

**Existential Posthumanism and the Rohingya Community: A Reading of Roshidullah
Kyaw Naing's Poetry Collection, *The Painful Life of Rohingya: The Voices of Rohingya
Genocide Survivor to the World* (2022)**

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The Rohingya community constitutes a Muslim ethnic minority with deep historical roots in Myanmar's Rakhine (Arakan) State and has endured prolonged and systematic persecution from the colonial period onward. Nurul Islam writes, "they are one of the world's most persecuted people" (14). The Rohingya crisis is one of the gravest humanitarian and existential catastrophes of the 21st century. The Rohingya community is facing ethno-religious discrimination, systematic violence, and juridical exclusion, and in this way, they have become stateless, displaced, and politically invisible in democratic Myanmar. In 1982, the Citizenship Law was enacted in Myanmar, and Rohingyas were formally excluded from the list of 135 recognized national races, thereby stripping them of legal identity and reducing their existence to a condition of extreme precarity. Hannah Arendt in her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* famously argues, "We became aware of the existence of a right to have rights (and that means to live in a framework where one is judged by one's actions and opinions) and a right to belong to some kind of organized community, only when millions of people emerged who had lost and could not regain these rights because of the new global political situation" (Arendt 296-297). Within this context, Rohingya literature, particularly poetry, emerges as a vital site of testimony and resistance of Rohingya refugees. Young Rohingya poet Roshidullah Kyaw Naing, who is leading a stateless life in Bangladesh as a refugee, his poetry collection *The Painful Life of Rohingya: The Voices of Rohingya Genocide Survivor to the World* (2022) articulates the lived experiences of displacement, fear, memory, and fragile

hope within refugee camps in Bangladesh. Therefore, this paper argues that the collection can be productively read through the framework of ‘existential posthumanism’, which interrogates the definition of classical humanism in contexts where citizenship, agency, and legal recognition have collapsed. Drawing on posthumanist theory, this study examines how Rohingya poetry articulates a decentralized, precarious subjectivity that exceeds humanist definitions of the political subject.

Posthumanism challenges the conception of the human as an autonomous, rational, and sovereign subject. Rosi Braidotti, in her book *The Posthuman*, mentions:

The human of Humanism is neither an ideal nor an objective statistical average or middle ground. It rather spells out a systematized standard of recognizability - of Sameness - by which all others can be assessed, regulated and allotted to a designated social location. The human is a normative convention, which does not make it inherently negative, just highly regulatory and hence instrumental to practices of exclusion and discrimination (Braidotti 26).

Posthumanism redefines subjectivity as relational, embodied, and embedded within structures of power, vulnerability, interdependence and coexistence. Braidotti also defines the ‘posthuman subject’ and writes, “It promotes an ethical bond of an altogether different sort from the self-interests of an individual subject, as defined along the canonical lines of classical Humanism. A posthuman ethics for a non-unitary subject proposes an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or ‘earth’ others, by removing the obstacle of self-centred individualism” (Braidotti 49). This reconceptualization is very significant to comprehend the wretched conditions of displaced communities such as the Rohingyas, whose lives are shaped by dependence, exposure, and survival. Francesca Ferrando, in her book *Philosophical Posthumanism*, further expands it and writes, “The

“human” is a historical notion referring to a culturally specific take on the processes which have brought the emergence of what will be later defined as the human species, that is, the process(es) of humanizing” (Ferrando 67). According to Ferrando, posthuman ethics prioritizes coexistence over hierarchy and rejects anthropocentric models that assign differential value to lives. From this perspective, the Rohingya community’s existence cannot be fully comprehended through humanist frameworks of ‘rights’ and ‘citizenship’ alone; instead, it must be understood as an existential condition shaped by radical vulnerability. This theoretical shift allows the present study to move beyond humanitarian discourse and examine Rohingya poetry as an articulation of ‘posthuman subjectivity’, one that emerges precisely from the collapse of political and legal recognition.

The Rohingya refugees and their stateless identity closely align with Giorgio Agamben’s concept of ‘bare life’, about which he writes:

At once excluding bare life from and capturing it within the political order, the state of exception actually constituted, in its very separateness, the hidden foundation on which the entire political system rested. When its borders begin to be blurred, the bare life that dwelt there frees itself in the city and becomes both subject and object of the conflicts of the political order... (Agamben 8).

The Rohingya community is excluded from Myanmar’s political order yet captured within it as subjects of violence and control. For Agamben, the refugee represents a figure that disrupts the assumed continuity between human being and citizen, revealing the fragility of the nation-state system itself. Stateless populations exist within a juridical void, where legal protections are suspended, and survival becomes the primary condition of existence. In Kyaw Naing’s poems, the refugee camp is repeatedly depicted as a space of confinement or imprisonment, surveillance, and deprivation. The poem “No More Refugee Life” can be

productively read through the lens of ‘existential posthumanism’, which reveals how the Rohingya refugee is pushed beyond the category of the fully recognized ‘human’ while still bearing the burden of existential consciousness. It is evident in the following lines of the poem:

I am a Rohingya refugee

With gigantic dreams

To survive like others

I belong to this world

I can’t bear sufferings

I’m like a prisoner

That lost my future

That lost my hope

I’m a human with big hope

But have become a refugee

That makes aimless

No more refugee life (Kyaw Naing 27).

