

Possibility in Crisis: Situational Vulnerability and Feminist Transformation Among Rohingya Women Beyond Myanmar

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Abstract

This study examines how crisis reshapes, but does not foreclose, political and social possibility among Rohingya women living beyond Myanmar. Drawing on ethnographic engagement with displaced Rohingya communities in Thailand—particularly in Mae Sot and Bangkok—and Malaysia, the study centers the voices of women who have fled military violence, structural persecution, and systemic statelessness in Myanmar.

Rather than approaching displacement solely as a humanitarian emergency, the paper situates Rohingya women's experiences within Myanmar's protracted crises of citizenship, militarization, and ethno-religious exclusion. It argues that vulnerability is not a fixed condition but a situational, relational, and temporally shifting process shaped by intersecting regimes of violence and governance. Building on feminist scholarship on situational vulnerability and broader interventions on precarity and relationality, the study challenges reductive portrayals of Rohingya women as passive victims defined by deprivation or dependency.

Through close attention to ethnographic narratives, the presenter will demonstrate how displacement generates layered vulnerabilities—legal precarity, gender-based violence, labor exploitation, and institutional abandonment in host societies such as Thailand and Malaysia. Yet these same conditions also generate new forms of sociality, moral economy, and political consciousness. Rohingya women cultivate informal protection networks, mutual aid practices, religious and community-based organizing, and cross-border solidarities that reconfigure vulnerability as a site where constraint and agency coexist.

By foregrounding Rohingya women's voices beyond Myanmar's territorial borders, the paper contributes to Myanmar Studies by shifting attention from state-centric crisis narratives to lived transformations in exile. It suggests that crisis should be understood not only as rupture, but also as a generative terrain in which new forms of belonging, resistance, and feminist possibility emerge across borders.