Perspectives on “giving back”: A conversation between researcher and refugee.

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1. Introduction

Qualitative and quantitative research with refugees is fraught with ethical complexities, not least because it is often undertaken in politically and physically insecure environments with participants who have been traumatised and are vulnerable (Mackenzie et al. 2007:299). This situation of insecurity and vulnerability is often what motivates researchers to connect with refugees, in the hope that they might be able to contribute to a wider understanding of the context/subject and also to a change in the refugees' challenging circumstances. Jacobsen and Landau (2003) have termed this as the 'dual imperative': namely that refugee research has to be academically sound and policy relevant. Ethics sits at the heart of academic integrity and demands that researchers “do no harm” (Anderson, 1999) in their research endeavour– in other words, that they do not exacerbate existing difficulties or create new challenges for refugees and, where possible, seek to contribute to peace outcomes. This latter responsibility, and the second part of the 'dual imperative', therefore also requires researchers to think about the idea of 'benefit'. What does 'policy relevance' or 'improved outcomes' mean (and to whom)? Are these goals enough to justify taking time and energy from already vulnerable refugee research participants? Are there other ways that researchers should “give back” to refugee groups that share their stories and experiences? What are the risks and impacts of balancing academic research with activism? There are no easy answers to this question and perspectives differ across contexts and research relationships. This chapter is our attempt to grapple with these questions from two different perspectives working in a shared context: that of a researcher and a refugee in Delhi, India. The pages that follow have emerged from a

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series of reflections and conversations that followed a research project led by the myself, Jessica Field, engaging with the Rohingya community in Delhi, which included Ali Johar, as a research participant.

Ali and I first met in the summer of 2017 and, as well as providing important data based on his own experiences, he was instrumental in connecting my team with relevant research participants in the two main Rohingya refugee settlements in Delhi. After finishing this piece of research (Field et al 2017; Tiwari et al 2017), Ali and I stayed in touch – often attending the same events or communicating about changes in the Rohingya's situation in India (Field and Johar, 2018). During these conversations it emerged that the community had seen a large spike in journalistic and academic interest since the August 2017 refugee exodus from Myanmar. Some of this was very welcome; press coverage for a vulnerable refugee group at risk of deportation can serve as an advocacy tool and academic research can document evidence of vulnerability or offer critical analysis of emerging policies. However, not all of it was well-intentioned, with some individuals reportedly using the media to spread misinformation (Tripathi, 2017). Nor was it always methodologically sensitive, with "drive-by" interviews that had no informed consent, debriefs, or means for follow up. Moreover, the sheer scale of the attention when a burst of it occurred was a little overwhelming.

As a researcher working with this refugee community while they received increasing media attention, I was also a little unsure at times how to tread. Was it appropriate to return for follow-up interviews when there were more urgent things for the Rohingya to worry about, such as the threat of deportation? What should I do to "give back" to a community who were so generous in giving my research team their time and experiences? What is the line between research and advocacy – should there be one?

When we were invited by the editors to contribute something to this important book on ethics in peace and conflict research, we saw this as a good opportunity to explore some of those challenging questions around what ethics means in practice, and the moral maze of "giving back" through research, in this case working with refugees who give their time and energy for research interviews. What follows is a brief background of the situation of refugees in India, and a profile of Ali and myself, to give you some context to the discussion. We then proceed with a semi-structured discussion that was conducted via email correspondence in September and October 2018.

2. Context and biographies

Rohingya Refugees in India

The Rohingya community have been present in Myanmar for centuries, primarily occupying the Rakhine state area of the region. Since the military took over leadership of the country in 1962, this Muslim minority population have experienced systematic marginalisation and discrimination. This has culminated in regular large scale, violent assaults across Rakhine state, which have displaced millions over the years. The most recent series of attacks from August 2017 have been widely acknowledged, including by the United Nations, as an act of genocide (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2018). While the global majority of the Rohingya refugee population are residing in Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh, there are sizeable populations in countries throughout the region, including India – some of whom have resided in the country since attacks in Myanmar in the 1990s. The Rohingya refugee population in India are approximated to number around 40,000 – though this statistic is one circulated primarily in media outlets and difficult to verify. Delhi and nearby Haryana are home to around 1,500 Rohingya refugees, the majority of whom are incredibly poor with low levels of education and literacy.

