the *Shiite* community that lives a few hundred meters away from the camps. They mourned on this day and performed rituals like joining the *Tazia*—the mourning procession in remembrance of the tragic killing of Imam Hussain, wearing black costumes, flying black flags, reciting elegies, and carrying a symbolic tomb. It resembles "a kind of celebration" (Korom & Chelkowski, 1994), prioritizing even more than Eid, contrasting the *Sunni Bangalis*. *Biharis* living outside the camp often got embarrassed by such custom and ridiculed by their *Bangali* neighbors (Jalais, 2015).

This extravagant celebration of *Muharram* contradicts *Sunni* norms and practices, affecting the neighboring *Bangali Sunni* Muslims' perception of the *Biharis*. During an FGD, these neighbors expressed their disapproval of *Biharis'* inappropriate celebration of this holy event. Respondent 21 (a 54-year-old male) who has lived beside camp 03 for about 20 years opined,

> My sons were fascinated with their (Bihari) celebrations and used to visit the camps during Muharram. But I never endorsed such Haram[13] acts. Good that they understood eventually (and stopped attending Muharram).

Figure 2. (a) Camp 03 and its surroundings; (b) *Imambara* at camp 03; (c, d) camps activities during *Muharram*.

Despite some *Bangali* neighbors' interest in this lively celebration, the more extensive section of *Bangali* Muslims—both *Shiite* and *Sunni,* hence identified *Muharram* celebration and the overemphasis of the *Imambara* as elements of this particular *Bihari* subculture. They considered these as clear misapprehensions of core Islamic values. Therefore, the *Biharis'* religious positioning into this third space or third way—between the two conflicting beliefs has contributed to their negative Muslim image to both sects at the local level.

Additionally, the peculiar absence of the Mosque from both camp areas implies the *Biharis'* deliberate demonstration of cultural exclusivity over adhering to core Islamic values. It is a tradition that they have upheld by using seemingly religious edifices and rituals, which, in reality, carries rather more political implications. They seemed to have achieved a lot from this; neither did they have to give up their traditional cultural customs and practices—underscoring a true *Bihari* identity within a *Bangali*-dominated neighborhood, nor did their political power (of negotiation mainly) waned any bit—if not increased. This careful choice of building and signifying *Imambara* as a religious-cultural edifice symbolizes a persistent ideological conflict between the *Biharis* and the *Bangalis*. It is also why the neighboring *Bangali* community considers the *Biharis* to be the "other," who are neither true Muslims, nor are they *Bangalis,* and who do not belong here. Such *otherness* is also reflected in all social indices, including the *Biharis'* level of education, citizenship, and occupation. Despite holding Bangladeshi citizenship, many still dream of Pakistan—the elusive dream that would never probably be realized.

Both camps had sizeable steel gates installed at their main entrances. But unlike conventional gated communities or refugee camps, none of these camps was confined by boundary walls nor barbed wire fencing. Instead, boundaries were lined with dwellers' street-facing home or shop entries. These street-front strips were also illegally encroached by these dwellers' private use of public infrastructure (Figure 3a). Their encroachment consisted of blocking drains, dumping used furniture, and parking three-wheelers on the opposite side of the street—along the property lines of their *Bangali* neighbors, yielding two fundamental benefits. First, extension into this light-traffic road benefits the space-scarce spatially (hence economically). Second, it

allows direct entrance from the street, turning the public street into their doorstep—helping them impose their physical and socio-political claims over this public good.

Biharis' encroachment and consequent movement along and across streets often disrupt traffic. Their *Bangali* neighbors, naturally, do not like this. They also showed their concerns for environmental degradation in how the camp dwellers filled up the drains along the *Bangalis'* property line with solid waste, causing waterlogging. Further, these acts discomfort even the former *Bihari* tenants. Respondent 05 (a 21-year-old *Bihari* male student), who left camp 1 seven years ago, gasped,

> I can easily invite my friends to my home now, which I could not do when I was in the camp. Now our Bangali neighbors often visit our home also. A few neighboring women also visit my mom. It all seems normal, and I feel good about it. But still, I feel embarrassed when they complain about the drains and roads messed up by the camp people.