The refugee camp operates as a ‘posthuman space’, where life is governed by logistics, containment, and biological endurance rather than ethical relations. The poet’s plea “Please treat me as human” reveals how “the human” is no longer an inherent condition but a status unevenly distributed by power. This portrayal resonates with Agamben’s assertion that the camp functions as the space, and he writes, “In the camp, the state of exception, which was essentially a temporary suspension of the rule of law on the basis of a factual state of danger, is now given a permanent spatial arrangement...” (Agamben 168). Conditions of Rohingyas

in the refugee camps in Bangladesh are reduced to a focus on biological survival- waiting for food, shelter, and aid, while political agency remains largely absent.

The poetic articulation of the Rohingya community's suffering operates as a form of trauma testimony also. Cathy Caruth, in her book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Memory, and History* argues, "The story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality—the escape from a death, or from its referential force—rather attests to its endless impact on a life" (Caruth 7). Literature, therefore, becomes a crucial site where trauma can speak in fragmented and symbolic ways. Kyaw Naing's poems are marked by recurring images of loss, fear, separation from parents, and longing for Arakan, the lost homeland. The poems such as, "Save Me", "No One Asks Me", "The Island of Ghosts", "My Dad: My Heart", "My Happy: My Mom", "I'm Half Dead in Camp", "My Black Life", "Arakan is Our Heartbeat", "Unforgettable Arakan", "Home", "Dream" and others reveal his inner agonies or traumatized existence as a Rohingya refugee and it is reflected in the following lines of the poem "My Heart is Crying":

My heart is crying for my birthplace

My mind is half-dead for it

It became in differences

Colours, from each side despair me

Now just about the last breath

Because I can't control it anymore.

Birthplace is vital for me

I love it forever (Kyaw Naing 34).

These motifs reflect what Judith Butler describes as precarious identity in her book *Frames of War: When Life is Grievable?*, "Precarity designates that politically induced

condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death” (Butler 25). The Rohingyas’ suffering remains largely ungrievable within dominant political frameworks. Butler says, “So, one way of posing the question of who “we” are in these times of war is by asking whose lives are considered valuable, whose lives are mourned, and whose lives are considered ungrievable” (Butler 38). Yet, the act of poetic testimony itself resists this erasure. By narrating pain, memory, and hope, the poems in the book demand recognition and ethical response, positioning literature as a form of moral intervention rather than mere representation. One of the most striking features of Kyaw Naing’s poetry is its rejection of a stable, individualistic self. The poetic voice frequently shifts between “I” and “we,” emphasizing collective suffering and shared vulnerability. The poem, “Being a Rohingya Minority”, shows:

Being a minority Rohingya,
 Am I not deserve for human right?
 Let me get full right
 I have rights like others
 Being a minority Rohingya
 Am I not deserve for peace?
 I don’t need peace at my last breath
 All I want is peace in my nation now (Kyaw Naing 61).

This destabilization of individual identity aligns with posthumanist critiques of liberal humanist subjectivity. Braidotti notes that vulnerability and precariousness are not exceptions but ‘structural conditions of posthuman subjectivity’. The Poet as a ‘Rohingya subject’ who emerges in these poems is relational rather than autonomous, shaped by familial bonds, communal loss, and historical trauma. This form of subjectivity reflects Ferrando’s assertion

that posthuman identity emerges through interconnectedness rather than sovereignty. In this sense, the Rohingya poet as a ‘posthuman subject’ speaks from a position of ethical exposure rather than political power. Kyaw Naing’s poetry implicitly critiques the nation-state model of Myanmar that ties human worth to citizenship. Arendt’s observation that stateless people suffer not from oppression alone but from the absence of belonging is particularly relevant. The poems call for recognition beyond legal status, appealing instead to shared humanity and ethical responsibility. In the poem “I’m a Human like You,” the poet mentions:

I’m a human like you

Don’t call me nationless

Which makes me hopeless

Don’t name me stateless

Which makes me aimless

I’ve everything on this planet (Kyaw Naing 1)

This appeal aligns with posthuman ethics, which emphasizes coexistence and relational accountability. By foregrounding suffering without surrendering to silence, the poetry collection challenges anthropocentric and state-centric hierarchies that determine whose lives matter.

Through an existential posthumanist framework, this paper has examined how the poetry collection *The Painful Life of Rohingya* (2022) articulates a radically precarious condition shaped by statelessness, displacement, and biopolitical exclusion. Drawing on the theoretical insights of Arendt, Braidotti, Ferrando, Agamben, Caruth, and Butler, the study demonstrates that Rohingya poetry exceeds testimonial function and constructs a decentralized ‘posthuman subjectivity’ rooted in vulnerability and ethical appeal. Ultimately, the collection calls for a reimagining of humanity beyond borders, citizenship, and exclusionary humanist paradigms.

Works Cited

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