At present India has no domestic laws that recognise refugees, and it is not signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or any regional frameworks. Thus, all are technically considered within the Foreigners Act of 1946 and Citizenship Act of 1955, just like any other category of foreigner. There are currently 208,571 refugees registered with UNHCR in India (UNHCR, 2018), though the number of de facto refugees that have sought refuge and to make a life for themselves within India's borders may be higher, due to regional conflicts, political instability and the impact of environmental hazards across India's porous borders. Refugees from Tibet number around 108,005 and Sri Lanka 61,812 - these groups are officially recognised by the Government of India as refugees, and have historically been provided Registration/Refugee Certificates, which enable them to live and work in the country and avail certain public services. The remainder fall within the UNHCR's (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) mandate and are a mix of refugees from Asia and further afield, including: Myanmar (21,442, primarily Rohingya and Chin refugees), Afghanistan (14,129 mixed Sikh, Hindu, Christian and Muslim refugees), and Somalia (964) (UNHCR, 2018). The majority of those under UNHCR's mandate live and work within Delhi, or the National Capital Region (NCR), which extends to parts of Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. This concentration in/near the capital is partly due to UNHCR's location

in Delhi, with status determination processes and humanitarian support requiring regular visits and assessments.

In 2017 the Government of India, ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), shifted its protection policy towards the Rohingya from one of tolerance to one of unwelcome and hostility. The government is currently attempting to deport all Rohingya refugees from the country, classifying them as “illegal migrants” (Field et al, 2017). This anti-Rohingya and anti-refugee rhetoric has emerged in India against a backdrop of rising Hindu nationalism and during a time where the Indian government is attempting to strengthen relations with Myanmar. The recent mass exodus of Rohingya from Myanmar, and the Government of India’s attempts to deport the community, have meant that Rohingya refugees in India have maintained a relatively regular presence in Indian national news. As a result, there have been spikes of academic and journalistic interest in their experiences of forced migration and their conditions in India. As an English-speaking youth leader and well-educated member of the Delhi-based Rohingya community, Ali Johar has been at the forefront of research engagement working with researchers, being interviewed and facilitating interviews for others.

Author Biographies

Ali Johar, Rohingya refugee youth leader based in India

Ali Johar (Maung Thein Shwe) has volunteered as a Medical Community Service Provider with Bosco-UNHCR in Delhi since 2013. He is also the founder of the Rohingya Literacy Program, a Rohingya Youth Leader, a mentor for the Genius Burmese Rohingya Youth Club, and a “Global Youth Peace Ambassador” recognized by the Rajiv Gandhi National Insitute of Youth Development (RGNIYD), under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India. In recognition of his work towards peace and development, in 2017, Ali was awarded South Asian People’s Choice Youth Leader Award by International Youth Committee. He was born in Rakhine (formally known as Arakan) in Myanmar. At the age of 10 he fled from the Buthidaung township of Rakhine state in Myanmar due to communal conflict and took refuge in Bangladesh. He completed his Secondary schooling in Bangladesh; however he fled to India in 2012 due to insecurity in Bangladesh. Today he is pursuing a Bachelors Degree from the University of Delhi, and intends to become a human rights expert to help his people.

Jessica Field, British academic based in India

Jessica Field is an interdisciplinary historian and social scientist from the United Kingdom who has worked on humanitarianism in India and elsewhere since 2012. Jessica took an Assistant Professor role at O.P. Jindal Global University, Haryana, in January 2017 and has since taught and researched there on refugee studies, forced migration, and modern humanitarian history. While she has looked at various humanitarian crises in her years as a researcher, Jessica's project on refugee self-reliance in Delhi (funded by the International Institute of Environment and Development) was the first time she had engaged with the Rohingya community.