The camps have remained important "voter banks" for local politicians (especially KCC Ward Councilors) and at the attention of politicians. Many other informal settlements in Khulna with migrant populations could not do so without voting rights (Sydunnaher et al., 2019). Moreover, *Bihari* dwellers have enjoyed material support from different international organizations since establishing the camps in 1971. This dual attention from politicians and INGOs/donors provisioned camp dwellers with essential services (water, sanitation, drainage) and facilities (like school, community center) within camps. Yet, despite their sheer dearth, dwellers have continued to demonstrate a curious tendency to mismanage these precious infrastructures. Public toilets, tube wells, and drainage infrastructure built by KCC and NGOs were all found in a dismal state in all camps. Ill-maintained drains and the community's erratic waste dumping behavior clogged the gutters and waterlogged the RCC roads during the rainy season, which were earlier built with financial assistance from UNDP's UPPR project and BRAC. The failed case of a JADE (Japan Association of Drainage and Environment) funded project from 2014–2015 needs special mention. What, with the support of local and foreign professionals, aimed at transforming a human waste-dumping parcel of land into a vibrant social space (including a school, a community center, two sets of public toilets and baths, two drinking water storages, two public open spaces, and two biogas plants), has, within five years of its completion, turned into a waterlogged and dilapidated environment (Figure 3b). Moreover, the installed water pump has also been converted into an open waste dumping zone.

These circumstances first translate as *Bihari* dwellers' unawareness, ignorance, and incapability in managing public amenities or, at best, lead to the conviction that deliberate degrading would bring further subventions. However, a closer look revealed that this dilapidation also led to their *Bangali* neighbors' perception of camps as unhygienic places and discouraged their entrance to camps. Respondent 20 (a *Bangali* middle-aged man) made this clear during an FGD,

> Look at the camps. Those are nothing but filthy slums. They (camp dwellers) even cannot manage to dump their wastes nowhere but in front of the school (refurbished by JADE).

Further, dilapidation also appeared selective and subjective. For example, the women's public baths in camp 01 (installed by KCC Mayor) were in clean and usable condition, whereas similar ones installed by NGOs were either ill-maintained (camp 01) or entirely abandoned (camp 03). These situations, together, have negatively affected *Biharis'* healthy social reciprocation with NGOs, local politicians, and *Bangali* neighbors.

5. Exceptionality of the camp and *Biharis'* social integration

The *Biharis* seem compelled to adopt *Bangla* as the medium of their formal education, while their new generations are encouraged to speak in proper *Bangla*. Farther to their state recognition as an Urdu-speaking Bangladeshi citizen group, their new affinity to *Bangla* is presently

Figure 3. Adjacent road with *Bangalis'* residences on the left side and camp 01 on the right (a); present condition of the school and public toilet provided by JADE.

visible in the *Bangla* signboards installed all over the camps. Referring back to Berry's (1997) discourse on "cultural maintenance and participation" in measuring the acculturation process of the *Biharis*, this key cultural compromise of the language demonstrates initial signs of *assimilation*. However, in the particular context of the Khulna camps, *Biharis'* efforts to assimilate manifest a strategic "political" message about their conformity/affiliation as regular Bangladeshi citizens. At the same time, it serves as a reminder to the state about safeguarding whatever authentic culture and identity there may be left for this *Urdu*-speaking ethnic minority group.

Despite holding the power of the largest "voter bank" within Ward 12, the *Biharis* never nominated anyone from their community to run for the *Ward Councilor* post. Instead of producing a "bare life" (Agamben, 2005), a very conscious tradeoff between camp dwellers and local political power is sensed here. Getting someone elected will undoubtedly win the *Biharis* a formal political representation. Still, it would also immediately isolate them as a "minority group" from the rest of society. At the same time, their access to various essential services, facilities, and resources, notably different aids for the infrastructural development of the camp areas, could get affected. Electing their candidates would also establish them as political rivals against the entire *Bangali* politicians irrespective of their party affiliation, which they clearly could not afford. Instead, the camp dwellers from Ward 12 chose to remain a critical element for winning elections for all *Bangali* Ward Councilors irrespective of their party affiliation. A threefold benefit thus could be warranted in terms of resource access, general political obedience to (the majority) *Bangalis* (hence avoid potential conflicts), and still retain a distinct group identity. The *Biharis* have maintained this unspoken accord with local politicians ever since they took refuge here, especially after being granted citizenship. Instead of active political involvement, this voluntary and purposeful act helped them enjoy power by being passive, in-between, and invisible. Contrary to Berry's views of participation or Esser (2009)'s placement and interaction, being in the camp gave them enough right and

negotiation power to warrant the bare minimum required for sustenance. They were neither fully separated and marginalized nor adequately integrated with the mainstream societal processes.