What follows is an exchange between Ali and Jessica that took place at the end of 2018 on the topic of refugee research, ethics, and what "giving back" can look like from a variety of perspectives.

3. Ethics and "Giving Back": A conversation

Jessica: *Ali, why have you agreed to be a part of research projects as an interviewee and facilitator?*

Ali: Every Rohingya has a tale to share. But I feel there has not been enough awareness in the global communities, especially among the policy makers, although the Rohingya community are counted as one of the most persecuted minorities in the world. Being a friendless community, we feel anyone trying to help us with any little or big things is a big help for us. It has always been the writers and students who brought our issues to larger platforms where our voice otherwise did not reach.

Jessica: Yes, the possibility of using research to "give a voice" to a community who might not otherwise have a platform is probably most strongly associated with journalism, though it has also been a driver of many strands of social science and anthropological research, particularly among activist-academics. And, as you point out, if undertaken with due ethical considerations it can be a two-way interaction, with the researcher learning more about the Rohingyas, and the Rohingyas connecting with larger platforms. Are there other reasons that you think academic research is important?

Ali: Yes, I feel a research paper is something which keeps our issues recorded and highlighted. I have come across a lot of people who are unaware about identity and dignity, which includes researchers as well. Because most people think we were driven out from our homeland because of communal conflicts, which is how they describe it, but there is so much which has remained untold. We want to let the people acknowledge our experiences and listen empathetically. The world community must know we are being forced to become displaced just because of our very existence and identity, but we want a dignified life.

Jessica: For me, as an academic researcher, it is the recording of experiences I am particularly drawn to – this is something I feel more skilled at doing than conventional 'activism', which I understand as direct action for change, such as campaigning. As such, I am drawn to what you say about wanting Rohingya experiences to be recorded empathetically, and the importance of dignity in the research process. This respectful engagement is obviously important during the interviews and fieldwork itself, but also in the final write up, where lived experiences are translated to black and white text. As scholars have written elsewhere (Crow, 2013), the anonymisation process of academic research does not mean that an account may be acceptable to those who are written about – and if it is not acceptable then there is a question about whether it should be published at all.

Ali: I myself agreed to be interviewed and facilitate because most of the community members even don't know why we are being forced to become refugees, although we have a homeland to call home. So many think the problems in Myanmar are just communal or racial. It is not only people from outside of Myanmar but also from within Myanmar ignoring the fact that there other factors at play including foreign interest, economical and political power. And it is because we have mentally grown-up just like that way; we have just accepted whatever has been forced on us. As the famous proverb says, 'Birds born in the cage think flying is an illness'.

Jessica: So, as well as the researcher learning more about the Rohingya experience, there is also the potential – through researcher-refugee interaction – for the Rohingya community to learn other perspectives on their own displacement? I certainly didn't think of this opportunity when we connected for the first time for my project in 2017, and I feel quite foolish for not considering it as part of the research interaction process. It brings to mind a reflection by the anthropologist Nencel (2001, cited in Lammers, 2007:73) who said:

> "A good anthropologist always tries to protect the group participating in her project... However, because the research group is envisioned as vulnerable, it is often assumed they find it difficult to protect themselves, overlooking the fact that most vulnerable people are continuously protecting themselves and usually more experienced in this area than the anthropologist".

I think this oversight occurs regularly in research with refugees, and by humanitarian actors too, because both areas of research/work begin from the starting point of vulnerability and therefore are not necessarily orientated to account for refugees' own resilience and survival strategies. This is wrong and often counter-productive.

Jessica: *Ali, what is your perspective on "ethical research? What does it mean for a researcher to be ethical?*

Ali: For me ethical research means trying to bring up or highlight the real issue which is faced by the researched group in a very careful way. People who are interviewed should not feel confused or they should be well informed about all the data which is being collected from them, like where it is going to be used, who are the readers or who the targets are and how it is going to benefit them.

Respect for the participants should also be maintained with human dignity. They should feel secured enough while expressing themselves otherwise the person will not be able to speak his/her real mind. They must be assured of the confidentiality of the personal data being shared, which should not be public in a way that might lead to their identification. Sometimes some researchers just highlight the points they needed, but for an ethical research it should be the perspectives of the participants which are more valued. No participant should be forced to share anything, which the participant is unwilling when even the participant became a friend of the researcher. As a main note I must say that it is very important for the researcher to ensure he/she is well introduced to the participant.

Jessica: *If these are the ideals, then what have been your personal experiences of "being researched"?*

Ali: I have been researched by several people with different purposes. Most of them are from media and academic institutions and have been very nice people. I have still contact with some of them even after years. But from some of them who said they're going to get back very soon I am still waiting to hear with whom I have shared a lot spending my valuable time but still waiting for the outcome. For some I am a man struggling for my identity and for some I am just a client who has nothing to give except time. I have been interviewed by international and national medias, researchers and scholars from various colleges and universities, government agencies, national and international NGOs, writers etc. Also, I was invited to speak in gatherings of interested people.

Jessica: *My institution has been one of the organisations that has benefitted from your time and thoughts, too. We were delighted to have been able to invite you speak to students at my university in November 2017, though I was once again conscious of taking up more of your time when you have so many pressing day-to-day challenges. Do researchers have a responsibility to "give back" to the refugees that give their time for research? What does "giving back" mean to you?*

Ali: With research projects, it is the researchers' responsibility to make sure the data provided by the participants are analysed well and given a capable platform so that the research can make a difference for the community or the topic in a positive way. Sometimes, the researchers do not follow up. This, in my opinion, is wrong. Researchers should look to give back to the community through volunteering, connecting organizations, contributions etc. – something which makes differences for the community. Such as by giving money or giving time. Giving back to the community should touch many people's lives or empower the community. Even the teeniest good deed can ignite change and positively impact the community by providing a renewed sense of hope. Researchers can also offer his/her skills to volunteer in the community.

Another form of giving back to a vulnerable community can be facilitating the empowerment of some selective leaders or members of the researched community who are struggling to become a better version of themselves. These individuals might have the potential to be leaders who can actually help their community's development or highlight their issues of concern to the relevant authorities or people in power. This is a responsibility for the students who are writing a thesis for graduation or masters degrees, as their writing will not reach a wide audience, unfortunately, so they can help in other ways. From my

experience, I can recall a of group students from University of Delhi who raised fund to sponsor scholarships of 14 secondary school Rohingya students.

Jessica: I completely agree that researchers can be prone to not following up and this is wrong. I have been guilty myself of very delayed follow ups and I have felt it affect communication and trust between me and my research contacts. Follow up, sharing findings, and seeking feedback on these findings from participants is an essential part of any ethical research project – otherwise the interviews are purely extractive.

On the wider question of "benefits" from the research, there has been much more discussion and debate (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003; Hynes, 2003; Rodgers, 2004; Mackenzie et al, 2007), and it is something I certainly find challenging when planning new projects as there is not a set formula to follow. Mackenzie et al (2007:301) note that researchers have an 'obligation to design and conduct research projects that aim to bring about reciprocal benefits for refugee participants and/or communities. The notion of reciprocity involves negotiating a research relationship with participants that not only respects, but also promotes their autonomous agency and helps re-build capacity'. I think this framing most closely reflects what you are saying about how research needs to have three main features: i) human dignity and respect for Rohingya agency at its core; ii) it must work towards empowering the community through capturing and sharing stories in a way that means Rohingya can learn as well as policymakers; and iii) it must offer ways of engaging beyond the report, whether that be through volunteering, networking, or monetary donations.