On the other hand, the exuberant celebration of a grieving occasion like *Muharram*—almost against the ideological construct of *Bangali Sunni* Muslims, affirms *Biharis'* strict cultural maintenance that dates back to their pre-migration days. *Bangali* Muslims were also quite critical about their religious-cultural use of *Imambara* infrastructure over the mandatory provisioning of mosques. This rather political use of "out of place" religious practices (*Muharram*) and infrastructure (*Imambara*) have significantly affected *Biharis'* social interactions and relations with the *Bangalis*. Berry's discussions highlight that a subtle but intense "ethnocultural identity conflict" (Ward, 2008) still prevails between *Bangali* and *Bihari* Muslims.

Again, *Biharis'* practice of language and religion exhibits simultaneous intent of both assimilation and separation. According to Berry's acculturation framework, defining their displacement status does not seem straightforward; none of his four categories—voluntary immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and sojourners (Schwartz et al., 2010) comprehensively characterize the *Biharis* and their particular socio-political-spatial practices and issues. Instead, their strategic, voluntary, and often artificial self-assertion as a "minority" (Farzana, 2009) while upholding a "superior" religious-cultural maintenance within the heart of their once political antagonists for five decades, and scope of participation do not appear as simple as the rest.

Camp dwellers' encroachment of camp-adjacent public infrastructure substantiates that they, whenever available, exploit public goods in violation of state law to justify their poverty/scarcity. They could not be held liable for maintaining public goods since they do not possess legal and permanent tenure. These acts of encroachment into shared public resources and their overall violation of law also hint at local power dynamics, which these communities are certainly part of. Especially after being allowed voting rights, the *Biharis* started using their "voter bank" power and were often allowed by local politicians to expand their illegal control over surrounding public infrastructure. Yet, they seem not to have done enough to take advantage of the same political power to avail of legally available opportunities (e.g., pursuing local *Ward Councilor* in lease-holding the public pond adjacent to camp 3).

While Agamben (2005) holds the ruling state accountable for camp dwellers' "bare life," the *Biharis* appeared quite privileged to be an active part of a somewhat opportunistic power structure. The silence of the sovereign power alongside "the diverse assemblage of political actors" (Ramadan, 2013) at the local level has indulged these dwellers into "informality and contestation" (Huq & Miraftab, 2020). Instead of being "suspended from political life" (Agamben, 2005), the *Biharis* seemed strategic and politically persuasive in retaining their group identity and securing their bare minimum livelihood. This approach from the *Biharis*, to a certain extent, resembles a "silent encroachment" (Bayat, 2010, p. 56), where their actions have been "quiet, largely atomized, and required prolonged mobilization with episodic collective actions." These struggles should be seen not as something necessarily defensive or resistant but as cumulatively encroaching, meaning that they tend to expand their space by winning new positions to move on. However, contrary to Bayat (2010, p. 90)'s suggestions that these actions involve "open and fleeting struggles without clear leadership, ideology, or structured organization," the *Biharis'* actions demonstrate clear leadership and organization and are often influenced by an overstated and alternative Islamic ideology. They use their Islamic belief as a flexible instrument to shield against potential *Bangali* contestations and antagonism. The *Biharis* used their camps' spaces, constraints, and surroundings to highlight their poverty and scarcity. They have also purposefully created and maintained an unhygienic environment within centers to accentuate these and ensure that they stay within the focus of development organizations (e.g., KCC, NGOs, UNHCR) and their works.

Bihari camps appear as places of exception. Such exception is created not through the denial of civil rights by the sovereign, as Agamben (2005) put it, but rather through this displaced group's silent politics (Bayat, 2010). Instead of *assimilation*, a peculiar mode of *local integration* seems to have been the more viable approach here. These camps are neither *extraterritorial* since

they are located right at the heart of one of the oldest planned townships in Khulna; there is also no *exception* of rules (apart from full citizenship) from the state since they are now legal voters of the country, and neither these camps are *excluded* spatially. These also contrast to Agier (2014) definitions of the above three integration indicators. Overall, the required two-way process could never instigate participation (the prerequisite for integration). As explained above, the *Biharis*' keenness for cultural maintenance and the spatio-physical environment of the camps, especially its confinement (Sigona, 2015), plays a crucial role.