It's interesting because the latter point about monetary donations remains a contentious issue in the social sciences, even though payment has long been an acceptable way of incentivising or compensating participation in the medical and psychological sciences (Head, 2009). I have never paid refugees for participation in my research projects, I have only bought soft drinks or food if the interview has occurred in a café or public space. However, I have frequently been hosted in the homes of participants and have been offered tea and snacks, as it is a part of Rohingya culture to welcome guests in this way. This is still a situation that makes me anxious and happy in equal measure – anxious that I am in some way materially disadvantaging a refugee who is already giving me their time and attention, but also happy to have the opportunity to develop a relationship with someone who I hope to remain in contact with for some time, and for whom my research might have some real relevance. I am not sure I always get the balance right.

Jessica: *What have been your biggest disappointments when engaging with researchers?*

Ali: Sometimes, some researchers try to ignore the fact the person who is giving time from the community has also life. His/her time is also valuable. He/she is also involved with a livelihood. He/she also has challenges in the life.

Jessica: Yes, I think this is a particular challenge for Rohingya refugees in the Delhi and Haryana context because the main settlement areas are so visible and accessible to researchers, NGOs, well-wishers and others that may want to visit. When public interest in the Rohingya plight peaks in India (whether for positive or negative reactions to unfolding events), significant numbers of people then descend on the settlement where your family, friends and fellow refugees live to ask questions, conduct interviews and take photographs in order to 'share your stories'. Yet, as you say, you and fellow refugees living there have to work, care for family members, attend schools or colleges, and basically survive. Or refugees simply may not be comfortable with the increased attention given the whole host of other daily challenges that arise with being a poor Rohingya refugee in Delhi.

I must admit, I feel that my researchers and I have made this mistake. We ill-timed a second phase of our research in November 2017 as we did not consider some of these factors. During this time the international media was covering the mass exodus of Rohingya from Myanmar in light of the August 2017 genocide, and Rohingya refugees in Delhi were incredibly preoccupied with the Government of India's escalating threat to deport the country's Rohingya population. My researchers were returning to participants we had previously interviewed and built relationships with over the previous year, but this time we were understandably met with anxiety and silence. We were seeking to learn more about Rohingya leisure practices after learning in our first phase of research that sport and music were important to the community, particularly the youth. However, the timing for these questions around leisure was inappropriate – and we were rightly pushed back on why we were asking such irrelevant things in that moment. As one female Rohingya refugee explained to us, 'whatever time you have is taken up with worrying'.

Next time if possible, I would like to aim to put more time into the relationship-building and the fieldwork stage of any project so that I have the flexibility to come back again if the timing for an interview conversation is wrong, and so that I have a stronger relationship with participants so that I can more sensitively read when might be an

appropriate time to visit. In this sense, mitigating the extractive nature of research can perhaps be seen as a part of "giving back".

Jessica: *Ali, what would you advise researchers of the future to do differently?*

Ali: For an effective result, spend as much as time you can among the community. When people feel the researcher is no more an outsider the community open up more. The more the researchers spend time with community the more the researchers get deeper facts and then their research is more accurate and relevant. This is about building a trusted relationship. This is especially important if you are collecting data from refugees or people who have survived violence. There are researchers whom I have chosen not to reply to if their questions were regarding my security or identity, but there are also people whom I shared as much as possible from side because trust had been built and the questions were sensitive. An unwise question can make the participant uncomfortable or put through trauma.

Jessica: Yes, I completely agree, as this deeper relationship can change a researcher's perspective on what is important or relevant beyond the pre-planned research questions. Mackenzie et al (2007:301) explain that this type of relationship-building in a research context is a basic principle of respect for a person; a researcher must understand and engage with different perspectives and experiences and 'construct research relationships that are responsive to [refugees'] needs and values'.

Unfortunately, the academic research project cycle is often not conducive to this type of longer term and more embedded engagement, as funding for research projects can be quite low and/or with a short time limit. However, while this structural issue does urgently need to change, I think it's clear from your own experiences of working with researchers that respect, dignity and empathy are a vital part of the researcher-refugee relationship and they have no minimum price or time limit.

4. "Impactful" research and "giving back" – two different things

When undertaking a new research project through a formal institution – such as a university, think tank or NGO – researchers will often be required to think about how research participants might "benefit" at multiple stages of the research process.

During the proposal drafting process, researchers will be expected to think about "impact", which has long been the *raison d'être* of NGO work but is also growing in importance in social science research. From an academic institutional perspective (i.e. universities, research funders and research councils) "impact" means that research proposals and outputs must increasingly show a 'demonstrable contribution' to improving society and the economy (ESRC, 2019). This can include influencing the development of policy, practice or law, reframing debates or capacity building among other things, and to prove success in this area a researcher must trace the golden thread from publication output to policymakers taking up ideas and implementing change. Grant winning, research awards and career development can depend on success in these "impact" areas.

During the application process to get ethics approval for research from the Institutional Review Board (IRB, or Research Ethics Committee/Board), researchers will be expected to think about, among other things, "compensation" for participation. Questions may include examples such as, 'Will the research participants receive reimbursement of expenses or any other incentives or benefits for taking part in this research'? While payment for participation is a common practice in medical and psychosocial studies, it seems much less common in qualitative social science research – or, at least, much less spoken about as a standard practice (Head, 2009: 336). Where a research project engages with vulnerable participants, such as refugees, payment for participation can be seen as having exploitative potential due to its inducement (Paradis, 2000: 846). A refugee may feel less likely or able to refuse or withdraw participation in a project because the money is much needed, and this raises a whole host of ethical concerns around harm to participants and further imbalance of power between researcher and participant. Paradis (2000: 847) has written about how a researcher may wish to offer services, such as running errands, to participants in order to "give back" to those who have been so generous with their time. These are non-material benefits that refugees might gain from research, and they align with Ali's comment above that a researcher might volunteer services or make other contributions to the refugees that participate in their projects. However, thought must also go into the wider harm this may cause by benefiting, and potentially elevating, some refugee participants over others in the same community who did not participate in the study. But is asking for a significant amount of a refugees' time to interview them without pay when they are likely to have other urgent needs and responsibilities not harm in itself? Especially when you consider that, at least in the Delhi and Haryana context, you are unlikely to be the first and only journalist or researcher to ask them for their time and participation.

This latter point brings us to the third major stage where a researcher is likely to be confronted with the question of how to "give back" to refugee research participants: in the field itself. This is 'ethics in practice' where the researcher may experience unanticipated dilemmas and will have to make on-the-spot decisions about what is the ethically sound thing to do in these contexts. Should a researcher purchase tea and snacks from a street food stall when they have just interviewed the refugee shop owner about their livelihood or does that constitute indirect monetary compensation? What level of contribution and/or visibility should a researcher have if they are invited to be part of a refugee advocacy campaign that has political undertones? Some of these decisions are small, some may be much larger and emerge later on in the research process. Almost all are associated with 'uneasy feelings' and no clear "right" answer (Blee and Currier, 2011: 405).

As our conversation above demonstrates, what is not acceptable is an "extractive" approach to research where the researcher swoops in and records participants' stories without investing time in the community or relationship building, and without following up afterwards. While it may be true that what is learnt from an extractive approach could have significant policy impact over the longer term, and may well be fully IRB-compliant on paper, it is not without a negative impact on the interviewed community. Similar to Ali's personal experience, Pittaway and Bartolomei (cited in Hugman et al, 2011: 1277) have recorded instances where refugees have become 'fed up' with researchers 'stealing our stories, taking our photos and we never get anything back, not even a copy of the report'. It can break trust between the community and other researchers/aid professionals, lead to a rejection of the solutions that emerge from the research, or even risk leading to emotional or material harm through broken promises or 're-traumatisation' if issues are mishandled or misrepresented (Pittaway et al 2010: 234). As Paradis (2000:853) writes, 'the researcher should also support the participants in acquiring the means to use the research for concrete changes in their own lives'. A 'reciprocal research' approach (Mackenzie et al 2007; Hugman et al 2011) can enable this through its focus on relationship-building and the co-equal exchange of ideas and benefits to be gained from the study between the researcher and the participant. In research with refugees, this requires the refugee participants to be actively involved in all stages of the study and part of the decision-making around what counts as a "gain" or "impact" (Hugman et al, 2011: 1279).