Overall, the exceptionality of the camps affects the *Biharis*' social integration, as exceptionality emanates from their many social, political, and spatio-physical actions. Typically, there is no single strategy. Instead, the *Biharis* deploy a combination of strategies to uphold their culture and identity and secure their resources for survival. They accommodate many compromises, often remain passive/indifferent/withdrawn, make exceptions violate state law, consciously mismanage, and even display acts and events of cultural supremacy. In their hands, a "third way" of Islam also becomes apparent where they work out neither "fundamental" nor "liberal," but a ritual- and culture-based "middle path." Often exaggerated and "out of place," it displays religious uniqueness and supremacy rather than the intended "submission." Their new recognition as Bangladeshi citizens does not make much difference, which is also marred by a lack of initiative from the state in rehabilitating them socially, economically, and spatially/environmentally in addition to their political rehabilitation (Haider, 2018). In all respects, the physical spaces of the camps play the double role of *instrument* and *stage* (Heynen, 1998), and the spatialities surrounding it, with all the exceptionalities, affect the *Biharis*' social integration.

6. Conclusion

This paper assessed the role of *Bihari* dwellers' camp life in their present state of social integration. It highlighted a scenario of persistent struggle by the *Biharis* to maintain their cultural identity, especially after 1971. It also found that many of their cultural customs and practices (language and education, livelihoods and economic activities, sense of privacy) have already been compromised by internal and external reasons. Despite some of these practices appearing exaggerated and out-of-context, their pursuit for upholding a distinct (and often superior) religious-cultural identity has been unrelenting. As in all camps, space scarcity and poor spatio-physical quality certainly limited the scope for maintaining *Purdah*. *Biharis*' decision to learn *Bangla* and choosing of *Bangla* education also send out a strategic message to the state about their conformity/affiliation as Bangladeshi citizens, thus highlighting the need to safeguard the remaining *Bihari* culture and identity being an *Urdu*-speaking ethnic group too. Farther, ill-maintained NGO-assisted civic facilities, and services; encroachment of public infrastructure for private use and compromised creation of a "public realm" at the settlement-neighborhood interface; political use of "out of place" religious practices (*Muharram*) and infrastructure (*Imambara*) have affected their social interactions and relations with their neighboring *Bangalis* significantly. In both cases, the physical spaces of the camp, in combination with a "third way" of Islam, played the double role of an instrument and a stage, as its exceptionalities negatively affected the *Biharis*' social integration. In the inevitable situation of permanent-temporariness/ displacement and imminent social integration, like in this case, the state, through required public policies and planning/design measures, also needs to play a crucial role in sustaining the unique cultural beauties of minor ethnicities like the *Biharis*.

This study attempted to inform the displacement and camp literatures about a unique case where "exceptionality" took a new dimension. Several pieces of evidence of conscious tradeoffs between the camp dwellers and the host society indicated a new understanding of "camp" contrasting the notion of Agamben's "bare life." Moreover, while measuring "social integration," it found camp dwellers' "in-between state" against Berry's "distinct categorization" of acculturation. In explaining the camps' context, this study could not find any demographic information (e.g., literacy, financial, health status) from the *Bihari* community or any secondary/public sources.

Using a similar spatio-social methodology and analytical frame and larger sample size and data, future studies on similar ethnicity contexts should better comprehend their cultural struggles, integration/mainstreaming approaches, and the role of residential spatialities in it. Such outcomes should be particularly relevant for both present and imminent times.

Notes

1. Shrine commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, the father-figure for *Shiite* Muslims.
2. Customs performed by Prophet Muhammad which are believed virtuous and henceforth followed by the Muslims.
3. A socio-cultural exercise by some Muslim women, considered as a sacred act to safeguard their privacy by wearing different types of veils.
4. The content of official proposal of belief in Islam.
5. A religious place, used for the mourning congregations in the memory of the tragic death of Imam Hussain.
6. Evening prayer.
7. The fundamental holy and spiritual manuscript of Islam believed as the revelation of God by the Muslim.
8. The leader/inheritor of *Caliphate*, an Islamic administration.
9. A mourning event in remembrance of the brutal homicide of Imam Hussain, celebrated by the *Shiite* Muslims as the most significant religious function.
10. The most dominant Islamic branch who denominate the first four *Chalifs* as the true successors of Prophet Muhammad as opposed to the *Shiite* who do the same to the son-in-law of the Prophet.
11. A form of romantic poem or verse, originated in Arabic poetry.
12. A Sufi Islamic devotional music form originated and popular into the Indian subcontinent.
13. Forbidden acts according to the law of Islam.

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