5. Ethical research in practice

To end this chapter it is useful to reflect on what we, as researcher and refugee, might do differently when next confronted with a similar set of circumstance.

Ali: For me the change would be in preparation for interviews. Sometimes I was not well-prepared while being interviewed or speaking before a gathering. For instance, once when I was discussing the situation of the Rohingya, someone asked me what makes me different from other refugees, as I am a stateless too? Only after answering the question I realised I have missed the main point and that I was not aware of it. So, it is equally important for the participants as well that they describe themselves in an appropriate way. This requires preparation before interviews, which also means that the interviewers have to allow time for that.

Jessica: Looking back on my research project with Ali and other Rohingya and Afghan refugees in Delhi, what I would change is the amount of time I spent on relationship-building and fieldwork. The research grant itself was limited in timescale and amount (with only 12 months for the whole project), but I definitely underestimated the amount of time me and my team should have been spending with our research participants in order to develop relationships that would offer more meaningful exchanges. While we did return to our interviewees when we had a draft report to show the fruit of their time and to seek their thoughts and comments on our analysis, it was only one meeting and in retrospect was more of a consultation than co-equal participatory engagement. While I have remained in contact with some of the Rohingya community in Delhi, such as Ali, I can imagine that to other refugee participants, we were just one of a number of "drive-by" interviewers that took their time during that difficult year. In future projects I will seek to employ the 'reciprocal research' model outlined by Mackenzie et al (2007) and Hugman et al (2011), and write more relationship-building time into project proposals. Research institutions need to seriously reconsider embedding this approach within their grant calls, too.

One thing I will continue to struggle with is how to balance academia and activism. Since beginning research with the Rohingya in Delhi in 2017 I have struggled to balance what I am trained and feel confident to do – i.e. qualitative research and writing for academic outlets – with what is more urgently needed – i.e. active campaigning against the injustices the Rohingya are facing politically and socio-economically in India at the moment. I often find conventional activism on refugee issues uncomfortable because it blurs what I thought

was a relatively well-defined line between my work (which I try to undertake in a somewhat detached and analytical manner), and my personal life, (which is inherently emotional, political and a sphere in which I wear concern for certain causes and people on my sleeve). When I attend advocacy and campaign events organised by the refugee and NGO community, I feel that this is an immediate and tangible way I can act on injustices I have been researching about, as well as a way to "give back" to the refugees that have shared their experiences with me. When I have the opportunity to advocate for change through writing in mainstream media outlets (as opposed to paywalled academic journals), I feel excited to contribute to the chorus of other voices demanding change. However, these situations also make me feel uneasy, as bridging the gap between academic work and activism has meant opening out to both emotions and criticism.

Emotionally I have felt guilty that I should have been doing more direct action for refugees long ago, and also that the meagre activism I have recently begun has been insufficient and short term. Working in this type of activist context, my academic outputs have felt stale and irrelevant, especially as it can take up to two years for a journal article to be published. Moreover, I worry about receiving criticism for using refugee and activist links to further my career rather than for social change. While this type of "opportunism" is never my intent and I have not, to my knowledge, received such criticism, it is not an uncommon experience in a world where direct action activism is seen as an all-consuming life choice, rather than one tactic among many for social change (Pickerill, 2008:1).These 'confessions' are less of a search for sympathy – I am aware that I come from a position of exceptional privilege in the researcher-refugee power structure. They are more of a prompt for new researchers to think about the role and reality of emotion in research (for themselves as well as for participants), particularly in conflict or displacement contexts where research, vulnerability, injustice and activism co-exist (Brown and Pickerill, 2009).

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